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VOILES



Vol. XXIII No.3 June 1983

## imprint

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**IT IS NOT** unlikely that the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, will call a poll earlier than one is next due. Mrs Gandhi is now less able to shape events to build into opportunities for her. The timing of the next general election will be determined, if we stay on the democratic course, by political developments over which she has no decisive control.

Whenever the elections are held, there will be more parties and more independents in the fray, this time round, than ever before. And the outcome will almost certainly be a hung Parliament. Consider the scenario: the Telugu Desam will put up its own candidates for Parliament from Andhra Pradesh. The DMK will contest from Tamil Nadu. The Lok Dal will field candidates from Haryana and from many districts of Uttar Pradesh and from some districts of Bihar and Orissa. The Marxists will nominate activists in West Bengal. There will be Assamese candidates either put by the AASU or supported by it if the students choose to get involved in the general election. Communists will fight for seats from Kerala. The Akalis would want their Sikhs to represent them in New Delhi. The Congress (S) will contest a number of seats from Maharashtra and Kerala. And, on the basis of earned merit in Karnataka and memories of 1977, the Janata Party will undoubtedly field candidates from all constituencies in Karnataka and from at least 150 other constituencies in the country. In the light of the recent political history of India, little arithmetic is required to calculate approximately how many seats the above combatants will leave to Congress (I) and to the BJP to win.

Neither the Congress (I) nor the BJP, no matter Mrs Gandhi's resources, no matter Mr Vajpayee's increasingly popular projection as the future Prime Minister of India, is likely to emerge a clear winner in the next general election.

In the event, a coalition will have to be formed to govern the country. A workable and a desirable coalition in the circumstances, could be between the Congress (I) and the BJP. Mrs Gandhi and the leadership of the BJP share an emotional view about the integrity of India and the role of the Centre. But it is too early for this probable eventuality to be realised in the mid '80s. A coalition of Southern parties and the Congress (I), is only a remote possibility; so is a coalition of Southern parties and the BJP.

In the scenario I am painting, only a very patchy coalition of incompatible parties is likely to be sewn together and it will be called upon by the President to form the next Government of India.

Coalitions, howsoever patchy and diverse as they inherently are, are not necessarily catastrophic. They do present constitutional problems; there is always a likelihood that one or the other partner will pull out and pull down the coalition. There is always a possibility that we will have a general election to follow a general election—an expensive exercise for India.

In India, largely as a response to Jawaharlal Nehru's partisan demands on behalf of his Congress Party and later through his daughter's clever manipulations on an already tamed and believing people, we attach far too much importance to the stability of numbers and to stability by conformity. When a government that is stable by numbers and stable by political party conformity is installed, we almost automatically assume that such a Government is functioning and has performed!

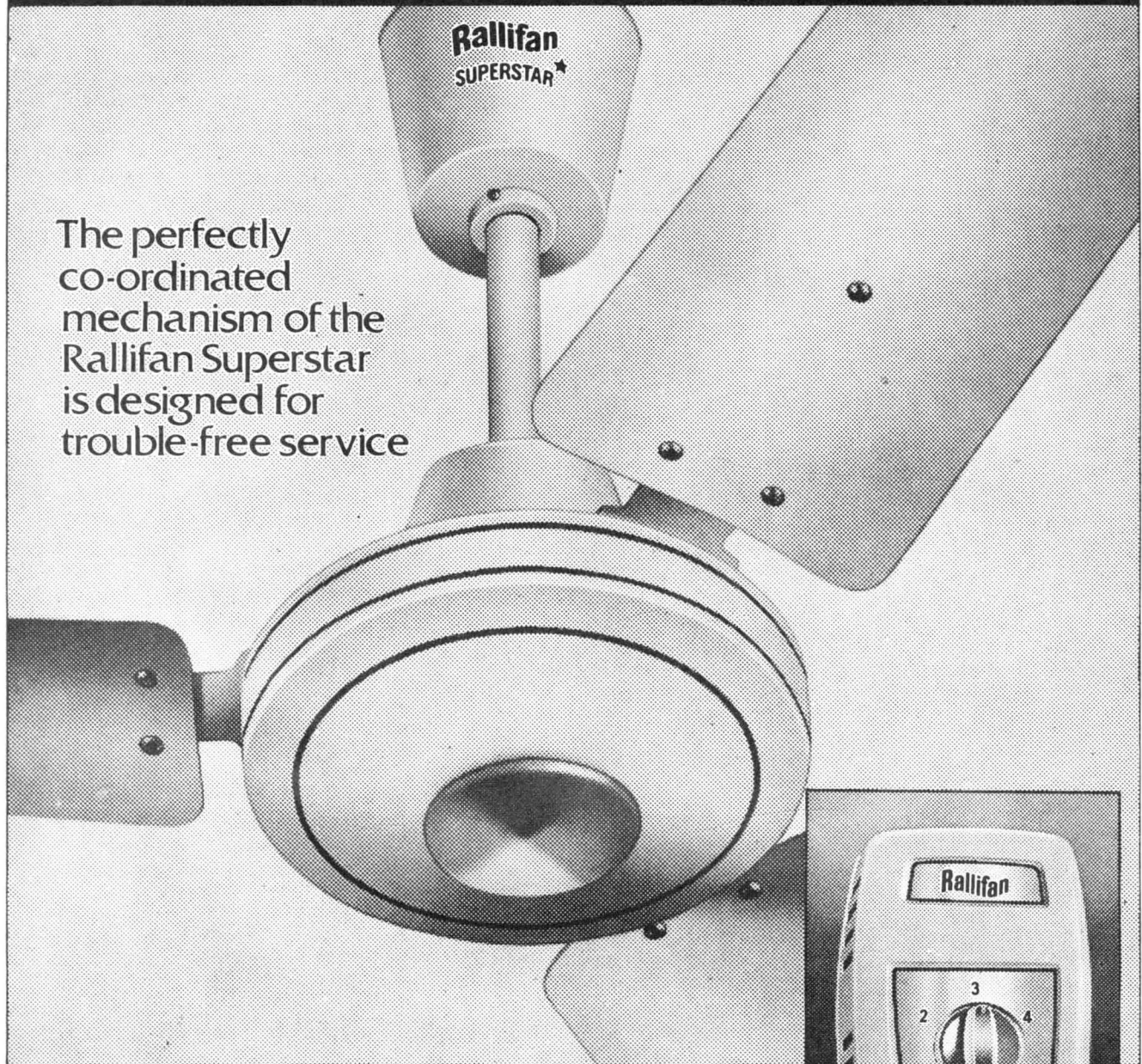
We have come a long way, travelling always on the democratic road, except for the brief 1975 aberration. We survived the first State Communist Government in Kerala in the late '50s. We have survived a Marxist government in West Bengal. We survived the dislodging of the Congress monolith in 1977. And we survived the premature collapse of the first non-Congress government at the Centre. We do not seem to be unhappy with what has happened in Andhra and in Karnataka and we are, I think, now mature enough to live with a government by coalition at the Centre, since coalitions too are sometimes the end result of the democratic process.

*R.V. Pandit*



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Volume XXIII No. 3

June 1983

## 5 HOCUS-POCUS

Godmen or Fraudmen?  
by PC Sorcar Jr

*The noted magician exposes Sai Baba, Uri Geller and other frauds.*

## 7 MANAGEMENT

The Search For Excellence  
by Richard Lambert

*A new American bestseller is causing managers to take a second look at traditional theory.*

## 13 SHOWBIZ

The Rock Invasion  
by Ashok Gopal

*Why foreign pop groups are stopping off and performing in India.*

## 15 UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Save Our Cities  
by Murli Deora

*Governmental neglect of the cities and the people who inhabit them has grave consequences.*

## 16



### FILM STARS AND POLITICS

*If Amitabh Bachchan were to stand for election our exclusive opinion poll shows that he would lose. But Bachchan apart, several Bombay film stars, have been involved with politics and politicians. A survey of these erratic and controversial relationships.*  
**Cover transparency: Mukesh Parpiani**

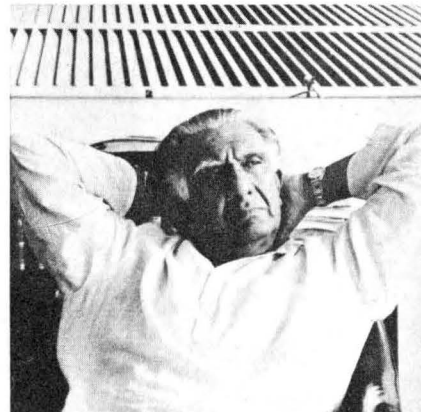
## 29

### PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG HIJRA

by Sunaina Lowe

*What is it like to live on the wild side? How does somebody who has opted for the ultimate alternative lifestyle feel? An unusually close look at the secretive world of Bombay's hijra prostitutes.*

## 39

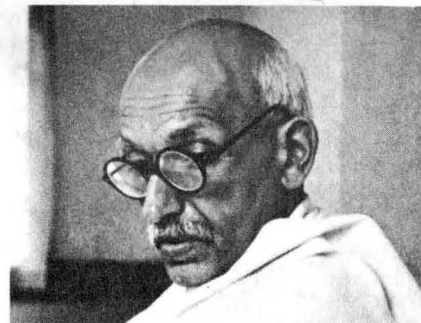


### PROFILE

Romesh Thapar: An Intellectual By Profession  
by Sushma Singh

*For three decades Romesh Thapar has been India's leading full-time intellectual.*

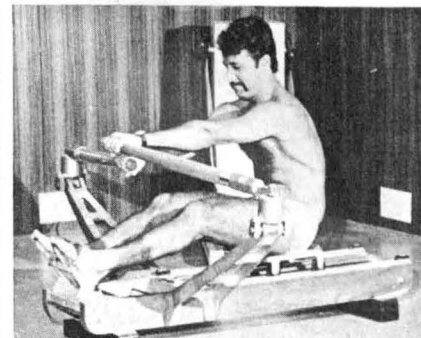
## 46



### INTERNATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

*A look at the personalities and events behind last month's news.*

## 50



### OPTIONS

**Bombay Gets Physical!**  
*Malavika Sanghvi on the health boom.*  
**Traveller's Tale.**  
*David Lloyd-Thomas's account of his Indian journey.*

## 54 BOOKS

**Bestsellers: The Dirty Business Of Double-Dealing**  
by Shirin Mehta

*The boom in bestseller sales spells trouble for the book trade.*

## 61 MEDIA



**The New Political Cartoonists**  
by Madhu Menon

*The answer to that perennial question: After Laxman, who?*

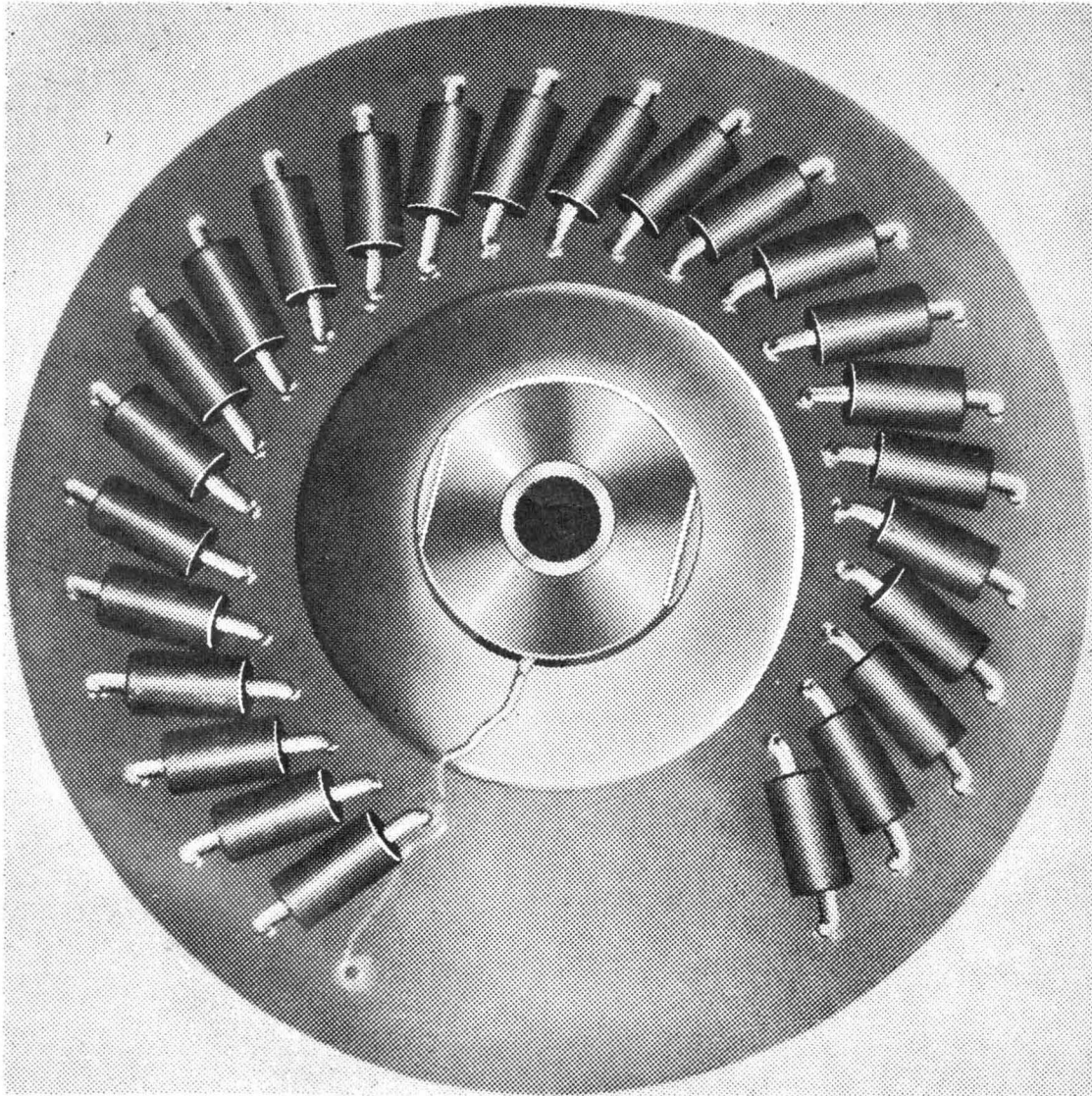
## 66 IN MY OWN ROOM

Justice JC Shah  
Photographed by Nitin Jhaveri

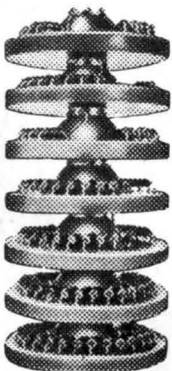
*The Justice at home, six years after the Commission that bore his name.*



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## GODMEN OR FRAUDMEN?

*Sathya Sai Baba is no better than a second-rate conjurer*

HUMAN NATURE IS a strange thing. Each night, hundreds of people come to my shows and see me chop a woman in half, make elephants vanish into thin air, and materialize objects out of nothing. Yet, nobody feels that I have any supernatural powers. But the same people, when confronted by a godman who performs a few simple conjuring tricks, are fooled by his pious protestations.

Take for instance, Sathya Sai Baba. Most magicians have no difficulty in reproducing his 'miracles' and the baba is therefore, unwilling to perform them in our presence. When I tried to visit his ashram, I was refused admission on several occasions. Finally, I had to disguise myself and pretend to be a wealthy Assamese businessman who wanted Sai Baba to cure his asthma, before I was allowed in.

It took me just five minutes to realize that something fishy was going on. For a start, devotees like myself were only allowed in to the sacred presence one at a time. All around the baba sat several 'followers' who were clearly regulars, or rather, members of his troupe. This is a common magician's ploy. Sometimes, when we call a member of the audience to the stage, we also arrange for four or five of our assistants to masquerade as other 'volunteers' from the crowd. Surrounded by people who are in on the trick, the genuine volunteer is easily intimidated and begins to suspect his scepticism.

This is Sai Baba's technique as well. It did not take me long to realize that all around me were his henchmen and this made me instantly suspicious. The baba gestured for me to speak. "I speak nothing except my own language," I said in a mixture of Assamese and



broken Hindi. Baba's head furrowed in a frown.

At once, a 'devotee' scampered off to find an interpreter. I thought it strange that God should have language problems but kept my peace.

When the interpreter turned up, our conversation began in earnest. "What is your problem," asked Sai Baba. I told him that I was looking for a cure for asthma. "You have come to see me," he intoned piously. "Now, you will be better." And that it seemed, was that.

"Could I get some magic medicine," I asked.

"No need," said Sai Baba. How about some sacred ash—the *vibhuti* that he materialized out of thin air, I persisted. The baba began to look uncomfortable and I realized what had

happened.

Materializing ash is the oldest trick in the book. The ash is contained in a bag in the arm-pit. A thin elastic strip connects this bag to the conjurer's hand. All he has to do is to tug at the strip for the sacred substance to tumble forth. (It is interesting that Sai Baba never materializes *vibhuti* when he is wearing a half-sleeved shirt.)

That day, I was among the last visitors and the bag of ash was probably empty. There was no way that baba was going to be able to produce *vibhuti*. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw one of his planted 'devotees' shift a plate of *mithai* near him and guessed that he would try and palm something off the plate and then pretend to materialize it to make up for the non-appearance of the ash. Next to me was another plate of *mithai*, so I quickly palmed a dry *rosogolla* off it.

I had guessed right. When I asked again if baba could bless me with some ash, he contorted his hand in the *choo-mantar* gesture used by all magicians and then produced a *sandesh*. "Take this instead," he said proudly, while his henchmen oohed and aahed.

"Thank you," I said and made an abracadabra gesture of my own before materializing the *rosogolla*. "You can have this," I told him. Predictably, all hell broke loose. The baba began shouting things in a South Indian language while the other 'devotees' attempted to grab me. It was time to come clean. "I am PC Sorcar", I told him, "and I have now realized that you are just a magician." Sai Baba looked nonplussed and was led away by his sidekicks, while others hustled me out of the ashram premises and warned me never to return.



## *Nearly all cases of seemingly paranormal behaviour have distinctly normal origins.*

This incident was widely reported in the press and I gave several interviews explaining how most miracles were no more than palming. The principle of producing an Omega watch from thin air is no different from the principle of producing a rabbit from a felt hat. All of Sai Baba's stunts can be performed by any moderately skilled magician.

But such is human nature that I doubt if my expose made any difference to Sai Baba's following. People want to be gulled. They want to believe in magic. They need people to tell them that God is on their side. And for proof, they will accept any second-rate conjuring trick.

It is no different in the West. Except there, godmen are not in fashion. Instead, the more sophisticated extra-sensory perception (ESP) swindle is in vogue. Magicians pretend that they have telepathic skills or can bend matter with the power of their minds and people are readily fooled.

Most of us stage magicians perform a mind-reading trick during which we are blindfolded and 'read' numbers off a blackboard or we guess what is written on a slip of paper that is concealed from us. The techniques vary (trick blindfolds or assistants who communicate the secret to us in code) but believe me, they have nothing to do with ESP. But the same trick, performed for an audience of scientists, is suddenly elevated to the level of a scientific breakthrough.

A leading conman in the field was a young Israeli magician called Uri Geller who claimed to have a mind that could triumph over matter. Geller's most famous effect was his apparent ability to bend a spoon simply by staring at it. I was invited to a TV programme in Madrid where Geller performed his spoon-bending act. I thought it odd that he should have brought along his own spoon and asked if I could examine it. While it

appeared to be perfectly normal to the untrained eye, I soon worked out the technique. And then, in front of a distinctly shifty Geller, I straightened out the spoon with a similar powerful stare and returned it to him.

Now of course, most magicians have cottoned on to the trick and the 'Geller spoon' is sold at all magic shops.

In my experience, nearly all cases of seemingly paranormal behaviour have distinctly normal origins. I am a very religious person and have always looked for genuine godmen or for evidence that miracles do happen. Sadly, I have always been disappointed.

The only exceptions are the yogis of India who have trained their bodies to levels where the laws of medicine no longer apply. My father, the late PC Sorcar, Senior, had an assistant with yogic training on whom he would perform his tongue-cutting illusion. It was a remarkably effective trick in the course of which he would seemingly cut off half of the man's tongue and show it to any doctor who happened to be in the audience. After the doctor was satisfied that the tongue had been severed and had examined the assistant, my father would appear to stick the severed bit back on again.

One evening, the trick was going as planned when the doctor noticed that the assistant had stopped breathing. He also had no heartbeat. This was more than my father had planned on and he hastily 'stuck' the severed tongue back. At this, the assistant suddenly came back to life and went on as though nothing had happened.

After the show, my father collared the assistant and asked him what he'd done. "Oh, that," said the man. "That's a little yogic technique I know. I thought it might add something to the trick."

So, yoga remains beyond the purview of science. But Sai Baba, Uri Geller and the rest of their ilk are no more than second-rate conjurers and conmen.

PC Sorcar Jr is India's leading stage magician.

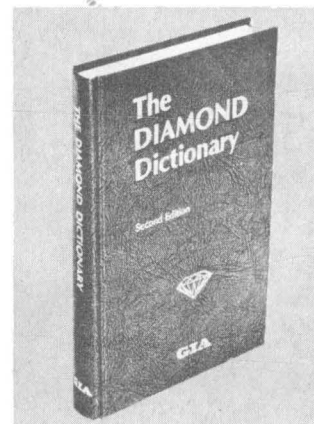
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BY RICHARD LAMBERT

## PURSUING EXCELLENCE

*A new American bestseller rewrites management theory*

**IT IS TIME** to scrap that ill-conceived matrix chart, forget that misshapen learning curve. The good news from America is that the corporate planners who made the lives of line managers such hell during the '70s are now on the retreat.

It may have something to do with the recession. It probably also owes something to the fact that so many companies have been through the strategists' mill—and still not found the promised land. Whatever the explanation, there appears to be a refreshing change of mood among US consultancy firms.

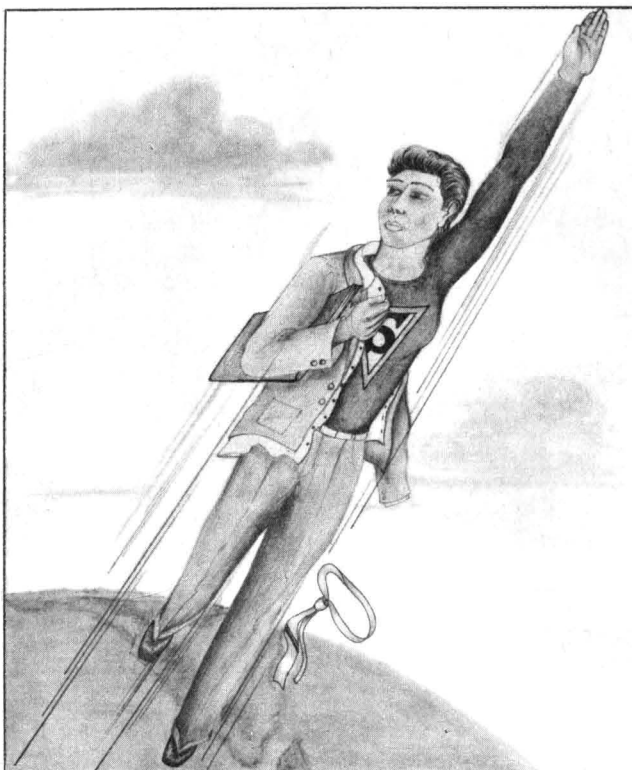
No one would ever accuse an employee of the Boston Consulting Group or McKinsey of humility. But there does seem to be a growing recognition that success in business may depend on more than just a proper understanding of a handful of rather simple rules.

A sign of the times is the success of a recently-published book by two men with a McKinsey background, Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman. They had the good idea of identifying a little over 40 really successful US businesses, and then trying to discover what makes them tick. The result makes exciting reading.

Although written in the style that might be expected of two Stanford Masters of Business Administration (MBAs) there is no disguising the message: successful companies treat their employees well, and have an almost irrational dedication to serving their customers.

The central theme is that winning businesses are not motivated simply by financial goals, or by an exclusively analytical approach to their markets.

*In Search Of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies.* By Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman.



It's not that they don't make plans, or do all the market research they can. But they refuse to let planning become an end in itself, and are willing to encourage practices which would simply not bear analysis in the ivory towers.

Frito-lay, for instance, is prepared to spend several hundred dollars sending a truck to restock a store with a couple of cartons of potato chips. That, you would think, is the road to ruin in a competitive commodity business. Yet through its dedication to the sales force and its '99.5 per cent service level', the company built a market share and a profit margin that was the envy of the food industry.

Peters and Waterman say that eight attributes generally characterised the excellent companies which they studied. The best bits of the book are the anecdotes which accompany these golden rules.

- A bias for action. In the great companies, you may well see a swarm of small task forces, each with a life of

perhaps five days and aiming to come up with an idea that will result in line operators doing something different. You will not find a 35-person working party spending 18 months on a 500-page report.

You will find an intense but informal system of internal communications—what Hewlett-Packard calls, 'management by walking about'—and a willingness to break down the organisation to a size where people can get to grips with its problems. There will be an emphasis on experiment—what Fluor describes as, 'taking an idea and making metal out of it', and a determination to keep things simple. At Procter and Gamble, the language of action is the famous one page memorandum. At Texas Instruments, there is an emphasis on the

doable: each manager is set one milestone per quarter. "More than two objectives is no objective," is one of TI's watchwords.

- Close to the customer. The authors say that in observing the excellent companies, and especially the way they interact with customers, "What we found most striking was the consistent presence of obsession. This characteristically occurred as a seemingly unjustifiable overcommitment to some form of quality, reliability or service."

McDonald's is fanatical about its slogan of "quality, service, cleanliness and value." Boeing is absurdly concerned about its after-sales service. International Business Machines (IBM) wants its salesmen to 'act as if they were on the customer's payroll.' Somehow, all this pays off at the bottom line.

Of course, it is possible to overdo the overkill. The safeguard is to listen to what the customers say, and to find

## *Good companies encourage their managers to think of themselves as champions.*

a particular niche in the market where you can be better at doing the job than anyone else. "Braniff thought that quality meant Alexander Calder paint jobs and comely stewardesses. Delta knows it means planes that arrive on time."

- **Autonomy and Entrepreneurship.** Good companies encourage their managers to think of themselves as champions, and are prepared to sacrifice a neat organisation chart to keep people on their toes. Small independent new venture teams are squirrelling away the whole time at 3M; brands compete against each other within Procter and Gamble; IBM has its famous 'performance shoot-outs'. Johnson and Johnson believes that "You've got to be willing to fail," while Hewlett-Packard says, "We're not really sure exactly how the innovative process works. But there's one thing we do know: the easy communications, the absence of barriers to talking to one another are essential."

- **Productivity through people.** "IBM's philosophy," says Thomas J Watson Jr, "is largely contained in three beliefs. I want to begin with what I think is the most important: our respect for the individual." When Rene MacPherson took over at Dana Corporation ten years ago, his first act was to destroy 22½ inches of policy manual and replace them with a one page statement of his belief in management's obligation to communicate with Dana people, and to provide them with proper training, incentives, and security.

The authors warn about what they call the 'gimmicks trap'. Quality circles, they say, are only the latest in a long line of tools that can either be very helpful, or can simply serve as a smoke-screen while management continues to get away with not doing its real job of managing people.

- **Hands on, value driven.** The successful companies are unashamed collectors of tales and legends in support of their basic beliefs. Frito-lay tells service stories; J and J tells quality stories; 3M tells innovation stories. Their values

are usually expressed in qualitative rather than quantitative terms, and flow right through the organisation. Delta people really do believe that they work for a better airline.

Another striking feature of the winners is that they are nearly all marked by the personality of individual leaders who created and defined their values. Disney, Watson, Hewlett-Packard—the list is almost as long as that of the companies themselves. Successful leaders can both inspire the troops with lofty visions and keep them up to the mark through their daily attention to detail.

