

HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

July 2000

THE AMBASSADOR IS DYING

**India was Indira
Indira was India**

- Ramachandra Guha

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Commentary

South Asian kiosk updated daily; Magazine section updated on the first of every month

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Long view from New Delhi by Ashok K. Mehta
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The Tiger's Trap by Shashi K. Kulkarni

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(The Times of India, New Delhi)

Pope takes up Christians issue with Vajpayee
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Osama bin Laden now calls for jihad against Jews, Christians
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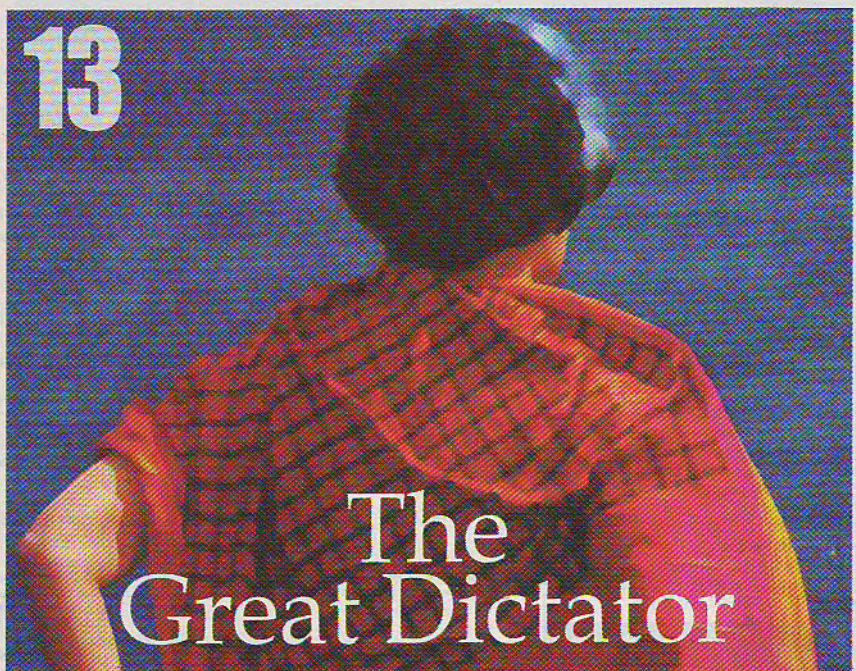
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Himal is published and distributed by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-543333/34/35/36
Fax: 521013
email: info@himalmag.com
editors@himalmag.com
marketing@himalmag.com
circulation@himalmag.com
http://www.himalmag.com
ISSN 1012 9804
Library of Congress Control Number
88 912882

Imagesetting at: Polyimage
Printed at: Jagadamba Press, Kathmandu
Tel: +977-1-521393, 536390

Himal was a Himalayan journal from 1987 to March of 1996, when it became a South Asian magazine.

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Roddy Mackenzie is an Australian climber, photographer, and tourism entrepreneur, who has sped around the Indian hill and plain in an Ambassador.

Samuel Thomas from Kodur in Andhra Pradesh, teaches in Kathmandu.

Tapan Bose and Rita Manchanda are associated with the South Asian Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR), which organised a meeting of Kashmir activists from both sides of the Line of Control in Kathmandu in July 1999. That was where work began to bring together activists from various parts of India with those of Jammu and Kashmir, which is written about in their article on page 50.

Cover design by **Swasti Rajbhandari**. Photograph by **Min Bajracharya**.

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	1 year	2 years
Nepal	NPR 540 (USD 7.8)	NPR 1000 (USD 14.4)
India	INR 520 (USD 12.5)	INR 1000 (USD 21)
Rest of South Asia	USD 16	USD 30
Elsewhere	USD 36/GBP 25	USD 66/GBP 45

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Country	Agent
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India	Central News Agency (P) Ltd., 23/90 Connaught Circus, New Delhi 110001. Tel: +91-1-7529385/777 0536
Maldives	Asrafee Book Shop, 1/44 Chandhane Magu, P.O. Box 2053, Male. Tel: +960-32-3424
Nepal	Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Tel: +977-1-543333-36
Pakistan	TransIndus Media (Pvt) Ltd., 2nd Floor, Haroon House, Ziauddin Ahmed Rd, Karachi 74200. (DEMAND DRAFT ONLY) Tel: +92-21-567 0081-4 Fax: +92-21-567 0085
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Tamil vs Kannadiga

This is in response to some of the issues you have raised in the article, "Tamil Nadu, Tamil Eelam and Greater Eelam" (Commentary, June 2000). I would like to quote verbatim from the said piece: "There are also other Tamil Nadu grievances, such as the refusal of neighbouring Kerala and Karnataka states to share river waters equitably with it; the sustained efforts of Kannadiga chauvinists to prevent the installation of a statue for the great Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar in Bangalore; and the violence perpetrated against Tamils in the border areas of their state by extraneous elements."

It is interesting to note that while you mention the so-called grievances of Tamils, you conveniently forget to mention certain facts that would turn these so-called grievances on their heads. For example, Tamil Nadu has been receiving an unfair share of Cauvery River water because of a one-sided agreement between the British and the defeated Mysore State nearly a century ago. May I ask, who is going to pay for all the suffering that the people of Karnataka have undergone due to this injustice? Right now, Tamil Nadu insists on continuing with the same pact, and thus depriving Karnataka of its just share of the river water.

Another issue you mention is about the Thiruvalluvar statue. But let me remind you that Kannadigas also have their own grievances—why is it that Tamil chauvinists want to prevent the installation of a statue of the great Kannada poet and religious leader, Sarvajna, in Chennai? Whenever this subject comes up, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu as well as most other Tamilians have been known to say

nothing. So why should they want to have a statue of Thiruvalluvar in Karnataka where nobody has even heard of his name? This is not chauvinism, but fanaticism at its worst.

As far as the third issue is concerned, are you talking about the dacoits who come from Tamil Nadu and terrorise the people of Karnataka who live in the border areas?

*Shreesh Mudri
Detroit, USA*

Good job

Your Commentary is one of the best written on the current situation in Sri Lanka. Your ability to understand the issues involved is lacking in most other journals.

*R Shanmugananthan
New South Wales,
Australia*

■ Impressed by the article, "Sri Lanka's Petition" (Commentary, June 2000). A well-researched and insightful piece that differs from all that the Indian media has to offer.

*M.Ramkumar
Toronto, Canada*

■ Brilliant analysis! Beyond doubt the most balanced, information-rich and thought-provoking commentary on Sri Lanka I have read for as long as I can remember. Congratulations on a job well done.

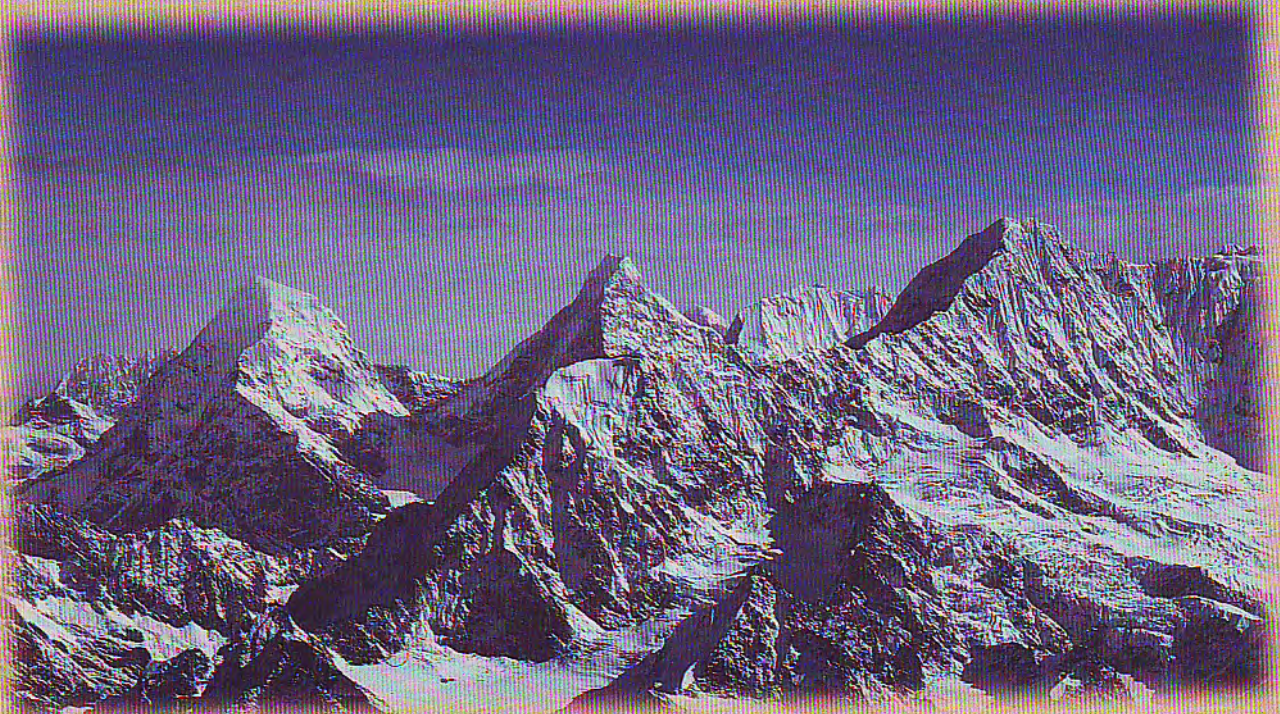
*S Sivaskanthan
Palmerston North
New Zealand*

Cliched

After a reasonably sensible, albeit lengthy, analysis of the current military/political situation in Sri Lanka, I find you too are a victim of disinformation by the Sri Lankan government, and fell for the usual clichés—that the Tigers are bankrolled by the 850,000-strong Tamil diaspora living in Western Europe and North America, who are involved variously in drug peddling, gun running, human trafficking, etc. (as mentioned in "War and Pain", Commentary, June 2000). Nothing can be further from the truth. There is not a single case of any LTTE cadre or sympathiser ever caught or convicted for the crimes you accuse them of. There were individual Tamils who got caught once in a while, and some of them to wash off the stigma, claimed



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that they did it for the LTTE. You can accuse the LTTE of any number of sins, but drugs no! So also human or gun trafficking. One of the reasons for the success of the LTTE is the high standard of discipline among its cadres.

*Velupillai Thangavelu
Toronto, Canada*

Be warned

I am informed by a colleague in Canada that the LTTE HQ in Canada is planning to feed disinformation to Himal. You should be cautious.

Name withheld upon request.

Clarification

While the various articles in the June issue of Himal on the spirit of Article 370 is relevant even today, a word of clarification about its origin may be in order. It is not correct that Jammu and Kashmir's special relations with the Centre was conceded by Nehru or insisted on by the Maharaja and Sheikh Abdullah at the time of accession as a special case. In fact, all the princely states were required to accede to the Indian Union, under the India Independence Act of 1947, in only three subjects: defence, foreign affairs and communications. They had also the power to frame their own constitution. In case of other states, the popular pressure forced the rulers to later on surrender their constitution-making power to the Indian Constituent Assembly, which the ruler and the leadership of Jammu and Kashmir State did not do.

Further negotiations between the Indian government and the Kashmiri leaders on Centre-State relations resulted in what is called the Delhi Agreement signed by Nehru and Abdullah in July 1952. On the eve of that agreement, I met Nehru and pleaded for extension of the logic to the regions within the state. He and Abdullah agreed to my submission and made a joint commitment to grant regional autonomy.

I am not here going into the reasons for erosion of the autonomy of the state within India and denial of autonomy to the regions within the state; which might explain many complications in the Kashmir problem. Nor do I contend that the situation on these lines is as simple today as it was in the life time of Abdullah, and for that matter, Nehru. However, I do believe that the present unitary constitution of the state has an in-built provision for regional and communal tensions which do not permit evolution of a consensus on the future set-up of the state. For this reason I had accepted the offer of the Farooq government to head the Regional Autonomy Committee (RAC) and had prepared a report which sought to reconcile aspirations and interests of all regions and communities of the state through a system of equitable share of political and economic power among regions and its devolution upto the panchayat level, along with measures for cultural safeguards for all communities. I do not think that by scuttling my report and removing me from the RAC, the government has in any way helped the process of internal reconciliation and finding a final solution of the Kashmir problem.

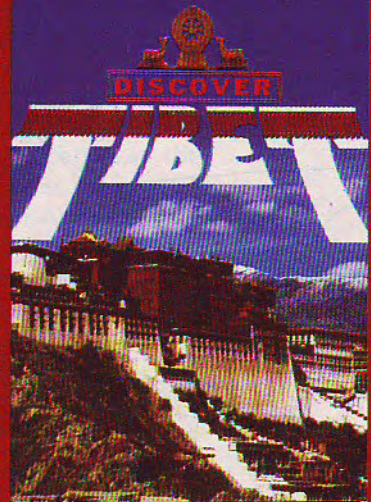
Balraj Puri, New Delhi

(Mr. Puri's article, "No dominoes will fall" appeared in the June 2000 issue of Himal.)

Lara's choice

As regards the opinion piece on "Miss Universe" Lara Dutta (June 2000), Ms. Dutta's answer about beauty pageants giving women a platform for whatever — "to foray...and forge ahead in...entrepreneurship, the armed forces...politics" — seems like the most manufactured matter out of the dungheap. It's hard to believe that she won on the basis of such an answer. I can only guess that the other contenders were dumber!

Jyoti Thapa, Melbourne



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Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside.

I stayed a week at the **Vajra**, by which time I had become so fond of it that I stayed another.

John Collee
The London Observer.

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PAKISTAN

SHARIF, MUSHARRAF AND KARGIL

BARELY A year after the 'war-like situation' of Kargil between India and Pakistan, ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif has stirred up another hornet's nest. Newspapers reported on 13 June that during a break in court proceedings at the 16th century Attock Fort, where he is detained, Sharif told reporters that he had not been informed about the Pakistan Army's foray into the strategic Kargil heights.

Reading from a prepared statement, Sharif said: "This ill-planned and ill-conceived operation was kept so secret that besides the prime minister, even some corps commanders and the air force and navy chiefs were kept in the dark." Had he been informed in time, he said, he would have dissuaded Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee from making that famous bus ride to Lahore, which started the "Lahore Process" of reconciliation in February 1999 before Kargil brought it down in May 1999.