- **Stick to the knitting.** It's no surprise to learn that the excellent companies seldom make major acquisitions. The typical diversification move dilutes the guiding qualitative theme: management loses its 'feel' if it jumps into new activities.

Companies like 3M are constantly making acquisitions—but they tend to be small, and related to its existing business disciplines. The good companies like to expand their field of operations in manageable steps—and are prepared to abandon a move quickly if it does not work out.

- **Simple form, lean staff.** Few of the excellent companies have formal matrix structures. Johnson and Johnson, for one, goes to extreme lengths to keep its organisation simple, divisionalised, and autonomous. And it seems that however big the company, there is seldom need for more than about 100 people in the corporate headquarters.

- **Simultaneous loose-tight properties.** This is a nasty piece of jargon which means the co-existence of firm central direction and maximum individual autonomy, and is really a summary of the other seven points.

Some of these ideas sound trite. Yet it is remarkably difficult to think of any outstanding business anywhere that does not share a majority of these characteristics.

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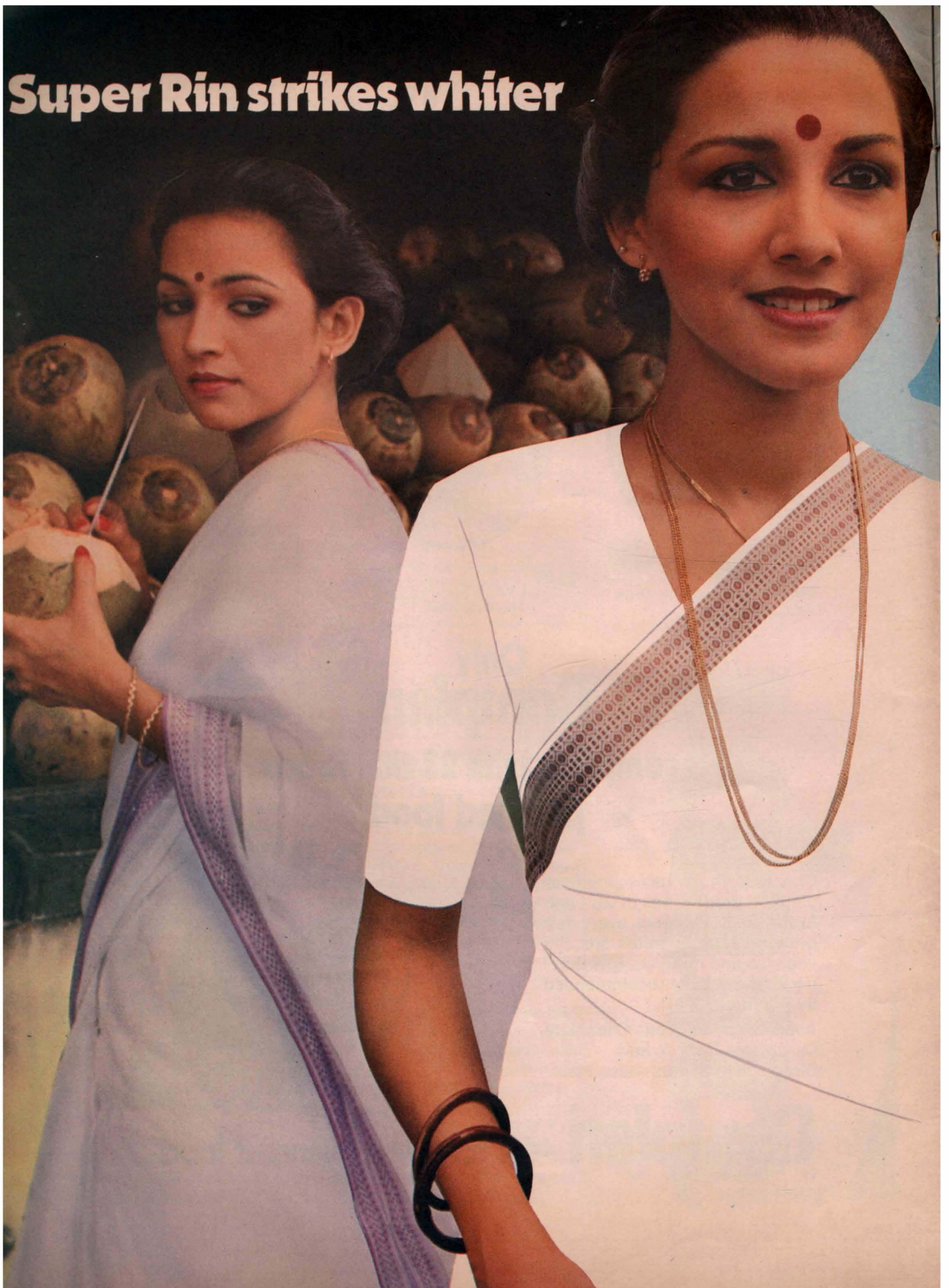


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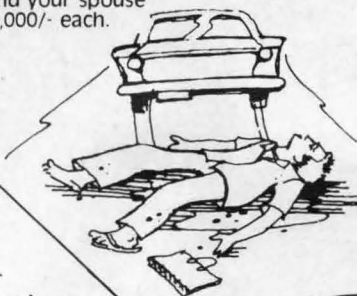
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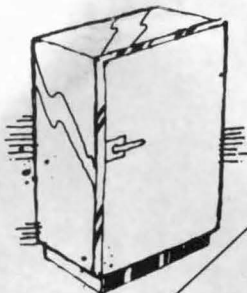
\* **HOSPITALIZATION** — compensates medical/surgical/hospital expenses for you and your spouse.



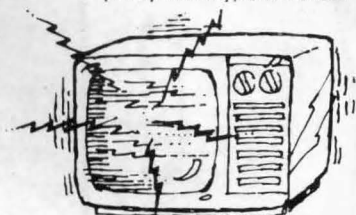
\* **PERSONAL LIABILITIES** — protection for legal liability worth Rs. 25,000/-



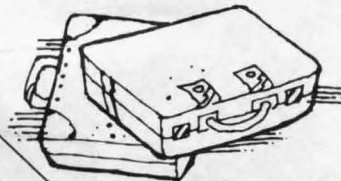
\* **ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES BREAKDOWN** — loss or damage due to breakdown is compensated for.



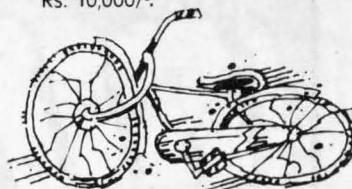
\* **TELEVISION SET DAMAGE** — due to fire, lightning, short circuiting, arcing, self-heating etc., as well as third party liability, is covered.



\* **BAGGAGE LOSS** — cover against accident, fire or theft of baggage during travel anywhere in the world.



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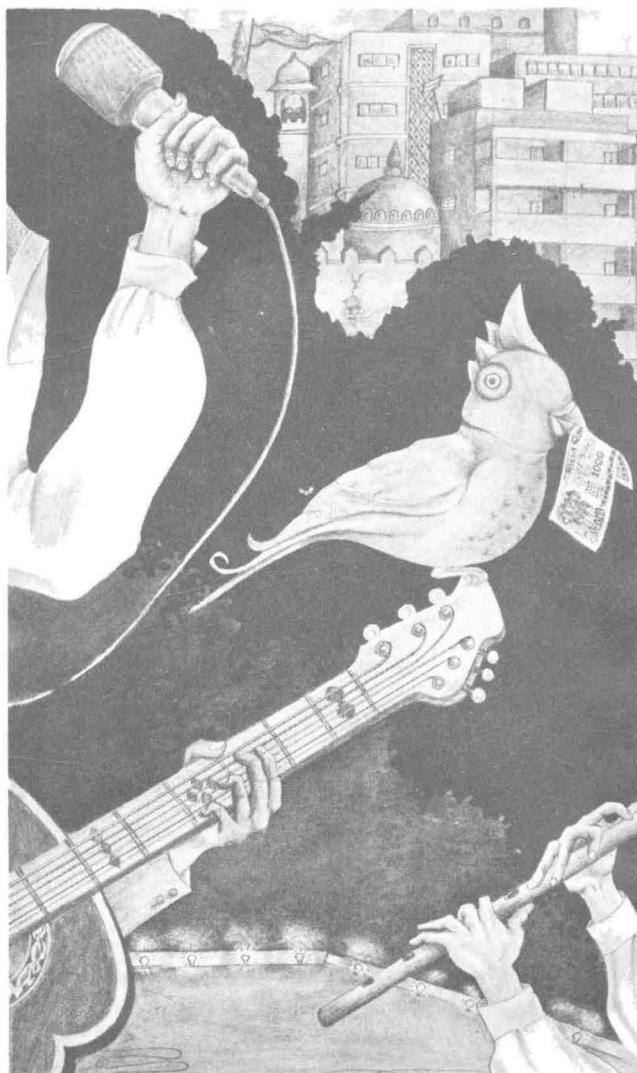
BY ASHOK GOPAL

# THE ROCK INVASION

*Why foreign bands are stopping off here*

WHEN STEWART COPELAND, Andy Summers and Sting landed in Bombay in March 1980, probably only a handful of people knew that they belonged to a British new wave band called the Police. Even the record companies hadn't heard of them though they were on top of the British pop charts. But when news of the group's concert in Bombay spread, hundreds of rock fans in the city grabbed on to the opportunity of seeing them for the first time. They were ready to pay upto Rs 100 just to see a rock concert by an international group—any international group it seemed, would do. The concert drew more than 3,000 people and ended with some thrilled fans chanting, "We want the *havalbars*." Subsequently, HMV released four albums. All sold well, and two were runaway hits.

Then came Kraftwerk, the West German electronic music stars. They had only one concert in Bombay, (September 1981), while on a stopover. A month later Campa Cola 'unleashed' Osibisa. Over two concerts in Delhi, three in Bombay and one each in Bangalore, Madras and Calcutta, the 'Woyaya' boys, (whom the critics would classify only as a minor group), drew thousands of cheering, shouting, feet-stomping spectators. When the group was 'unleashed' at New Delhi's Ashoka Hotel the pricetag for the cheapest ticket was Rs 500 and still the hall was full. At the concert at the India Gate Pavilion, the audience included Rajiv Gandhi, Arun Nehru, Arun Singh (all MPs) and Vivek Bharat Ram of the DCM group. In Madras, the concert almost led to a riot as hordes of over-enthusiastic fans flooded the stage. Within weeks, more



than 40,000 copies of the LP *Osibisa-Hottest Hits* were sold out.

Until the Police concert no international rock group had given a public performance in India. Now, the floodgates have been suddenly opened. Three months after Osibisa came Wishbone Ash, the British heavy-rock band; a month later, (February 1982), the vaguely 'new wave' Boomtown Rats; and some months later, two fairly obscure groups: Classix Nouveaux and Hanoi Rocks. In February 1983, Wishbone Ash started on their second Indian tour. And now, there are strong rumours that Boney M, Abba, Jethro

Tull, Stevie Wonder and others may tour India. In a space of just over 24 months, India seems to be developing into a recognized venue for international rock and pop concerts.

The spurt in rock music concerts comes from the initiative of a small, but probably growing, coterie of professional music promoters and a belated awareness from sponsoring companies that the affluent youth segment of the market is perhaps best reached through the music it loves. Pure Drinks' Osibisa binge shows both these trends. Introduced through a Rs 30-lakh media blitz in the newspapers, cinema slides, television sports and street hoardings, the Osibisa tour was obviously a marketing ploy to take Campa Cola to the youth segment, especially in Western and Southern India where Pure Drinks is a poor second to the market leaders. Charanjit Singh, Cong (I) MP and Managing Director, Pure Drinks, announced that he was starting a company to arrange promotional tours by foreign musicians, apparently in collaboration with Colin

Brown, owner of a London casino. Singh promised to get Boney M and Donna Summer over for the inauguration of his New Delhi hotel, the Meridien. Those plans fizzled out and nothing has since been heard of Charanjit Singh's music promotion ambitions but music industry sources are confident that he is only 'keeping quiet' in the wake of embarrassing press and parliamentary questions.

Other lesser-known entrepreneurs have followed suite. Vikram Singh, a man with some connections with the princely Rajpipla family, founded a 'charitable trust' known as the

## *Rock impresarios have apparently devised their own methods of by-passing RBI regulations.*

Bombay Music Association (BMA) and brought Wishbone Ash and the Boomtown Rats to India. Another enterprising promoter is Yusuf Gandhi, 32, who describes himself as an 'administrator turned music promoter'. Gandhi, who is jazz key-board player Louis Banks' manager, had organised a festival of Indian rock groups in 1972. Later he also helped organise the Xavier's classical music festival, and was tour manager for Shakti in 1979-80. Last year he joined hands with Henry Tham, son of a Chinese restaurant owner, to start Arena Promoters. Unlike the BMA whose ostensible aim is 'charity', Arena Promoters' avowed aim is to bring foreign music to India for profit. It's maiden concert—by Hanoi Rocks—lost money because of counterfeit tickets and a lack of sponsors, but Yusuf Gandhi insists that within two-three years he will establish himself very well. "The success of The Police and Osibisa," Gandhi adds, "shows the tremendous potential for this business." Moreover it is a business that requires little investment—only contacts in the international music business and some legal dexterity.

The biggest obstacle to arranging international music concerts are regulations of the Reserve Bank of India according to which no foreign currency can be paid to foreign musicians performing in India. Further, organisers can only pay for the musicians' living and travelling expenses—they cannot give the group gifts or a nominal fee or even pocket expenses in Indian currency. Only when an organiser gives such an undertaking to the RBI can he obtain a license from the police to hold such a concert. In effect, this means that a group can perform in India 'only for the fun of it'.

The question of payment did not arise in the case of The Police and Kraftwerk concerts. The Police were on a year's world tour to take advantage of a tax exile. When they stopped over in Bombay they offered to play

over AIR free. They were directed to the Time and Talents Club, a reputed trust, that has organised concerts by foreign musicians for the last 20 years. The aged Parsi ladies who run the club asked Niranjani Jhaveri, Honorary Secretary of Jazz India, to arrange the concert. The Police performed for 'charity' and HMV sponsored the publicity. Likewise Kraftwerk performed in India on a stop-over. HMV, who released their successful *Man Machine* album, claims to have only paid for the group's hotel expenses. Pure Drinks claimed that the Osibisa tour was financed by a 'London-based business house'. But they refused to give any further details. As one record company executive remarks, "Only a Charanjit Singh with all his influence could do it."

The other impresarios have apparently devised their own methods of by-passing RBI regulations. At least one group is known to have received 'gifts' in lieu of payment from the organisers. Another group is said to have been paid in dollars bought in black. Music organisers say that other modes of payment are through a foreign bank account or diversion of a company's export earnings. Though all these procedures are blatantly illegal, enforcement is unheard of. Hotels, for example, are known to pay musicians from their foreign exchange earnings without taking the RBI's permission.

Despite these alternatives no one can really afford to pay for a top international group. When they came to India The Police were reportedly demanding £50,000 a concert. Even Osibisa, who were well past their prime, demanded \$ 12,000 a concert. Further, the cost of transporting the 27-member group, including eight musicians, 19 'roadies', one manager and the 28 tonnes of sound equipment from London was about £20,000. Since average gate proceeds from an international rock concert in India are only about one lakh rupees, it is hardly surprising that most of the groups who

have performed here are relatively minor in the international context.

But, Rima Kashyap, Manager, Creative Services, HMV, says, "Many top music groups heading to the Far East or Australia may not mind performing free in India, if only for a paid holiday in our country."

Once a promoter has signed a group, he turns to a sponsor. Wishbone Ash and Boomtown Rats were sponsored by Golden Tobacco who are obviously looking for avenues to advertise their product without printing their statutory warning. Other sponsoring companies claim to be motivated by less crassly commercial interests. Boots (makers of Strepsils), who sponsored the publicity for Shakti, consider it part of 'corporate social responsibility'. "Or to put it in other words," says Anil Kapoor, Marketing Manager, "Some of us like music and believe that such concerts should be encouraged." Now Philips India are reportedly trying to organise concerts by Polydor artists who have an arrangement with the parent company in Holland. Philips sought to arrange an Indian tour by the American country group Seals and Croft, but later dropped the idea when it learnt that the group had played in South Africa. A Philips executive however, makes it clear that, "We will arrange such concerts only if the musicians agree to perform free. We will not try to twist regulations."

If a promoter ropes in a company to sponsor all expenses, it is estimated, he can easily make a profit of about one lakh rupees per concert. Legally the promoter directly claims 15% of the profits, the rest goes to 'charity', usually a trust floated by the promoter himself. The sponsoring company also establishes a progressive image amongst the English-speaking, and generally affluent, youth. With such spin-offs it seems certain that more entrepreneurs will enter the fray, whatever the legal obstacles. There is money in the business and the crowds are waiting.



BY MURLI DEORA

## SAVE OUR CITIES

*We cannot afford to neglect the urban middle class*

IT WAS MAHATMA Gandhi who told us that the real India was in the villages and subsequent events have more than proved him right. The vast majority of our people live in the rural areas and agriculture remains the most common occupation. Because they have the number, the rural voters have always dominated the political scene and most of our important politicians were elected from rural constituencies.

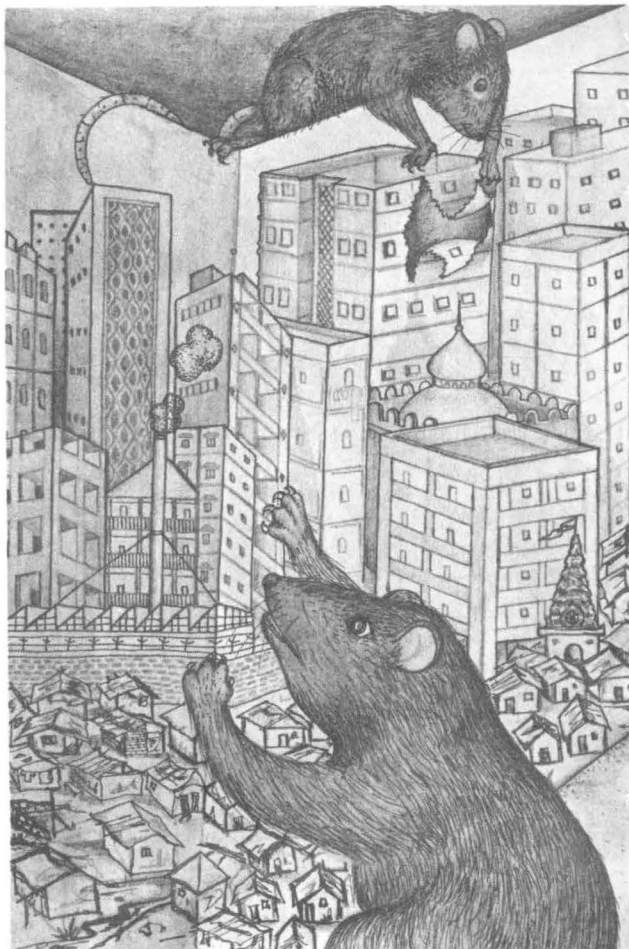
It is therefore fitting that the government should regard rural affairs among its top priorities and necessary that the villages should be developed. No sensible person could possibly dispute this. However, as an essentially urban politician, I think it is only fair to point out that rural development must not be allowed to take place at the cost of the cities.

In terms of tax revenue the cities contribute far more to the national exchequer than the villages—72 per cent of Maharashtra's revenue comes from Bombay, for example and much of the country's wealth is created here. The industrial infrastructure that allows us to hold our own in today's world is located here. Our research, our development, the key to our progress—all of this is to be found in the cities. The more the country develops, the more important will be the role of the cities.

Unfortunately, the cities and the people who live in them have been neglected by successive governments. Because the villages have the power of numbers and therefore, the political clout, the problems of our cities have never been paid enough attention to.

One need only look at the city of

Murli Deora is the President of the Bombay Region Congress Committee.



Bombay to see what the result of this neglect has been. All development has been haphazard and ill-planned. Gigantic tower blocks have come up in areas that lack the civic infrastructure to cope with them. The public transport system cannot handle the loads placed on it. The air is so polluted that your eyes burn and sting. The water is even more polluted and is almost totally unfit for human consumption.

As with urban development, so it is with the urban dweller. Take the case of the average office worker in Bombay. Over the last decade, he has seen his standard of living drop alarmingly. His salary has gone up only marginally, while inflation has eaten into the value of the rupee in his pocket. A high rate of taxation, both direct and indirect,

compulsory deposits, provident fund deductions and the like ensure that his take-home salary is so small that he cannot maintain his life-style.

Of course, there are those who are even worse off. Slum dwellers and semi-employed transients, for instance. But my point is this: the urban middle class is, in many ways, the backbone of this country. Its members are educated, hard-working, largely honest, morally upright and too 'civilized' to agitate or to use force to get what they need. Unfortunately, they lack political clout because they are relatively small in number.

But it is this small number that throws up our administrators, our entrepreneurs, our scientists, our doctors and our teachers. The more the urban middle class finds itself neglected and its cities destroyed, the more disillusioned it gets. Its members look for jobs abroad or discard the middle class morality that keeps them honest and up-

right. And with the disillusionment of the middle class comes a breakdown in the country's development.

We have been right to concentrate on rural development. But we have been wrong to do this at the expense of the city-dweller. If this country is to continue to create wealth, if it is to continue to produce some of the world's best professionals and if it is to develop a healthy, honest, democracy, then we cannot afford to neglect our cities.

We must take urgent steps to improve urban conditions and stem the haphazard growth inspired by speculators. And we should try and see that our economic and social policies take into account the interests of our city dwellers. ♦

# *Film Stars*





# *and Politics*

*If Amitabh Bachchan stood for election, our opinion poll shows that he would lose. But Hindi film stars have been involved with politics and politicians for much longer than is generally recognized.*

**I**T HAD TO happen. When NT Rama Rao followed MG Ramachandran's lead and became the second film star to become chief minister of an Indian state, the implications for the Bombay film industry were clear. If regional idols could find political success in the South, couldn't the national heroes of the Hindi screen do even better? After all, only two kinds of people are widely recognized all over India—politicians and Hindi film stars. After Mrs Gandhi, Amitabh Bachchan must be the most widely known Indian alive today.

It seems logical for the Congress (I) to cultivate Bachchan and for the Gandhi family to regard him as a very special friend. As the idol of millions, Amitabh could easily top the achievements of an NTR or an MGR. He would be a natural politician.

Or would he?

An opinion poll commissioned by Imprint and carried out for us by Pathfinders: India, an independent marketing research organisation, shows that Bachchan's political charisma is over-rated. The poll shows that were he to stand for parliament from the Bombay north west constituency, where he lives, Amitabh would lose to sitting Member of Parliament (MP) Ram Jethmalani by a huge margin (51% for Jethmalani versus only 23% for Bachchan). It also shows that a majority of people in that constituency feel that film stars should not enter politics and that even if they do, they will make poor politicians. They do not object to Bachchan and Rajiv Gandhi being friends, but feel strongly against Rajiv taking Amitabh's help for his political campaigns. And worse still, for the Bachchan ego, they feel that of the Hindi movie stars, Dilip Kumar, not Amitabh, would make the best politician.

The results show the folly of trying to transfer the

southern experience into the Hindi movie world. The Bombay audience may love its idols, but is discerning enough to realize that an angry young man does not an effective young politician make. In the circumstances, perhaps it is just as well that Bachchan has consistently played down any speculation that he will enter politics.

Of course, the results do not necessarily mean that Bachchan would also lose from a rural constituency with a largely illiterate electorate. And they do not negate the years of contact between politicians and film stars during which each helped the other in countless ways. The stars have received favours, censorship clearances, assistance in tax matters and official recognition, while the politicians have shared in the glamour of the movie business, have used the actors to raise funds for relief schemes and campaign chests and have sometimes even won elections because of the crowds that the stars have attracted for them. Moreover, several Hindi film stars have felt the urge to dabble in politics at some stage or the other and of course, many of them even formed their own political group—the National Party—in 1979, which was conspicuously unsuccessful.

**I**T ALL STARTED in 1957 when Krishna Menon chose north Bombay as his parliamentary constituency. To be sure, film personalities and politicians had met before and some of them (such as Mehboob Khan and Jawaharlal Nehru) were even friends. But it wasn't till the Krishna Menon campaign that the film industry really involved itself in politics. Recalls Dev Anand, "We believed in Menon. He was a great man. But he was a complete stranger to his constituency. He had just returned from abroad and used to address meetings in English. I think the stars swayed the electorate in his favour."

## *Can a film star easily switch roles to become a politician?*

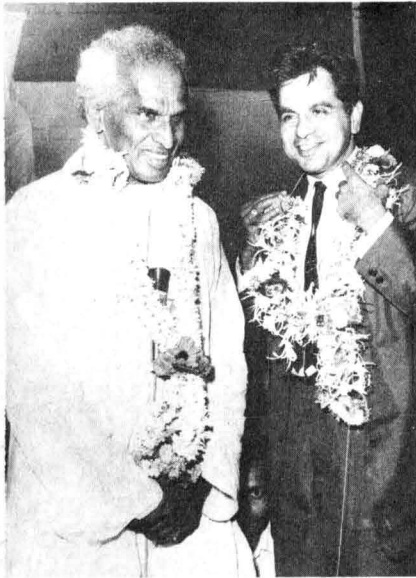


Among Menon's campaign organisers was film director Rajbans Khanna. It was Rajbans who realized that Menon on his own, would not pull in the crowds. He managed to collect together Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor, Pran, BR Chopra, Dilip Kumar, Sohrab Mody and others. As each film personality got involved, he brought along his own friends. Dilip Kumar enlisted Johnny Walker, BR Chopra brought along brother Yash and the stars of his films and so on. The ploy worked. Each time Menon was to address a meeting, the film people would work the crowds first, warming them up for the finale of Menon's speech. The voters loved it and a crusty, tea-drinking, cantankerous politician was transformed into the popular MP for north Bombay.

In 1962, when Menon defended his seat against veteran Gandhian, JB Kriplani, the stars were back. Menon's campaign managers (including Rajbans and lawyer Rajni Patel) decided that the theme of the campaign was going to be Left (represented by Menon) versus Right (represented by Kriplani and his Congress supporters such as SK Patil). So while Kriplani was portrayed as being an 'agent of Right reaction', with suggestions that party bosses and Marwari industrialists were behind him, Krishna Menon became the 'man of the people'. Film stars, with their public popularity seemed the ideal vehicle to get this message across.

Balraj Sahni, a young Manoj Kumar, Ashok Kumar (remembered as being utterly committed to Menon's campaign), Dev Anand, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar and several others became enthusiastic volunteers and toured the constituency, ceaselessly proclaiming their support for Menon's populist cause. Degrees of commitment, of course, varied. Many people involved in the campaign seem to remember that Raj Kapoor needed some persuasion before he stirred from his Chembur villa, while Dilip Kumar was perhaps the most tireless of the supporters. Recalls Rajbans Khanna, "There was one occasion, when after campaigning had officially ended, Dilip asked us if there was anything else he could do. We told him that we were nervous about a part of Mahim, where we felt that Menon might lose. It was too late to campaign, but Dilip said he'd see what he could do anyhow. He put on an armband saying 'volunteer' and visited nearly every flat in that area, climbing up and





down staircases all day. Because campaigning had ended, he would not ask people to vote for Krishnaji. All he would say is, 'I've just come to remind you to vote!' It was enough. Everybody knew which side Dilip was on so they realized what he meant. And many of them were so overwhelmed by the fact that Dilip Kumar had visited their homes that they all turned out to vote for Menon."

Needless to say, Menon won again, this time by a huge margin. Significantly, in 1967 when Menon contested once more without any stars as part of his campaign, an obscure Congress politician called Barve defeated him handily.