Stating that it was time to inform the nation about the facts which led to the Kargil operation, he posed three rhetorical questions: who sabotaged the Lahore Declaration; who derailed the process of dialogue for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute; and who was responsible for Pakistan's isolation in the comity of nations.

Sharif added that he had been misinformed about the losses expected during the operation. "Our loss on the Kargil heights was more than what we suffered in the full-fledged war of 1965," he said. "Unit after unit of Northern Light Infantry were wiped out. Every passing day, Pakistan was losing posts." Pakistan lost Tiger Hills and 1514, he said, and if the conflict had not been halted, the remaining heights would have been lost. It was the Chief of Army Staff (COAS, at present the Chief Executive) Parvez Musharraf who had wanted Pakistan to involve the USA in the issue, which was why he (Sharif) had made the dash to Washington, the ex-PM said.

A similar controversy had arisen last year, when the press reported the then foreign minister's statement that the prime minister had not been taken into confidence by the generals on Kargil. General Musharraf had publicly denied the allegation then, insisting that Sharif had been kept up-to-date on each

step, first through a briefing and later through the intermediary of the then information minister Mushahid Hussain. This was the beginning of the breach between the general and the prime minister, which culminated in the coup of 12 October 1999.

Shortly after the coup, an exclusive report in *The Indian Express* (12 October) made the dramatic disclosure of tape-recorded conversations between Pakistan's COAS and its Chief of General Staff. These had been picked up by India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) during the Kargil crisis, and by 1 June 1999, the Indian prime minister and members of the Cabinet Committee of Security had heard the tapes. By 4 June, "India had taken the audacious step of delivering the Musharraf tapes, along with a written transcript, to Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif himself," said the newspaper report, which continued, "From the Indian viewpoint, the Musharraf tapes firstly nailed Pakistan's claim that the Kargil intrusions were a non-military affair, and secondly they made it clear that General Musharraf and his fellow commanders were dealing with Premier Nawaz strictly on a need-to-know basis."

While *The Indian Express* report supports Sharif's claims of having been kept away from the details of the tactical situation, the question arises as to why Sharif has chosen to make these disclosures now, eight months after being ousted, while facing trial for his life, and his political career apparently irreparably halted. Why did he maintain silence following Gen. Musharraf's denial last year, and prefer to cling to power at that time? Perhaps he was just biding his time, already planning to rid himself of the troublesome COAS. But if he was as against the operation as Sharif now suggests, why did he then present medals to the 'Kargil heroes' and give posthumous recognitions to the 'Kargil martyrs'?

While obviously, as BBC radio put it, this was a cornered Sharif "trying to reappear on the political front", the former prime minister's desperate strategy of exposing the military's role in Kargil seems to have backfired. If anything, Sharif has fuelled even more hostility towards himself, from a public which sees him as playing into India's hands by making such an admission. A no-win situation for the former prime minister if there was one.

Benazir Bhutto told a reporter in London a year off that a similar plan of storming the Kargil heights had been submitted to her while she was

It does seem ingenious for Sharif to claim that he was completely unaware of what was happening in Kargil even while Vajpayee was heading Lahore's way in the bus.

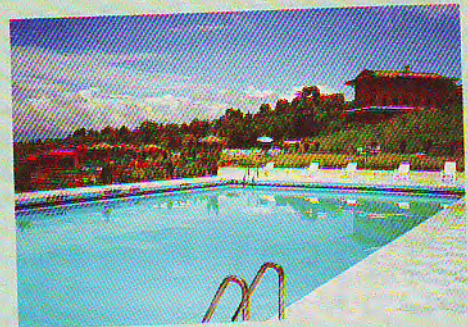


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prime minister. She said she instituted a committee of defence experts to examine the plan, which concluded that while it would be easy to capture Kargil by force, it would be impossible to retain it diplomatically. The plan was dropped. If a government as weak as Bhutto's was consulted, it is unlikely that one as strong as Sharif's would have been kept in the dark by the army. While details of the tactical situation may not have been divulged to him, it does seem ingenious for Sharif to claim that he was completely unaware of what was happening in Kargil even while Vajpayee was heading Lahore's way in the bus.

From a South Asian perspective, it is important—at some point—to know exactly the why's and who's of Kargil. Why did the Pakistani army feel the need to carry its adventure deep across the Line of Control, to bring the fragile structure of peace-making between Islamabad and New Delhi crashing down to the ground, taking the two nuclearised nations to the brink? Who planned it, and who okayed the plans? Who knew, who did not? The answers are important so that a disaster like Kargil will not again happen, to thwart peace efforts yet again.

The situation demands an independent inquiry into the affair—a demand made by Sharif himself—because the Pakistani and South Asian people have a right to know. ▽

INDIA

FEEDING FRENZY IN ALMORA

THE SEEMINGLY sedate Kumaon hills in Almora district were witness to some frenzied activity in April and May, when a non-governmental organisation called Sahayog was on the dock for allegedly presenting a "distorted" image of Uttarakhand society. The ngo had, somewhat inadvertently, put out a report that carried some graphic descriptions of the sexual behaviour of a section of people in rural Almora. Tempers rose, mostly among the political elite it appears, and the ngo's office-bearers were jailed and generally vilified—far in excess of the presumed harm done to Uttarakhand society. Meanwhile, the civil administration kowtowed to a small but aggressive group that was playing full hilt to the gallery, using this episode as one more example of the outsiders' (read plainsmen's)

insensitivity to hill society. In this case, it seems the activists overreached.

Almora is the hotbed of the movement for a separate Uttarakhand state in India, which is a legitimate demand from a hill region that has been constantly sidelined by the power brokers of Uttar Pradesh, based in Lucknow. Understandably, the activists here are on edge, as the Centre vacillates on the statehood demand. Unfortunately, the Sahayog episode does not leave the statehood proponents looking like responsible activists, people who will have to play a critical role in the days ahead to negotiate for their state, and who will have to show sagacity and courage in governance once statehood is attained. The reaction to the Sahayog booklet, instead, has projected them as reactive and insular, perhaps even sectarian, and opportunistic enough to use every convenient event to score a point and rouse the rabble.

The report in question was prepared in Hindi, titled *AIDS and Us: Possibility of AIDS in Uttarakhand*. It was published in September 1999, but caught attention only in April. Five hundred copies had been distributed among experts and ngos for feedback. Founded by outsiders Abhijeet and Jasodhara Das Gupta, Sahayog has worked in the villages of Almora for almost a decade now through the medium mostly of local men and women field workers. Its area of focus has been the dalit condition and women's empowerment, two areas where the hills of Uttarakhand are behind in social evolution. It does not seem unlikely that the ngo's area of focus had created an undercurrent of resentment among the majority upper castes of the region, as in the past ngos like Sahayog have been accused of diluting the "culture of movements" by "dividing Uttarakhand society on caste and gender lines".

The Sahayog report referred to the inferior quality of health services, the migration of menfolk to the plains, and the influx of plains people to the hills, all of which are high-risk conditions for the proliferation of HIV. However, the report's most contentious sections dealt with interviews indicating the prevalence of incest, homosexuality, extra-marital and pre-marital sexuality in the hills. It is also not clear whether it was the suggested notion that some Uttarakhandi women may be promiscuous (in a given circumstance) or the allegedly-broad labelling of Uttarakhand society as promiscuous that left the patriarchal order stunned and agitated. Male promiscuity,

The suggested notion that some Uttarakhandi women may be promiscuous... left the patriarchal order stunned and agitated. Male promiscuity, presumably, is par for the course.

presumably, is par for the course.

Granted, there seemed to be methodological problems with the conclusions drawn, but these could have been challenged empirically, rather than through a politicised reaction. The study was not complete, and it was limited in analysis and depth. But it did state that the findings could not be applied to the whole of Uttarakhand, an aspect that was glossed over by the protesters. Moreover, the sexuality described in the booklet would not imply that Uttarakhand was any worse than other regions of India, as this was not a comparative study.

The reaction against hapless Sahayog was, if anything, primitive. The mood was set by two national Hindi dailies and by local Uttarakhand leaders who maintained that the report was nothing but full of obscenity and lies regarding the sexual behaviour of the hill people. On 20 April, the ngo's office located opposite the Almora jail was ransacked. The same day, a field team of Sahayog was set upon in Jageshwar in Dhauladevi Block by local toughs in full presence of the revenue police. The crowd beat up the male members and forced some of the women to read the verbally daring portions of the report. Besides seizing all available copies of the report, the police arrested 11 Sahayog workers, of whom six were detained behind bars, including the Das Gupta couple. The district magistrate thought it appropriate to recommend action against them under the National Security Act, and only widespread condemnation of the DM's action and an order by the Allahabad High Court, prevented the travesty from proceeding.

Meanwhile a social boycott of the Sahayog members was called for. Traders' groups and the bar association attempted to block bail for the accused, and the few lawyers who came forward to defend Sahayog were ostracised by the legal community. Furthermore, conservative groups like the Shiv Sena and the Uttarakhand Mahila Morcha swung into action to condemn Sahayog, as did BJP party legislators, who also demanded an inquiry into the activities of all ngos in the hill region. At the Centre, the ruling BJP kept quiet because the Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi comes from this area and had made his own sympathies obvious.

The Sahayog case threw up for discussion once again the matter of "well-funded ngos" and their commitment. Of course, ngos are never entirely blameless, but in conservative societies like the Uttarakhand hills they at least

hold the potential of bypassing established structures of society to try to get at the roots of inequity, be it in terms of caste, class or gender. The non-governmental organisations necessarily have to be the subject of scrutiny, and the proliferation of ngos in the hill areas is something to be scrutinised. It is also correct that a lot of funding goes towards research in HIV/AIDS when the health priorities within a community may be quite different.

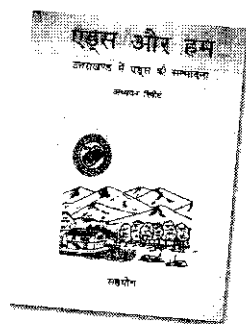
The Sahayog case perhaps indicates a need for activists to be more careful when reports are prepared on sensitive social matters. On the other hand, a negative reaction from conservative societal leaders is as often as not a useful index of the impact of one's work. A belligerent reaction such as the one against Sahayog shows that the ills that the report indicates, probably do exist, although not exclusively in Uttarakhand. The 'mistake' that Sahayog may have made, was to publish its report in Hindi rather than in English, as is the age-old ngo tradition. This meant that the report went closer to the 'people', which is why it got the reaction it did. Which cannot all of it be a bad thing.

NEPAL ● INDIA

CRY WOLF IN KATHMANDU

IF IT was possible for an Indian magazine to drop a bombshell on a neighbouring country, then on 12 June *India Today* did so in the form of a leaked intelligence draft of a 'report' that claimed a whole battalion of well-known and not-so-well-known leaders of Nepali politics, media, business and society to be 'agents' (or alternatively 'contacts') of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). Even more a matter of concern, the report's authors seemed to want to paint the entire Nepali Muslim community Pakistani-green, as if to be Muslim was to be pro-Pakistan and ipso facto an agent of the notorious ISI.

The fact that the report was leaked days before a visit to Nepal by India's National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra was seen as significant by a large portion of Kathmandu's intelligentsia and press, seeing this as an effort to pressure Nepal on a whole cluster of contentious issues that — from trade to territorial to monsoonal waterlogging — have brought Indo-Nepal relations to their lowest-ever point



in the last decade of Nepali democracy.

The report understandably created an uproar in Nepal, not because people believed it—the finger pointed so indiscriminately—but because it topped all other previous leaks in the Indian press regarding alleged ISI infiltration of Nepal. Meanwhile, *India Today's* reporter had not done original research, but merely acted as a conduit for allegations. Apparently titled “Pakistan’s anti-India activities in Nepal”, the report was made available in full on the magazine’s Website. To a kind eye, it looked like a draft prepared by some intelligence operatives out to please the political masters of the day, an internal document serving up a concoction of facts and unverified allegations.

Whether it was prepared within the Intelligence Bureau or the Research and Analysis Wing, or some other official Indian agency, the report did indicate the Nepal-wide nature of their operations. But this was not unexpected. What *was* unexpected was the poor level of analysis and the excessive reliance on coincidence and conjecture in reaching lackadaisical conclusions on individuals and institutions of another country. If this were in fact an authoritative report that was seen fit to be leaked, then one would have to worry about the quality of the intelligence-gathering apparatus of South Asia’s greatest and nuclearised power.

The report names some of the known smugglers of gold (and other contraband) of Nepal and also lists a series of already-reported cases thought to be linked to the ISI, such as the use of a hotel safehouse, discovery of counterfeit Indian notes and RDX caches, and so on. However, these were cases already brought to the open by the Nepal Police, which by all accounts had acted with alacrity given India’s sensitivities. What needs investigation now is whether these cases were the tip of the iceberg in relation to the activities of Pakistani intelligence in Nepal, or was that about it. The leaked report does not help in clarifying the point, but those who prepared it seem not to have considered the fact that the Nepali bureaucracy, journalists, politicians, and the intelligentsia as a whole, are protective enough of their polity not to allow the ISI a walk-through in Nepal.

Of course, every instance of the ISI using another South Asian country as a base to target India would be one too many, and the Nepali government must of course act when there is evidence. If necessary, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala must pick up the phone and call Chief Executive Parvez Musharraf and

request him to call off the spooks. However, available information and discussions with knowledgeable members of Nepal’s bureaucracy and police do not indicate the dire situation implied in the document, or as reported as a matter of course in the Indian press.

While the breathless naming of well-known Nepali-journalists, politicians and business people without supporting evidence must be considered extremely irresponsible, given the impact on individual hard-earned careers, it is the singling out of the Muslim community living largely in poverty in Nepal’s Tarai region that has potentially larger ramifications. Without too much effort, the authors of the report give away their bias when they make the presumption that members of a community can be by their very nature a) anti-India, therefore b) Pakistan sympathisers and hence, c) ‘agents/contacts’ of the ISI. This is a dangerous line of thinking, particularly because the Tarai Muslims of Nepal are demographically identical to the Muslims across the open border, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The fact that the discourse of the Nepali intelligentsia is mostly conducted in Nepali and hence does not reach the corridors of power of New Delhi with any sense of urgency, should not blind India’s powers-that-be to the fact that there is ‘public opinion’ even in small countries like Nepal. Granted, this public opinion is often led by individuals who tend to be paranoically suspicious of every move of Big India, but leaks of reports like the one just released have the power of jostling a society off its moorings. And Nepal’s stability should be a matter of enough concern to New Delhi that pressing issues are tackled directly and at the highest levels where necessary, rather than through under-the-table transfers of files to media persons who are unwilling to do their homework. Nepal’s stability, of course, should be of concern because Nepal, Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are locked in a demographic, economic and geographic embrace which will remain in place whether or not the open border between the two countries is closed or regulated.

It will be important, if the matter is considered serious enough, for those who claim that the report did not reflect the official Indian point-of-view—as Brajesh Mishra did in Kathmandu—to investigate how and why such an amateurish report was prepared, and who it was that chose to leak it.

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OUTLOOK

25th Anniversary of Emergency Rule

India was Indira, Indira was India.

Mrs. Gandhi was not the matriarch unwillingly pushed to drastic action. She was inclined dictatorially, writes **Ramachandra Guha.**

Between June 1975 and January 1977, Indian democracy took an extended leave of absence. Under directions from prime minister Indira Gandhi, political opponents were jailed, human rights extinguished, news censored, and a personality cult of the Leader promoted. The "Emergency", as it is known, was once regarded as a defining moment in the history of independent India. After it was lifted, and Mrs. Gandhi dethroned, the Emergency experience was viewed as a "near miss", when India had narrowly failed to permanently join the well-subscribed ranks of the world's dictatorships. Political commentators alerted the citizenry to its lessons — not to allow bureaucrats and judges

to ally with political parties, never to justify curbs on freedom of expression and, above all, to always put faith in process rather than personality.

This June marked the 25th anniversary of the declaration of national emergency by Indira Gandhi. One might have expected solemn and cautionary remembrance. Instead, recent events suggest that the Indian political class may be revising its views of the Emergency. The ruling coalition in Delhi is dominated by men who were once jailed by Mrs. Gandhi. Yet, this past January, the Government of India awarded the Padma Vibhushan — the country's second highest honour — to one man who was Cabi-

net Secretary during the Emergency, and to another who, as High Commissioner to the United Kingdom between 1975 and 1977, enthusiastically spread false information about the situation at home. When the person who had been Indira Gandhi's Ambassador to the United States died in March, the obituaries respectfully marked the important milestones in his career without so much as mentioning his energies spent justifying the Emergency, in Washington. Service to the state, it seems, shall ultimately be rewarded regardless of the kind of service or, indeed, the kind of state.

Perhaps the most daring re-interpretation of the Emergency comes in a just-published book (*Indira*

Gandhi, the Emergency and Indian Democracy, OUP, New Delhi, 2000) by Mrs. Gandhi's long-serving principal secretary, P. N. Dhar. The Emergency, we may recall, was promulgated after a High Court judge in Allahabad found the prime minister guilty of "electoral malpractices". An appeal to the Supreme Court could be made, but in the interim, the prime minister would have to vacate her post in favour of some other Member of Parliament from her party. The thought was abhorrent to Mrs. Gandhi's family and advisers—and to herself as well. An emergency had to be declared.

In P. N. Dhar's account, the Emergency was not really a consequence of Indira Gandhi's fear of losing her personal position. It was, rather, the outcome of a year-long agitation against corruption and mal-admin-

"I do not think there is anyone who is less authoritarian than I am."

- Indira Gandhi, in an interview with American journalist Mary Carras, July 1978.

istration led by Jayaprakash Narayan, the veteran Gandhian. This agitation, in Dhar's interpretation, had undermined law and order, and spread anarchy and violence. Were one to reduce his argument to numbers, then it would appear that the responsibility for the declaration of Emergency was 90 percent Narayan's, 10 percent Mrs. Gandhi's.

Dhar does not deny the violations of human rights and the prevalence of state violence during Emergency rule, but he determinedly draws the reader's attention to the simultaneous arrest of inflation. And, suggests Dhar, if Narayan was the one principally responsible for the Emergency, then it was the prime minister's second son Sanjay who was principally responsible for what went wrong during the Emergency. The harassment of slum

dwellers and the forced sterilisations were the work of this son who held no official position. But the rise in foodgrain production and the checks on inflation were, one supposes, exclusively the work of the mother.

Narrow domestic walls

For a dictator, Indira Gandhi had a remarkably long and unique preparation in the school of democracy. On her 13th birthday, her father, then in prison, began writing her a series of letters, later published as *Glimpses of World History*. Starting with the Greeks, this wide-ranging tour took in the old Indian village republics, ancient Chinese kingdoms, the rise of monotheism and its associated political formations, Buddhism, the Mughals, and the Industrial Revolution (and much else besides). Jawaharlal Nehru was both an Indian patriot and a Western-trained socialist-democrat, for whom history unfolded as the oft-interrupted progress of the human animal towards greater sociability and freedom. The later letters explored how "democracy, which was for a century and more the ideal and inspiration of countless people, and which can count its martyrs by the thousands", was now "losing ground everywhere". The last letter, sent to Indira on 9 August 1933—three years after the first—ended with this excerpt from Rabindranath Tagore's great poem, *Gitanjali*:

*Where the mind is without fear and
the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken
up into fragments by narrow
domestic walls;
Where words come out from the
depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its
arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has
not lost its way into the dreary
desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by
thee into ever-widening thought
and action —
Into that heaven of freedom, my Fa-
ther, let my country awake.*

Glimpses of World History sold briskly, and in time the author was persuaded by his publisher to bring out an expanded edition. A freshly written postscript, dated 14 November 1938, outlined the major political developments of the 1930s. "The growth of fascism during the last five years and its attack on every democratic principle and conception of freedom and civilisation," wrote Jawaharlal to Indira, "have made the defense of democracy the vital question today."

Later, in her adulthood, Indira Gandhi participated in five general elections in free India. All were won by the Congress party—thrice under her father's leadership, twice under hers. The odd reference here and there suggests that she did not unequivocally share Nehru's trust in the democratic process. In December 1949, she angrily protested to him for not interfering when lesser Congressmen took over the *National Herald*, a newspaper started by Jawaharlal and regarded by some as Nehru family property. "You tolerate a lot of things," she told her father sarcastically, "it makes one's heart bleed to hear everyone say that it is no use bringing anything to your notice since you don't do anything about righting things."

In 1956, Indira argued with him against allowing autonomy to regionally powerful (and respected) Congressmen in dealings with their states. She wrote, "You are tending more and more to accept without question, the opinions of certain people with regard to certain parts of the country." Most famously, as Congress president in 1959, she prevailed upon Nehru to implement a then never-used provision of the Constitution to dismiss the democratically-elected Communist government of Kerala.

The same year, while on a visit to Kenya, she spoke approvingly in public of one-party regimes. The Chinese invasion of October 1962 and the criticisms it spawned of Nehru and his government, seemed to have consolidated these feelings. In January 1963, she wrote to a

friend, complainingly, of "the price we pay for democracy [which] not only throws up the mediocre person but gives strength to the most vocal howsoever they may lack knowledge and understanding".

These reservations were to find full expression in the Emergency of 1975-77. One might damage the revisionist views now current by a careful reading of the social history of those years, by a documentation of democracy's destruction and the spread of terror, intimidation and violence. Instead, this essay seeks to set the record straight in the words of Mrs Gandhi herself, by demonstrating that the Indian prime minister was an actively willing dictator, not a reluctant one pushed by malevolent opponents and an unruly son. My main sources are Indira Gandhi's own words, as articulated in print, as well as in some private correspondence that has not been publicly available.

All Indira Radio

Mrs. Gandhi's singular contribution to Indian political discourse was the idea of the 'foreign hand'. The nationality of this hand is hard to establish, although one presumes it was coloured white. A week after the declaration of Emergency, the prime minister gave an interview to M. Shamim of *The Times of India*. "The aim of the opposition parties was obvious," she remarked, "[it was] to paralyse the government and indeed all national activity and thus walk to power over the 'body' of the nation. The situation had come to such a pass that a few more steps would have led to disintegration, which would have exposed us to foreign danger."

She returned to the theme in her speech of 11 November 1975, broadcast over what was now routinely referred to in private, as All Indira Radio. The prime minister told the nation that "there are many people outside the country who are not our well-wishers and who do not like to see India being strong and united and carrying forward its economic programmes. This was their desire

Jayaprakash Narayan: he, certainly, caused the Emergency.

and their efforts and our countrymen also got entrapped in the process."

Then, and afterwards, it was difficult to reliably identify these foreign ill-wishers. India's otherwise most dangerous neighbour, Pakistan, had recently been defeated on the battle-field, and was still to come to terms with the loss of its eastern wing. With Mao on his deathbed, neither was China in an adventurist mood.

There was in place an Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty which took care of the Russians. No European country had much of a stake, political or economic, in India. Was it the United States of America that Mrs. Gandhi had in mind? She would never clearly say, although her advisers and followers would occasionally speak of the dark doings of the Central Intelligence Agency.

This paranoid talk of interfering foreigners is best understood, perhaps, in the light of internal politics and the rapid fall in Mrs. Gandhi's own popularity. The decline had been dramatic. The year 1971 began with the sweeping victory of the Congress in the general elections and had ended with the decisive triumph over Pakistan in the Bangladesh war, a win in which more credit accrued to the prime minister than to her generals. She was now the elected Empress of India. Opposition politicians began comparing her to the all-powerful Hindu goddess, Durga, a comparison made permanent in a series of murals painted by a famous Muslim artist. No one dared predict how long her lawful reign might last, but then two bad monsoons supervened, and OPEC raised the price of crude oil. The scarcity of water and fuel was made more deadly by nepotism and graft. The prime minister's son, Sanjay, a half-trained mechanic



"I had always believed that Mrs Gandhi had no faith in democracy, that she was by inclination and conviction a dictator. This belief has tragically turned out to be true."

- Jayaprakash Narayan, prison diary, entry of 22 July 1975.

with no proper qualifications for the task, started building a car factory with land and loans allotted at preferential rates by public institutions. Two crucial Congress-ruled states, Gujarat and Bihar, saw the unprecedented spread of official corruption.

The response to all this was the movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, which quickly spread from his native Bihar to other parts of the country. Suddenly, the Empress looked vulnerable. Mrs. Gandhi's predicament, circa 1974-75, is comparable to the current situation of Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwean

president. Mugabe, too, started on a high, and at first climbed higher, but then drought, graft and nepotism gave rise to criticism. Mugabe's initial response to this was to concentrate power in his hands, by marginalising erstwhile comrades, much as Mrs. Gandhi had swiftly cut to size Congressmen who had en-

"I have no more powers than I had before."

-Indira Gandhi, in an interview with NBC, 24 August 1975.

joyed an independent source of moral or political authority. When the criticisms of his increasingly dictatorial rule intensified, Mugabe warned of conspiracies aided by Western powers. Like Mugabe today, in 1975 Mrs. Gandhi found it hard to understand how a previously adoring citizenry had begun to protest so. It was altogether more convenient to blame foreigners than to look for signs of flawed governance within.

During the Emergency, the Congress president D. K. Barooah coined the slogan "Indira is India, India is Indira". This equation of herself with the nation—or at any rate with the nation's best interests—was also often made by Mrs. Gandhi herself. The Emergency was declared, she claimed in her broadcast on 11 November 1975, because:

we felt that the country has developed a disease and, if is to be cured soon, it has to be given a dose of medicine, even if it is a bitter dose. However dear a child may be, if the doctor has prescribed bitter pills for him, they have to be administered for his cure. The child may sometimes cry and we may have to say, 'Take the medicine, otherwise you will not get cured'. So, we gave this bitter medicine to the nation.

The doctor-matriarch continued: *Now when a child suffers, the mother suffers too. Thus, we were not very*

pleased to take this step. We were also sad. We were also concerned. But we saw that it worked just as the dose of the doctor works.

The Indian dictator's mentality is also revealed in some previously unpublished correspondence with her English friends. The art historian and former Indian Civil Service officer, W.G. Archer had written to Mrs. Gandhi in December 1975 to congratulate her on her "bold action". She "must have been bitterly aggrieved," wrote Archer, "that many supposed 'friends of India' in this country had patently failed to understand or approve your action in declaring the Emergency." Now the prime minister was indeed cognisant of the general (and well-merited) opposition of the British intelligentsia to what she had done.

While some English politicians, such as Michael Foot, had offered unconditional support, the press was not so obliging. *The Times* carried a series of hostile reports, prompting the then Indian high commissioner—and this year's Padma Vibhushan awardee—to write a letter to the newspaper describing conditions in Indian jails: "The care and concern showered by the state authorities upon the welfare of the detenus who are well housed, well fed and well treated, is almost maternal." But the criticisms persisted. The December 1975 issue of the respected *Encounter* magazine printed a long essay sympathetic to Jayaprakash Narayan under the title "Indira Gandhi's Prisoner".

Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter could live more easily with American or Soviet disapproval. So she wrote back to W. G. Archer saying she was "touched" by "the understanding you show of the complex situation in our country". She continued: "India is not an easy country to know. Perhaps that is the reason why we irritate the Western world so much. The struggle here is not merely one of economic growth or even of social justice but of retaining our individuality and developing in our own way. Unfortunately

most educated Indians are taken in by the glitter of the affluent countries and by their propaganda that their's is the best of all possible worlds."

One is struck by the resemblance here to sentiments expressed by the likes of Mobutu Sese Seko, Fidel Castro and Lee Kuan Yew, that is, by authoritarians of military, communist or any other provenance. These would reject human rights as a Western imposition, and home-grown defenders of those rights as Western agents. To that presumed universalism is offered the Singaporean or Cuban or Indian alternative of "retaining our individuality and developing in our own way", a way that does not admit of such irritants as freedom of speech and freedom of association.

In March 1976, Archer visited India and met Mrs Gandhi. His notes of the interview reveal a ruler whose resolve was mixed with a dangerous dose of paranoia. "I have to keep India together," she said to him. "That is an absolute must." "Total freedom (of the press and public opinion) will be fatal to India." Likewise, "total devolution [will] be fatal to India". And, notably, "the

"I am a very humble person."