**W**HAT MADE THE stars do it? Why did they suddenly immerse themselves so totally in political matters? Partly, it was commitment. Men like Dilip Kumar, Balraj Sahni and Ashok Kumar genuinely believed in Menon's cause. But for many of the others, it was the first opportunity they had to prove that they were more than mere *tamasha-wallahs* or jokers. For the first time, they were being taken seriously and their political opinions listened to. Recalls Rajbans, "I remember that late one night Raj Kapoor, BR Chopra, Dilip and myself were driving into Bombay from Poona having met Nehru there. We were all quite drunk and little concerned about being stopped by the police—this was the Prohibition era. Sure enough, after we'd entered the precincts of Bombay city, our car was stopped at a police checkpoint. As film stars were known to be flagrant violators of Prohibition laws, we felt cer-

## Because of his support for Menon, Dilip Kumar was victimised.

tain we'd be arrested. Much to our surprise, the policeman who looked through the car window did not even notice we were drunk. 'You must be coming from a meeting,' he said, smiled and waved us on. I told the stars then that this was what their political involvement had done for them. Earlier, the policeman would have inferred that they were returning late from a drunken party. Now, with their enhanced stature, he assumed that they'd been out campaigning late."

For many stars, proximity to politicians also took care of their own interests or so they thought. In fact, some of them were in for a major disappointment. Once elected, Menon refused to help them in any way. Nor was Pandit Nehru more forthcoming. He entrusted the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to Dr Keskar who objected to the 'left-wing' stance of the stars and remained unsympathetic to their problems. When a delegation of Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, BR Chopra, Bimal Roy and Rajbans went to see Nehru to ask for KD Malaviya as their minister, they were turned down. Instead Gopala Reddy, whose tenure in the Information Ministry was only distinguished by his dependence on civil servants, was appointed.

The stars had not realized that by embroiling themselves in politics, they ran the risk of making many important enemies. The attitude of the right-wing Dr Keskar helped many of them to recognize what they had got into and some actors quickly made their peace with all factions of the ruling party. One man who did not was Dilip Kumar and he spent the next decade paying for his folly. His first production *Ganga Jamuna* was brutally hacked by the censors on flimsy grounds, because several important politicians wanted to teach him a lesson. Then, he was accused of being a Pakistani spy without any real evidence. Shantilal Shah, a right-wing Morarji Desai protégé who was Home Minister of Maharashtra

even had him raided on espionage charges. Later, Morarji's Finance Ministry kept up the persecution. Though he was widely regarded as being among the poorer stars in the film industry (because he made only one film a year), income tax authorities filed several complicated suits against him that took nearly ten years to settle. (Ironically, the cases were finally disposed off by two other politicians: NKP Salve and Rajni Patel.)

**D**ESPITE THE MANY problems that Dilip Kumar's political involvement caused him, there was a silver lining. The Menon campaigns elevated him in stature to a level that none of his contemporaries had reached. He maintained this stature by acting as though he was more than a mere film star and today, the years of effort have paid off. As the *Imprint*—Pathfinders poll shows, the electorate still regards him as the best potential politician among the stars.

In 1963 he even managed to publicly win the affection of Pandit Nehru. At a Congress meeting in Delhi that year, Dilip was billed to appear on the same platform as Nehru. The police, fearful of the pandemonium that would undoubtedly follow Dilip's arrival, asked him not to enter till the Prime Minister had been seated on the dais, so that they could ensure Nehru's safety. When Dilip did appear, Panditji had already begun speaking. The crowd recognized Dilip as he tried to sneak

(Continued on page 22)



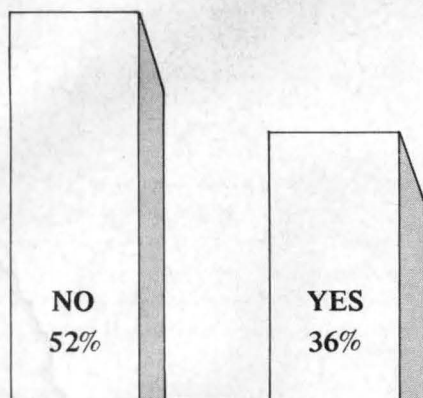
Dev Anand congratulates Krishna Menon after his election victory.

# THE RESULTS OF THE POLL

Imprint commissioned Pathfinders:India to conduct an opinion poll in the Bombay north west constituency to find out how people felt about film stars joining politics.

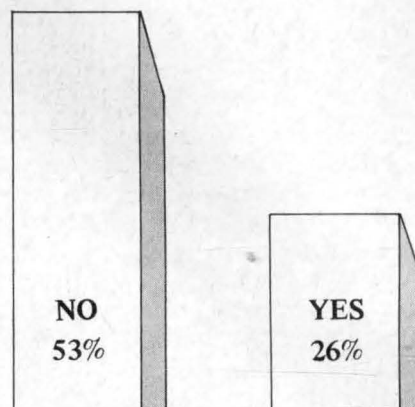
Pathfinders interviewed 207 voters from all walks of life to obtain an accurate picture of the voting climate in that constituency. Most film stars (including Amitabh Bachchan) live in north west Bombay.

## Should film stars enter politics?



The majority was against film stars entering politics, though 12 per cent said that they couldn't decide either way.

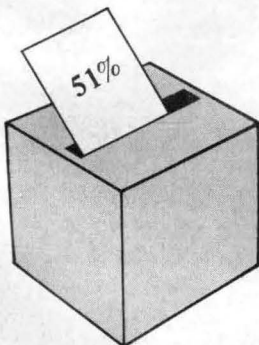
## Would film stars make successful politicians?



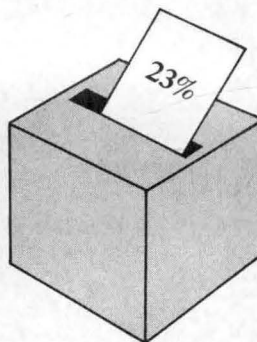
Over half the respondents believed that film stars would not make successful politicians. A relatively high proportion (21 per cent) said they couldn't say.

## Who would you prefer as your next MP?

Ram Jethmalani



Amitabh Bachchan



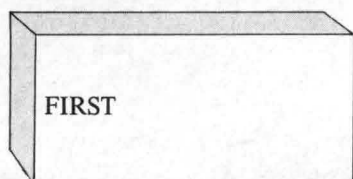
Despite speculation to the contrary, the poll shows that Ram Jethmalani (the current Member of Parliament for the constituency) would easily defeat Amitabh Bachchan were the star to stand.

Sixteen per cent said that they would vote for neither candidate while ten per cent said that they didn't know how they would vote.



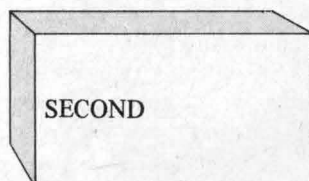
## Which of the following would you vote for?

DILIP KUMAR



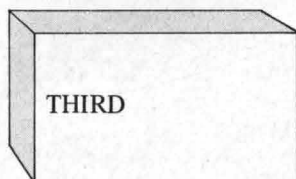
*Regarded as the best potential politician.*

AMITABH BACHCHAN



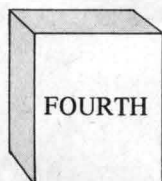
*Not taken as seriously as Dilip Kumar.*

SUNIL DUTT



*A very close third to Bachchan.*

DEV ANAND



*Preferred by very few respondents.*

SHATRUGHAN SINHA

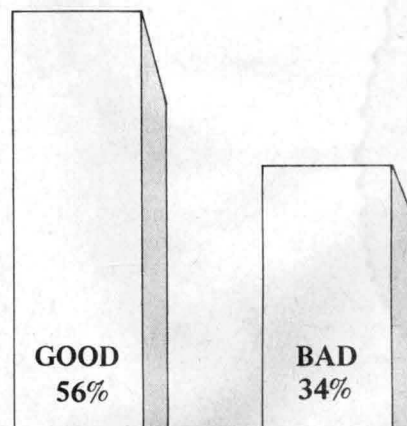


*Clearly not in the running at all.*

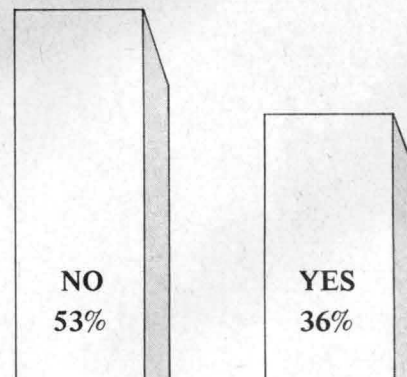
Respondents were given the names of five film stars and asked which of the stars they would vote for (in order of preference) in the event of a parliamentary election.



## Amitabh-Rajiv relationship—good or bad?



## Should Rajiv seek Amitabh's help?



Respondents felt that Amitabh and Rajiv Gandhi were welcome to be friends but disapproved of any political involvement.

(Continued from page 19)

on to the dais and began clapping and cheering. The cheers were so loud that they completely drowned out the Prime Minister's speech. Nehru stopped, turned around, saw what the commotion was about and made a sudden decision. For a second, others on the dais feared a flash of the famous Nehru temper but instead, the Prime Minister walked upto Dilip, embraced him warmly and led him to the front of the stage, holding his hand high. The film industry, had clearly, arrived.

It was this sort of recognition that many of the other stars sought. Throughout the second half of the '60s, there was a steady stream of stars to Delhi. They had film premieres to donate to political charities and were only too willing to raise funds or to campaign for any deserving cause. When Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister and announced that his slogan was *Jai Jawan, Jai Kissan* Manoj Kumar proclaimed that he would make a film *Upkaar* on that theme. He flew to Delhi, invited Shastri to the premiere of *Shaheed* his film about Bhagat Singh and since then, has managed to portray himself as the embodiment of every patriotic cliché ever written.

In the late '60s Nargis and Sunil Dutt were friends of the Mohans of Mohan Meakin Breweries. The Mohans had close links with the Gandhis (especially Sanjay) and were only too willing to introduce the Duttts to them. At that time, there was talk of building a film studio near Delhi in which both the Duttts and the Mohans would be

## Manoj Kumar became the embodiment of every patriotic cliché.

involved. Nothing came of the scheme, but Sunil Dutt made his debut into political circles. Later, as his career went into a nose-dive, he kept himself in the public eye only by ensuring that the government kept inviting him and his Ajanta Arts troupe to entertain the armed forces or to perform at public functions. In 1971 the Duttts campaigned for Mrs Gandhi's Congress as did Dara Singh and Mahendra Kapoor. The Kapoor family also offered its assistance. Slowly but surely, the links between Bombay's film world and Delhi's political circuit, were being established.

**B**Y THE '70s though, whatever ideological component there may have been to the links in the Krishna Menon days, had largely vanished. As Indian politics became more ideologically ambiguous, the relationships between stars and politicians became murkier. Clearly, many of the film people were still in it for the recognition but now there were other motives. They wanted entertainment tax exemptions, the withdrawal of income tax cases or assistance with



unsympathetic censors. The politicians too, seemed to have forgotten the crowd-pulling ability of the stars. They were rarely invited to campaign and when they were called, they were not properly utilized. For many of the newer politicians, film stars were attractive only because they were glamorous and could provide alcohol and women. Only in Bombay did Rajni Patel use his close friendship with Dilip Kumar to organize processions of stars to raise funds whenever there was a drought or a famine.

This trend continued through the Emergency. To Information and Broadcasting Minister, VC Shukla, the film industry represented no more than a source of easy money and cheap sex. Producers found that to get censorship clearances, permission to shoot abroad or even the raw stock that went into their cameras, they had to pay off officials in cash or kind. The VC Shukla stories are well known. At a meeting of producers in 1975, he berated Ram-anand Sagar for daring to release the posters of his *Charas* before the censors could clear the film. The film would now be banned, Shukla announced. By the next morning, Shukla had changed his mind. The film industry had no idea what blandishments Sagar had provided to make Shukla relent in the course of a single night, but it could guess.

Shukla's womanizing ways soon became common knowledge. At a film festival, he made a pass at actress Vidya Sinha and stories about his dalliances with other stars are still retold by film people. But his susceptibility to women made it easy for producers to bribe him. GP Sippy, the producer of *Sholay* is even reported to have arranged for a star aspirant called Candy to minister to Shukla's needs.



Sunil and Nargis Dutt with SK Patil (centre) : in the public eye.



It was during the Emergency of course, that the *Kissa Kursi Ka* episode took place and Sanjay Gandhi and Shukla were later accused of having burned the print of Amrit Nahata's satirical film.

**T**HE FIRST INDICATION that ideology was once again going to play some part in film-politics relationships came with the announcement of the 1977 elections. Dev Anand, Shatrughan Sinha and Amol Palekar announced that they were opposed to Mrs Gandhi's regime and campaigned openly for the Janata Party. The sceptics maintained that they were only complaining because they had themselves suffered during the Emergency. But of the three, only Dev Anand had been adversely affected by the Emergency and even he maintains, "Yes, I was harassed but this made me realize that if I, who is a somebody in this country, could be made to suffer so much, what happens to the millions who are nobodies? You could say I was motivated by a personalised perspective, not by selfishness."

All three stars were taking a con-

## ***Emergency-era politicians liked the easy money and cheap sex.***

siderable personal risk by coming out in the open. At the time, it seemed probable that Mrs Gandhi's Congress would win the elections and there was the possibility of official retribution. "I wasn't naive enough to believe that I wouldn't pay for my involvement with the opposition after the Emergency. But at the time, I wasn't worried about it," says Amol Palekar. "I was doing it from my own conviction—not to seek favours or to hit back at anyone."

The Congress Party had its usual supporters campaigning for it but this time, they were less successful. Dilip Kumar and Johnny Walker went to Uttar Pradesh in 1977 and did their best to re-awaken enthusiasm for Mrs Gandhi's regime. But from all

accounts, Dilip's heart was not in it—his mentor Rajni Patel had been victimized by Sanjay Gandhi—and the crowd was less than responsive. When Dilip tried to lead his audience through the usual chorus of *Desh Ki Neta—Indira Gandhi*, he found an unusual response. The crowd would shout back 'Saira Banu'. Later, when he attempted a political speech, somebody yelled, 'Gaana gaao'.

After Mrs Gandhi had been defeated, Dilip is reported to have sworn off campaigning forever. The new heroes were the Janata stars. Says Amol Palekar, "Jayprakash Narayan invited me to Delhi for the swearing-in ceremony of the new government but I refused to go." Shatrughan and Dev however, did go to Delhi, and were mobbed at every meeting.

But history repeated itself. Just as the stars who had believed in Krishna Menon's cause found that no favours were forthcoming from their mentor, the Janata stars were also in for a shock. Dev Anand had placed all his hopes on *Des Pardes*, a film about immigrants to the United Kingdom. He was shattered when he discovered that



(From left to right) : Ramesh Sippy, Rajni Patel, VC Shukla, Dharmendra, Amitabh, GP Sippy and Dilip Kumar at the Sholay premiere.



under the Janata government's censorship policy, the film would get an 'Adults Only' certification because part of the action took place in a pub. He went to Delhi, pleaded his case and was turned down.

As always, it was the people who had no ideological affinity with politics

## ***Shatrughan's chamchas said he would be Chief Minister of Bihar.***

who prospered. Actor Sanjay Khan became a close friend of the new Industries Minister, George Fernandes and even claimed that as they were both brought up in Bangalore, they came from similar backgrounds. For his part, Fernandes happily dispensed with his much proclaimed hatred of five star culture and let Khan throw massive parties in his honour at Sanjay's Juhu Villa. What he discussed with the likes of Ranjeet and Zaherra at such gatherings, must remain a matter of speculation.

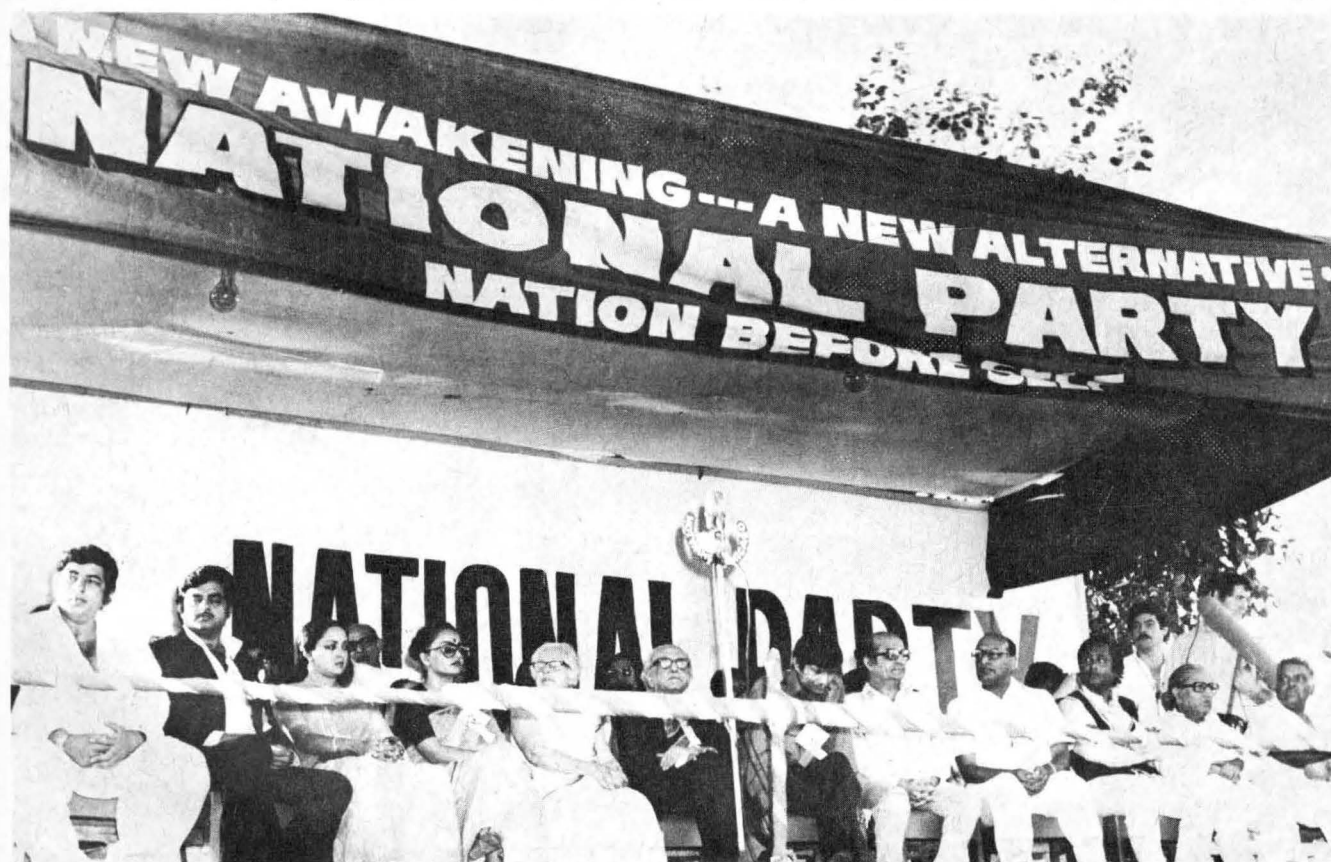
**W**HEN THE JANATA government fell, people like Sanjay Khan kept a low profile. Instead, it was left to Dev Anand to suggest that film stars enter politics not just as campaign attractions but as candidates.

"We realized that the country need-

ed a new alternative—a new slogan," Anand explains. "We felt that all our political leaders had let the people down. So we decided to form our own party." It is not clear whose idea the National Party originally was but Anand soon became its spokesman and later, its official leader. At a press conference in the Crystal Room of Bombay's Taj Mahal Hotel, a veritable Who's Who of the industry lauded the party's objectives: Shreeram Bohra, Gulshan Rai, GP Sippy, Ramanand Sagar, IS Johar and Tarachand Barjatya.

As the campaign continued others promised their support—among them Manoj Kumar, Rajesh Khanna and Dharmendra. The party spoke in terms of putting up 300 candidates and Shatrughan Sinha's *chamchas* suggested that he could well be the next Chief Minister of Bihar. Dev Anand's argument was simple, "A film-maker knows what the masses want. He makes films for them, so, he can gear his policies towards them and win elections."

In the event, this hypothesis was never tested. First of all, Manoj Kumar opted out. Then the producers began to get cold feet. And predictably, the film people began fighting within themselves. Some of them questioned Anand's leadership and others thought



*The inauguration of the National Party: Dev Anand (centre) flanked by Justice Chagla (left), Nani Palkhivala (right).*



# The North-South Divide

## *Hindi film stars lack the political clout of their southern counterparts.*

THERE ARE TINSEL gods all over India. But it is only those from the South—namely MGR and NTR, who have risen to positions of political power. No Hindi film star has won an election seat let alone occupy a position of power. This itself shows the remarkable difference between the film industry in the south and in the north and the political consciousness and psychology of the respective audiences.

But any analysis of this north-south cleft would go awry if MGR and NTR were to be clumped together in the same category. MGR is a part of an established ideological (Dravida) movement and was actively involved in the affairs of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam (DMK) years before he took the plunge for power; NTR has no such background. In fact only eight months before he rode to power he had no political connections to speak of.

Still, it can be safely said that the Hindi film star dabbling in politics operates in an environment quite different from his southern counterpart. Firstly the latter has the advantage of a homogeneous, regional audience. Hindi film stars have no such strong regional roots—the typical Hindi film is based on no real geographical and cultural milieu. Thus while a NTR and his films speak to the Andhras, an Amitabh Bachchan or a Dilip Kumar has to cater to Punjabis, Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Kashmiris, Kannadigas and a score of other regional audiences. In other words if Amitabh Bachchan enters politics he will have to talk only about national issues and not just the injured pride of a particular people or the glory of a particular language, as NTR and MGR did.

Just as the Hindi film audience is complex and diversified so is the Hindi film industry itself a divided house.

One recent instance proves the point. The income tax swoop on Hindi film stars after the Andhra elections left the entire industry shaken and angry but no organized protest materialized. As BK Karanjia, Editor, *Screen* remarks, "When the industry cannot join hands and fight for its own survival what is the chance that it will join together to oppose the government?" Of course the industry would like to believe otherwise. At a meeting held after the income tax raids some producers spoke of 'declaring war on the Cong (I) with all the resources at our command' and 'showing the government that if NTR and others can do it we too can'. There was even some talk of reviving a kind of National Party. Needless to say nothing came out of all this wild talk. Said Shreeram Bohra, President of the Indian Motion Picture Producers Association later, "The film industry in the South is more politically conscious. Here almost everyone is a coward."

But it is perhaps not so simple as all that. Even if any major Hindi film star plunges into politics today it is doubtful whether he will be able to repeat NTR's success. Several Hindi film stars have campaigned for different politicians at different times but their impact has at best been marginal. Adds Shreeram Bohra, "To attract votes one needs a party and a programme." Hindi film stars have neither. All of them who have dabbled in politics have done little beyond talking of platitudes like the unity of the nation, the population explosion.

Only MGR and NTR capitalized on their screen image to propagate a specific alternative and a specific programme (however populist). NTR promised to retrieve the injured pride of his people, MGR promised cheap rice and free meals for children. Indeed the one common factor in the NTR and the MGR campaigns was that they went about their business not primarily as film stars but as seasoned politicians with catchy slogans. That seems to be the clue to their electoral triumphs. In politics as in films, success lies in catching the public imagination. ♦

that the party's policies (such as they were) had not been properly thought out.

Anand went on, regardless. He invited non-film luminaries like Ramakrishna Bajaj, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nani Palkhivala and MC Chagla to a mammoth rally at Shivaji Park and printed posters announcing the participation of several major stars. Many of them (such as Rajesh Khanna) did not turn up but enough did (Amjad Khan, Hema Malini, Shatrughan Sinha and Reena Roy) for the rally to be a great success.

It augured well for the party but at that stage, the infighting finally overtook the commitment and the party collapsed. It put up no candidates at all and dissolved itself a few weeks before the elections. Looking back, Dev Anand has this to say, "We entered politics in the heat of the moment. We soon realised that politics requires full dedication, money and organization. We had very little experience and time, just four to six weeks to raise funds and a grass-roots organization."

The tragedy of the National Party was that it discredited film star-politicians before they were even put to the test. Some of the party's candidates may well have won. But as it turned out, the collapse of the organization before any nomination papers were filed, meant that this was never established.

**O**NE STAR WHO the National Party did not even bother to approach was Amitabh Bachchan. Almost from the time he entered the film industry in 1969, Bachchan's connections with the Gandhi family had been well publicised. His parents had been friends of the Gandhis in their Allahabad days and his brother Ajitabh was a close friend of Sanjay. Amitabh himself, was a friend of Rajiv though their relationship does not seem to have been particularly close then.

In the post-1974 period when Bachchan became a big star, rumours to the effect that his success had been orchestrated by the Prime Minister's office, began to gain currency. This was, of course, quite incorrect. The producers who signed him up for his first film (KA Abbas and Hrishikesh Mukherjee) did so without any political prompting and later (1971-73), when Amitabh hit a lean patch, there was no question of the PM's office stepping in. His political



connections have helped his career only in the sense that his films never face censorship trouble. And now, no income tax officer would dare raid him.

Throughout the '70s, the Gandhi-Bachchan relationship remained strictly non-political. The families attended

## ***It is rumoured that the Gandhi money was given to Amitabh for safekeeping.***

each other's weddings and the mothers met regularly. It is now rumoured that Sanjay's money was given to Amitabh for safekeeping, but this seems unlikely. Sanjay was far more likely to know how to invest it abroad and during the Janata regime, Amitabh, like all stars, was a prime candidate for a tax raid.

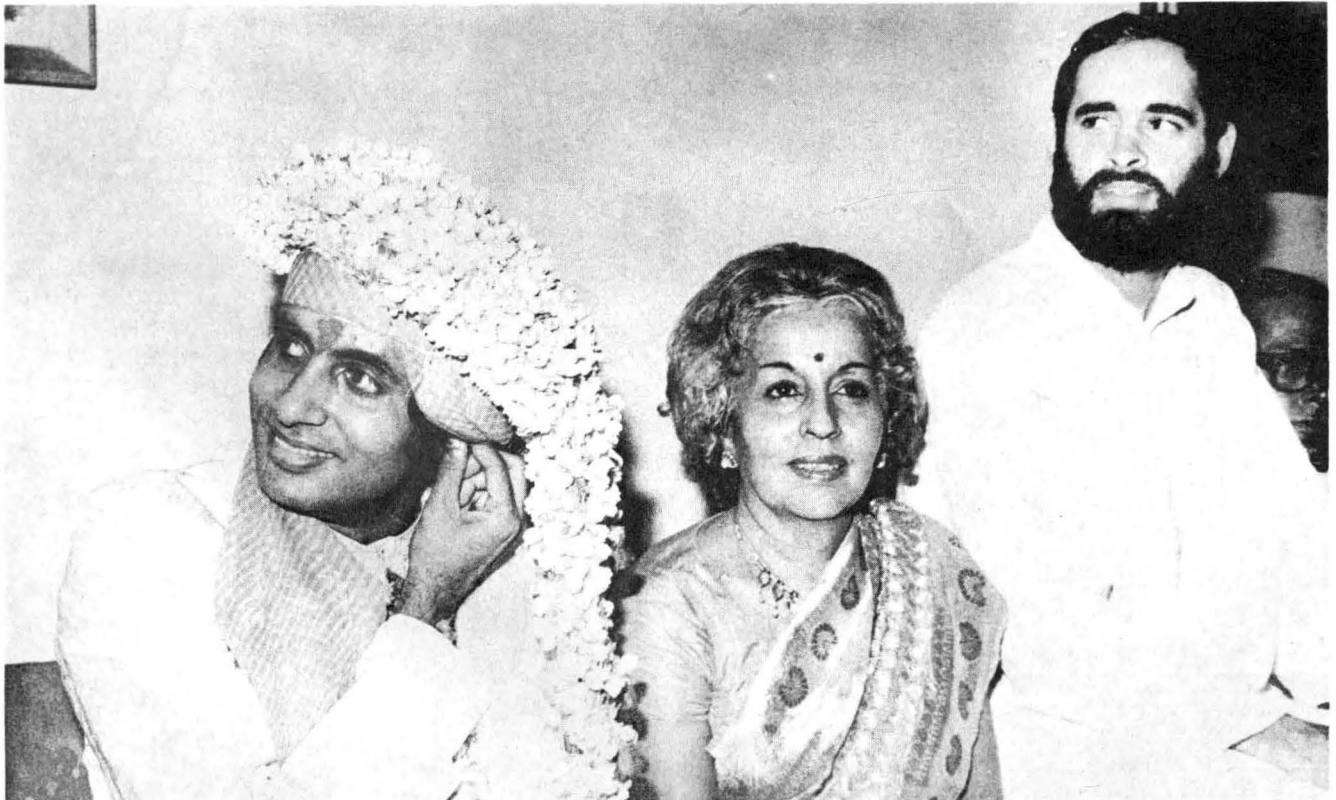
It was after Sanjay's death in 1980 that the Bachchans and Rajiv Gandhi seem to have moved closer to each other. Ajitabh would drive Rajiv all over town and Amitabh was often seen with the new heir-apparent. Bachchan's accident and brush with death in 1982 seem to have cemented the relationship. Mrs Gandhi flew down to Bombay to visit him at Breach Candy hospital and Rajiv cut short his US trip on hearing of Amitabh's condition. During an extended convalescence in Delhi (at the time of the Asiad), Amitabh's many public appearances in the company of the Gandhis led to

speculation that he was joining politics. When NT Rama Rao won the Andhra Pradesh elections it seemed logical for the Congress (I) to draft Bachchan as its own film star. So far, Amitabh has denied that he will join politics in nearly every interview. But then, as the sceptics point out, that was what Rajiv said almost to the moment when he filed his nomination papers from Amethi.

**T**HE CONGRESS'S RETURN to power did not faze some Janata supporters. Sanjay Khan dropped George Fernandes and latched on to young, fun-loving, Karnataka Chief Minister, Gundu Rao. Once again, the Bangalore connection was trotted out and 'we-knew-each-other-in-our-youth' became the refrain.

Unlike many other stars with political links, both Sanjay Khan and his brother Feroze have always managed to extract favours from politicians. Feroze placed a vulgar full page advertisement in the newspapers when Sanjay Gandhi died addressed to 'My Sleeping Prince' (sic), and in return for such ostentatious displays of sycophancy, was never troubled by the censors or the income tax authorities.

Sanjay got even more. His tasteless extravaganza *Abdullah* was passed by the censors (who obligingly held up



*Sanjay Gandhi at Amitabh's wedding : non-political relationship.*



Dev Anand's *Lootmaar* so that Sanjay could take the cinema Anand had reserved for his film) and his Bombay premiere boasted of such political big-wigs as Gundu Rao and AR Antulay. During the speech that preceded the show, Gundu Rao announced that Karnataka would exempt the film from entertainment tax. Then, he turned to Antulay and urged Maharashtra to follow suit. Trapped on the dais, Antulay fumbled uneasily and then, granted the exemption.

Later, Sanjay got more ambitious. He used his political contacts to secure the agency for all advertisement sites at the Asiad. Had all gone well, he stood to make a crore or so. Unfortunately for him Meetco, his Dubai-based associates fell out with the Indian government and the deal ended in litigation.

These days Sanjay seems to have decided that Maneka Gandhi is going to be influential in the future. Accordingly, he is spending rather a lot of time with Akbar 'Dumpy' Ahmed.

**T**HE LINKS BETWEEN politics and Hindi films go back nearly 25 years. But whereas earlier, politicians tended to believe that stars

## *Sanjay and Gundu Rao trapped Antulay at the Abdullah premiere.*

could draw crowds but not win elections, they are not so sure now. The success of MG Ramachandran in Tamilnadu had always been explained away in terms of the DMK's tradition of combining films and politics. However, NTR's sudden rise to political prominence has caused a rethinking of many attitudes. NTR had no political base at all and yet he sailed to victory simply because his was a familiar face.

According to many Congress Party organizers, a star like Amitabh could easily recreate his on-screen persona for the benefit of the voters. Some reports have it that Bachchan is slated to oppose Ram Jethmalani in the Bombay north west constituency, because the Congress feels that his

man-of-the-people image would go down well with the slum dwellers of that area. As our poll shows, this is wishful thinking.

But could Hindi film stars succeed in politics? Many observers feel that they couldn't. Says Rauf Ahmed, editor of *Movie* magazine, "While South Indian stars have used their popularity to capitalize on matters close to the people's hearts, matters they themselves believed in, Bombay's stars have dabbled in politics only as stars, not as politicians. Everybody knows what MGR and NTR stand for. But who knows what any Bombay star believes in?"

To observers like Ahmed, the film-politics connection has ensured mutual benefit for both sides. The more mercenary stars have received favours while the politicians have exploited the stars' crowd-pulling abilities. But that is where the nexus ends. Just as it would be absurd to talk of politicians becoming actors, it makes no sense to regard Bombay's stars as potential leaders.

The Imprint-Pathfinders poll supports this view. But the true test of its validity will be the events of the next two years. ♦



(From left to right) : Sanjay Khan with Gundu Rao, Raj Kapoor and Antulay at the Abdullah premiere.

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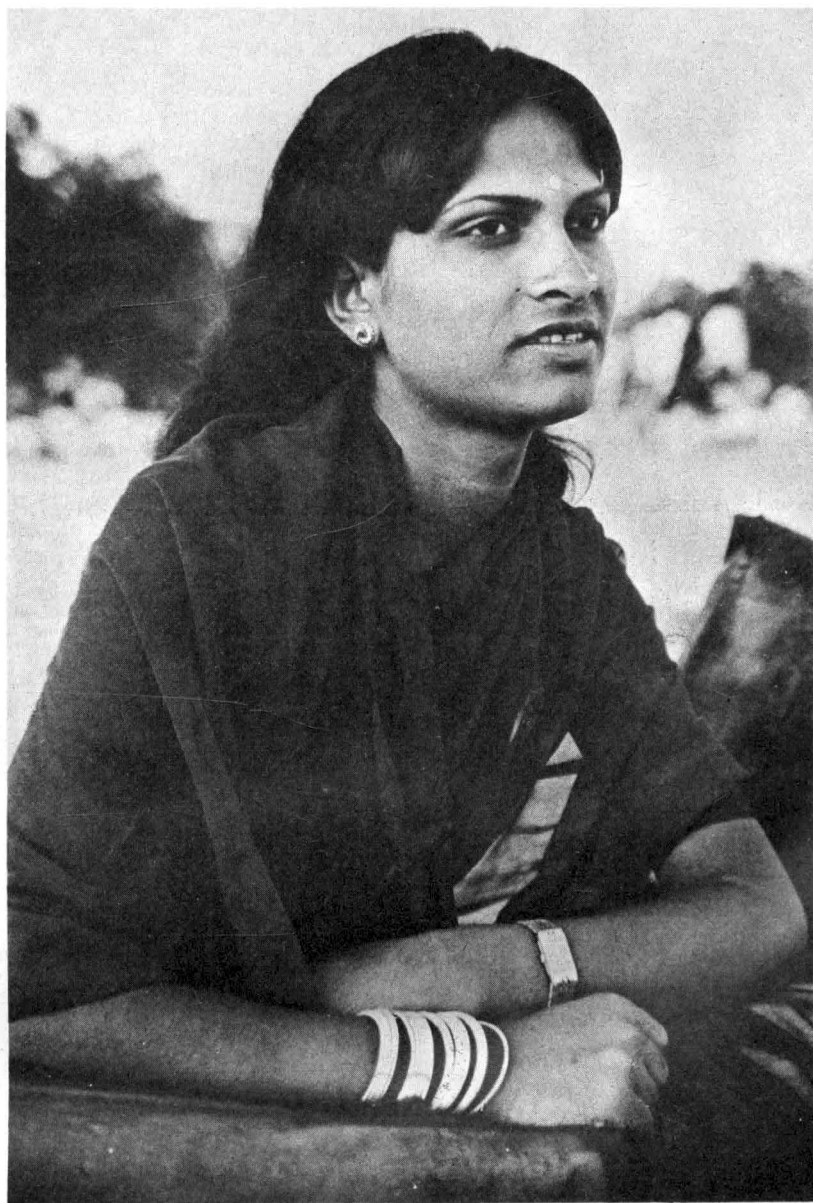
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|              | Mon               | Mon                | Wed               | Thu                | Sat               |
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| Singapore    | A 1640            | 2310               | 1540              | 2310               | 1710              |



# PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG HIJRA

By Sunaina Lowe



**L**ATA STANDS ON one side of Pahela Galli, off Sukhlaji Street, in her yellow georgette sari with the silver embroidery and the one rupee ear-studs she

Sunaina Lowe is on the staff of *Imprint*. Her last article was on the feminist wave in Delhi.

bought at Grant Road shining with a deceptive glitter in her ear lobes. She taps her foot impatiently as she waits for her next customer, thinking all the while that in two days time she will be going home to Hyderabad. Going back after nearly ten years. What is her family going to think of her? The last

time they saw her she was a little boy of ten. She smooths down the bangs on her cheeks and flicks back her shoulder length hair in an unconscious gesture of nervousness.

All around her the carnival of Pahela Galli is gearing up for another crazy night. The street is overrun with flam-



**He  
would not  
share her,  
he said,  
come and  
keep house  
for me.**

ing colours—bright orange, startling almost luminous pink, parrot green with shimmering purple. The whores and the *hijras* are resplendent and the customers in their ordinary nine-to-five dull browns and blues fade into the background. Five little girls in bright red ribbons and cheap, pink nylon dresses stand in a line, their painted red mouths frozen in an almost identical expression of boredom and bewilderment. Taxis and cars come and go, picking up girls or depositing clients. Three drunk men with their arms around each other, in enormous flared trousers, their bottoms squeezed tight by the fabric, lurch towards a staircase and a room that they obviously know well. Somebody's gramophone provides a sound-track of filmi hits.

The *hijras* are in their element parading up and down the street with the exaggerated strut of a striptease artiste, calling out raucously to each other, letting their *pallavs* trail on the ground and pushing out their chests.

One of them is playing up to a group of customers around her. It is Sheela. Lata watches her prance and preen for the men. "Stupid bitch," she thinks, "*Kaise heroine ban ke ayee hai.*" Sheela pulls down the swooping neckline of her flame orange maxi and adjusts it around her carefully contrived 38-inch

bustline. She swings her hair, curled seductively over her shoulder, and laughs with her painted mouth wide open as one of them grabs her arm. Her face is powdered to an even whiteness and she looks like Mumtaz in her *Apna Desh* heyday. Sheela walks jauntily towards Lata, trailing the men behind her and Lata turns away, sick with memories of a time when for her too, the attentions of men had been more than a just a means of making a living.

Four years ago Lata had fallen in love. He was a young tea shop owner, who lived a few houses away from the *hijra chawl*. He visited her every day, swore undying love and finally begged her to leave the *dhanda* and live with him. He would not share her, he said, come and keep house for me. She moved in and gave up her streetwalking. She cooked and cleaned for him, met him at the door every evening and put *sindoor* in her hair with naive avowals of love.

Till the night he came home with six drunk men. For 300 rupees he told them, you can do anything you want with her. He collected their money and left the house. Lata, in her pretty, red sari, her wet hair over her shoulder, froze, horrified. A man made a grab for her. She ran into her room her

brain ticking over in panic for possible schemes. Grabbing a knife, she smeared wet *sindoor* over it and onto her stomach. In retrospect, the melodrama makes her laugh; but at the time, throwing open the door and falling into the company with a red trickle leaking from her stomach, was the only thing she could think of doing. The men were very drunk. Rape was one thing, but murder quite another. They left in a hurry.

Lata waited through the night for her treacherous lover. He let himself in at six the next morning. Before he could gather a thought, she had swung herself at him and kicked him in the groin. "You bastard," she screamed, "so this is what you brought me here for? This is what you mean by loving me?" She returned to her communal home and wept. Leave, her guru told her, they'll come looking for you once they find out that you've tricked them. So Lata shifted house and came to stay at Sukhlaji Street, determined never to get involved again. Love was a sordid affair and men were strictly for business.

**SUKHLAJI STREET HAS** a special smell about it. I get a whiff of it as I go past the footwear shops and the grade-three *biryani* joints that line the main road all the way from Grant Road station. Beyond the shiny, garish green of Taj Talkies and its loud overblown posters, the smell is a tangible thing—surrounding you, getting into your hair and into the folds of your clothing till you feel you must brush it out like grains of sand for it to go. It is the smell of cheap sex.

You could easily miss the turning into Pahela Galli, off Sukhlaji Street, if it wasn't for the royal blue signboard of the municipality offering the street a name that no one uses. But the narrow opening is deceptive and Pahela Galli is suddenly wide and quiet from the wail and rattle of the trucks, taxis and handcarts that choke Sukhlaji Street. A long decrepit building runs to the left of it with peeling green paint that is now an indistinguishable grey. This is the *chawl* where Lata stays.

*Hijras* and whores line the balconies like pigeons on a rail, watching the activity on the street with desultory eyes. They sit around in little idle groups on the threshold of their rooms doing the hundred odd things that women on their own do. Oiling and plaiting their hair, picking nits, pluck-



ing eyebrows and talking. Vendors weave their way through the groups on the narrow balconies and call into each room selling *mehndi*, bangles, *gajras*. In the daytime there is an uneasy somnolence about the place.

The street ends about a 100 yards further at a crossroads that has a police *chowki* at its junction. Beyond it lies the worst area in Bombay, infested with local *dadas* and their criminal gangs, petty thieves and pimps, smugglers and their henchmen. Even the police rarely venture in unless they come looking for trouble.

I run up the stairs to Lata's room on the first floor and several women sitting idly on the balcony catch my hand and direct me to the second floor. "Up, up," they say, "You go up." The second floor is a pot joint and they are sure that anyone in faded jeans and a kurta must belong there. I smile at them and continue walking to Lata's room. A goat is tied outside it. Lata comes out to greet me with a wide smile.

"I thought you wouldn't come," she says, with the strange lisp that I am now growing used to. It is the result of trying to convert a male voice into one of female sensuality and the drawn-out syllables have an exaggerat-

ed coyness.

"Of course," I say, "Why shouldn't I come? I am your friend, aren't I?"

"We don't have many friends," she says simply. "His mother died," she points at the goat, "So we are feeding him with a bottle."

The inside is painted a bright blue, that is really quite pleasing. A giant fourposter occupies almost three quarters of the room. Two people are sleeping on it. One under it. The only other furniture is a bright blue wooden bench and someone is sleeping on that too. Somebody else sleeps on the ground between the bed and the bench. Lata shoos everybody awake and makes room for me on the bench. There are two girls and three *hijras* and all of them sit up rubbing their eyes and grin, unabashed at being caught sleeping at ten in the morning. Mithu the parrot gurgles in his cage in a corner and a girl gives him a smacking kiss through the bars.

The walls are covered with pictures and oddments. Pictures of Bechrabi Mata, the *hijras'* patron saint, extracts from the Koran and over the door two orange sacks, garlanded and anointed with *haldi* and *kumkum*, that look suspiciously like male organs. I'm told that they are the 'Supreme God'. A



Lata (sitting) with friends: living together in harmony.

covered *dholak*, the *hijras'* traditional instrument for making money, hangs in a corner, dusty with disuse.

The room is neat. Even the clutter of seven people living together has a certain order about it. The mountainous lump on the bed resolves itself into the *amma* of the house, the guru, the madam, the provider. She is all of these things and a *hijra* too. Everything about her is well-kept: her finger nails glow with health and her fat, pudgy feet have no cracks in the heels. She is the only one among them all who wears gold in her ears, her nose and on her arms. Her voice is a deep rumble in her stomach when she greets me. *Hijras* I have discovered have their own language and although everybody in this *chawl* speaks a civilised Tamil or Kannada, they sometimes converse in their own heathen tongue to members of their sect who come from different parts of the country. As a special concession, Lata has taught me the words for 'man' and 'woman'. Now *amma* quizzes her quickly on who I am. Lata explains and introduces her to me. "This is our *amma*. She owns all of us."

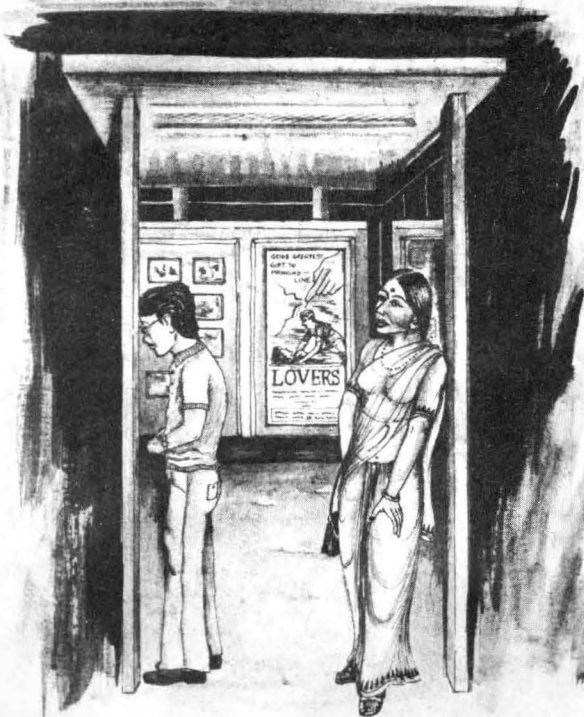
"All?" I question, "Even the girls?"

"Of course," is the answer. They tell me a story.

Once upon a time the whores were frightened of the *hijras*. They were better with the clients and stole their custom. Besides girls were dangerous, they carried diseases. Men came back and asked for the *hijras*. "Arre you stay one night with us, *babu*, and you'll



Hijras and whores line the balcony of the chawl like pigeons on a rail.



### The whores were jealous and the hijras were forced to find a street of their own.

never go back to a girl again," they boasted. The *hijras* had a neat little racket going. On Falkland Road it was open war. The whores and their pimps wouldn't let them stand at their street corners and peddle. So the *hijras* found a street of their own and cooed and clucked over their men while the whores still went through the motions with bored indifference and said, "Twenty more for stripping and charges apply for one time." The girls lost more custom.

In the end they swallowed their pride and in the joint interests of business, let the *hijras* into their houses. The madams bought *hijras* and girls and gave the customers a selection. The arrangement worked very well. Pahela Galli hosted a combined dormitory, with *hijras* in a majority. On Falkland Road they limited themselves to a large shaky house on Cross Lane 5 that didn't allow any *chokris* and through the dark corridors of which the *hijras* roamed freely, clad only in stuffed bras and petticoats, making playful passes at the giggling tea boys who brought up their refreshments.

**I FIRST MET** Lata with Pramod Navalkar, a Shiv Sena stalwart and Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), with an uncanny knowledge of the under-

world. He knew Pahela Galli like an old shoe and took me one night at one am for a quick reconnaissance. We found Lata and her friend Jayanti outside the *chawl*, eyeing us with a friendly curiosity, as we stopped the car in front of them. "*Arre, chokri hai!*" they exclaimed and giggled into their hands. Navalkar asked them if they would come for a drive with us. "She wants to be your friend," he explained. They looked wary immediately. A man, already with a girl—hardly regular custom. Fears of being duped into a tough spot, of rape or a mugging raced through Lata's mind. A hurried consultation and they reckoned we looked innocent enough. "Come," they said, "We'll go." Minds made up, they were like children out on a treat, smiling and giggling happily. Lata explained their initial reluctance, "*Kya* aunty, here the people are very bad. We must be very careful. They take us to lonely spots and then they can do anything. Steal all our money—*anything*. We generally do not go outside our area."

Lata was a surprise. If it hadn't been for Navalkar's keen eye, I would never have thought her a *hijra* at all. Her face was smooth and hairless and with eyebrows plucked to a fine arch, she was really quite pretty. Her sari hid any masculinity of build and her

gestures were entirely feminine. She would use her arms and hands with the effectiveness of an actress. But Navalkar said the swaying walk was a dead giveaway. They all walked like cancan girls at rehearsals. And once they spoke, their masculine tones left no doubt.

Navalkar suggested going to a restaurant to eat. There were squeals from the back seat. "No, no," they both said in chorus, "We feel shy."

Shy? I was astounded. I could hardly reconcile their attitude to the image of the brash, brazen *hijras* I had seen begging and singing at weddings. Why were they shy? I asked.

"It is like this, aunty," Lata replied. "See, you people have some standing. Now if we go with you to some place where there are other people, they will whistle and catcall and how will it look? We don't like it." I sat in silence perplexed by the sensitivity I had not credited them with.

I tell them that I am interested in the way they live and why they have become *hijras*. Navalkar, who has himself extensively researched and studied the *hijra* community, told me that all of them were originally men and had come into the community very willingly, contrary to the recent rumours in the press that suggested forced emasculation and induction into the ranks. I check the veracity of this with Lata. From what she tells me, Lata at least, needed no coercion.

**LATA GREW UP** in a lower middle class neighbourhood in Hyderabad. She was then, a playful and deviant little boy with an inexplicable desire to dress dolls. His parents grew impatient and a trifle worried as he persisted in his strange urges to grow his hair and wear frocks and his father beat him often to get him to behave more like a boy. The bewildered child understood nothing about the beatings and withdrew more into himself as the pressure to conform intensified. When he was nine he finally ran away and found a home with the *hijra* community who understood his desires perfectly and even encouraged them.

He was bought by a guru in Bombay who took him before a council of elders to decide his fate. A slight, fair child with delicate features, the elders decided he would grow up a fine woman if he were emasculated immediately. The *jalsa* was organised with a great deal of fanfare and a *davat* for





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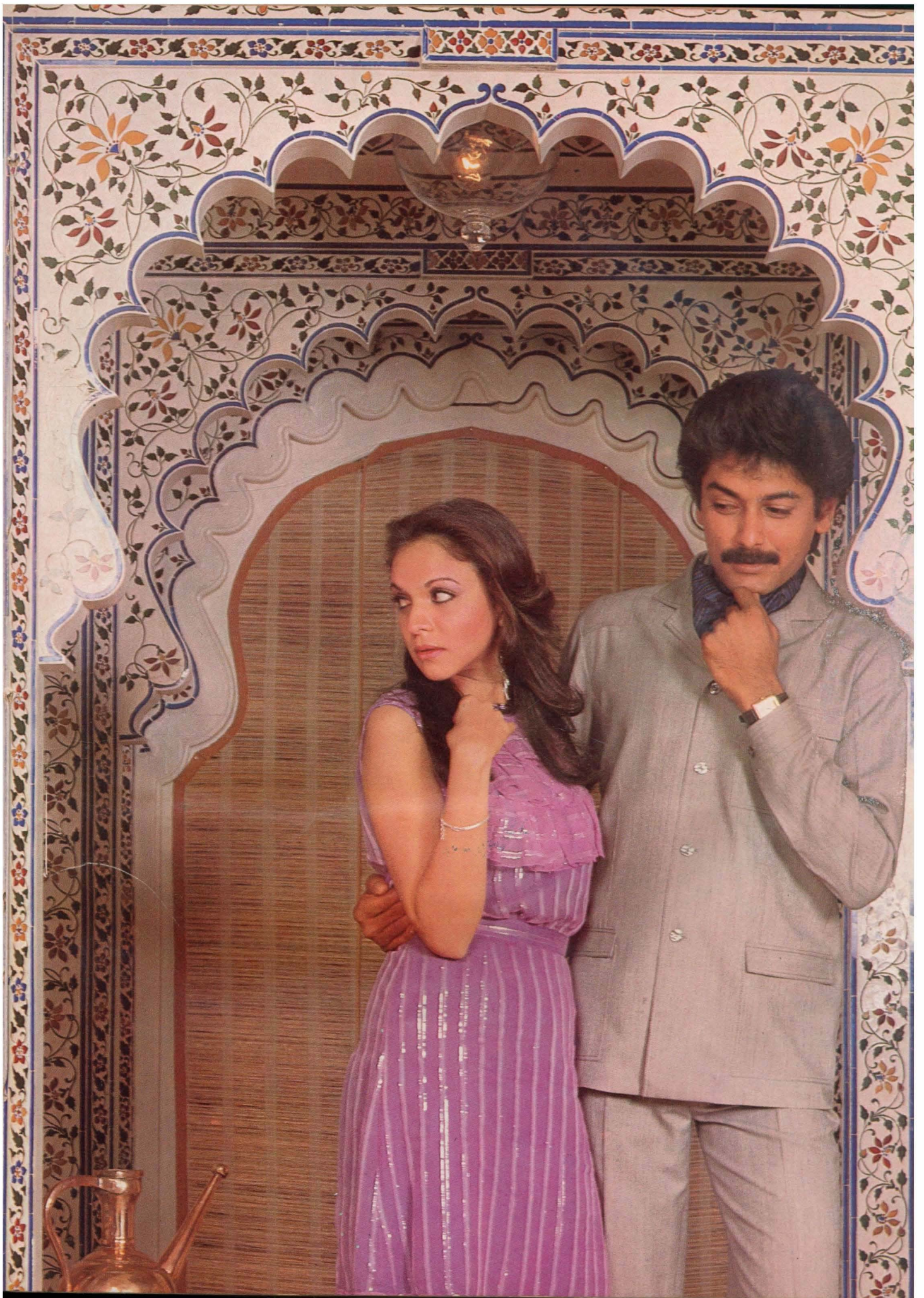


\* Trovine — Polyester/Cellulose.  
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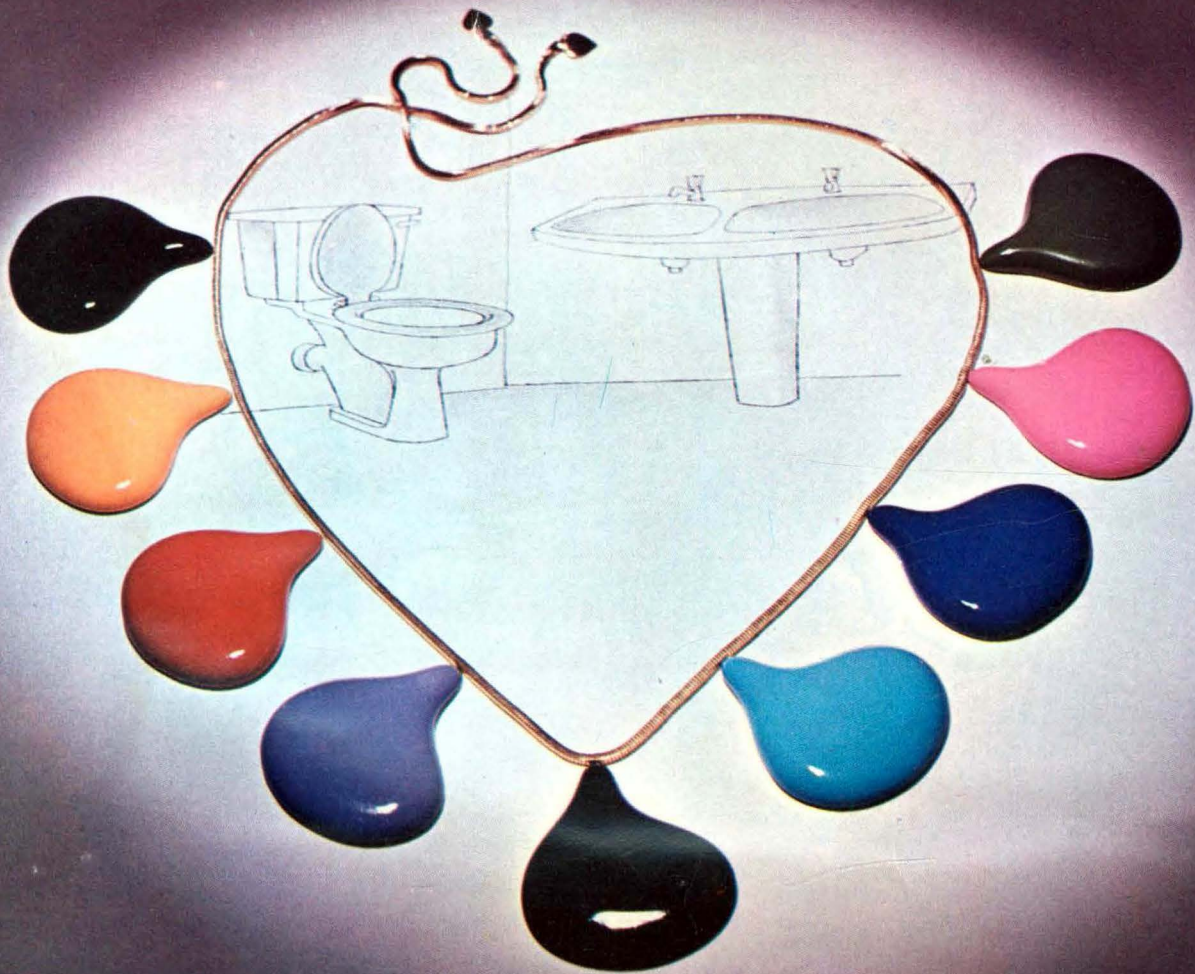








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the entire community was arranged. He was dressed as a bride and fussed around like a new born foal and Lata, still shaky from the operation performed a week before by an experienced old hand, was delighted. She grew up into a good investment, good looking and smooth skinned, an asset she remains inordinately proud of. She would make a customer run his hands over her almost hairless arms and smooth cheeks and say, "See? No bristles. Show me even one hair and *main aap ke naam pe sava rupia chada ti hun, Babu, haan,*" then giggle at her own vanity.