-Indira Gandhi, in an interview with the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, 4 October 1975.

Emergency had made the state ministers shake in their shoes. This was long over-due..."

It is clear that there was no serious threat to the unity and integrity of India either before or during the Emergency. Was it that freedom of the press and public opinion would be fatal to India, or to Indira? In October 1976, the question was raised by the British columnist Bernard Levin in a two-part essay in *The Times* which focussed on press censorship and interference with the judiciary in India. "After studying a substantial amount of material on

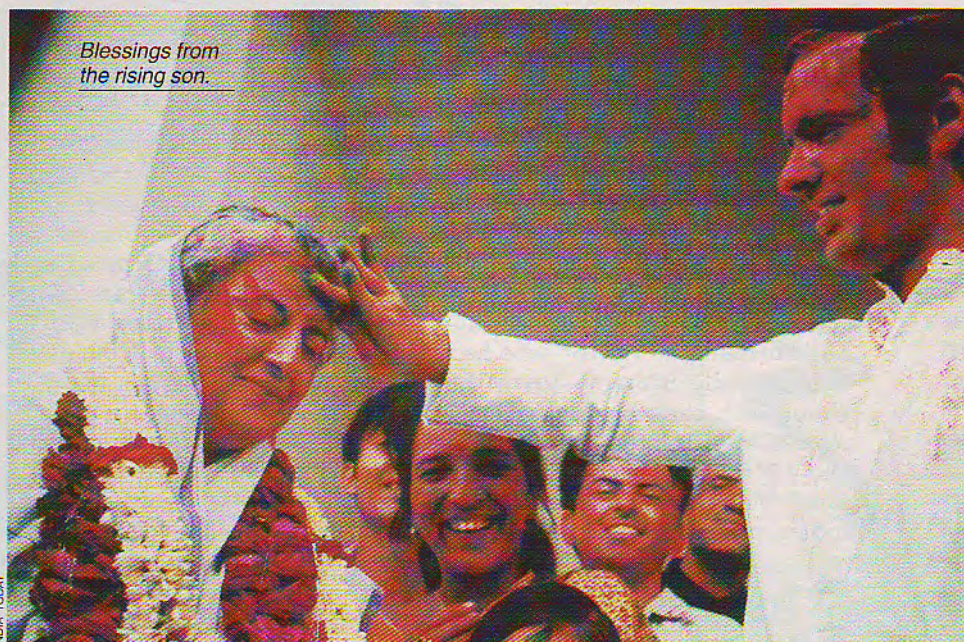
the subject," Levin concluded that, "Mrs. Gandhi's shabby little regime" definitely qualified for that definitive epithet, "totalitarian". He ended his essay by quoting the farewell editorial of the Bombay journal, *Opinion*: "The current Indira regime, founded on 25 June 1975, was born through lies, nurtured by lies, and flourishes by lies. The essential ingredient of its being is the lie."

The fall

The Emergency lasted for 20 months. In January 1977, to everyone's surprise, Mrs. Gandhi called elections. There are competing explanations as to why she did this. Back then, it was widely believed that Mrs. Gandhi's own trusted advisors in the Research and Analysis Wing had predicted a hands-down victory for her. In his book, P. N. Dhar speculates that Mrs. Gandhi wanted once more to hear the accolade of the people, to seek through the campaign trail the admiration and reverence that had so readily come her way in 1971. A third possibility is that Mrs. Gandhi was shamed by the example of Pakistan, then enjoying one of its all-too-rare periods of democratic rule.

When general elections were due in early 1976, Mrs. Gandhi had amended the Constitution to extend, by a year, the life of the Lower House—the Lok Sabha. Later, the Lok Sabha's life was extended by a further 12 months, until early 1978. Her advisers, and especially her son Sanjay, thought this process could be made to continue forever, and so it is not clear why Mrs. Gandhi decided to hold elections at all.

As it turned out, the Congress party was roundly defeated, and the prime minister and Sanjay both lost. Others saw her defeat as a commentary on authoritarianism and abuse of power. But for Mrs. Gandhi, it was time to unwrap, once more, the theory of the foreign hand. Thus the unseated dictator wrote to a relative that, "people have always thought that I was imagining things or over-reacting but there has been a deep conspiracy and it was bound to overtake us". Or, as she helpfully ex-



Blessings from the rising son.

plained to a foreign interviewer, "they had a lot of money to spend... Some sections in the Janata party had the support of the Western press, Amnesty International and other Western organisations. Another section was supported by the Soviets."

Mrs. Gandhi was now out of power, but the condemnation of the Emergency persisted. In *The Guardian* of 16 November 1978, E. P. Thompson, the British radical of the Left, recalled a visit to New Delhi in the winter of 1976-77. The prime minister personally received the gift Thompson was carrying—copies of letters written by her father to him—but Thompson came away convinced him that Mrs. Gandhi and Sanjay had unfairly confiscated and abused the good name of Jawaharlal Nehru. In his essay, Thompson wrote with feeling of how, despite spending years in British jails, Nehru could still befriend Englishmen: "One would have to go rather far back in British history to find an article of that quality: to find persons willing to undergo years of imprisonment, and to emerge with unflagging intellectual vitality and with so little bitterness." This was a civilised human being and, as his years in office showed, a democrat besides. During the Emergency, Mrs. Gandhi and her son were teaching the Indian

"Today's papers also published a Mrs Gandhi Karanjia interview. Most of it is the usual stuff: self-righteousness, smugness, and the pose of being the country's saviour."
-Jayaprakash Narayan, prison diary, entry of 22 August 1975.

people to turn their backs on "the best traditions of Congress and of Nehru".

Retrospective defense

Mrs Gandhi had certainly read Bernard Levin, in October 1976, and it is likely that, two years later, she read E. P. Thompson too. Like other Indians of her class and generation, she respected both *The Times* and *The Guardian*, the one the voice of the British Establishment, the other the vehicle of progressive, anti-imperial, and generally, pro-Indian sentiment.

But their barbs were nothing to the one that came her way in October 1981.

The Emergency was now a distant memory, and the person who brought it about was now back in office, after being two-and-a-half years out of power. Mrs. Gandhi saw, or was perhaps alerted to, an item in the British Press which claimed that Lord Louis Mountbatten, the viceroy who had so gracefully brought down the Union Jack back in August 1947, refused to visit India between 1975 and 1977 as it was then a "police state". Mountbatten was dead, so the Indian prime minister instead ad-

"Today the only thing the people are allowed to do is to sing the praises of Mrs Gandhi."

-Jayaprakash Narayan, prison diary, entry of 7 September 1975.

dressed her complaint to his son-in-law, Lord Brabourne. "During the emergency," wrote Mrs. Gandhi to the English family whose approval she most sought, "some people were arrested, some were politicians but the larger number were what we call anti-social elements – smugglers, dacoits, hoarders, black-marketeers, etc., whose activities had been pushing up our prices, creating shortages and were generally harmful to the people as a whole. Not once during [the] emergency was there any show of police strength. We ourselves released all political prisoners some time before the 1977 elections. When the Janata Party came to power, it released the criminals, with dire consequences from which we have not yet recovered."

This was an illustration of euphemistic lying, characteristic of dictators and dictatorial regimes. It was a language that came naturally to Mrs Gandhi. In a broadcast of 27 June

1975 that first justified the Emergency to the nation, she had said that "the purpose of censorship is to restore a climate of trust". In August of that year, with all her political opponents locked up in jail, fundamental rights extinguished and the media censored, she informed the American journalist Norman Cousins during a visit to the United States that "what has been done is not an abrogation of democracy but an effort to safeguard it". In a televised discussion on this trip to the USA, she magisterially announced that "people are already being released almost every day". A little later, she told a Bombay weekly that "there is no use of force and... there is no show of force anywhere in the country. The truth is that the police have had less work since the Emergency than ever before."

In the last week of 1975, alerting a conference of lawyers to some impending amendments to the Constitution, Mrs. Gandhi remarked that "if any change is required, it will be not to lessen democracy but to give more meaning to democracy, to keep democracy, to make it a more living democracy." Such gems, carefully culled from their boss's speeches by a craven high commissioner and his staff, were printed on art paper by an expensive London studio and presented to the world in a pamphlet with the title: "Democracy Preserved: Facts about the Emergency in India".

More notable than Mrs. Gandhi's attitude while the Emergency was on, was her retrospective defense of it. This, as the comments to Lord Brabourne suggest, was total. Consider also Volume III of Indira Gandhi's *Selected Speeches and Writings*, issued by the Publications Division of the Government of India in October 1984, the very month she fell to assassins' bullets. At the heart of the book is the reproduction of a series of speeches delivered and interviews undertaken during and in defence of the Emergency. Their republication in 1984, we may be assured, was approved by Mrs. Gandhi herself.



Robert 'Indira' Mugabe.

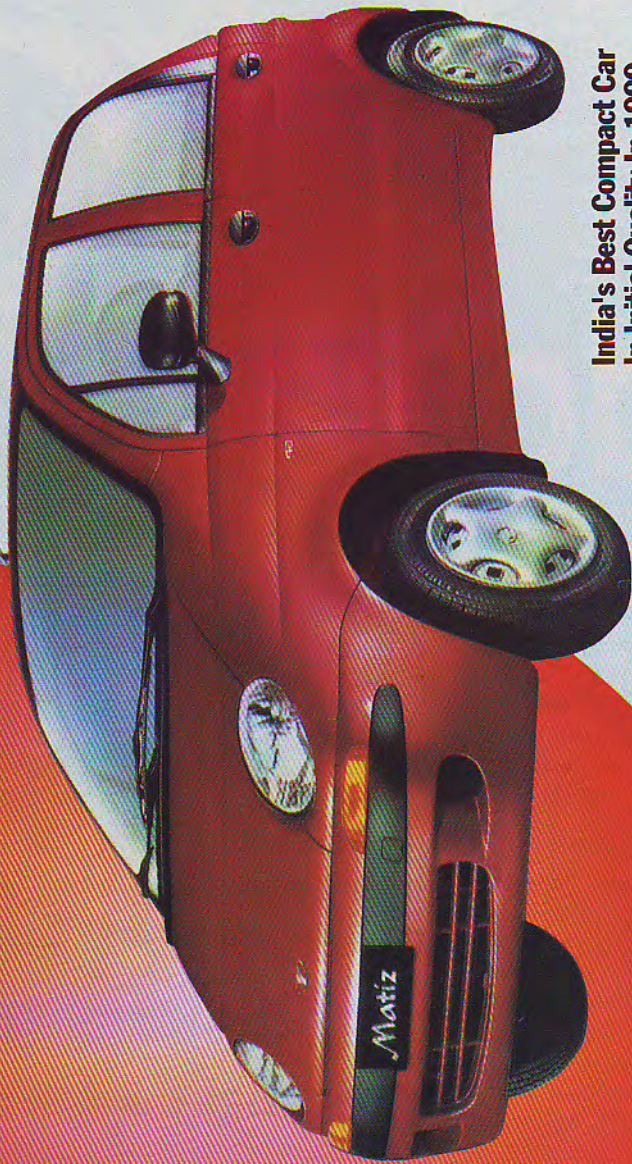
Consider, finally, an excerpt from an interview given in July 1978 to the American writer Mary Carras. During the Emergency, said Mrs. Gandhi, "We built our foreign-exchange reserves, and we were beginning to make a go of the public sector. Production had gone up and corruption had come down, and everything was going much more smoothly... During the first year of the Emergency, everyone (except the smugglers) asked why we hadn't done it earlier."

A large number of smugglers must have been granted the vote in the elections of March 1977. That is one explanation for her defeat. Or perhaps we should set against the dictator's defence the pithy remark of an Indian jurist that the Emergency was a "fraud on the president, a fraud on the Council of Ministers and a fraud on the people". But the fairest comment on Indira Gandhi's Emergency was reported by A. M. Rosenthal of *The New York Times*, who had served as his paper's correspondent in India. Rosenthal, like E. P. Thompson, would underline the contrast between the democratic Nehru and his dictatorial daughter. Visiting New Delhi in late 1975, he was told of a grim joke doing the rounds, which assumed that the father still lived while the daughter reigned. Thus, "Indira is in the Prime Minister's house, and Jawaharlal is back to writing letters to her from jail again."

EURO II

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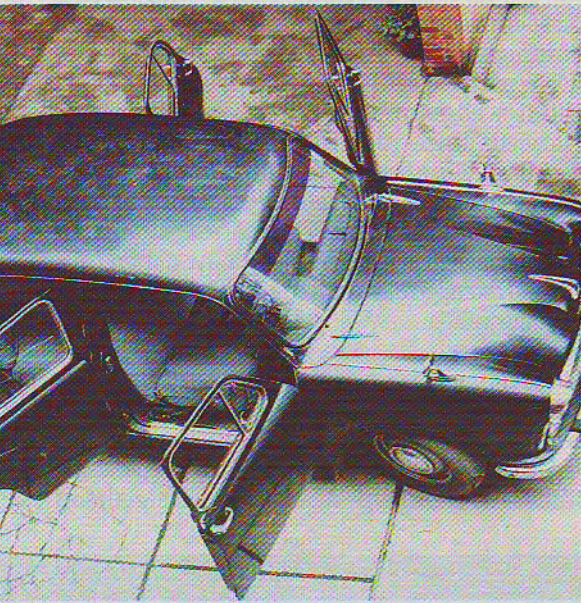
The dowager's last days

Economic liberalisation and smart new entrants have finally caught up with the manufacturers of the Ambassador who had for decades successfully resisted advances in technology and management.

by Rajashri Dasgupta

A mention of 'the Ambassador' immediately conjures up images of a corpulent car with more than ample leg space and the capacity to carry, at a crush, the largest of Indian families. For the BM (Before Maruti) generation and before the advent of more ritzy cars in the Indian market, the good old 'Amby' was the country's workhorse. People either learnt to drive it or were driven in it. They had no choice.

It was (and still is) the car of the President of India, the vehicle for the highest and the powerful in the country even though the foreign dignitaries and the new economic elites may prefer the Mercedes or Citroen. In all their



official functions, the motorcade following the president or the prime minister is made up of the national pride, the Ambassador. The preference of fastidious bureaucrats and police officers in the capital Delhi, Calcutta or Chennai are white Ambys, while army officers zoom around in Ambys that are black and green in colour.

Over four decades, the sturdy Ambassador's portly outline has become an integral part of the Indian road-scape. While there are cities which prefer some other makes—for example Mumbai seems to prefer Fiats (Padminis) just as Calcutta loves the Amby—the Ambassador is still the country's automobile king. While the Morris Oxford, after which the Ambassador was fashioned, has long been of interest only to automobile collectors, the Ambassador has refused to have its epitaph written. While other Third World countries caught in the economic time warp—such as Cuba, Cambodia

or Vietnam—continue to tinker with 1950s sedans and keep them on the roads, only in India is a relic of the first half of the 20th century still produced.

BM and AM

It was the entrepreneurial spirit of GD Birla that saw his flagship company Hindustan Motors (HM) registered in Calcutta after Independence, in 1950. Amby started its pedigreed life as the "Landmaster" and it was only after 12 years that it got its legendary name. Its reputation grew and so did its price. Over the years, the body underwent cosmetic changes but gasoline continued to provide the juice till the 1980s, when the diesel engine arrived.

In the car's heyday, which was in the early 1980s, the Uttarpara factory near Calcutta was manufacturing 30,000 of it a year. Dealers in Calcutta recall that the waiting period to buy an Amby was anything between five to seven years. There would be under-the-table deals to expedite delivery of an Amby for the daughter's dowry. It usually arrived after the baby was born, though. Others say that way back in the 1970s, they were willing to pay the princely sum of INR 5000 over the original price even for a second-hand Amby. An uncle recalled how his life's ambition was to have his engineer son hired as a mechanic in Birla Babu's factory. The patriarch seemed never to disappoint a jobseeker, and his benevolence, call it feudal, caused the workforce to swell to 14,000.

The virtues of the old lady are indisputable. It is spacious, to begin with. There are no head-bending or hip-twisting gymnastics involved to get in or out of the car; it's a walk through. You do not have to place yourself on the across-the-chassis seats in front or back, you simply slide into them. The boot is large enough to carry three jumbo suitcases, with space to spare on the sides, and the large wheels are ideal for potholed and rugged terrain. Says car consultant Rahul Sarkar, "It is the most comfortable car when one is being chauffeured around. You can sit back and enjoy the view."

The Ambassador also enjoys a reputation for being easy to repair. Spare parts are cheap and can be obtained practically at every street corner. There is seldom a lane in Calcutta, for example, where a car mechanic or a garage does not possess the expertise to repair an Ambassador inside-out. "That is why Ambas-

The Ambassador enjoys a reputation for being easy to repair. Spare parts are cheap and can be obtained practically at every street corner.



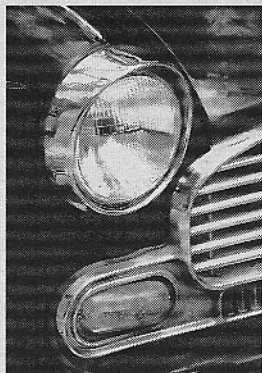
sadors are popular as taxis. The wear and tear is high on our roads, but repair is readily available," says Kalyan Bhadra, president of Automobile Association of Eastern India. There are 28,000 taxis plying on Calcutta roads, every one of them an Ambassador.



But as the times they changed, the HM management seemed not to care, or was too righteous in its belief in the Ambassador. Or perhaps too secure in the (correct) belief that government would continue to provide custom beyond the turn of the century. And so the Ambassador production continued unruffled even as the smaller, sleeker and fuel-efficient Maruti ran off with the customer over the 1980s. Then came liberalisation, giving even Maruti a run for its money, but the Ambassador steered along with equanimity.

The kids refuse to be caught anywhere near the old mare, leave alone ride it, or be driven in it.

We are now in the AM (After Maruti) period, when high-on-technology cars like the toad-like Santro, the snub-nosed Indica, the spacious Hyundai and the serious Zen have taken to the Indian roads and highway. And finally, auto enthusiasts have begun to sing a different tune—the dirge of the Ambassador. The final nails began to be hammered in on the coffin after the lending institutions jumped into the bandwagon, offering easy car loans. As the production managers in the Uttarpara factory looked on askance, the scenario changed overnight. The faithful of decades began to dump the Amby without a second thought even though it was priced at around INR four lakhs, to buy a Cielo or an Astra for a whopping INR six to nine lakhs.



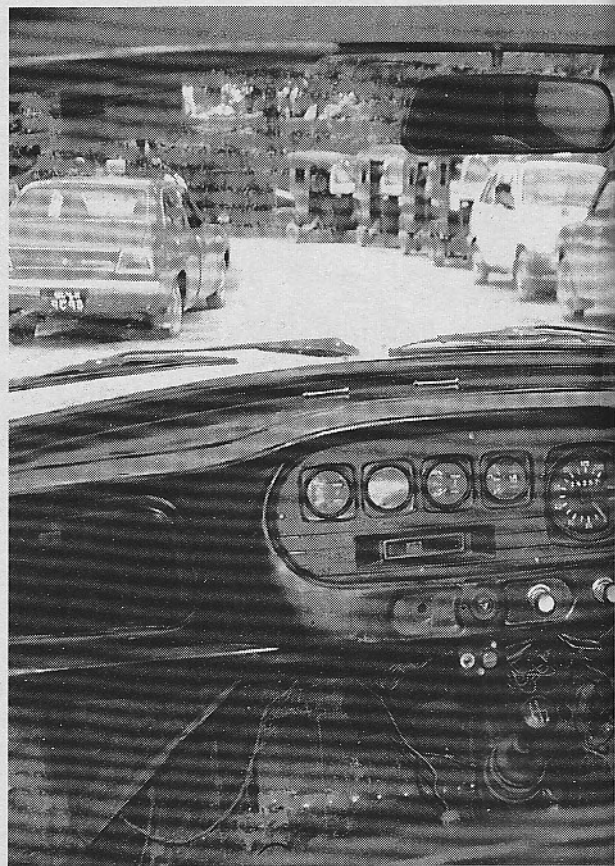
Meanwhile, together with Manmohan Singh's liberalisation of the economy, a demographic shift to smaller families was playing havoc with the Ambassador's market. The government's family planning drive over the 1970s and 1980s, extolling the virtues of *hum do, hamare do* ("we two, ours two"), delivered small-sized middle class families in the 1990s. For these new families, there was no need to hanker after an unfashionable clunker. And so, despite the INR 75 crore that HM has spent over the last three years to modernise the Uttarpara factory, sales have refused to pick up. The competition compared favourably in front of the

Ambassador's easily-clogged filters, weak braking action, and the loud humming sound from the differential, which has been the passenger's constant companion.

For the all-too-visible bratpack class, full of purchasing power, the portly shape of the Ambassador was an embarrassment rather than a welcome holdover from the past. The kids refuse to be caught anywhere near the old mare, leave alone ride it—or be driven in it. Senior tea executive Sunil Munshi's sons reject the idea of going to school in their Ambassador though their mother loves the car because she can lie down on the backseat. "It's an embarrassment. What will our friends think?" the teenagers exclaim in unison. Given the choice, Munshi preferred to keep his sons happy rather than humour his wife. He scrapped his Amby of years and brought in a Zen. "It's a dinosaur," snorts well-known stock broker Subrato Roy. "It needs to be rubbished." Students of automobile engineering see no future for themselves if they join HM. "We will never join HM for a job," says Buku Bannerjee, a II Year student at Jadavpur University in Calcutta. And then rubs it in, "Except to study the Ambassador as a vintage car."

Uttarpara blues

Even the advertisements created by the Mudra ad agency for the Ambassador, now appearing sparsely, were pitched to make a legacy out of the car. The copy dwells on nostalgia, and



does not take on the new entrants in the market on their merits. One ad shows a crowded Dusherra scene, with two children standing on the roof of an Amby to watch Ravana's efigy torched. Another shows the car being driven in a desert with three children running behind it. Says Shibnath Sen, senior creative director of Hindustan Thompson, "The Amby ads tickle the heart. It is positioned as the car that understands India, the Indian family — a car that is always there." The Ambassador advertisements do not highlight its curves and styling like the Accent does; they do not emphasise the spirit or silence like the Maruti's; or trumpet ambition as in the Corsa ads, which claim sale of a million cars in 1999 alone.

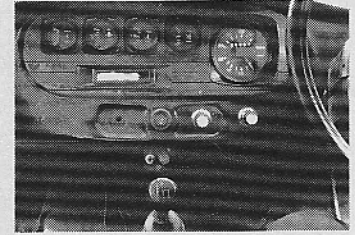
That the Ambassador has a place in most hearts has never been in doubt, and how could it be otherwise given that it is part of the childhood memories of practically every middle-aged professional of India. However, the number of jokes about the Amby more than match its years. The latest doing the rounds in Calcutta is that while doing the rounds in Heaven in his automobile, God the Maker chanced upon CK Birla, the Maker of the Ambassador. But the Creator was none too impressed and said to him, "You have set up factories, and companies and all manner of enterprises. But what have you done for me in your life?" Birla fell on his knees, "Why, Lord, I have ensured that those who ride the Ambassador always remember you. When they start the journey, the

first thing they do is to pray to you for their safety and when they reach their destination they remember you again and thank you for bringing them alive."

Jokes apart, as Rahul Sarkar says, "The Amby's brakes are just not adequate though the company is trying to improve and develop disc brakes." The steering needs power, he adds: "It requires quite an effort to drive the car." The upholstery could do with a facelift, and the fit and finish needs a major overhaul. The door panels have gaps that are two fingers wide, which will hardly do when sleek models now abound in the market. One major problem faced by Amby owners has been the breakdown of the drive shaft. "It requires frequent repairs, its fatigue and breakage is phenomenal. After buying a new Amby, the taxi owner has to initially spend 8-10,000 rupees to make it street worthy," complains Kalyan Bhadra. And it guzzles fuel, one litre giving only 6km as against the Santro's 10km.

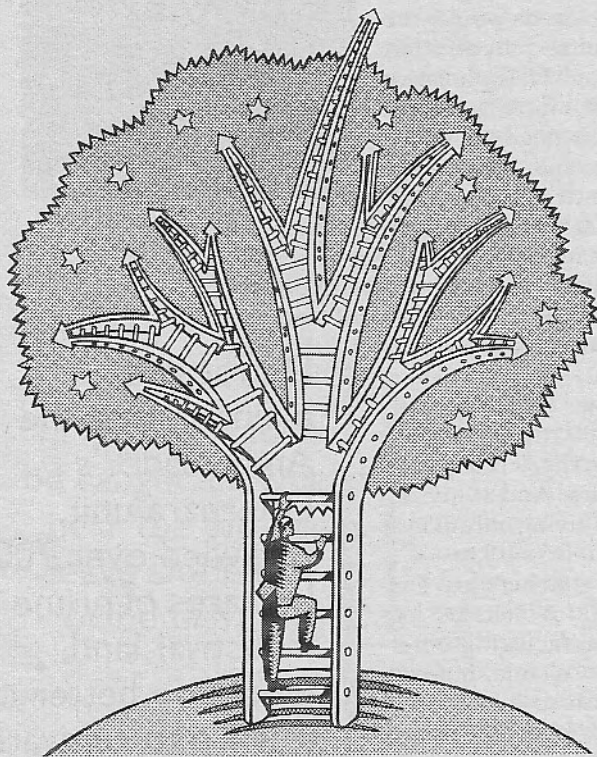
Industry watchers are convinced that HM is on its last legs as a car-manufacturing enterprise here in Calcutta, unless it can bring itself to invest up to INR 500 crores to revamp its production. Detractors who have become increasingly malicious over the years, maintain that the Uttarpara unit, sprawled over 700 hectares of prime industrial land, would do better if it were to cultivate paddy instead. Any re-orientation in the auto industry requires deep pockets, and HM was willing to invest no more than INR 75 crores to put in new dies for the panels and to upgrade the engine to satisfy new Euro II norms. In a recent interview, HM's Executive Director A Sankara Narayanan ruled out a joint venture, "You become part of the multinational and the second promoter becomes the investor. But you have no control over the company."

It is not that the derivative of the Morris Oxford has not morphed stage by stage since 1948. It now boasts the Japanese Isuzu engine, which is powerful yet easy on the ears. The gear box has been tinkered with, and the Amby now sports Mercedes-like door handles and a recessed boot floor for greater luggage space. The



Detractors maintain that the Ambassador's Uttarpara unit, sprawled over 700 hectares of prime industrial land, would do better if it were to cultivate paddy instead.





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Centrally planned sedan

by Roddy Mackenzie

ENID BLYTON'S Noddy drove one, so did Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Jyoti Basu of West Bengal still has one. The Ambassador was the undisputed king of the Indian roads, inextricably linked to many an influential person's childhood memories of pleasurable events and grand excursions to hill stations...

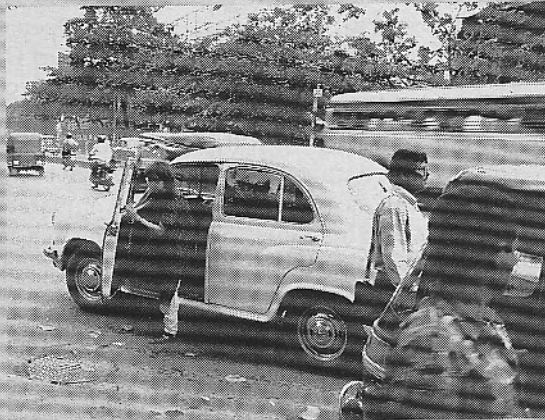
When the car first hit Indian roads it was not far behind its time in terms of automobile design. The cost was high, about 20 times the

annual average wage, so it remained the preserve of bureaucrats and government servants. The inefficiencies in manufacture were not considered to be a problem because the commoner was never intended to own an Ambassador. Short production runs and over-staffing legislated by government fiat, ensured that the manufacturers were beholden to the bureaucrats who were the biggest customers.