Jayanti, with her small dark face still besieged by adolescent pimples and her thin, wiry body masculine in look and movement, was not so lucky. She left home, a village outside Bangalore, when she was a grown man of 18 but with a similar predilection for femininity. Her father was disgusted and Jayanti quietly went away to avoid causing him further embarrassment. In Bombay, her guru would not pay for her *jalsa*, so Jayanti has to save from her own earnings. She looks upon her rite of emasculation as a *nirvaan* and bears the burden of her masculinity with quiet fortitude till she can be re-born.

**NOW IN LATA'S** room, I am being overwhelmed with hospitality. A Mangola has appeared like magic and is thrust into my hand. Nobody listens to my no, thank yous. They have assumed I am staying for lunch and someone is quickly dispatched to the kitchen to start preparations. The kitchen is at the far end of a narrow corridor that leads from the main room and has several little wooden cubicals on either side. These are the 'business rooms'. They are inhumanly small.

I am a prize curiosity and several heads pop round the door to check me out, ask me my name and enquire what I am doing there. Sheela comes in with a heralding commotion. "Oh," she says pouting at me and swaying theatrically, "Who are you?" she asks in English. I show my surprise and tell her that I know who she is and I prefer her without her paint. She is pleasantly disconcerted. "Oh, do you think I am pretty?" she asks her reflection in the mirror on the cupboard that *everybody* looks into as they go past.

"Yes," I say with a smile "but what happened to your impressive bustline?"

I notice her blouse is almost flat, compared to the nights when she always displays an expanse of cleft and flesh.

"Why," she says affronted. "I still have it." Exhibitionist to the core, in a trice she has undone her blouse and stripped it off. "See," she says showing off two small breasts.

"That's incredible!" I am truly shocked, "were you born with them?"

"Of course," she laughs at my incredulity.

"*Bahut chalu hai,*" Lata says with a contemptuous curl of her lips, "Don't believe her. *Kya hai, injections se ho jata hai. Woh injection lagwati hai.*" Silicon? Here? Sheela flounces out of the room bored with the conversation.

"How?" I ask Lata.

"*Arre,* here any doctor will do it for you."

But doesn't it cost the earth? "No, no. Only eight rupees for every injection.

You have to undergo a course of a few weeks. And you have to repeat it every year." My mouth is open in shock. "Yes," smiles Lata recognising the sentiment, "I know. And it hurts, too. If you press it, it goes flat and hurts like hell."

I take Lata out to Chowpatty for what I think will be a nice change. There's obviously a mix-up in wavelength because Lata is nervous and afraid. Jayanti refuses to come out-right. Why, I ask. "She doesn't have any nice clothes," Lata replies.

"No, seriously," I say, "why won't she come?"

"Because she doesn't have any nice clothes to wear," Lata emphasises with mild irritation. It's a little more than just vanity.

The day is really not Lata's element at all. She is quiet and withdrawn in the cacophony of the Sunday evening



*Sheela preens for the camera: an overt desire to be feminine.*

crowds on the beach and is convinced that everybody is staring at her. "Relax," I tell her, "No one is looking. And anyway you've been here before."

"But that's after nine at night. Then there are no families here, only men. Then it's nice." She looks a little more animated, "We come with all our friends in a group, and we don't bother with saris and all that. Just wear any old thing. It is fun."

We sit quietly on the edge of the water watching the hungry breakers gobble up bits of sand and Lata pleats and unpleats her brown nylon sari with agitated fingers. The *pallav* is pulled protectively around her shoulders and the face she took such trouble over before coming out, is pensive.

"Are you happy?" I ask her suddenly.

"Yes," she says.

"But for how long do you think you can continue like this? What will happen when you are old and ugly?"

"It is like this, aunty," she says, "Now I am young and I can earn I give all my earnings to my guru. She will keep enough for all of us to live and give the remaining to the old *hijras*



*One of the painted faces and contrived bustlines on Pahela Galli.*

who live in a big complex at Lakhi Compound. That is a big *chawl*. We own the whole building and all the old people stay there. When I am old the younger ones will support me." Yes, I say, but what a life.

"Why," she retaliates immediately,

"The way we live is as precious to us as yours is to you."

I take her back to Sukhlaji Street and Pahela Galli and her animation grows with each familiar turn. I realise just how much on edge she has been and I am sorry. She brushes aside my apologies and tugs at my arm as we reach the *chawl*. "Come up," she says, "Don't go without having something to eat." I protest, she has been too good to me already and I can tell she is impatient to get dressed. Twilight has fallen in a rush and the colourful players are already walking their stage. Sheela with her pancake make-up is out early on the prowl. "So you're still here," she says saucily, as she walks past my taxi. Jayanti waves to Lata and me from the balcony. "Hurry up," she calls out to her, "You have a lot to do." The gramophone starts up its first round of filmi hits. Lata, preoccupied with what she is going to wear tonight, bids me a hurried goodbye. "And be careful," she shouts a last caution as she runs up the stairs, "Don't get out of your taxi, drive straight out. This area is very bad." I smile and nod, but she doesn't see me. Lata is busy. She has her whole day ahead of her. ♦

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# ROMESH THAPAR: AN INTELLECTUAL BY PROFESSION

By Sushma Singh

After three decades of shifting loyalties, evolving ideology, changing designations and varying occupations, Romesh Thapar has come to be regarded as India's leading intellectual.

**I**T is there on the foreign news page of the *New York Times*, sticking out of the second paragraph of yet another article on the imminent collapse of Indian democracy, "According to Romesh Thapar. . . ." Across the Atlantic, the name turns up again. On the edit page of the *Guardian*, in a witty feature on India's corruption, "As Romesh Thapar says. . . ." At university seminars, in journals of academic discussion, in the pages of *Time* magazine, on television and in documentary films, Romesh Thapar is omnipresent.

And yet many Indians are known

to mutter, "Just who the hell is Romesh Thapar? And why is *his* opinion so important?"

People in Delhi or Bombay, of course, know better. There have been rumours and talk for at least two decades: Head Cook in Mrs Gandhi's Kitchen Cabinet, presiding deity at intellectual soirees, overlord of the Indian Tourism Development Corporation's (ITDC) chain of hotels, sonorous voice in Films Division documentaries, reigning doyen of intellectual columnists, Prophet of the Uncommitted Left, Delphic Oracle to the foreign

correspondents—Thapar has been all of these things and has yet eluded being any one. He has been so many things at the same time that the persona has blurred at the edges and people have given up trying to classify him.

Yet, if any one description fits, then he is probably the only true example in India of that almost defunct tradition: the professional intellectual.

"His metier was really being a lecturer or a professor. He should have been in some Ivy League university with people like Galbraith and Kissinger," says Bobby Kooka, a long time



## ROMESH THAPAR

friend.

And indeed, Romesh Thapar would have flourished in the rarefied atmosphere of think-tanks and brains trusts, where finding suitable solutions to impossible problems is a dignified and lucrative way of making a living. Enlightened countries encourage such institutions. In India, however, Thapar and his ilk are ignored and sometimes ridiculed. Many give up, but Thapar has persisted and built himself a following, and in the process, made himself India's presiding intellectual.

For 17 years, he has written a column in the *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, that is required reading for much of the intelligentsia. And *Seminar*, the magazine he started 24 years ago, retains its influence with opinion makers and academicians.

Thapar has packed more into his 61 years than people have in several lifetimes. Born into a successful family that flourished as the first rank of white-collar nobility where, as Thapar recalls, "everybody was in the ser-

vices," the young Romesh had a favoured upbringing. His father, a doctor in the British Indian army, sent his son to the best schools—first to the Bishop Cotton's School and then the prestigious Aitchison Chief's College at Lahore.

Of the two, the Aitchison College did Thapar much good. In 1938, when he enrolled, the Principal, Sir Harold Barry, was trying to liberalise the school from the princes' college it had been. He took Thapar under his wing and the boy blossomed. He became an outstanding scholar, and an excellent debator. But even then, he showed traces of rebelliousness. Despite winning the Chirag Deen Trophy for debating, it was denied to him because his acceptance speech contained derogatory references to Lady Willingdon, the Vicereine.

Although his father had planned, for Romesh, a career in the Army, Barry persuaded him that the boy should go to University. The father eventually gave in and Thapar was sent to Government College, Lahore, where he won most of the debating trophies awarded in the North. He was all set to go on to Cambridge to study Law, but the War intervened.

Destined to remain in India, Thapar turned to journalism. He wrote to the *Times of India* in Bombay asking them if they could use a trainee. His essay for the Oxford University Press' competition on *Blockade in Modern War-*

*fare* had just been awarded the first prize, and he received a letter from Sir Francis Low, then the Editor of the *Times of India*, enquiring if he was the same Thapar. If he was, would he be interested in coming down to Bombay to join the *Times*?

**I**N June 1942, Romesh Thapar left Lahore and all its comfortable familiarity to go to the alien world of Bombay. Low started Thapar off as a trainee and within a few months promoted him to Assistant Editor at the princely salary of Rs 450 a month. Thapar was a fast learner and was soon at home in the *Times*. His best friend was Frank Moraes, the only other Indian Assistant Editor on the paper. It was really through Moraes that Thapar found the one ideology that was going to last him half a lifetime. Moraes introduced him to a group of active Bombay Communists which included PC Joshi, Mohan Kumaramangalam, and many others. Till then Thapar had nursed vague ideas of returning to the Punjab and joining an underground movement there. But in Bombay, and in contact with the bright stars of India's communism, Thapar became aware of the evils of Fascism. The war intensified the feeling and he abandoned any ideas of returning to the Punjab. Bombay was the place for him. He began to speak at the Bombay Brains Trust meetings on the need for socialist reform and participated with enthusiasm in the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA).

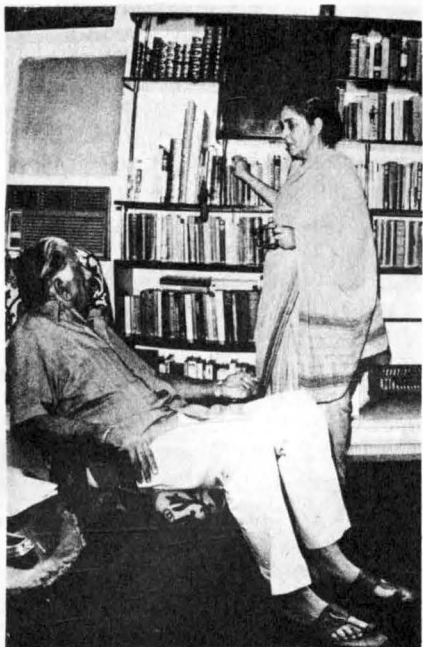
Thapar was a prominent member of the leftist IPTA which was set up in 1941. Recalls Dina Pathak, now a prominent stage and cinema personality, "It was a spontaneous movement. The best talent in the country was there at the time. People like Sardar Jafri, Mulk Raj Anand and Chetan Anand. And of course, Romesh Thapar. Everything was geared towards the goal of Independence. For the sake of the need of the hour we could be moulded in any direction." Pathak was herself a singer first, then turned to dancing, and finally theatre and even film, as the occasion demanded.

Thapar was adept at such versatility. He was not only a forceful speaker at the Bombay Brains Trust with other members like Minoor Masani, Dr DJ Jussawala and Moraes, but was a vigorous editorial writer for the *Times*. He also did talk shows on All India Radio called *News and Views Behind The*



*The cast of Thapar's production: They Came To A City.*





**The Thapars: a synergistic relationship.**

News, and launched into reading and writing commentary for the Films Division *Weekly News Review*.

In 1945, Thapar married Raj Malhotra the daughter of PC Malhotra, a senior officer in the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal. The families had known each other for years and after the disappointments of Romesh's choice of career and circle of acquaintances, his family was reassured that he had married a sensible girl with an unimpeachable background. Now greying, but still very engaging, Raj Thapar laughs, "It irked him that he had done the conventional thing and married me."

There exists an unseen synergism between the two that develops not only with years of living together, but of living together in perfect accord. Romesh will start a thought that Raj will complete without the least hesitation, and often they will say things in unison. But as Romesh is the first to admit, "There is a basic difference in our make-up. I have always been very idealistic and I get carried away very easily, while she is down-to-earth and very pragmatic." Their differences have been complementary, and whenever Romesh has been lost in a fit of depression or euphoria, Raj has been around to get him back on his feet.

The Thapar flat at Mafatlal Park soon became the favourite haunt of the cultural set, and the local intelligentsia. "It was literally an Open House," recalls Raj, "All sorts of people walked in and out all day. Sometimes we would leave the house, return a few

hours later and people would still be coming in or going out."

In 1946 Thapar hit a bad patch. Francis Low retired as Editor and was succeeded by Ivor Jehu. A definite animosity grew up between Thapar and his new editor. Jehu wanted him to write editorials hostile to all his openly professed socialist ideals. The management of the paper was also changing hands, with the Dalmias taking over the Bennett Coleman & Co. Ltd. from the departing British. Disgusted, Thapar decided to quit and leave the country on a long holiday. He had vague plans of freelancing in London, but no clear idea of what exactly Raj and he were to do for a living. On the eve of his departure, an offer from an unexpected quarter solved his problem.

S Sadanand of the *Free Press Journal* wished to establish the Free Press of India News Agency. He called Thapar and asked him to set up the Europe bureau of the agency. He offered to pay them £30 a week for as long as it took them. Thapar was delighted, he now had a mission too, in going to Europe.

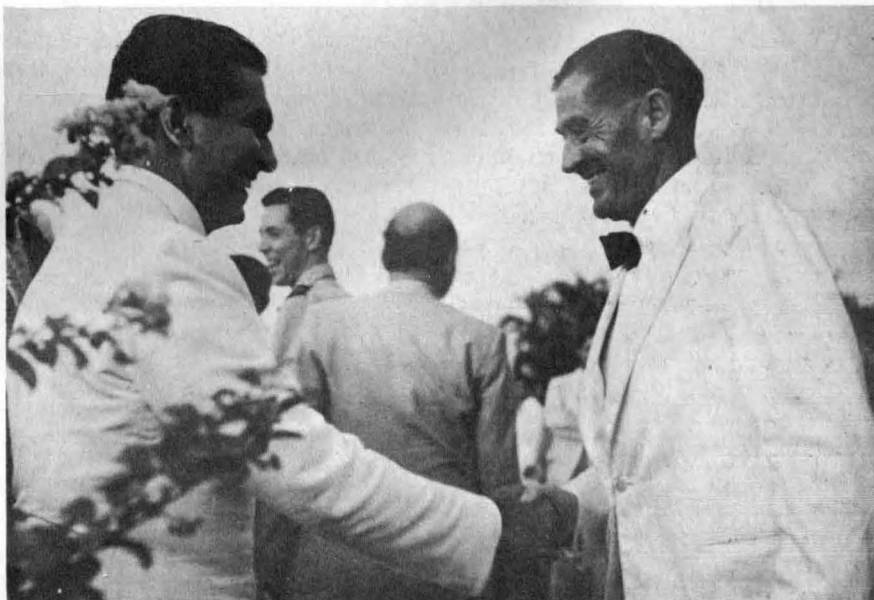
"I met the Thapars in London in 1947," recalls Rusky Karanjia, then a war correspondent for the *New Statesman*, "I was told that he was the doyen of London-based Indian journalists like Rafiq Zakaria and others." Thapar had built up his little court in London too. "He loves to hold court," says Karanjia, "And I must admit, he does it with grace."

The Thapars spent a year travelling all over Europe building up contacts

and setting up Sadanand's news agency. The Free Press of India News Agency, however, did not get off the ground. Sadanand fell out with Vallabhbhai Patel and was refused teleprinter lines.

**T**HE Thapars returned to a partitioned and independent India, and soon went back to their social whirl and hectic activities. In 1949, with the financial help of a few friends, Romesh started his own weekly magazine from Bombay called *Crossroads*. It was to be a general interest weekly covering a variety of topics. Around the same time, the Communist Party of India was banned and many of Thapar's old friends like Mohan Kumaramangalam and Romesh Chandra approached him for assistance. The Communists needed a publishing medium. Would Thapar be willing to publish occasional pieces that supported their viewpoint? Thapar agreed willingly. *Crossroads* carried several daring articles critical of the government in the state and at the centre, and started a running feud with Morarji Desai, then the Chief Minister, who was wary of their activities. They were also embroiled in litigation with the Madras government that eventually reached the Supreme Court.

Thapar had turned to communism at a time when it was fashionable to be radical and left. But after Independence, the scene changed dramatically. The Communist Party of India was beginning to become more extreme because of the views of men like BT Ranadive who believed in the violent overthrow of the government. Thapar found himself at odds with the new



**Thapar welcomes Sir Francis Low at his wedding.**



## ROMESH THAPAR

Communists. He believed in their goal, but no longer in the means with which they hoped to achieve it. It was the Communists' attitude to Nehru that widened the rift between Thapar and them. With his prosperous background and western orientation, Thapar had always admired Nehru's style and charisma. As he himself admits, "When you come from the upper middle class you have this weakness for civilized people." The Communists on the other hand, attacked Nehru regularly in *Crossroads*, and accused Thapar of being an armchair leftist. " 'Oh, he's a general's son,' they said, 'what does he know about communism?' " recalls Thapar.

He tried hard to conform to their idea of what a Communist should be. He rendezvoused clandestinely, went underground, played an active part in the outlawed network of the Communists, and yet the rift continued to grow. In 1954, he decided he had had enough. The paper was being used as the central organ of the Communist Party. He could not even begin to restore its image, so synonymous had it become with the Communists. Although he was never a party card holder, he was forever marked as suspect. For instance, BV Keskar, the ultra-conservative Minister for Information and Broadcasting, had him blacklisted from Films Division. Tired and shaken by the confrontation over Nehru, Thapar quit *Crossroads* and handed it over to the Party. For two years he sat at home doing nothing, trying to regain some sort of an identity. "It was definitely a bad time. Morarji hounded him out of every job, he was really knocked flat," recalls Raj, who managed to hold them together through the troubled period.

Thapar ended up doing odd jobs in films and even played second lead to Dilip Kumar in a film called *Footpath*. This only depressed his father; and in any case, he decided that regular film work was not for him. In desperation, he elected once again to leave the

country. He left Bombay and went to Delhi to say goodbye to his parents.

He was sitting, one evening, at Connaught Circus and having coffee with Sardar Jafri, the Urdu poet, when MD Bhavnani, Chief Producer of Films Division, came over to talk. He suggested to Thapar that he write to Nehru and get the ban lifted. Thapar did not know Nehru at all, but egged on by the others, wrote a letter anyway. The effect was dramatic. MO Mathai, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, was on the phone the very next morning, apologising profusely and assuring him that Keskar would call the same day to lift the ban on his voice. This is exactly what did happen.

WITH the professional ban lifted, Thapar returned to writing scripts and reading commentary for Films Division. He was asked by the United Nations to do a film script for a project in Afghanistan and attended a seminar in this connection. "The seminar was on community development and was a very interesting experience. It made me feel that a magazine that dealt with one issue from all angles, like a symposium, would be a good idea." In 1959, the Thapars launched *Seminar* from Bombay. It was an intellectual monthly that was more like a reference document than popular reading. And in a year's time, it made the logical shift to Delhi, to be closer to its high profile readership and to the source of national policy.

The years between 1960 and 1966 were the real coming-of-age of the intellectualism of Romesh Thapar. "Everybody who was anybody used to be at his home in Delhi," recalls a friend, "Inder Gujral, Clobis Macsud, Gopal Radhakrishnan, Karan Singh. . ." He had so established himself that in 1965, he was called into an advisory

committee chaired by Mrs Indira Gandhi, to organise the New York Trade Fair. "Mrs Gandhi was playing the Pupul Jayakar role. The arrangements were elaborate. I was asked to give ideas and advice—even on the designing of spoons and crockery for the restaurant!" It was the first of many such advisory committees.

Thapar went on to receive international recognition at the UNESCO International Round Table on Nehru in 1966, where he sponsored a project on a 'Design for Living'. By the time Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister he had risen from being a professional intellectual to being a close advisor. He was asked for advice on projects as diverse as a rural wall newspaper to the organisation of the ITDC. He was the first Chairman of the National Book Development Board and was, for six years, the Honorary Director of the India International Centre (IIC). He left his distinct imprint on the latter, remaking it into a sort of inner sanctum for the intellectual. He organised the discussions, seminars and talks by visiting intellectuals, that have now come to be regarded as the trademark of the IIC. Along with other close advisors like Dinesh Singh, Inder Gujral, Asoka Mehta and Nandini Satpathi, Thapar became famous as part of the 'Kitchen Cabinet'.

In 1969, the year of the Great Congress Split, the Kitchen Cabinet helped the rift along. "We are the generation that grew up under the shadow of Nehru. We thought that Indira Gandhi was the person who would carry through the ideas of Nehru. We felt that we were clearing the way for action. Actually, we were clearing the way for Indira Gandhi," Thapar says with bitter hindsight. The Congress split established Indira Gandhi as a political personality in her own right, not simply as her father's daughter.



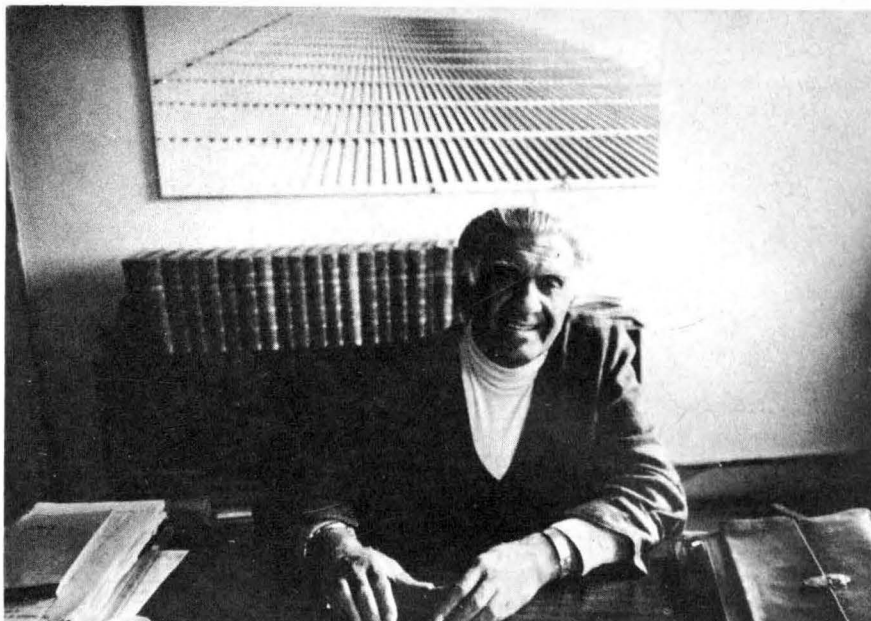
Thapar's *Crossroads* team.



"Now when some of us meet and talk about old times," shrugs Thapar, "We all say, '1969 was a bad year.'"

Indira Gandhi was already showing signs of outgrowing her Kitchen Cabinet. She no longer consulted them on projects and became adept at listening patiently to everything they had to say, and then doing nothing about it. There were new stars in the ascendant and Thapar and his colleagues were rapidly being given the cold shoulder. Thapar's constant memos to her and his very definite notions on how things should be done, also helped in alienating her further. His slightly pontifical attitude, people feel, got on her nerves and Indira Gandhi decided she did not need him any more. In 1972, the break became final. Indira Gandhi was on the crest of a tumultuous wave. She was the Empress of India. She had humbled the Pakistanis and helped create a new country. "It was then that she could have done anything that she wished. Instead she was more interested in Sanjay and Maruti," says Thapar. His disenchantment was reflected in *Seminar* and his *EPW* column which was also critical of Maruti and other Sanjay toys. Thapar resigned his directorship of the Central Bank in protest, when the Chairman was fired for refusing to sanction a loan to Maruti.

On June 26, 1975, Romesh and Raj Thapar sat in the office of *Seminar* on the first floor of one of the blocks that make up the inner Connaught Circus. The streets were deserted and traffic had been cleared. "Suddenly a convoy of Army trucks rounded the corner. Soldiers with guns and shields jumped out and took up positions around the street. It was like something out of Europe in the 1940s! I said to Romesh, 'This is the beginning.'" Raj remembers fearing the start of something akin to Fascism. The Thapars denounced the tyranny of the Emergency at private parties and social gatherings, through the pages of *Seminar* and in any paper that was willing to print their views. The foreign pressmen, harassed and on the verge of being expelled, turned even more to the voices of dissent, like Thapar. But local people moved away from them, unwilling to be party to such political heresy. *Seminar* was served with its censorship order. Thapar refused to accept censorship and thought it was better to close down the magazine and his *EPW* column rather than toe the government



*The intellectual at work: Thapar at his Seminar office.*

## SK 'Bobby' Kooka On Romesh Thapar

A BIG MAN with a booming voice. When you telephoned him you heard "Thapar" at the other end in tones an operatic bass would have been proud of.

Thapar was the *guru* of all the documentary commentators who followed in his wake.

He was frustrated working for the Old Lady of Bori Bunder, because this newspaper has sat on the fence so long, the iron has entered its logical destination. Romesh then started his own paper—*Crossroads*. But it ended in a blind alley. He did not have Karanjia's gut sense for what sells.

The *Indian Express* might have been a vehicle close to his heart but Frank Moraes had switched from the *Times of India* to Mr Goenka so that was that.

Romesh then migrated to Delhi where he was one of the intellectuals Mrs Indira Gandhi liked to listen to when she was Information and Broadcasting Minister. A time when she smiled at you and with you, without you having to be a Head of State!

Romesh loved good food, good drink and his creature comforts, so it was natural that his political thinking should have been left-of-centre.

In another incarnation he could have been a very popular lecturer in a country with educational standards far superior to ours.

When Mrs Gandhi, as PM, made Romesh the first Chairman of ITDC, against my advice as a member of the board, he soon relinquished the chair and made his Number Two take over. This, of course, proved to be a total disaster which Dr Karan Singh, the Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism, did not have the antennae to foresee.

During the Emergency, Thapar, a champion of free editorial utterance, was disillusioned with Mrs Gandhi and had to close down the periodical he had started—*Seminar*. My guess is that one of his regrets is that as a freedom-fighting journalist he did not permit himself to be jailed during the Emergency. That would have been his *cicatrice de l'honneur*!