Of course, the Ambassador could be fixed almost anywhere in India. The fact that it required repair almost anywhere in India seemed to be overlooked. The mechanic was not concerned with the cost of the large inventories of parts sitting on the shelf, so long as the machines continued to break down and he was able to realise a good margin on his stock. The spares makers were happy with faulty design and the manufacturers did not care about after-sales service. Only the private owners felt the pinch of continuous trips to the mechanic, but then private owners of luxury goods were considered to have stolen their money from the poor, so their interests in value for money were not an issue.

Most people who owned an Ambassador never drove it. The chauffeur did. Therefore driver-comfort was not considered an issue to the purchaser. This meant that the off-centre pedals and oblique steering wheel angle continued to be a feature, to the present day even. From experience one can say that this leads to driver fatigue as well as back pain. Thus, the need for hourly tea stops, much to the benefit of the roadside dhaba.

The heat from the engine and transmission are radiated nicely onto the driver's seat, to ensure a well-warmed driver, which is no doubt a delight in the summer. The sturdy construction ensured low fuel efficiency as well as excessive wear on the



Easy to get out, easy to get in.

suspension, and high turnover for shock absorbers—a boon to the steel manufacturers, although a drain on net resources in terms of returns.

The low acceleration rate ensured poor traffic flow in the cities but obviated the need for good brakes. The lights were presumably kept weak to ensure that no one dazzled oncoming traffic by failing to dip at night. However, it is hard to understand why the indicator switches were placed on the dash-

board, where it is impractical for a driver to reach, particularly in the dark. No doubt all this contributes to India's world record road fatalities-to-vehicle ratio.

The tinny Marutis were derided initially as too delicate to handle the rough Indian roads. This overlooked the benefits of overall lightness and the reduction in impact forces from the bumps. Lighter vehicles and faster stopping times mean that pedestrian populations are at less risk from the new vehicles. Emissions from the Ambassador are necessarily greater per kilometre of travel. Lower fuel efficiencies and a high rate of dropping out of tune ensure that the exhaust from the rusty beasts is nicely filled with nitrate compounds to the detriment of all and everyone.

It appears that not a single paisa was spent on research and development for the Ambassador. According to an ex-managing director of Maruti Udyog, there was a generally-held belief that the engineering skills required to modify the car were not available in India. This seems to be patently absurd. At the same time that Hindustan Motors was stolidly churning out obsolete designs, the military establishment was indigenously designing and innovating in the name of import substitution. The most convincing argument is of how the company was protected from competition by a cozy relationship with the government and the party in power. Premier Automobiles, the only other competitor, was not allowed to increase production and so there was no need to innovate.

Even as bureaucratic controls decrease, the Ambassador serves as a reminder of the risks of central planning, and its contempt for the consumer and enterprise. Expensive, inefficient, heavy, slow, dangerous and blessed with a set of stately curves that appeal to the idealist alone.

new latches are said to be bust proof, and the paint shop is now state-of-the-art. However, these changes are a case of too little, too late. Neither is the Ambassador competitive on the road, nor is its spaciousness any longer its strength. The smaller Indian families now regard the Ambassador's size and driveability as "cumbersome". With its dowdy appearance and reputation as a fuel-guzzler, the Amby has dropped out from middle class aspirations. "The Ambassador has not kept pace with the car industry. Its technology is defunct," says Ratanlal Passari, the oldest and one of the well-known car dealers in Calcutta, who witnessed the heyday of the Amby. "Now I barely sell 250-300 Ambassadors a month," says Passari.

Games managements play

When the Maruti stormed the streets in the mid-1980s, challenging the Ambassador's market leadership, all that the HM management did was to wait and watch. Sales plummeted from 3500 a month a decade ago to barely 1100 per month in October 1999, while Maruti's sales are reported to have topped four lakh a year. The Uttarpara workforce of 9000, down from 14,000 people in the good old days, is today threatened with layoff and a three-day-week. Workers gather around the factory gate to protest the deferment of salary. In June, they had not been paid as late as on the 13th of the month. The faces of workers who emerge during the afternoon change of shift look sullen—they tarry for a while to listen to what the union leaders have to say but their eyes do not betray emotion.

The inertia that gripped the HM management over the years is difficult to shrug off. The factory's earlier strengths are today its greatest weaknesses. Uttarpara is a 'vertically-integrated' plant that manufactures most of its components internally at high cost, whereas the competing manufacturers' plants are mostly assembly units which outsource components; HM produces more than 18,000 car parts by itself, most of these for the Ambassador. This raises wage bills to 22 percent of the car cost as against 6 percent in HM's own Mitsubishi plant in Madras. Only recently has the management tried to farm out some parts of the Amby.

To manufacture the Ambassadors it

still manages to sell, only 3500 of the present workforce of 9000 are required, says a senior manager. He points out that the Madras factory which manufactures the Lancer employs only 750 workers to produce 34,000 cars per annum. "It's a ridiculous comparison," remonstrates Deepak Bakshi, secretary of Shramik Karmachari Union. "Why do you forget that in Uttarpara, workers not only manufacture Ambassadors but also the Trekker, trucks and the Contessa. Moreover, the spare parts manufactured are to the tune of INR 75 crores. How can you compare the productivity of the workers of the Chennai factory to those of Uttarpara?"

The trade unions refuse to believe that the HM plant is running at a loss as shown by the Birla management. They point out that in 1996-97, HM showed a profit high of INR 30 crores; since 1985 the company has raised bonuses to 20 percent of the salary and absorbed 850 casual workers. "Are these signs of sickness?" demands Poltu Sen of the Indian Federation of Trade Unions. "The management is playing games."

For example, workers point out, a notice is put out in the morning shift stating that salaries cannot be paid because there is no demand for the Ambassador and sales have dropped; by the afternoon shift, a new notice is circulated that 50 cars have to be produced immediately. "What it does," says Sen, "is create a fear psychosis among the workers. This way, older workers will be forced to accept the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) without a squeak. Moreover, it will legitimise layoffs, which we have been fighting. If the management can win here, they can replicate the strategy in other plants."

Despite repeated requests, the HM management refused to speak to this reporter or allow her a visit to the Uttarpara plant. "The time is not amenable and the business condition does not permit a visit. Lots of changes are taking place," said PK Chatterjee, production manager. An insider, however, thought he knew why Chatterjee was unwilling to allow a visit. He said, "What is there to show? The plant looks like a slightly better version of a garage down the street. Pieces of iron rods, steel and junk are left heaped around. Workers move around in their vests and lungis. Worse, car parts are assembled manually even today; there is no software or computerised system to check the quality or specifications. Credit must be given to the skill of the workers that the parts fit and there are no major disasters."

A former automobile student who had trained for six months at the HM plant nar-

The Ambassador's predecessor, the Landmaster.



rated how an Ambassador just off the assembly line emitted a terrible rattling sound on the trial run. A team of engineers mulled over the problem and suggested various reasons as the cause of the noise. Yet nothing worked, and the chassis was about to be pried open when suddenly a worker realised a screw was loose. It was duly tightened and the rattle disappeared. "There seemed to be no system in the plant to identify even such a minor problem," laughed the student.

Autumn of the matriarch

The issues at stake are no laughing matter, however. Exports of Ambassadors to neighbouring countries have dried up. Five years ago, a surge of sales to the UK had awakened hope of better times, but HM soon realised that the Ambassador was in demand overseas only as a vintage showpiece. It wouldn't last. Meanwhile, the upwardly mobile Indian middle class is seeking its rightful place under the sun and refuses to be seen in the dowager, howsoever impressive its past and pedigree.

"For the big family, the Tata Sumo is now the car of choice," says Ratanlal Passari. The army, more alert after the recent skirmish with Pakistan, is eyeing the Maruti-Gypsy though it has not abandoned the armoured Amby completely. The last straw for HM was the new government notification allowing Indian

taxpayer's money now to be spent on Maruti and its many versions. It was also only last month that the Union government finally allowed its ministers to buy Marutis or other vehicles for their use.

But the Ambassador as yet refuses to be left on the wayside like its compatriots the Padmini and the Standard Herald. It may possibly live on among ministers and bureaucrats who like to travel

with an entourage and an equal number of luggage pieces. And in taxis servicing passengers in Calcutta, Delhi and Madras who like the solace of sprawling seats. As long as Indians are willing to blush away the Amby's outdated looks, steering wheel that looks like it would do for an ocean-liner, differential hum, and problematic brakes, perhaps no car in India can match the good ol' Amby's comfort and spaciousness levels. But it will never again be the car of prestige, the symbol of India's self-reliance.

Car nap in Calcutta.



Nepal's own *gaadi*

LITTLE NEPAL, too, has a *gaadi* of its own. No prizes for guessing its name, "Sherpa", the symbol of mountain sturdiness. And it does live up to it. When Sherpa did its first run, it was carrying a mean load of 1.8 metric tonnes, and it pulled it off, all the way up from Biratnagar across the length of Nepal and upto the hill district of Baitadi.

Those at the assembling firm, Hulas Motors Pvt. Ltd., couldn't have been more thrilled. "We take pride in our Sherpa," says Surendra Golchha, executive director of the company. He adds for good measure that the Sherpa does all justice to environmental norms. The mileage, too, is good, at 12 km to a litre of diesel.

But it was not an easy ride to assemble a car in Nepal, and it took three failed models before the present Sherpa 46(D) came along, with its 5+1 gear

system, claimed top speed of 100 kmph, all for NR 710,000. While the design is Nepali, as are the chassis, the body and the tyre, the engine is Chinese, and the differential Indian.

For the moment, the Hulas company estimates a modest production run of 10 cars a month at its plant in Biratnagar. Service centres have opened up in Kathmandu, Butwal and Biratnagar, while another is coming up in Nepalgunj.

Sherpa owners are all praise for their vehicle, some of it of course tinged with patriotic pride about the Nepali jeep that could. All of which does really seem to indicate that Nepal has arrived quietly on the auto-assembly scene.

-Toya Gautam





THE NEWS

started assembling the motorcar in Pakistan. With more than 70 percent of its parts made in Japan and only the assembling done in Pakistan, it was almost as good as an imported car. But far cheaper, and smaller. The 796cc Suzuki Fx, for convenience addressed as 800cc in both India and Pakistan, had the lowest horsepower of any automobile around—and the lowest price. At PKR 45,000, it cost less than half the next cheapest car in the Pakistani market than the 1000cc Daihatsu Charade, priced at over PKR 100,000.

The Suzuki factor revolutionised the automobile industry in South Asia, as millions more in the middle-class could now think of owning a vehicle. The seating capacity may be indicated at four, but who cared when you could fit in six or even eight passengers and head out to the bazaar for ice cream! In Pakistan, the Fx soon became ubiquitous, its small size and easy manoeuvrability making it ideal for crowded city streets and narrow gullies. Everywhere, the roads suddenly became congested.

Suzuki introduced its Alto in the market in 1988-89. It was basically an Fx with a different shape and a different name. More than 50 percent of the Alto's auto-parts were manufactured in Pakistan. Due to poor quality control, the model's performance suffered, and it was considered inferior to the Fx. In 1990, the front grill of the Alto was made more trendy, but it blocked the air passage to the radiator. The car would heat up and the model lost popularity, until local quacks diagnosed the problem and introduced some air space in front of the grill.

To get over its troubled past, the Alto was renamed Mehran in 1992, after an area in central Sindh—Wadi-e-Mehran (Mehran Valley). The modifications were slight, in lighting and monogram design. Relatively cheap to purchase, the Mehran is also cheaper to maintain, since much of the spares of the 800cc are now locally manufactured. A whole cottage industry for spares has sprung up, and not just in big cities like Karachi and Lahore, but also in smaller towns like Gujranwala and Faisalabad (formerly Lyallpur) near Lahore.

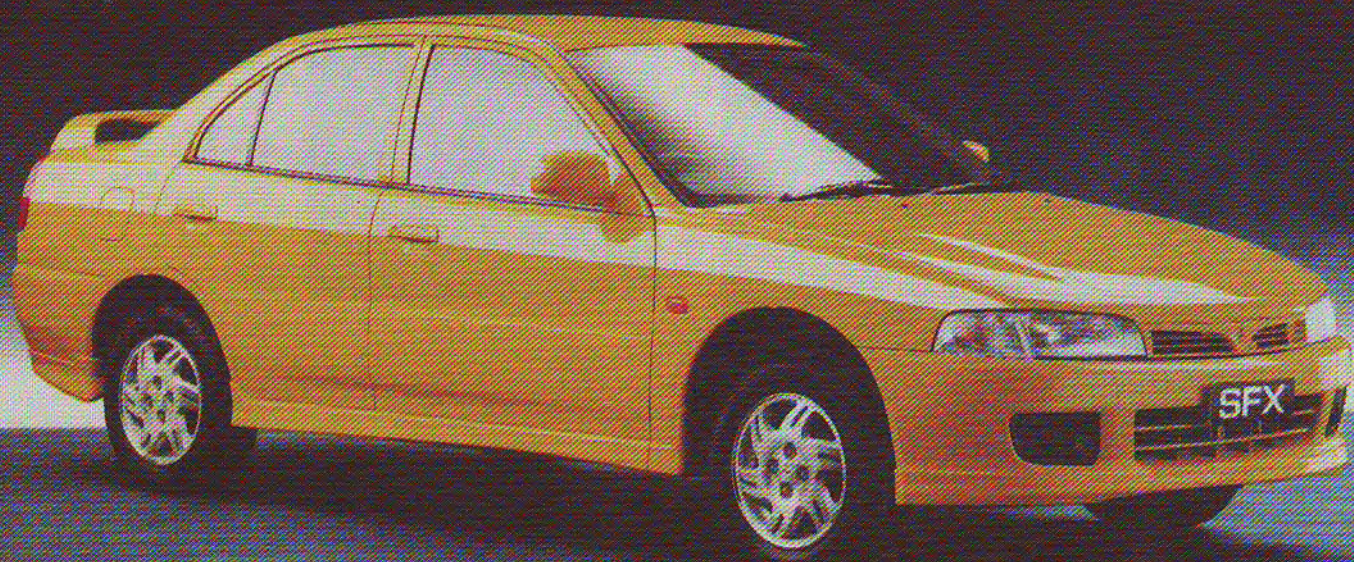
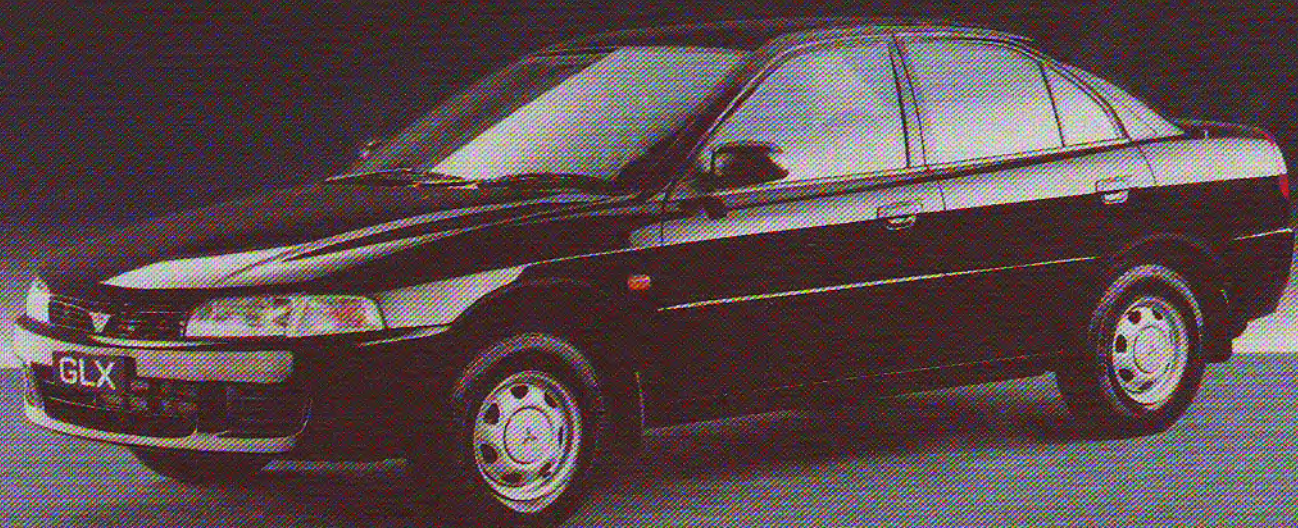
The Mehran also gives good mileage: an average of about 13-14 km per litres of gasoline in congested road conditions, improving on a highway by 2-3 km per litre. Like with the Maruti across the border, its remarkable manoeuvrability and economic efficiency made Mehran an ideal 'city car' for the middle class. For those who can afford an imported car, the Mehran is the ideal second car. It delivers excellent re-sale value and it is the car of choice for young professionals wanting to up-

What's in a name? Maruti, meet Mehran

by *Hassam Qadir Shah*

There are two automobile makes which ply the roads of India and Pakistan, one Mehran and the other Maruti. They are practically identical, both having their provenance in a model developed in the 1970s by the giant Suzuki Corporation of Japan. It is an appropriate commentary on the most tension-ridden geopolitical separation of South Asia, that just as the people of India and Pakistan are more or less alike, so are the popular little cars that they drive. A Pakistani visiting New Delhi thinks he is getting into a Mehran, while an Indian in Karachi thinks it is a Maruti that whisks him away.

It was in 1982 that the Suzuki Corporation





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Only in India does a Peoples' Car turn into a status symbol. Where else in the world would a midget of a car like a Maruti be commonly chauffeur-driven?

by **Ranjit Devraj**

In the beginning was the Ambassador. And for several generations of Indians it seemed as though this venerable model would be the end too. If there are finally intimations of mortality for these "period-cars-in-production", Indians must raise a hallelujah to the Gandhi brothers – Rajiv and Sanjay. Glory be to the bungling of these exemplars of *baba log*. For it gave deliverance from the tyranny of crony socialism, the flagship of which was the 1952 Morris Cowley *aka* the Ambassador.

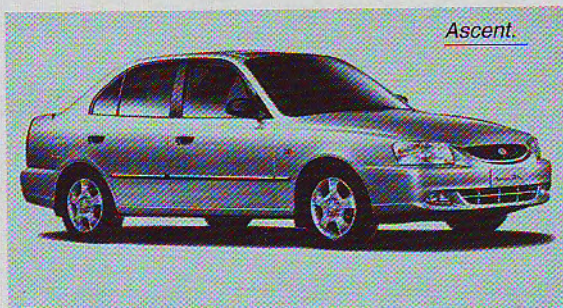
It was Sanjay who floated the idea of a people's car. Something in the nature of Hitler's Volkswagen. Of course, Sanjay never had Hitler's luck – either with fascism or with the people's car. His role in bringing forth a new car for the *volks* of India was limited to naming it Maruti, the Hindu god of wind (incidentally, Sanjay named his

son, his other production, after the god of waters – Varun). While he was alive, Maruti never produced anything worth mentioning except road-rollers and armour-plated Ambassador cars. The latter moved so ponderously that some VIP customers thought they were better off ordering the former. The god of wind would definitely not have been pleased.

Things changed in 1980 after the Gandhi brothers' other great passion, flying, abruptly ended Sanjay's life as he crash-landed into a dhobi ghat in the heart of Delhi. Elder brother Rajiv, then a pilot with Indian Airlines, was quickly grounded by mummy and prime minister, Indira Gandhi. Sycophants of the grieving Mrs. Gandhi dotted the landscape with hospitals and other public institutions to the memory of the fallen "Son-of-India". They also revived his pet project Maruti by bringing in the Japanese Suzuki. Along with Honda, another motorcycle manufacturer, Suzuki had carved a niche for itself in small, fuel-efficient cars, which were giving the Detroit gas guzzlers a run for their money in the world market. It was the time of the Saudi Arabian negotiator Sheikh Yamani, the evil genius behind OPEC, and the unseemly fuss about fossil fuels.

Virgin market

To say that the three-cylinder, 800 cc Maruti was a hit would be understating the case. Those who did not wangle quotas from the public sector company through the *bhai-bhai* network fought each other in serpentine registration queues. Premiums were about half the cost of the vehicle and resale value better than 100 percent. The all-too-plebian Maruti was in India a status symbol and to own one a statement of arrival – either through the bureaucratic route or the premium-paying one. India then must have been the only country where such a midget of a car was commonly chauffeur-



Ascent.

driven to testify to the clout of its owners.

Who said anything about a people's car? In the beginning, the Japanese insistence on quality meant that parts could not be turned out at the blacksmith's but had to be imported at considerable cost. A customer who required a new door panel discovered that it would cost a fourth of the price of the car. Maruti did not entertain his plea that they keep all four doors and let him have a car free. Clearly, something more drastically damaging had to happen to the Soviet-style, closed economy before the car owners of India got a respite.

Maruti itself contributed to that change by helping to deplete foreign exchange reserves. But it was left to Rajiv Gandhi, who took over as prime minister following Mrs. Gandhi's assassination in 1984, to ensure a wide enough hole in the balance of payments position for a once-proud India to beat it to the portals of the World Bank, begging bowl in hand. In his five years as prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi went on a shopping spree, the like of which has never been seen in independent India—German HDW submarines, British Westland helicopters, Jaguar fighters, French Mirages, and yes, the notorious Swedish Bofors howitzers. By the time, Rajiv lost the elections in 1989 he had all but demolished India's 'planned' economy, and the World Bank was already scripting India's annual budget. The stage was finally set to crack open the almost-virgin Indian automotive market.

Desperate designs

That meant that the makers of the clunky Ambassador and its long-time rival the Fiat Delite, both spoiled rotten by a monopoly market, had to change their ways or perish. So they upgraded, but not enough to meet anything like the attributes proclaimed on stickers that Indian motorists so touchingly stuck on their Ambassadors and Fiats—"16 valve", "fuel injection" and even "six cylinder". Upgradation for the Birlas meant bringing in a ponderous Vauxhall; fitting it with the Ambassador's aging 1400cc engine, and grandly calling it the Contessa. The car floundered like a beached whale. Finally, under threat of official action, the Birlas transplanted into it a petrol-guzzling 1800cc Isuzu motor. What this meant was that politicians and bureaucrats who would not be seen dead in anything other than a white Ambassador (first popularised by Indira Gandhi) had something faster and sleeker to move in and still be politically correct.

The foreign antecedents of both the Ambassador and the Contessa were too historically

remote for members of the unsuspecting, unexposed Indian public to get wise to the fact that this was not the "indigenous technology" they proudly thought it was. Neither model was in production anywhere else in the world—nor could be. But with liberalisation now well underway, and the Gandhis history, politicians are beginning to gain the courage to order sleek Mitsubishi's, also from the stables of Birla's Hindustan Motors.

Premier Automobiles finally upgraded from the Fiat Delite to the well-known 124 model from the mid-1960s, which had had a successful run in Eastern Europe as the Lada. But it chose to underpower the car with a small Isuzu engine and dispensed with pesky details like corrosion-proofing, so that Fiat was soon disassociating itself from the rust-bucket it turned out. Premier also had problems with the French Peugeot and had to drop its 306 version after a brief production run of a model regarded as ideal for Indian road conditions.

Wheeler dealers

If HM and Premier Automobiles were notoriously economical about quality, soon enough the upstart Maruti was beginning to learn lessons from them rather than the other way around. Once sticklers for quality, the subsequent arrival of the sleek Koreans (Hyundai and Daewoo), the Germans (Astra) and the Americans (Ford), showed up the Japanese as having slyly employed an Indian trick or two. And having acquired controlling interest in Maruti, they could no longer lay blame on the Indian public sector sloth.

Maruti's strong point in a rapidly changing market can be said to be its national network of dealers and service centres. But as the focus shifts to quality and the price of imported spares drop, its network of wheeler dealers, out to make a killing through unscrupulous practices and by cutting corners on service, are proving to be Maruti's doom. Many of them have Japanese mottos displayed on their walls but provide service that is often worse than that offered by roadside mechanics. Little wonder then that in 1998-99, Maruti's market share dropped from 80 percent to 62 percent, and now it is thought to hover around 50 percent. If the Maruti still sold 397,586 units in 1999 as against 326,523 in the previous year, it was more a testimony to

Sanro.





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Authorised Local Dealer: Gandaki Trade House. Naya Bazar, Pokhara, Tel:23848, 21206, 24848
Authorised Spare parts Dealer: Awai Auto Trading Co. Jyatha, Kantipath, Kathmandu, Tel: 249115, 249375
 Auto Land Pvt. Ltd. Teku Road, Kathmandu, Tel: 261235, 261446

the robustness of the market than anything else.

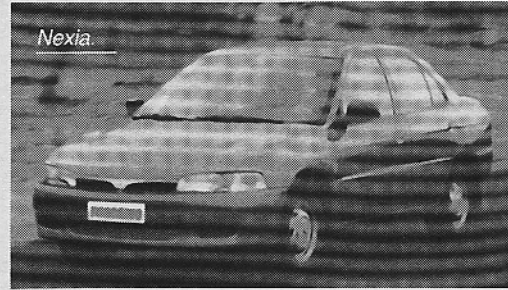
However, the management's worries are more than abundantly clear in the across-the-board slashing of prices of its products. The sticker for the bread-and-butter 800cc car has been slashed by INR 10,000 to 23,000, depending on the version. Prices have also gone down for the Wagon-R because of stiff competition from Hyundai's Santro and Tata's Indica, and the Omni 800cc microvan has also become cheaper. The asking for the 1.3 litre Esteem has similarly been pegged down by around INR 50,000, while upgrading it to Euro II emission standards following a Supreme Court order in force from April.

The reduced price has kept the Esteem in the reckoning, but only just. Its once sought-after aerodynamic 'wedge' design is getting a little long in the tooth. In the beginning, about a decade ago, the Esteem sputtered around as a grossly underpowered, if fuel-efficient, 1000cc version. The Japanese moved it through a carburetted 1300cc version before finally installing fuel-injection and a new multi-valve head. In other words, the Japanese were caught adopting the Indian trick of not selling the best until forced to by competition and by court order. Recently, Maruti announced multi-valve heads for its 800 and for the Zen (exported as the Alto), literally breathing life into these aging models. To take on the Santro, the company has brought in the Wagon-R, claimed to be the best-selling vehicle in Japan.

Claiming second place to Maruti overall is the South Korean Hyundai, which last year, sold 75,895 units mainly on the strength of its three-year warranty—seen as a convincing show of confidence in the quality of its own products. Hyundai has positioned itself well with the mid-size Accent for those with larger disposable income. Its cheaper, "tall-boy" Santro is poised to overtake every other model in the market for sheer popularity, even Maruti's 800cc mini. To make things worse for Maruti, the small car segment that it monopolised for more than a decade is under assault from the formidable Indian house of Tata, with its Italian-designed 1400cc Indica. Another Korean entrant, Daewoo, is also in the fray with its Matiz, one of the most popular small cars in the world today. Daewoo also makes the Cielo and Nexia, reckoned to be good value for money for those looking for mid-sizers. Obviously the Indian car-buyer is beginning to get spoiled for choice.

No account of the Indian automobile scene would be complete without mentioning the popularity of "oil-burners", which are in high demand thanks to the heavy cross-subsidy on

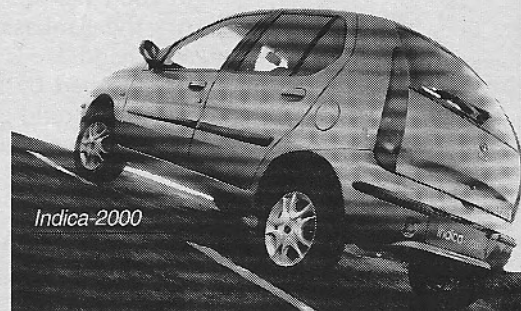
diesel. Fiat's popularity in India today rests largely on the diesels it has in its Uno and Siena models. And Peugeot has a ghost of a presence in the country by providing diesel engines for a version of Maruti's Zen. Diesels are especially popular in the rugged multi-utility vehicles (MUV) category where the Tatas reign supreme with their Sumo, Sierra and the sleek 4x4 Safari. But the Japanese Toyota, a relatively new entrant into the market, is already making a dent in the MPV segment with the increasingly popular Qualis. Together, the Tatas and Toyota are giving nightmares to Maruti's well-established, gasoline-driven offroader, the Gypsy, which now comes with an 82 bhp multi-valve, MPFI power plant. And of course, diesels power the Mercedes E220 turbo-diesel, which allows some of India's richest men and perhaps



Upgradation for the Birlas meant bringing in a ponderous Vauxhall, fitting it with the Ambassador's aging 1400cc engine, and grandly calling it the Contessa. The car floundered like a beached whale.

in the world as well, to drive around on subsidised fuel.