My second guess is that Romesh would have given his back teeth to have been an Arun Shourie, but India has produced only one of this endangered species!

Had Romesh been reconciled to genuflecting and the touching of feet he would have made the grade of minister. His girth was not the only deterrent to such honours—to cringe and to fawn being advisable ingredients in our democracy. Romesh Thapar has not achieved what was expected of him; his fine mind, his convictions and his power of speech have not produced the end product he himself was in search of. More's the pity. ♦



## ROMESH THAPAR

line. They posted cyclostyled circulars to all their subscribers saying that because of censorship, they were being forced to close down; this, at a time when no publication was allowed to admit that such a thing as censorship existed! But Thapar had too many powerful connections to be openly persecuted. "I had been too close to her, and people were not sure of what my position was. So they just left me alone."

Without his paper and without his column in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, without the patronage of the Empress, and without his court, Romesh Thapar should have faded into obscurity. Instead he came back from a temporary relegation with renewed vigour and charged with the same sense of creating a new destiny as in the days of his youth, when Independence was to be won. With the coming of the Janata and the new boldness of the press, Romesh Thapar was reinstated as an intellectual pundit. *Seminar* resumed publication and Thapar was offered a platform in *India Today*, a magazine that was emerging as a new force in the free press of the land. As SP Godrej, Chairman of Godrej & Boyce and an admirer of Thapar says, "If he didn't have a place in society

and the scheme of things, people would not ask for his opinions. Nobody has ever thought of him as redundant. He has made contributions."

THE story of Romesh Thapar is really the story of India's upper middle class intelligentsia. He is the true Midnight's Child, with his fortune irrevocably linked with the fortune of the educated elite of the country, and blessed with the special powers of perception. His changing ideology—from militant to Fabian Socialist to Communist to Indira Gandhi's brand of Capitalist to, finally, Gandhian Socialist—has followed closely the pattern of the thinking of the Indian intelligentsia, and his disillusionment with the cult of charisma has been theirs as well. After the Emergency, Thapar turned to Gandhi. He admitted to himself that Nehru had been a Romantic and Gandhi had all the real answers. He read everything that Gandhi had written and carried excerpts in *Seminar*. "It is amazing that I did not see it before. Any problem and Gandhi has a solution to it," he says, reflecting once again the current ideology popular with the liberal thinkers.

Today Thapar has been reduced to being little more than an armchair dissident with no means of bringing about any real changes in society. This is the fate of the Indian intellectuals as a whole.

Sometimes the frustration this generates breaks through the cultivated veneer of 'Oh, I never wanted any more'. He now admits to the helplessness of not being able to do anything, to change anything. "I am terribly

embarrassed about the fact that I cannot do anything in political terms. To be a politician you have to have a power base, a constituency. I have none. And I cannot mobilise people. I just do not have the right chemicals to work with people. I believe that everybody should find his own level and what he is good at. I am basically a communicator and in the course of a tempestuous life I have learned a lot of practical things, so that in a sense you can say that I am an organiser, an administrator."

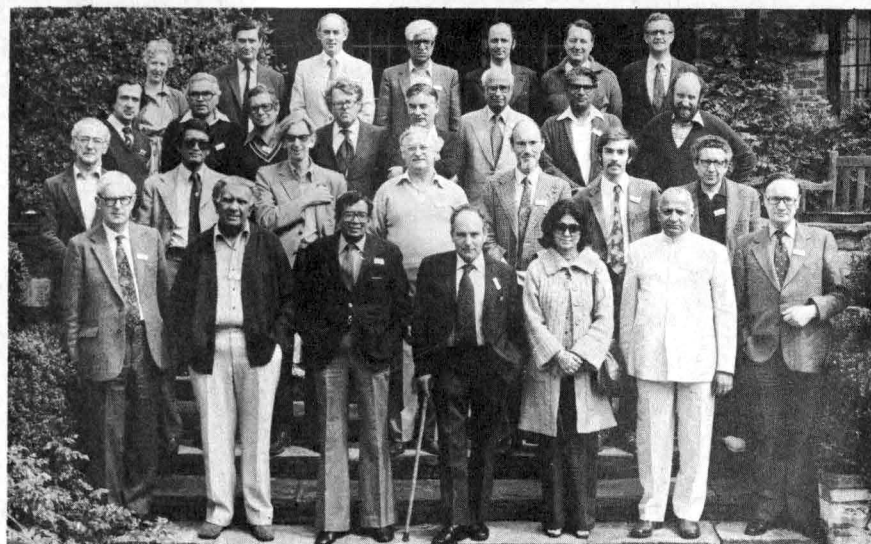
More than that, Thapar is an institution. Out of the wreckage of every ideology and situation he has been able to not only survive, but maintain a stature as well.

Ironically, it is his children who are now living out many of the things he only dreamed of. His daughter Malvika Singh is editor of a cultural magazine called *The India Magazine* and was very actively involved in the theatre. His son, Valmik, is a documentary filmmaker and an authority on Indian wildlife. "We sometimes joke about it," says Thapar with a wry laugh, "but our children are doing all the things that we wanted to do."

In a sense, Romesh Thapar has been a disappointment. With his potential, one would have expected him to do a lot more. Although he has an impressive record of titles and offices, that attest to his prominence as an intellectual (such as the Vice Presidentship of the World Future Studies Federation, and a decade-long membership of the Club of Rome), they are little more than designations. The achievement in real terms is lacking. As the Thapars admit themselves, if they were to live their lives over again, they would have to make an important decision, "Either go into politics—we have always stayed on the fringes and that is bad—or specialise very definitely in something, academically. We wasted too much energy in doing so many little things."

In truth, he has no desire to be a politician at all. He is happy being an advisor. "The world is in such a mess, there should be people who suggest ways to improve it. I would like to be the one to give such ideas, and ultimately," he laughs at himself, "have the power to implement these ideas. Or influence people who have the power to implement them."

Which suggests, if Romesh Thapar were to live his life again, he'd still make the same mistakes. ♦



Thapar with George Fernandes, Devraj Urs, Peter Shore and others.



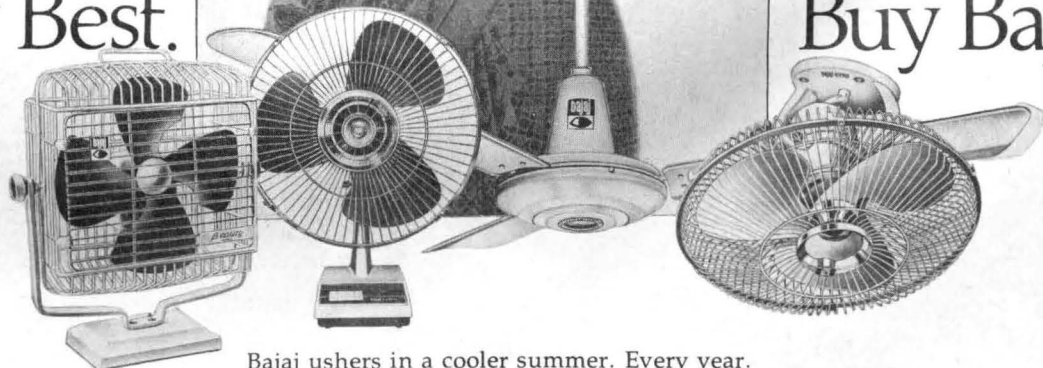
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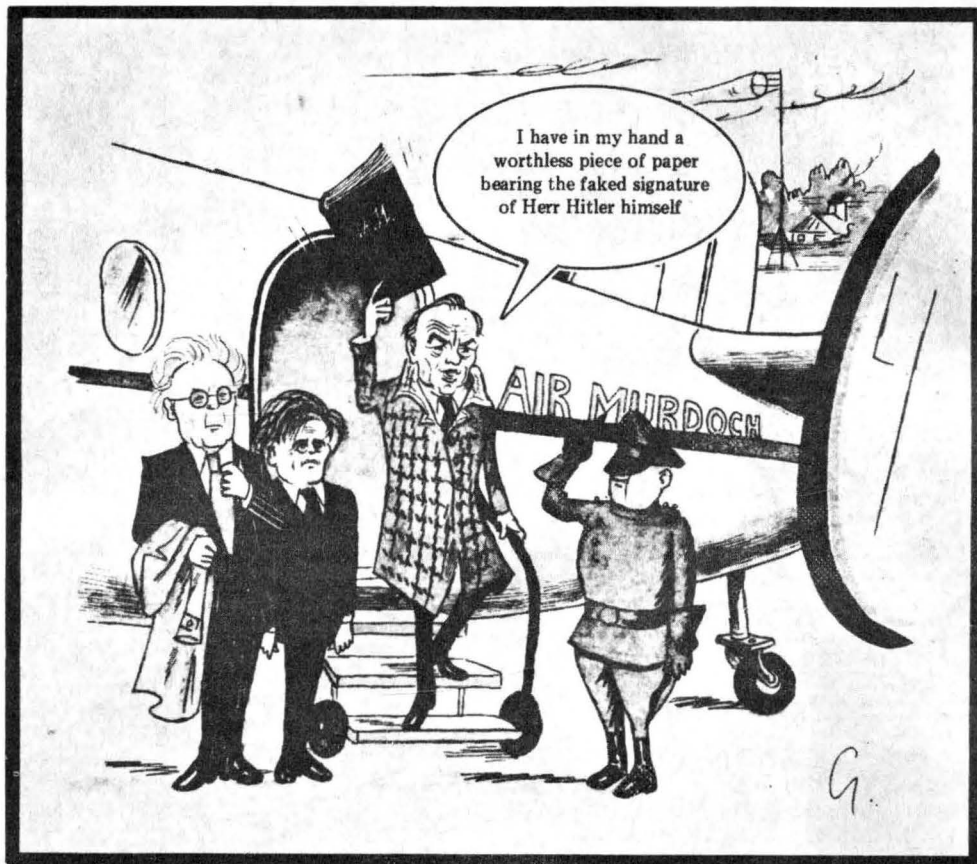


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Private Eye's view of the fake diaries.

for Lord Dacre, Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge (formerly Oxford don Hugh Trevor-Roper), who is a director of Times Newspapers and therefore, almost an employee of Murdoch's. Dacre was sent to Germany to examine the diaries.

He declared that he was '100% certain of their authenticity', and in an article for *The Times*, hailed them as an important contribution to history. Dacre had spent very little time examining the documents and other historians were openly suspicious of his conclusion. Lord Bullock, author of the definitive Hitler biography (which, it now transpires, was one of the forger's two major sources of information), expressed surprise at Dacre's hasty authentication and said that as far as anyone knew, Hitler had never kept a diary.

In spite of such doubts, Murdoch instructed his editors that they were to

press on. Accordingly, *The Sunday Times* carried a long article pooh-poohing the criticisms of Bullock and other historians. As for scientific proof that the paper the diaries had been written on was as old as it was supposed to be, the paper said that *Stern* had made the necessary tests—which was, in fact, not true.

### FRAUD DISCOVERED

Times Newspapers received a jolt when Dacre did a rapid about-turn and said that he was no longer sure that the diaries were genuine. "Oh no, you haven't changed your mind, have you?" *The Sunday Times'* Frank Giles is reported to have told him. But Dacre was adamant. As far as he was concerned, there was no proof that the documents were authentic. According to his colleagues, Murdoch had bamboozled him into providing his endorsement and he had begun to have his doubts almost as soon as he had left

the publisher's demanding presence.

At this stage, all *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* had were several documents that most historians were convinced could not be genuine simply because Hitler never kept a diary. The papers had no scientific proof of their authenticity and their own kept historian had withdrawn his endorsement. Most newspapers would have held off then, but not those owned by Murdoch.

He insisted that both papers continue acting as though the diaries were the real thing. Fearful of their credibility in the face of such odds, various members of *The Sunday Times* staff asked editor Frank Giles to address them on the subject of this 'world exclusive'. Giles, who had nothing of his own to add to Murdoch's directives, refused and left for his villa in Corfu on holiday.

As more and more his-

torians began describing the diaries as an obvious fraud, Murdoch began to get nervous. He forced *Stern* to send him two volumes of the diaries and asked forensic scientist Julius Grant to check the paper. Grant, accompanied by *Sunday Times'* special correspondent Phillip Knightley (co-incidentally, a former Managing Editor of *Imprint*), carried out several tests before concluding that the diaries were obvious fakes.

Unfortunately for Murdoch, he could not claim even this revelation as a scoop. The West German government had already taken another volume from *Stern* and carried out its own tests. It was soon convinced that the diaries were frauds and announced this before Murdoch could release the conclusions of his British experts.

### CREDIBILITY WRECKED

Its 'world exclusive' punctured and its credibility in tatters, *The Sunday Times* carried a grovelling apology to its readers on the front page. Despite its regrets, the paper blamed the entire fiasco on *Stern* who it said, had insisted on the urgency that led Times Newspapers to overlook getting the diaries authenticated. It was an even sorer spectacle. Not only had *The Sunday Times* ended up with its ego all over its face, but it had also tried to pass the buck and absolve itself of all responsibility.

Fortunately for Murdoch, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher dissolved parliament two days after his 'scoop' fell apart. Both *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* have announced spectacular coverage of the new elections. Obviously they hope that with the election fever, the sad fiasco of the Hitler diaries will be forgotten.



## MADRID LETTER

# Marquez Causes A Stir

On April 6 to mark the first anniversary of the Argentine invasion of the Falklands the Spanish daily *El Pais* published an amazing account by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Colombian novelist who won the Nobel prize for literature last year.

According to him, the Argie conscripts on the islands had been so poorly clothed and sheltered against the bitter cold that 92 of them had to be castrated, their testicles having been badly frostbitten and then had to go back to their trenches. Others were shod only in tennis shoes, which tore off strips of gangrenous flesh when removed after weeks in the cold and wet. Snow glare had blinded 500 Argentine soldiers who lacked protective glasses.

Officers drugged enlisted men before combat, first through chocolate and later by injections, to dull hunger and keep them awake. Many died of cold in their sleep, said Garcia Marquez, luckier than colleagues who died of hunger while trying to get out meat paste that had solidified in its tins. Front-line soldiers were lucky to get sardines covered by ice, while rearguard troops sometimes were given hot food.

Outgunned by British troops with modern rifles and infra-red sights, Argentine conscripts were further traumatised by seeing attackers bowled over by direct hits, then get up and charge again—the Argentines had nothing to compare with the Britishers' bullet-proof jackets.

Garcia Marquez reported all this from unpublished

letters circulating among Argentines in their own country and abroad. His article began with an account, as cool as the temper of the whole piece, of an Argentine recruit returning to Buenos Aires after the war and phoning his mother to ask whether he could bring home a colleague who had lost two limbs and been blinded in battle. The horrified woman told her son, no, she couldn't bear to have such a mutilated creature in her house. The son hung up and promptly shot himself, for he was the wounded, blind man.

The piece ended with a reaffirmation of Garcia Marquez's support for the Argentine claim to the Falklands (referred to throughout as the Malvinas), but with the forceful rider that no one should forget the barbarity of those who governed the islands briefly last year, nor the thousands of people who have disappeared in Argentina during the past ten years.

So, how did this bit of Argy-knocking from the top Latin American writer not get a show in the British media?

Well, Garcia Marquez also said in the piece that among the Argentine prisoners released after the war were 50 who had to be treated for anal lesions, caused by rapes perpetrated by Britishers who had captured them in the Darwin area. He also reported that Gurkhas were in the vanguard of the task force's overland push on Port Stanley, "yelling and cutting off heads. . . one head every seven seconds. They would hold up a head

by the hair and cut off the ears." So wrought up were the Gurkhas, the account goes on, that when the battle was over, they continued their killing among the British and were only stop-

ped by being tied up. Of the 700 Gurkhas who disembarked on the Falklands, only 70 survived, Garcia Marquez said.

Clearly over the top there, old boy. ♦

## THE GANDHI PROFITS

# Who Gets What?

When Sir Richard Attenborough came to India to make *Gandhi*, it now seems clear, he did not have the money required to finish the film. He had verbal assurances from the Government of India that the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) would provide the rupee component of his budget but the precise terms of the deal had not yet been ironed out when he began filming. And his foreign financing was far from secure, with several prospective investors backing out halfway through the negotiations—some during the actual shooting.

All of this seems amazing in retrospect because *Gandhi* has proved to be an extremely profitable film. By some accounts, it is the most profitable British film in history and certainly, it will make far more money than most other films released this year.

### MISGIVINGS

Originally Attenborough had been counting on a financial package put together for him by Jake Eberts, chief executive of Goldcrest Films, the British company that made last year's Oscar winner *Chariots of Fire*. As filming went on however, the package fell apart. Many institutional investors expressed misgivings about the film's commercial prospects and a family of wealthy expatriate Sindhi businessmen, who had agreed to put several million dollars into the project, backed out.

Finally, Goldcrest was left with only one co-investor: NFDC. Of the film's \$22 million budget, the NFDC component was not expected to exceed \$6 million or so. Goldcrest had to find \$18 million itself if the film had to be made. Eberts went to Pearson Longman, Goldcrest's parent company and secured a guarantee that the



Attenborough and Kingsley : respectable profits.

money would be forthcoming.

It has proved to be a remarkably good decision. The completed film was sold for worldwide distribution to America's Columbia Pictures for a figure in excess of \$23 million, thus ensuring that neither Goldcrest nor NFDC made a loss.

### RESPECTABLE PROFIT

Even before the announcement of the Oscar awards, the film had been declared a hit and was expected to gross \$60 million in cinema rentals. Allowing for Columbia's share and the cost of the publicity, this left both NFDC and Goldcrest with a respectable profit.

After the eight Oscars however, all estimates have been scaled upwards. For a start, the US and Canadian television rights have been sold to Embassy Communications for \$20 million—making the deal one of the biggest in the history of the TV business. Cinema revenues have also shot up. According to current calculations, the film will now take anywhere from \$100 million to \$180 million at the international box-office. There will also be further revenues from the sale of TV and video rights for the rest of the world.

Of the revenues from cinema rentals, the distributors will take \$50-90 million to cover their costs, the costs of the publicity and their profits. With other expenses deducted, Goldcrest, NFDC and Indo-British Films (Attentborough's own company) will be left with a spectacular profit of \$40-60 million. The exact ratio in which this sum will be distributed has yet to be worked out and nobody is willing to divulge any details.

### BIASED CONTRACTS

According to Indian film industry sources however,

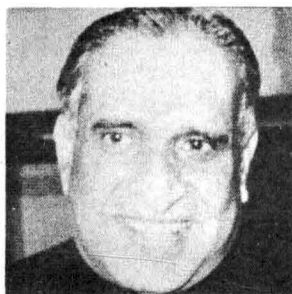
the contracts are biased against NFDC. Goldcrest will it seems, take the major share of the profit with Indo-British, which put up none of the capital, getting a hefty chunk. Because NFDC put up 33% of the financing, it appears to have a right to claim 33% of the profits.

Anil Dharkar, the former

NFDC executive who helped negotiate the deal, says that misgivings about the profit sharing are misconceived. "NFDC put in Rs 6.5 crores," he explains, "and will get a third of the profits." That figure could now be as high as Rs 20 crores—enough to finance the art film industry in this country for two decades! ♦

## TV STORM *Sins Of High Commission*

A nasty little row has erupted among London's Indian community. At the centre of the storm is Dr Seyid Muhammad, India's High Commissioner to the



Dr Seyid Muhammad

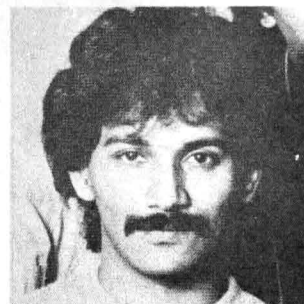
United Kingdom. On January 25 Muhammad was interviewed by British TV's Eastern Eye programme, on the Akali agitation. The interviewer was Karan Thapar, a former journalist on the London Times and the questions were quite searching. Muhammad found that he could not keep up with Thapar's questioning, fumbled for answers and generally, disgraced himself.

Staff at India House (as the High Commission is known) were greatly embarrassed by their leader's performance and to make up, put it about that Thapar was a) rude, b) incompetent and c) being paid by the Pakistanis. Claims of Pakistani patronage are no more than

laughable as Thapar (a Doon School product) is the son of a former Indian army general and is said to harbour political ambitions himself. Nevertheless, India House arranged for Balwant ('Bali') Kapoor, London correspondent for Delhi's *The National Herald* to libel Eastern Eye in an effort to salvage Muhammad's reputation.

### PAY-OFFS

In March, the *Herald* reported that the Pakistanis had paid Eastern Eye £18,000 to carry 'hostile anti-Indian propaganda' and to damage Muhammad's reputation. Like most other news in the *Herald*, the story was ignored in India. Nevertheless, India House sent clippings of it to members of the 'ethnic' press in London and

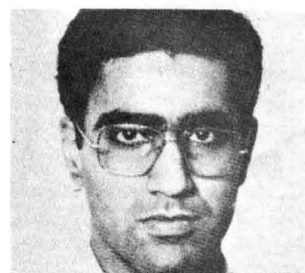


Samir Shah

arranged for the allegations to be given wide publicity. Accordingly, a weekly called *Asian Times* frontpaged the

story and added that Muhammad had been "hectorred and bullied by an interviewer with little ability and even worse manners".

The row got worse when Eastern Eye's producer Samir Shah called the allegations 'libellous' and British TV executives took offence at the slurs. *Asian Post*, a slick *Newsweek*-style journal for UK Asians, also entered the controversy claiming that the High Commissioner and his Minister (Information) Niranjan Desai had



Karan Thapar

made similar attempts to slander Chottu Karadia, its editor. And by May, the prestigious Sunday newspaper *The Observer*, had got wind of the controversy. It referred to 'wild allegations' about Pakistani payments and concluded 'it's not true'.

### DESAI BLAMED

Now, the row shows no signs of abating. According to *Asian Post*, India House has resorted to slander and libel since Niranjan Desai 'has been under a cloud because of a badly publicised Festival of India'. It adds, "Desai is in the frontline of the battle to save his skin and that of his boss who is not a career diplomat. He is using the intelligence wing of the diplomatic mission as well as the services of a bunch of carefully cultivated journalistic contacts to discredit newsmen who do not see eye to eye with him."

At this rate, it seems probable that Mrs Gandhi will have to step in and do what she always does in such cases—ask Swraj Paul to settle the matter. ♦



# OPTIONS

## Living

### *Bombay Gets Physical!*

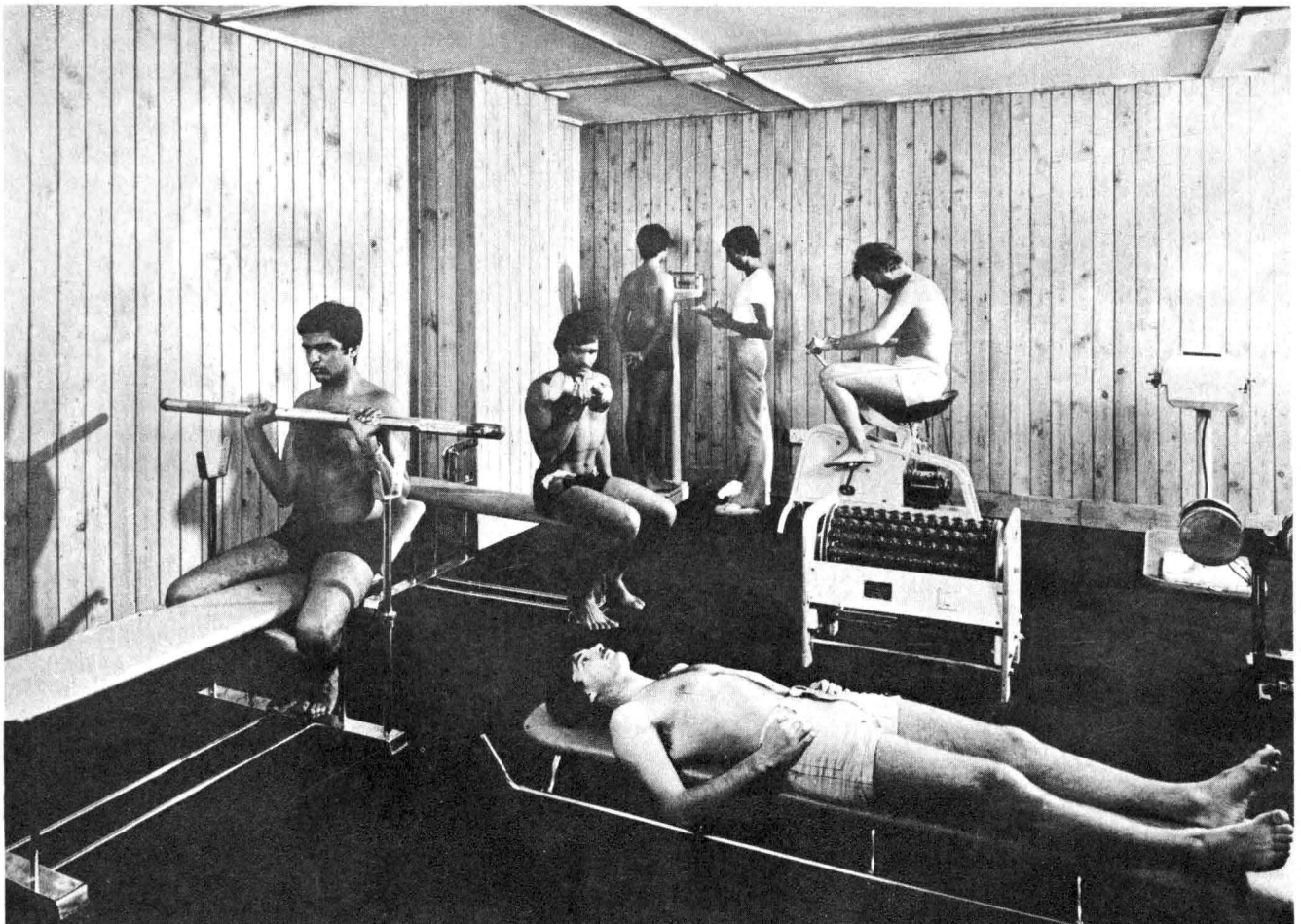
Coincidences, coincidences! Bombay and Los Angeles seem to be tied together by that fine and unbreakable cat-gut of coincidences. Firstly they are both glamour-towns, housing vast and slightly surreal film industries. They're geographically similar: far-flung, bordered by a technicolour sea, and a margin of 70mm beaches; but, what makes them so distinctly similar is their obsessive preoccupation with all things healthy. Both cities have spun themselves into a tizzy over body. The LA preoccupation with the physical is legendary. Golden-hued, impeccably-muscled women and Adonis-like men seem to stalk the streets and haunt the beaches; their jeans snug,

their wheat-bran chewing teeth in mint condition, and their armpits free of hair. In LA, it seems, everyone is lean, laid-back and tanned. Leave New York to the muggers and Washington to its Watergates. LA simply has its Golden People with their yoga and yoghurt. Similarly Delhi might boast of its Asiads and Calcutta of its culture-junkies, but for Bombay, the city of stars, socialites, gangsters and glamour-molls, is reserved its health-consciousness.

Suddenly businessmen are joining health clubs by the droves and even harmless housewives are being initiated into the secrets of the whirlpool bath and the treadmill. In a collective leap, Bombayites have realized that it is

fashionable to be healthy. And everybody knows, to the Bombayite fashion is a serious business.

Of course, in pockets of the city, there have always been sweaty Arnold Schwarzenegger-like individuals, their muscles balloon-like and bulging, sweating it out under dumbbells. The Talwalkar gyms have been very much a part of Bombay's psyche. But, to become a cult in this premier city of five star culture, things have to begin at the top: in a five star hotel. And so it was that when the Taj opened its Health Club in 1973, with much fanfare and with the likes of Zeenat Aman and Khushwant Singh crediting their bodies beautiful to the wonders of



*The Bombay businessman: keeping fashionably fit.*

# OPTIONS

calisthenics and steam-baths, it had on its hands a phenomenon.

In the wood-panelled environs of the sauna room, the ugly Bombayite contemplated his navel and fantasized about getting pretty. Businessmen, their paunches well-supported by *pakor*as and *halwa* were seen to be embracing fierce-looking Health Club apparatuses with desperate frenzy. Salvation, were it to come, was going to do so through the vigours of the motor-operated vibro belt.

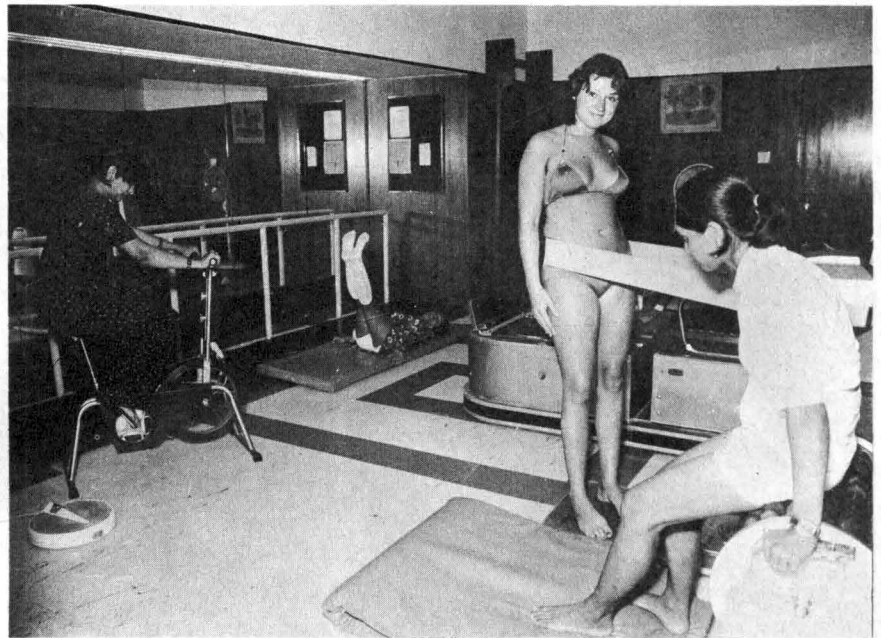
Nobody cottoned onto it as snugly as the admen. Everything that expanded, contracted, minimised or maximised you, was being sold in magazines. Bust-expanders, bull-workers, vibrating belt and diet pills could be bought by the bucketfuls. Just fill in the forms, enclose the cheque and remember to write the correct pin code number, thank you.

Of course, this consciousness was to expand to food and drink. Rama Bans, that invincible high-priestess of health was one of the first to do it. In a comprehensive compendium, she meticulously listed the calorie count of items as incongruous as *jalebis*, *dhoklas* and *shreekhanda*. Praveen Babi was on the Beverly Hills Diet, Shashi Kapoor on Dr Atkins, and Rekha just surrendered her luscious body to the dual cares of Dr Snehlata Pande and Ms Bans.

Dalda was the dogma of the day and later, even this was considered passé and cooking oils such as Saffola were promoted. And whereas, the bogeymen of businessmen had previously been income tax and ulcers, today they are cholesterol and flab.

Quietly, assiduously, in another corner of the city, the wily doctor Vishnu Kakkar was mixing powders and potions which promised to pulverize the pounds off pachydermal females. As the fever caught on, everybody who was anybody was on the racecourse. Models, admen, film stars, were seen to be sweating it out on the equestrian grounds, stumbling into equine excretions, at unearthly hours.

Of course, an entire section of the city had to be costumed for its new role. T-shirt manufacturers with such optimistically-charged names as 'Smash' 'Move' and 'Action' mushroomed from Mulund to Matunga.



*Harmless housewives: seeking salvation with the vibro belt.*

Jeans were sold, with the emphasis on thigh, bottom and crotch. And track-suits were the order of the day.

Then came the turn of the exercise classes. Dancers Astad Deboo, Kavita Sahni and Farida Peddar seemed to have a monopoly on them. Deboo and Peddar taught an interesting concoction of dance and drill, Rukshana Todiwalla did aerobics in her workshop class and Kavita Sahni stuck to teaching the Jane Fonda course. The name of Jane Fonda, that Queen of contortions who'd spun an entire industry around her leotard-clad body, was being invoked in private homes too. Her book (*Jane Fonda's Work Out Book*) reached the bestseller lists in the city, her cassettes were played incessantly, and the video cassettes of her lessons were as precious on the video circuit as the latest hard porn films. Religiously, between five and six, (the bewitching hour) nubile and not-so-nubile females were seen clad in fluorescent leotards, ankle-warmers, hair smartly held back with headbands, vigorously performing the Fonda rigours.

Then, the next step up the health-spiral was reached. Diet beers and a diet cola, Do it, were thrust upon an enthusiastic, sweaty city. Marketed as containing only 75 calories, the cola, when last heard of, was doing rather

well. Diet beers, seeming paradoxes in themselves, were also being lapped up gratefully.

Rama Bans then defected to the Sea Rock Hotel and got even more ambitious. Venturing forth into a plethora of exercises, she flew down a Japanese masseuse, trained in the ancient secrets of the *shet shu*. There was even talk of converting the entire Sea Rock Hotel into a health farm.

Clearly, matters had reached a head. Mr FP Shroff of the Taj group of hotels, sees the trend catching on. "Bombayites have suddenly got health-conscious," he says. "And as a five star hotel, we have to offer all kinds of amenities for the health conscious."

Deboo, the versatile dancer says, "Yes there is a trend in Bombay, people have suddenly got conscious of their bodies. I don't know how long it's going to last, but certainly the young kids are very serious about it. I guess its because of celebrities like Jane Fonda and the media exposure of health fads. But like most things, it started in the West and, as far as I'm concerned, I've no complaints."

Nor do the other dance exercise teachers, health club owners, diet cola bottlers, bull-worker makers and T-shirt manufacturers, who are jogging all the way to the bank.

*Malavika Rajbans Sanghvi*



## Comment



### Traveller's Tale

BY DAVID LLOYD-THOMAS

*David Lloyd-Thomas is a British journalist who spent three weeks in India last month. This is his account of the trip.*

TAKE YOUR OWN water they warned me when I set out for India. And so I did. It was unnecessary. After four days of drinking bottled fluid, I switched to the indigenous version. So far, there have been no after-effects. But if you should read an obituary in the next month or so. . . .

What they didn't tell me to do was to take my own conversation. I arrived the week after Richard Attenbore won his misbegotten Oscar. Tired of the media hyping of *Gandhi* (I have nightmares about TV interviews in which a fat man keeps intoning, "Mountbatten and Nehru begged me to make this film"), I had hoped to find the real India here. Instead, all anybody would talk about was *Gandhi*.

At a smart Delhi party, thrown by a poovy antique dealer (who added to his image by putting it about that he pimped), I tried unsuccessfully to listen to the many distinguished musicians who were performing. But I was collared by several plumply determined ladies who wanted to know if I had met 'Dickie'. Somewhat warily, I said that yes, I had and no, I wasn't taken in by his portly sincerity or his dreadful film. It was as though I had farted at a funeral or dared to look up the Queen's skirt. Was I aware that the film had won eight Oscars? Did I realise that at this very house, Dickie had rolled an appreciative eyeball at my host's Chinese-eyed merchandise? And how dare I say this to friends of Sir Richard's?

I made my excuses and left. But *Gandhi* was to pursue me. Attempting to put together an article on the Bombay film industry (yes, yet another one), I interviewed an aging star. His much lifted face settled on an expression of bewildered disapproval when I told him what I thought of *Gandhi*. At a media party in Delhi a Sikh writer fixed me with the sort of look South-hall bus conductors reserve for skin-heads. Was I mad or just perverse?

The reaction surprised me. How would the Americans react if an Indian used their money to make a mediocre film about George Washington, which portrayed him as a 'cute' old man who always got his own way by refusing to eat dinner before he went to bed! Or us Brits to a film about Winston Churchill that had an Indian actor playing the old boy as though he was a cousin, once removed, of ET—the extra terrestrial?

But Indians, I soon discovered, are a generous people. They even swallowed old Kingsley's line about miraculously rediscovering the Indianness he had carefully concealed during his years with the National Theatre and forgave (I am told) Attenbore's mistreatment of his Indian unit. Us Brits are not so kind. Consider the uproar over *Tatler* editor Tina Brown's censorship of Gita Mehta. Brown is married to Harry Evans who is a director of Goldcrest, the part financiers of *Gandhi*. When Mrs Mehta tore the film to shreds in a review, Brown refused to

print it, presumably because of Harry's Goldcrest involvement. British journalists were outraged by the affair, but here, Mehta's own countrymen don't seem to mind.

Nevertheless, I am not going to complain about the generosity of Indians. I did very well out of it, thank you. The only Indians I had met in London were the kind I had not wanted to see again. Overweight journalists who wrote about curry and cricket, slimy Cambridge Union types who had turned to 'ethnic' broadcasting because their papers were about to fire them and podgy antique smugglers who used Arab money to social climb.

I was pleasantly surprised to discover how different Indians were in their own country. A friend had given me a few phone numbers. I called them all, expecting nothing and was overwhelmed with hospitality. In eight days in Bombay, I attended five parties, was asked to lunch six times and managed two assignations.

Indian women, I had been warned, did not take kindly to men who made passes. This, I soon discovered, was not quite the case. At a party by the pool of an established Bombay hotel, I counted at least three tentative approaches. One woman wore white and read the news, another was a former Miss World contestant with pouting lips and protruding front teeth and the third was married to an electronics millionaire.

I mention all this, not to offer any

# OPTIONS

vicarious thrills but to illustrate the extent to which I found my preconceptions out of joint. The final straw was when a busty painter with the sort of mouth that looked great on Bugs Bunny, dragged me to a corner to discuss 'the perfectly normal sex urge', while giving my inside leg a 'perfectly normal' stroke.

Was I dreaming, or was this really India? At the risk of sounding neo-colonial, I must point out that several people connected my sex appeal with my Englishness. Everybody I met seemed to love England (the Sikh writer in Delhi even told me that he wanted the Raj back—his father had been a knight!), all things English were to be admired, be they Attenbore or the horrific flop of the Festival of India.

I remember the Festival well—though nobody else in London seemed

princes we were told. Leave the maharajahs to their bubbly and boys. Let the Indian meritocracy emerge. But judging by the charlatans and climbers who dominated the Festival, we were better off with the princes and their Dom Perignon and debauchery.

Incredibly, nobody here shared this perception. I met some lovely people—bright, talented and witty. But at every party, the same conversations were recycled. Praises of *Gandhi*, nostalgia for the Raj, curiosity about the Festival and pointless anecdotes about some man called Paul, who is supposed to live in London.

It is not my place to say this, I know. And a few weeks in India do not a pundit make. But honestly, can't people be a little more perceptive? India is too wonderful a country to be plundered by Oscar-hunting Attenbores

*I had been dispatched to interview an elderly Indian woman who was said to be Mrs Gandhi's art adviser and the Queen of Indian Culture. She held court at an expensive London hotel and was accompanied by a simpering poof. ....*

to have noticed it. I had been dispatched to interview an elderly Indian woman who was said to be Mrs Gandhi's art adviser and the Queen of Indian Culture. She held court in an expensive London hotel and was accompanied by a simpering poof who could well have been the Queen of Indian Culture himself, for all I know. I had hoped to learn something about Indian art from this pair. Instead, all I got was cringe-making 'social chit-chat' with generous name-dropping and quite naked social climbing. Did I like David Hockney, wasn't The Barbican simply *dreadful* and guess who they'd met yesterday?

I returned to the office profoundly depressed and decided against writing out the interview. In the '50s and the '60s, when Aisha Jaipur and Jackie Baroda (who is now almost completely spherical) represented India in London society, the liberals remained standoffish. Aisha and Jackie were

and self-seeking cultural ambassadors! At a London party, I once ran into an expatriate Indian tycoon. He was young, quite good looking, immaculately tailored and very bright. He owned a building in the City of London, sold arms to half the world and lived in style in Hampstead. I was quite impressed till, after his fifth Scotch, he began telling me about his Indian interests. It soon became clear that he longed to do nothing more than to rob the country of his origin. To this end, he had enlisted the services of an aggressive if dimunitive minister and together, the pair had netted millions in wheeling and dealing. Why did he do it? Surely, he didn't need the money?

The tycoon put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed it playfully. "You British," he chuckled, "you'll never understand India."

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# Bestsellers And The Dirty Business Of Double-Dealing

By Shirin Mehta

IN 1961, WHEN HAROLD ROBBINS' *THE CARPET-BAGGERS* WAS IMPORTED INTO INDIA, IT SOLD 5,000 COPIES. LAST YEAR, THE SAME AUTHOR'S *SPELL-BINDER*, BY ALL ACCOUNTS A MUCH WORSE BOOK, SOLD 18,000 COPIES

within weeks of distribution. Best-sellers have never had it so good in India. Sales figures are shooting up and newspapers and magazines are full of reviews and information about new books. Each year, a new breed of authors with names like Jonathan Black, Michael M Thomas and Jeffrey Archer seems to emerge and their books are snapped up as soon as they hit the stands. The local book import trade has never before had to cope with this huge volume of sales and business is booming.

Or is it? Despite the jump in sales, the trade is more disorganized and panicky than it has ever been before. Increased competition has led to a price crash and spells potential disaster for some importers. Undercutting and dumping are now commonplace and distributors' fortunes change from day to day. Hardcover editions are being sold for a third of their price, American editions are challenging the security of established distributors who have traditionally distributed British editions. And cheap, pirate editions pose a threat to the importers of the official editions.

The only people who stand to benefit from this chaos are the readers. With the constant undercutting, it has now become possible to shop around for a book, coming up triumphant with the hardcover edition at only Rs 20 or so. Besides the range of books has expanded as more and more importers have brought in a wider selection.

A catch-22 however prevents this boom in sales from working to the benefit of the trade. Sales are increasing because prices are, incredibly, falling. And prices are plummeting because of cut-throat competition in the business today. Booksellers find themselves in a quandary. If two distributors both import the same book, there is going to be no incentive for the shopper to stock them unless he gets an attractive concession. So, if one offers a 20% discount, the other will offer 25%. And there is no guarantee that a week later, an unknown party will not offer an even greater discount. As business increases, so do the risks.

This is a far cry from the workings of the book trade prior to the late '60s. In those days, it was a staid, starchy business: well-organized, always ethical and seldom hazardous. Well-established corporate names like Orient Longman, Macmillan and Allied were all in it together. They co-existed amicably, with rigid, compartmentalized areas of sales that seldom overlapped.

And then came piracy. A dirty, much-abused business, but one that grew in rapid leaps. No longer were the rights of the publisher sacrosanct. Also, the Open General License scheme allowed practically anyone (even individuals) to import books and changed the nature of the trade. It attracted more competition. And sharks.

Conducting business over polite luncheons became passe. Open rifts between publishing houses paved the way for battles between importers. The changes were compounded by an aggressive new breed of entrepreneurs who exploited the overlap in the international publishing market. Tradition-

ally, Indian distributors dealt with British publishers and imported their editions. In fact, authors' contracts in Britain, specifically covered sales in the Indian market. However, each best-seller has a minimum of four editions: a paperback and a hardcover in Britain and a paperback and a hardcover in America. Under the standard authors' contract, the US editions are only meant for distribution in certain overseas markets such as Latin America, while the Commonwealth market is reserved for the British. Unfortunately, distinctions are difficult to enforce.

The new breed of importers took to bringing in the US editions and began competing with the established houses and their British editions. The originators of this trend were India Book House (IBH) and they soon found that there was nothing the older distributors could do to stop them. In the late '70s, Harkin Chaklani, IBH's leading manager broke away and started India Book Distributors (IBD), and found quick success with American editions.

The British publishers are deeply concerned by this erosion of their market but there is little they can do. The cost of keeping up with the violators is greater than the loss in sales. In the process, distributors like Rupa and Co have suffered. An established house that will have 'nothing to do with the Americans', Rupa finds itself at a loss to cope. Mr Shenoy, Manager, Bombay, bespectacled and nervous explains, "Our British editions are generally ten rupees more expensive than the American ones. People like IBD import the US editions and have a run of the market. Recently, Fontana and Pan have had to offer us reductions on their



*The business of bestsellers: attractive concessions and cut-throat competition.*

titles—from £2.50 to £1.75 and so on—to let us compete.”

Examples abound. *The Art of Japanese Management* which is out in a paperback edition Penguin, also had American competition. Rupa's sales declined. The only way to sell the book was to get an added concession after contacting the publisher. Sometimes, import orders have to be cancelled altogether when they learn that the American editions are already in the market. Often, to recover their losses, they tear off the cover page and send it back to the publisher for re-imbursement. Recently, IBH were able to beat IBD over *Jane Fonda's Workout Book for Pregnancy, Birth and Recovery*. Though IBD had imported a cheaper American edition, IBH were able to negotiate a lower price with the British publisher and it was the reduced price UK edition that became the bestseller.

Also affecting sales is the problem of hardcover dumping. The tussle between hardcovers and paperbacks is a

recent phenomenon. Usually, the paperback edition is imported a year or so after the hardback and so, there is no question of competition. But with the multiplicity of importers and editions, this safeguard has vanished. For instance, Anthony Sampson's *The Moneychangers* was selling well in hardcover at Rs 153, till the paperbacks hit the stands. To stay in the market, the distributors had to slash the price to Rs 50. Says DS Sanvordekar of Bombay's Nalanda bookshop, “We have had to sell so many hardcovers at prices that are only marginally above the paperback.” Some instances: Robert Ludlum's *The Parsifal Mosaic* crashed from Rs 140 to Rs 40, Collins and La Pierre's *The Fifth Horseman* from Rs 141 to Rs 40 and MM Kaye's *The Golden Calm* from Rs 250 to Rs 50.

Another reason is the overprinting of hardcovers abroad. The hardcover edition is printed first in the west. The price of the paperback rights depends on hardcover sales. Overprinting the

hardcover edition is therefore in the interests of the foreign publishers who are able to claim a greater sale. All the extra, unsold copies can be shipped out to Third World countries at throwaway prices. The scheme works to the advantage of all concerned: the foreign publisher makes up his hardcover losses by the sale price of the paperback rights; the Indian importer gets the book at a very low price competing favourably with any other edition on the market; the Indian consumer, of course, gets a book at the price of a paperback one.

The established distributors remain concerned about the import of ‘job lots’ or ‘remaindered’ copies. Because bookshop space in the West, is severely limited, any book that does not begin to sell strongly in the first few weeks after its publication, has its price marked down. Such unsold copies are then sold cheaply as ‘job lots’ or remaindered lots.

Reputed publishing houses natural-





*Pirate editions: offering readers the latest books at the cheapest prices.*

ly look down on the whole business. Says Mr Stan Rebello of Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd, "We are the sort of publishers that do not import job lots so there we lose out. It was started by Gangaram in Bangalore who owns Book Bureau. He got in his books cheap and sold them at a tremendous profit. . . . The American publisher himself may not sell to the Indian buyer. It is the wholesalers on both sides who are involved in the trade."

Kamlesh Shah, a young entrepreneur who deals almost exclusively in 'job lots', is unruffled by the criticism. "If we can get our books in at a cheaper rate, it is due to our business sense. Why should anybody else object? Look at the gain to the consumer!"

Just as the remainder merchants have pushed importers into a tight corner while benefitting consumers so have the pirates. They offer readers an opportunity to get the latest books at reasonable prices. Importers are also powerless to take action against them because pirates change presses regularly and operate from such obscure locations as Ludhiana. Moreover, no action can be taken against them unless they are caught in the process of printing. Usually therefore, publishers prefer to ignore piracy as an inevitable, parasitic evil.

In a few cases though, action has

been taken. Mr Mehra, owner of Rupa, tired of threatening shop owners who kept pirated editions, resorted to police action. Its effects were, however, shortlived.

Says Rebello, "There was a recent case of piracy of *Fools Die* by Mario Puzo. It was a book that fell within our jurisdiction. I phoned up the Additional Commissioner of Police and the place was raided. Unfortunately the shopowners can do us much more harm by refusing to stock our books than we can do them by getting them caught."

The only sensible solution to piracy is to print cheap, Indian editions of bestsellers. Publishing houses like Rupa, who have exclusive rights over Pan and Fontana books, have started re-printing books here. Since pirates can only operate *after* the book has been released abroad, they are increasingly demanding simultaneous re-printing rights in India. The paperback edition of Sidney Sheldon's *Master Of The Game* was released at the same time as the hardcover edition in UK. A great concession to any publisher. Rupa has also done this successfully for Jack Higgins' *Touch The Devil* and Alistair Maclean's *Partisans*. So far no pirate edition of these books has been discovered, since the publishers are selling it cheap (between Rs 15 and 22).

The new set of aggressive entrepreneurs seem to be here to stay. The deals are quick-thinking, sharp-cutting ones and the customers are rolling in.

The older, more established houses have still to get used to the new, hectic pace of business. This was shown yet again when Salman Rushdie visited India earlier this year. Pan, who had published the British paperback of *Midnight's Children* airfreighted 1,000 copies to capitalize on the publicity generated by Rushdie's visit. However, Rupa, the Indian distributors, sat on the books and failed to get them into the shops. Rushdie was understandably furious when people gave him pirate editions to autograph. However, IBD, sensing the vacuum, at once imported the US edition and distributed it to the shops. *Midnight's Children* sold phenomenally during Rushdie's stay, but because of Rupa's sloth, the official British edition lost out.

In this intricate web of intrigue and chaos, the reader is the only one that stands to benefit. Older publishing houses may be forced to close down, newer ones may be ruined by their own deceit but better books are coming in cheaper with a wider choice. And whichever way the book trade may tend to swing, one thing is sure. It will never be the same again.

# International Intelligence

*A Monthly Look at the Events and Personalities Behind the News*

## HITLER FORGERIES

### *Decline Of The Times*

In the first years of every decade, a major journalistic con-trick is perpetrated on an important section of the world's media. In 1971-72, Clifford Irving sold *Life* magazine the rights to his exclusive Howard Hughes biography for several hundred thousand dollars. Just as the magazine was getting ready to go to press, the biography was exposed as a fake—a rewrite of two older Hughes books. Irving, it turned out, had never laid eyes on Hughes despite his claims that the two men had collaborated on the biography.

In 1982-83, an even greater con-trick has been perpetrated on another important section of the media. The so-called diaries of Adolf Hitler, which were to be serialized in the German magazine *Stern* and those pillars of the British establishment: *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*, have been shown to have been shoddy fakes. Said an eminent historian who examined them: 'they read as though they were written by Charlie Chaplin'. And scientific tests have proved that they were written on paper that was first produced in the '50s, a decade after Hitler's death. The forger had simply rewritten large chunks of two popular Hitler biographies, to the extent that he had even incorporat-

ed the typographical errors of his sources.

#### DELIBERATE CON

It will be many months before anybody can conclusively establish who was responsible for this con. Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal believes that the diaries were the work of neo-Nazis seeking to refurbish the Führer's image. Others suspect that the East German security services manufactured them as a deliberate disinform-

ation device. It is also possible that they were simply a money-making operation on the part of Gerd Heidemann, the *Stern* reporter who 'discovered' them.

Whatever the source, what seems amazing is that such obvious forgeries should have come so near to publication in reputable journals. In the case of *Stern*, which has always had a sensationalistic streak, the error of judgement is not entirely surprising. But what of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* the two most respected papers in the English-speaking world? How had such reputable news organizations agreed to print the diaries without

checking out their authenticity?

#### THE MURDOCH STYLE

Part of the answer lies in *The Times*' change of ownership in 1981. That year, the paper was bought by Rupert Murdoch, an aggressive Australian publisher. Murdoch also owns Britain's *The Sun*, and *The News of the World*, which are best known for their pictures of semi-clad women, and *The New York Post* which has turned into a lurid sensationalistic tabloid. Murdoch has no real political biases but cares only about running profitable papers.

He vowed, when he bought *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*, that he would make them profitable. His strategy, it now turns out, was to look for 'scoops' like the Hitler diaries. It was Murdoch himself who opened negotiations with *Stern* for the British rights to the diaries over the heads of his editors. When he was convinced that they were worth the expense, he paid *Stern* £400,000 for them.

Charles Douglas-Home, Editor of *The Times* and Frank Giles, Editor of *The Sunday Times*, were simply informed that their papers would be carrying this 'scoop of the century'. They were not allowed to examine the documents or express any misgivings about the arrangements.

#### PAID EXPERT

The problem of historical authenticity, however, did remain. So, Murdoch sent



*Adolf Hitler : diaries from beyond the grave?*



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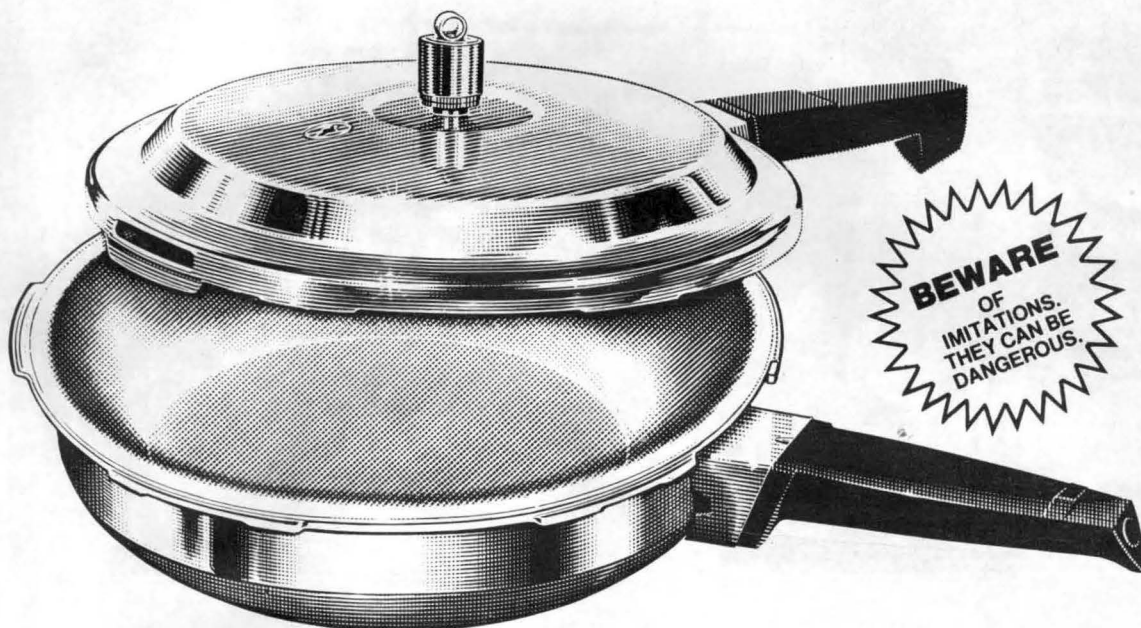
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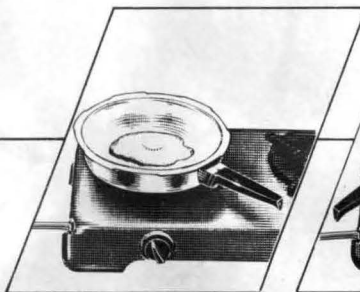


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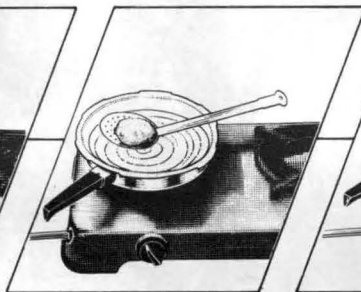
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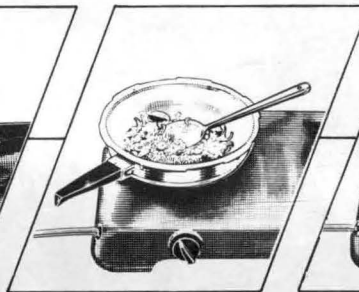
**FRY**



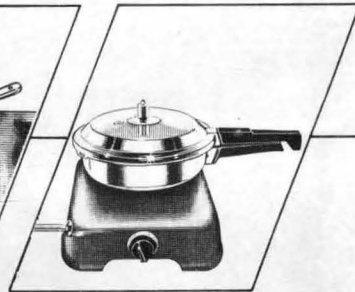
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# The New Political Cartoonists

By Madhu Menon

A POLITICAL CARTOONIST IN INDIA CAN NEVER REALLY RUN OUT OF IDEAS. PEOPLE LIKE RK LAXMAN, SUDHIR DAR, ABU AND MARIO HAVE ESTABLISHED themselves as first-rate cartoonists with their direct, daily attack on our seemingly eternal and never-changing rigmarole of loud-talking politicians, spiralling prices, useless telephones, and always, never-ending queues everywhere. Laxman, in fact, has come to occupy a special stature in the *Times of India*—with an 'undisclosed salary'.

Now two relatively new cartoonists are trying to carve out a Laxman-like niche for themselves in the English language press as strictly 'political'

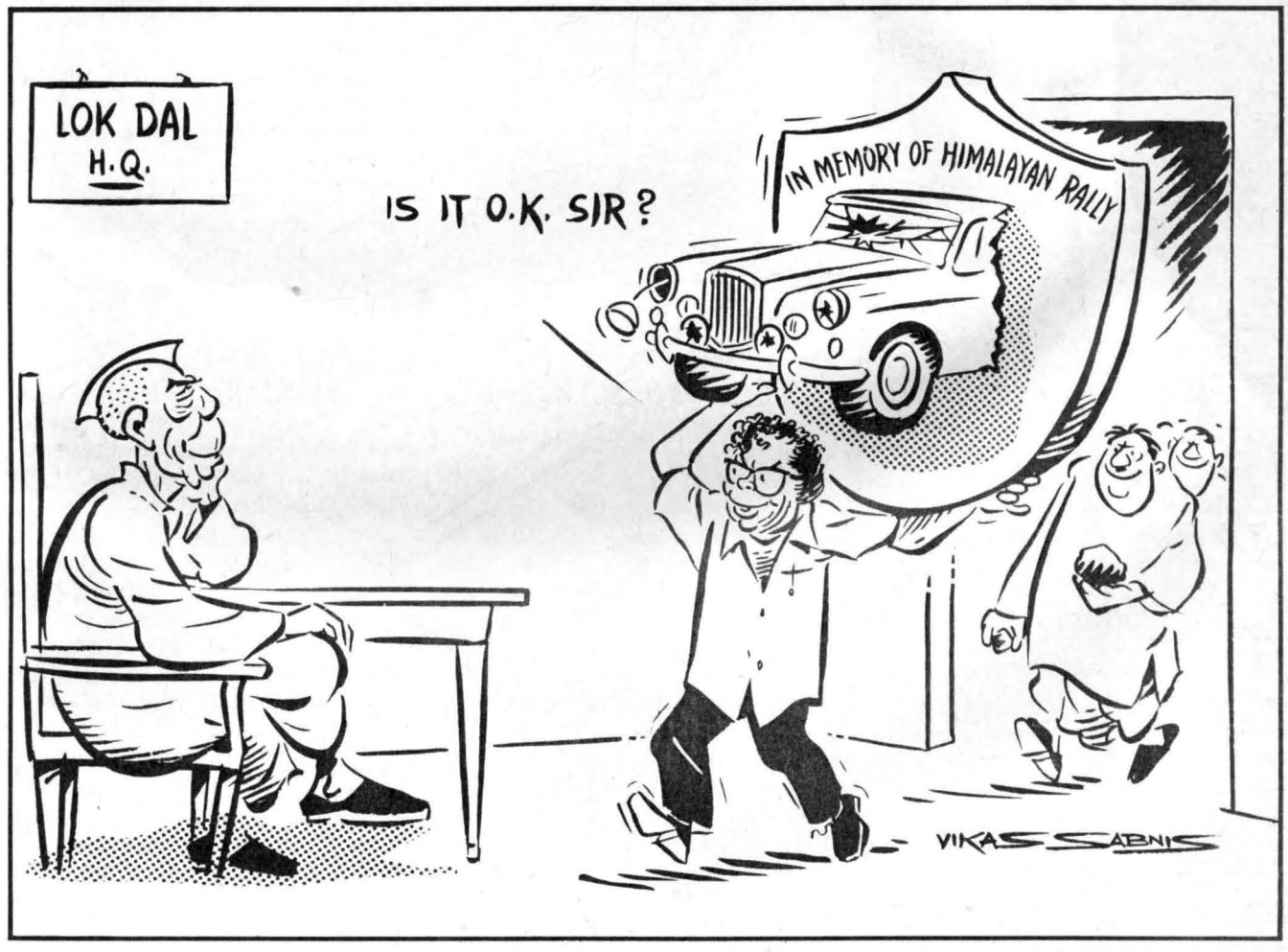
cartoonists: Vikas Sabnis, 32, who does daily pocket cartoons for the *Daily* after working for ten years in the Marathi *Mumbai Sakal* and a one year stint with *Mid-Day*; and 'Eskay', the nom de plume of an amateur, Sunday cartoonist (who does not like revealing his name for 'professional reasons') who has made a mark with his *Side-Show* column in the *Indian Express* Sunday section and his caricatures and illustrations in several magazines.

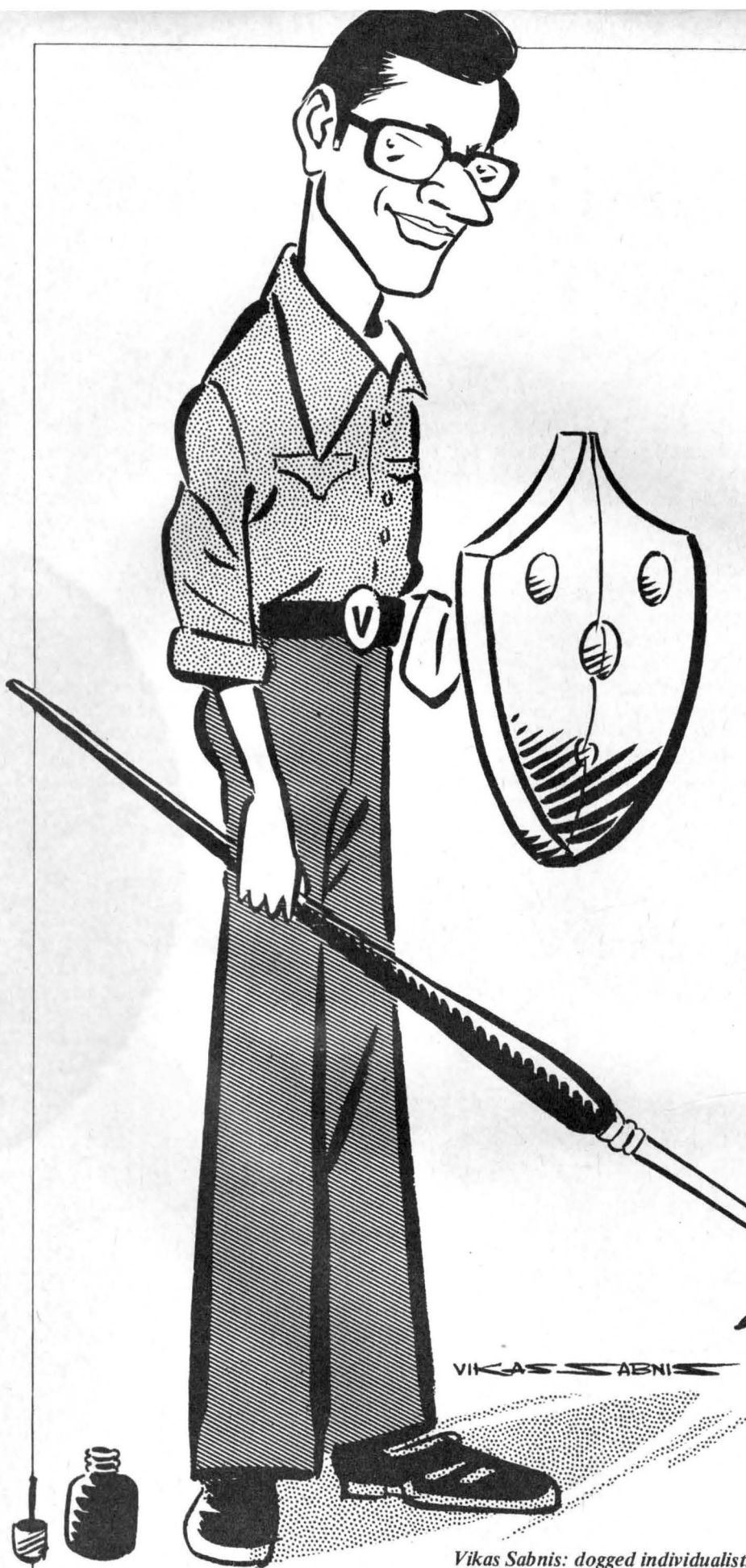
Though they both came into the limelight only in the last three years

Sabnis and Eskay differ widely in style and attitudes towards their art: the former is an impassive observer, his cartoons wry comments; the latter is angry and his work simmers with disenchantment and cynicism.

\* \* \*

**VIKAS SABNIS IS** a looming (he is almost 6' 6"), thin, gangly man with thick-framed spectacles perched on a narrow face. He looks more like a character from the Woody Allen comic strip or one of those slightly dazed IIT *wunderkinds*, than a Marathi speaking





Vikas Sabnis: dogged individualist.

cartoonist from Shivaji Park, Bombay's very middle class Shiv Sena stronghold. He takes himself very seriously and his vocation, even more so.

Every morning, he diligently scans the newspapers and international magazines like *Newsweek*, poring over every page, letters and editorials included. "The concept for my daily cartoons usually come from this reading," he says, "But often I get ideas even when I am travelling to office. I am constantly alert. Every waking moment of the day, I am looking at the world through a cartoonist's eyes." But those eyes conceal no bias. Sabnis has no clear-cut political or ideological preferences—any current topic is a good enough subject for his pocket cartoon. "You can never really run out of ideas for political cartoons in India. Every day there are a hundred interesting things happening which can inspire a humorous comment, a cartoon."

Sabnis gets to his drawing board in his cubbyhole-like office at the *Daily* in the afternoon, when he first works out different sketches for the concept already in his mind. "To me, the picture is the most important part of a cartoon—at least 75 per cent of the beauty of a cartoon lies in the picture. In fact, the ideal cartoon is one that has no captions at all: the picture says everything."

Fitting an appropriate caption to the final sketch comes next and here, Sabnis is often open to ideas from the editorial department. But otherwise, he is a dogged individualist. "I always work out the concepts for the cartoons myself—no self-respecting cartoonist will ever listen to anybody on that point." Added to this fiercely independent streak, is a volatile temperament. Since he left the JJ School of Art in 1968, Sabnis has switched three jobs and never for money alone. On one occasion, he was sent on an assignment to New Delhi with second class train fare. Later he learnt that another well-known freelancer had also been sent for the same assignment but with air fare. Sabnis' reaction was instant and typical: he quit.

Even at the *Daily*, with its pro-Soviet, pro-Indira bias, Sabnis maintains, "I think a cartoonist should be necessarily impartial. When he takes sides, he stops being a cartoonist, he



becomes a propaganda man."

"The biggest challenge for a cartoonist in India," Sabnis adds, "is to fight for his self-respect. Most Indian cartoonists, especially those working with regional or chain newspapers are very badly treated. They are looked upon as mere illustrators to fill up empty spaces on the page. I will never stand for that kind of treatment. Money is not the most important thing for me. Even by freelancing at home, I can easily make about Rs 2,000."

Sabnis can, of course, afford to stand on principles. There is a shortage of talented cartoonists in the English language press today. Says

Sabnis, "The new newspapers and magazines are desperately looking out for good cartoonists. It is fairly easy to get a break and if you are really good, you can easily establish yourself and set your own terms."

Like most artists Sabnis finds it difficult to talk about his style and technique. By his own admission, he began by imitating the doyen of Marathi cartoonists: Shiv Sena leader, Bal Thackeray. Sabnis even bears an uncanny facial resemblance to Thackeray, but he insists, "I only admire Bal Thackeray's style. I do not share any of his views." Sabnis' cartoons today, critics say, are only watered-down

imitations of RK Laxman, but he maintains, "Over the last ten years, I have evolved my own style."

But some Laxman-like characteristics prevail. Like Laxman, Sabnis is an intensely private person, a family man (he is married and has one son) whose only weaknesses are Dev Anand films and old Hindi film songs ("I hate this RD Burman stuff"). Also, he is terribly unfunny. "The only thing funny about me," Sabnis says, "is that I saw New York before I saw New Delhi. I had visited my brother there." Then, as an after-thought, he adds, "The other funny thing about me is that I get my best ideas in the toilet. I think most good ideas on any subject come in the toilet."

\* \* \*

**STOCKY, BEARDED, FORTYISH**, a broad forehead, deeply thoughtful eyes. Also a complete cynic. That's Eskay. "I am never interested in a statement a public figure makes, but in the motives behind it. I don't take anything or anybody at face value. And I view all politicians with suspicion. I think this political system is a complete hoax." Strong words indeed, coming as they do from a happily settled family man and professional engineer, who has been publishing cartoons only for the last three years.

Like all cartoonists Eskay started by doodling on school note-books or walls. But he never considered making a career out of cartooning. He had no formal training in drawing or painting and he was also interested in maths and all things mechanical—he once broke a watch to see how it worked. "My interest in engineering and my parents' desire that I should take to it as a profession, made me restrict cartooning to a hobby."

The hobby persisted even as he started on an engineering career, got married and settled down. It was only three years ago that he considered publishing his cartoons. "I felt my children—I have a daughter and a son—were old enough and I have more time to spare now." But equally crucial was the urge to publish. "I felt it was pointless doing a cartoon if no one was going to see it. Besides when you do cartoons for publication and not just for your own pleasure, your range of themes widens."

Since then Eskay has built up a reputation amongst Bombay publications as a consistent and reliable contributor. Though he does change



*Eskay: the complete cynic.*



styles to satisfy different editorial requirements, an underlying tone of 'sharp-toothed unkindness' remains. "My cartoons are not meant to be obviously funny," Eskay insists. "Rather, they are intended to be thought-provoking."

His caricatures, he maintains, are unique. "Generally, a caricature is a picture of a person's face with exaggerated features, meant only to look funny. My caricatures try to show some important aspect of the subject, either through pose, attire or expression." Thus in his caricature of Gandhi, which he considers his best, he added a whimsical look to the Mahatma's face, highlighting what he considers the most interesting aspect of his personality. Another kind of message is contained in the caricature of Pranab Mukherjee—he is shown hunting for solutions that have already vanished. Eskay is also rather proud of never having gone to an art school. "I follow no rules, no

conventions. If I have to put colour, I just dab any colour where I feel it should go."

While Eskay's sketching style is entirely impulsive, his attitudes to politicians are very thoughtfully worked out. Most of them come from years of reading the edit page of the *Times of India* and though he contributes most regularly to the *Express*, Eskay confesses, "I am basically a *Times* man. Most of my opinions are formed after reading the analysis of Inder Malhotra, Prem Shankar Jha and other editorial writers." However, he does not share the *Times'* general pro-establishment stance. "I feel very strongly about what is happening in the country, about the hypocrisy of all our politicians, all the double-talk, about the complete mess we are in."

But if Eskay is angry, he is not an activist. In fact he is quite pessimistic about the role of the intelligentsia in contemporary India. "Yes we have a

few people who have, perhaps in all sincerity, decided to actively participate in the affairs of the country to try to do something concrete. But they are all working in isolation—which is useless. It's just like giving alms to a beggar—you are only easing your conscience, you are not really doing any good."

So the complete cynic is convinced that unless something drastic happens ("like a messiah makes his appearance") things are going to remain much the same. "We will move on, but in slow motion." And so will Eskay continue to play the role of the disenchanted, angry and often viciously funny observer.

But now he has conceived an entire comic strip which has no political overtones at all—"It is just something very funny like Woody Allen's strip." But he will not give further details. "Wait till I have finally executed it," he says excitedly. ♦



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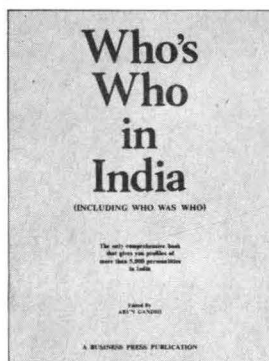
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## Justice JC Shah

*Photographed By Nitin Jhaveri*

'OF THE SHAH Commission', is the common appendix that most people add verbally or mentally when they talk of Justice JC Shah, the erstwhile Chief Justice of India, who performed magnificently a task that many others would have reduced to an unseemly farce or an unjust inquisition. Yet there is nothing pretentious about Justice Shah and he seems untouched by his fame. Sitting comfortably in his pyjama and shirt with gold buttons, among his dearly-loved law books and in the stark simplicity of his library, he says with characteristic humility, "It was a matter of duty, nothing more. A judge does not feel personally involved in any case he tries."

His favourite room reflects his personality. Stark to the point of being bare it has no carpet, no fancy paint-work, no beautiful furniture, nothing that isn't simple and functional. Twenty cabinets of law reports, judgments, court decisions, and income tax cases crowd the uneven walls. Several unlovely chairs, a couple with broken seats that must be used by anybody who comes to consult with the Justice from the Singhania to his son; and in one corner, an overflowing desk and chair, make up the furniture. "It serves as my consulting room, my library and my retreat." It is the haven he has returned to from the cloisters of the Supreme Court and the maximum security chambers of the Commission.

A judge's life is a lonely one and Justice Shah spends most of his spare time in this spartan room, rarely socialising except for a routine rubber of bridge at the Willingdon Club every evening. The clutter of books and notes and references on his desk are in an order that only he understands. His three-year-old granddaughter Sonal, whom he dotes on, runs around in the room among the scattered chairs and tables, but never touches a thing. "She knows she shouldn't," he laughs. A wooden chest by his desk contains notes on a company law book that he is

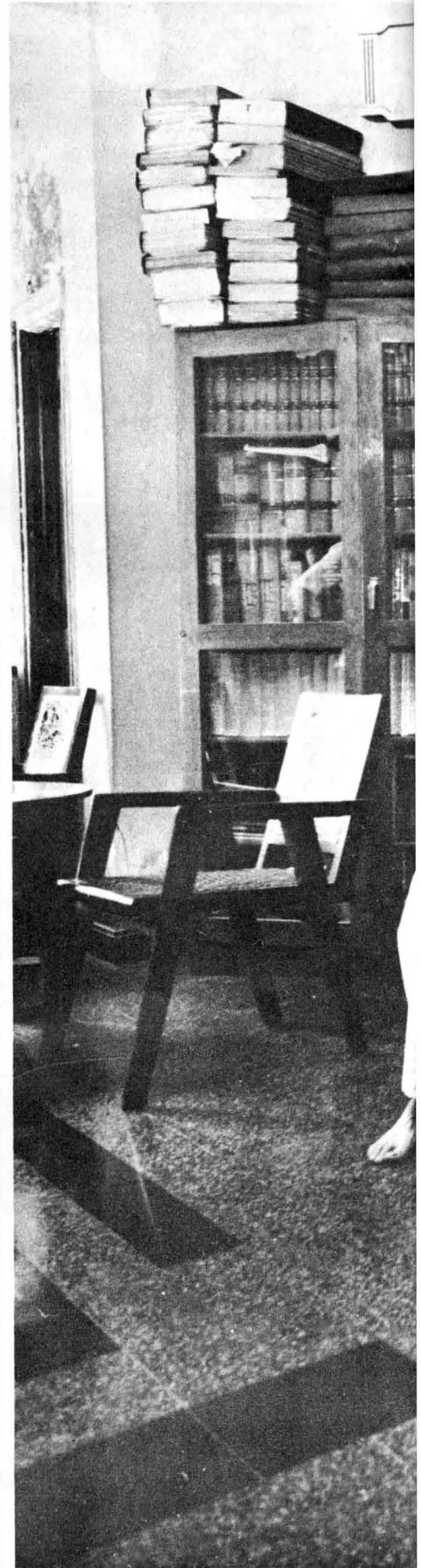
editing and over one cabinet lie bound volumes of assorted opinions he has given over the past ten years.

Once upon a time you could see the sea from the window at the far end of the room. "It was a beautiful view and there was a fine breeze all day." The concrete jungle on Pedder Road and Warden Road in South Bombay have totally obscured the sea, but the fresh breeze is still there.

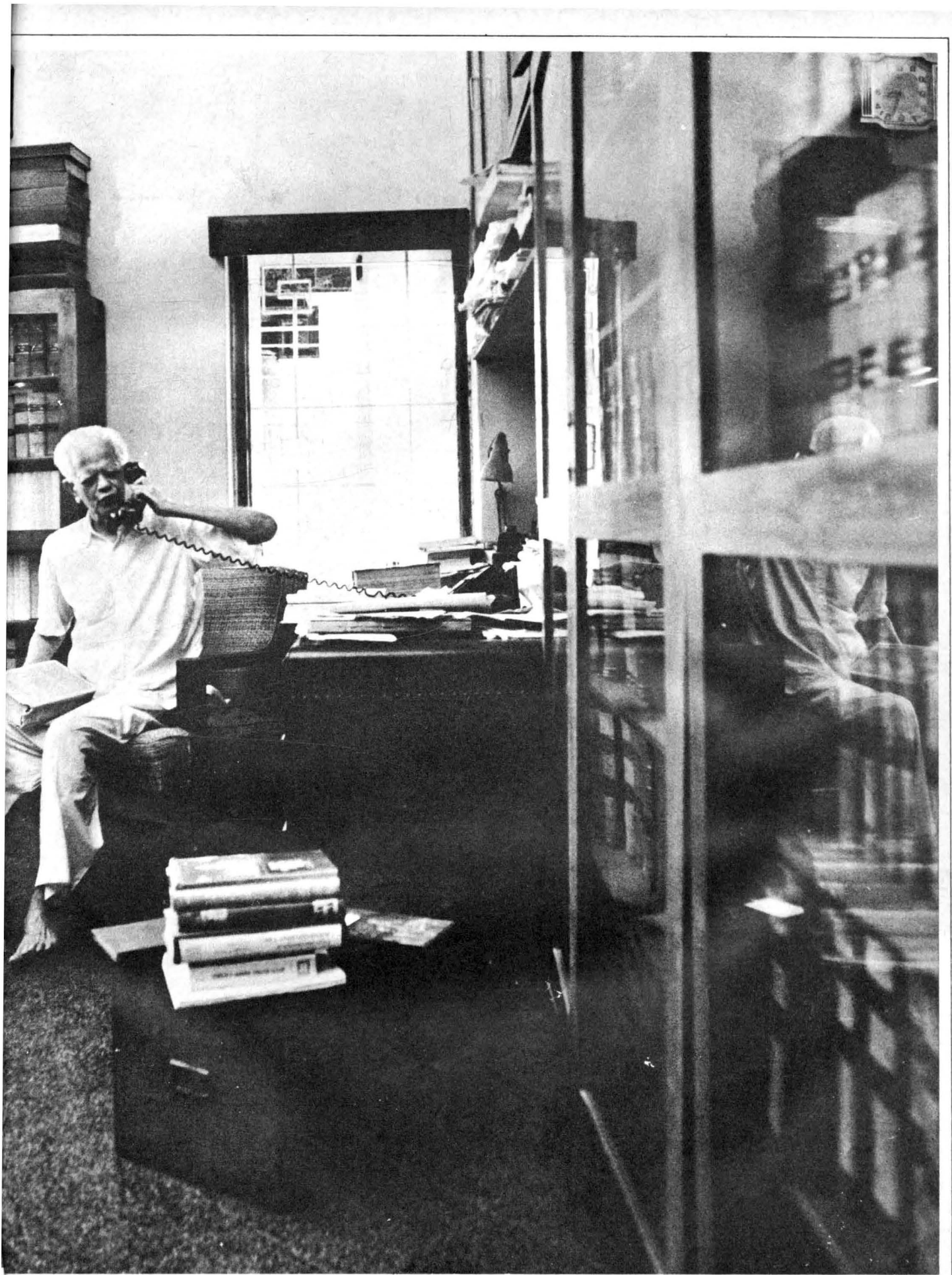
The old building on Carmichael Road, in which Justice Shah has lived intermittently since 1950, is built like a castle. "Even the bedrooms are semi-circular," he says. This room in particular is shaped very oddly. An uneven polygon, it looks like an adjunct to the house, an afterthought. It boasts several features that could only be described as architect's mistakes. A space at the far end of the room and at right angles to it, has been carelessly converted into an alcove that is as useless as it is inaccessible. An arch from the entrance of the building, which the room overlooks, protrudes into it. The architect has camouflaged it with a queer wooden bench. Justice Shah finds them both quaint.

Justice Shah is a confirmed workaholic. In the quiet of his room, he can indulge himself to the fullest. Law is his life. "But it is an acquired taste. I wasn't born into a lawyer's family." His father was the executive head of a small princely state in North Gujarat and only one of his four children is a lawyer. Justice Shah has never thought of doing anything else and today at 77, he runs a flourishing company law and taxation law practice and is also Chairman of the Board of Directors of *The Statesman*, President of the Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay and on the board of the Press Trust of India.

"If I have nothing to do, I think I will just fall apart. I have been accustomed to eight to ten hours of work every day for the past 50 years and even the doctors have advised me to continue my practice or they fear I will disintegrate." ♦







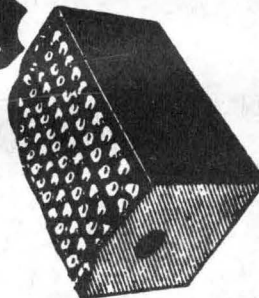
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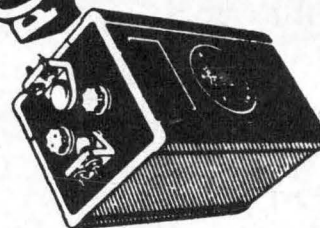
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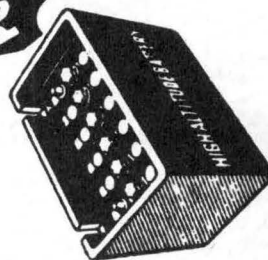
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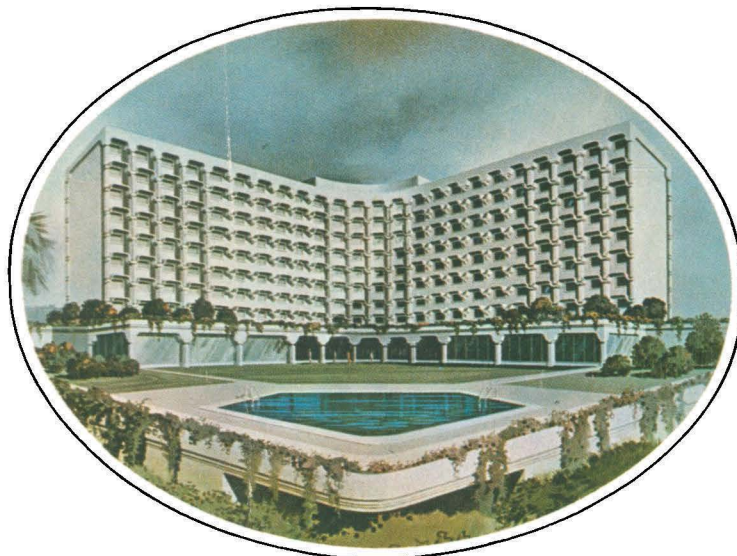
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