The real competition for Maruti, however, is in the premium (by Indian standards) segment, where big names like the Opel Astra and Honda City have already edged out the Ford Escort from the 1.6-litre turf. Ford tried out the trick of an underpowered initial model, but could not redeem itself with a multi-valve upgradation. The Astra seems to have fallen into a similar predicament. Clearly, buyers are more discerning and less forgiving in this rarefied zone where details count. The entry of the Mitsubishi Lancer by Hindustan Motors and Suzuki's Baleno, both sporting a range of internationally standard features to which the post-liberalisation Indian is getting used to, foretells a shakeout in the "executive" sector where prices hover around a stratospheric one million rupees. Here, at last, are cars that could do with some chauffeurs. ▽



The Ambassador's *Mistri*

by Mark Tully

Why should I care so much about the Ambassador, which I do? Because I do not want to lose an old friend, especially one which brings back memories of better times. With her friendly pug-nosed face, headlights resembling the eyes of Thomas The Tank Engine, aero-dynamically-unfriendly rounded roof, and unfashionable high gait, she recalls the gallant days of motoring when drivers never knew whether they would reach their destination without a breakdown.

The Ambassador is the steam engine of the Indian road, a challenge to drive and requiring much maintenance. Like a steam engine, she too has a long working life—you do not trade in an Ambassador. Until the courts stepped in

with emission standards this year, the average age of the Ambassador taxis on the rank outside my house in Delhi must have at least been 20. But longevity isn't her only selling point. The Ambassador is rugged. A recent advertisement admitted that modern cars scored on miles to the gallon, miles per hour, but the Ambassador won

hands down on potholes to the mile. She has advantages for the taxi driver who charges on a per capita basis and ofcourse for the joint family. No one knows what the exact record for an Ambassador's load is: the claims go as high as 30 passengers. I have counted 20 in the remoter parts of India east of Varanasi.

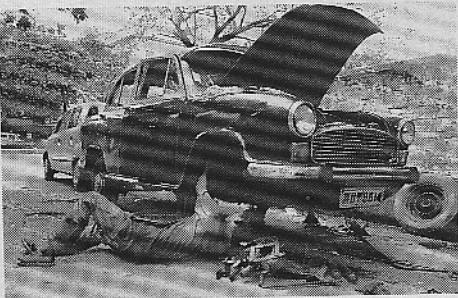
Potholes, unmarked speed-breakers, bullock cart drivers for whom left and right have no meaning, lorry drivers who claim the freedom of the middle of the road no matter how narrow, and many other hazards, mean that breakdowns and accidents are both bound to be frequent on the Indian roads. Here again, the Ambassador scores. Over the many years that she has dominated the Indian roads, there has grown up an efficient and cheap vehicle recovery system. Almost every village on a main road has its *mistri* or mechanic, who knows the Ambassador like the back of his greased hand. He is a master of improvisation, never stumped by lack of spare parts. Additionally, you could get the car to a *mistri*, or he will come to you and repair her on the spot.

I once had the misfortune to collide with a tractor. My Ambassador limped to the nearest *mistri* who extricated the fan from the radiator with a yank on a crowbar, filled the radiator up with a mixture of water and turmeric, and told me to get it welded in the next place with electricity. The turmeric sealed the worst of the leaks, and I reached a welder with one or two stops to take water. Ambassador *mistris* have a language of their own, collapsed shock absorbers or shockers "sit down", *brooshes* or brushes need replacing, a "denter" removes dents others have caused. *Mistris* are also inclined to be cavalier in their attitude to minor problems. A driver complained that a *mistri* hadn't repaired his brakes and was told, "The car is going now and that's what matters".

But it's not just the Ambassador's suitability to India's own very special road conditions, which have kept it going for so long. It was the beneficiary of those years of economic planning when industrialists had to get a license from the government to make any investment, the notorious "license permit raj". Licensing enabled some 20 families to retain a stranglehold over the industrial economy by using their influence with politicians and bureaucrats to ensure that their products were not threatened by competition.

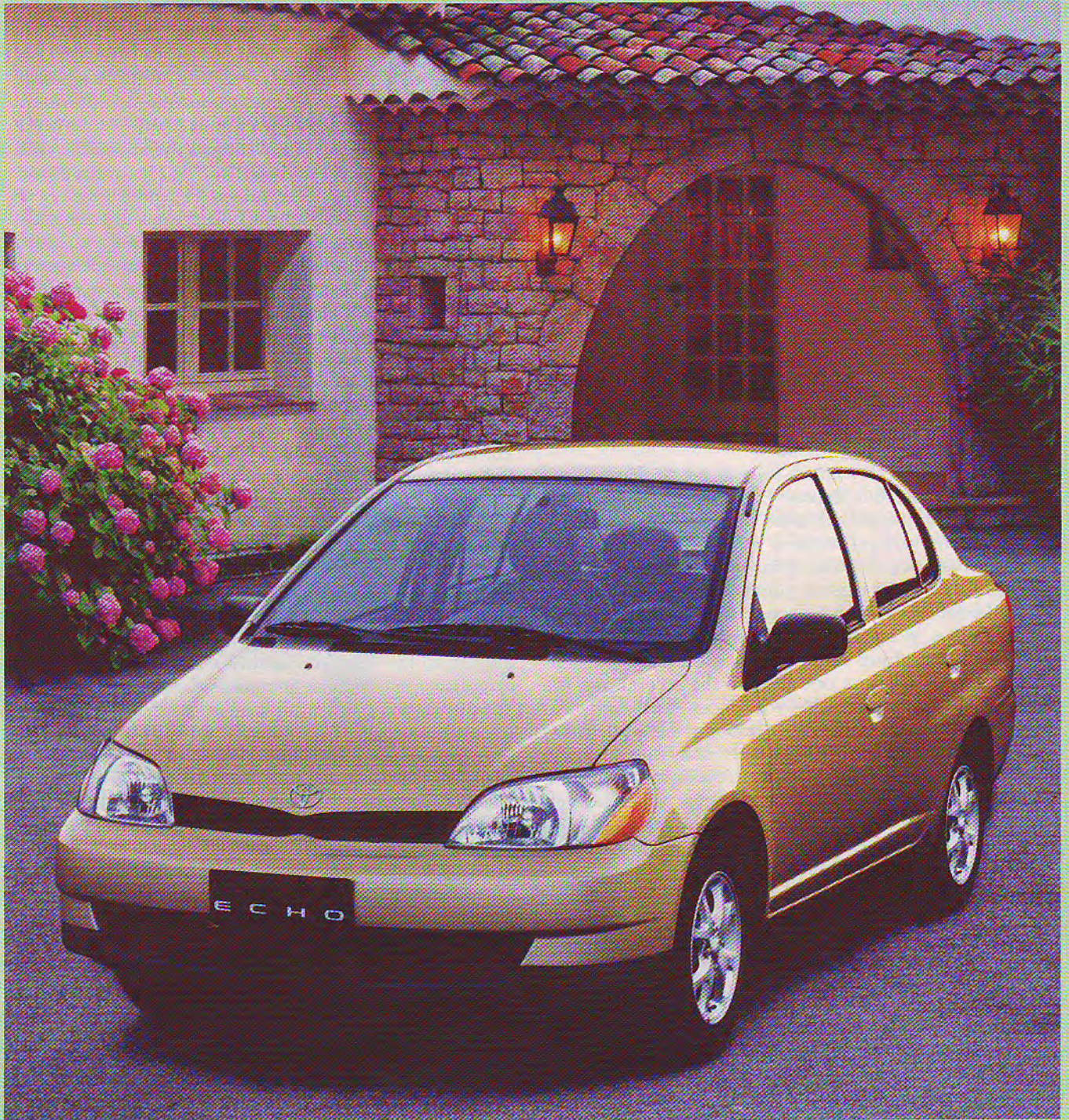
It wasn't until the early 1980s that the Ambassador faced any competition which might have threatened it. Indira Gandhi's younger son Sanjay, a former apprentice with Rolls Royce at Crewe, had plans to manufacture a people's car, the Maruti. The plan hadn't even got off the drawing board when Sanjay was killed while doing aerobatics over Delhi. Fearing that the record of Maruti might be a stain on Sanjay's memory, his mother called in the Suzukis to rescue the company. Suzuki did a good job, and small modern cars soon started pouring off the production line but the ancient Ambassador still retained a sizeable share of the market.

But India is a land which values tradition, and so even after other competition has arrived in the market, Hindustan Motors say they have no intention of phasing out the Ambassador. So the lady lives on, a symbol of the license-permit raj, which too is taking its own time in fading away. ▽



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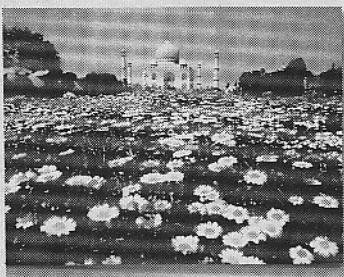
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THE HINDU TELLS us of a whole arena of work and interest that we take for granted. It is lighting at night. How easily we have come to demand visibility after sunset at the flick of a switch, while the parents of a majority of South Asians alive today shuffled around in the darkness, with the help of a *tuki* lamp or a hurricane lantern. Which is why I am happy to hear that Mr. H.S. Mamak, president emeritus of the Indian Society of Lighting Engineers, is giving his all to create awareness of lighting among the countries of South Asia. The topic of "lighting awareness" covers a whole gamut, including energy savings, the effect of lighting on human (and I am sure, animal) behaviour, aesthetics, environment, and so on. There is a city I know where huge highway lighting is placed so low on the city poles that there is excessive brightness in patches, and large sections of darkness. Certainly, something which would bring tears to a 'lighting activist' such as Mr. Mamak.

WHO HAS NOT wanted to visit the Shalimar Gardens of Lahore, but Masood Hasan writing in *The News* states unequivocally that the Gardens "are dead". He took some Western visitors who insisted on a visit, and what he came away with was the knowledge that "years of official neglect, public indifference and our well-established apathy about our past" have reduced the earlier grandeur to a shell. Writes Mr. Hasan: "There is nothing sadder than a fountain that's silent... Walking from one level to the second and the third, all that was visible was decay. The walkways are cracking, the walls are crumbling, the gardens are dry, dusty and forlorn. The trees somehow struggle on, maintain some little dignity in the death all around. An air of desolation and hopelessness hangs heavily in the summer evening. This is not a living monument." Mr. Hasan's writing, I believe, speaks for all South Asians visiting all gardens new and old in neighbourhoods all over. We have lost all sense of landscape in these modern times.

THE ONE PUBLICATION which maintains we did have such a landscape aesthetic is *Folio*, the magazine published by the Hindu group,

which I have claimed in these pages more than once to be one of the finest periodicals to come out of a South Asian publishing house. It is understated, competent, and visually appealing. The latest issue is all about flowers, gardens and gardening (see the *Taj* picture).



Highly recommended. If you subscribe to *The Hindu*, *Folio* comes along as part of the deal.

EVERYONE REMEMBERS THE IC 814 hijack episode. What *Chhetria Patrakar* finds interesting as the Indian police begins to unravel the entrails, is the region-wide nature of the planning that went into the operation. Four fake passports were provided to the Harkat-ul-Ansar militants by Suresh Bhatnathre of Seven Travels in Bombay. Over in West Bengal, police arrested Noor Mian (could be an alias) at Bashirhat near the Bangladesh border on suspicion of being complicit in the hijack. Meanwhile, the Central Bureau of Investigation arrested Kumar Bhujel in Kalimpong, for having provided the arms to the hijackers, via a certain Yusuf Nepali, who is a Nepali dalit converted to Islam. Meanwhile, Abdul Latif, one of the five persons picked up by the Bombay police soon after the hijacking, recorded his confession in the court of a special magistrate in Patiala, Punjab. For a hijack which started in Kathmandu and ended up in Kandahar after passage through Amritsar, Lahore and Dubai, this pedigree of complicity across the length and breadth of South Asia makes one marvel at how popular regionalism has finally become in South Asia—even criminals and militants are now on board!

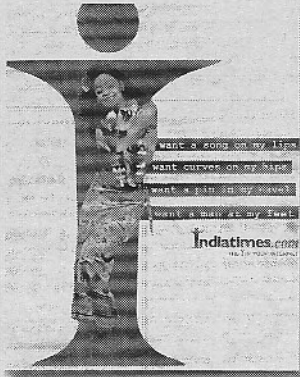
EVERY SO OFTEN, I realise with shock that *Reader's Digest* is still around, feeding useful and useless information to the English reading mass. The latest issue caught my eye because it promised, with a rather provocative cover, "firmer thighs in 30 days". For a majority of South Asian ladies swathed in salwar kameez, sari or dhoti, how important is the matter of firmer thighs, something of importance for English-speaking upper class ladies given to slacks and skirts. So there you have it, the audience profile of *Reader's Digest*.

I HAVE NOT read something as captivating as this in a long time—an Urdu litterateur saying that the "Devnagri script can save Urdu". The gentleman is Shakil Adilzada, born in Muradabad, UP, and migrated to Karachi in 1957, where he has become a successful publisher of a Urdu fiction magazine, *Sab Rang Digest*, which used to sell 155,000 copies every month in the 1970s, having gained popularity with its cliché-free Urdu and interesting translations from world and Indian literature. Adilzada (see picture) was interviewed by *The News on Sunday*, and this is what he had to say, summarised: "Any language that stops helping you earn your livelihood is doomed. As you know Urdu is not responding to this need. My child cannot speak proper Urdu for it does not help him grow in life. In India, we know that Urdu faces even a tougher situation. I think



we have also hurt our language by mixing excessive Persian and Arabic in it. The way Indians have hurt it by Sanskritising it. The most important thing to protect our language is to translate massively in Urdu. One way that we can save Urdu is through the Devnagri script. If today we start writing Urdu in Devnagri script, it will overnight become the language of one billion people. I think our insistence on the present Persian script is not a forward looking approach. Interestingly, Devnagri, unlike (Persian) Urdu, is an extremely scientific script. It includes *zair, zabar, paish* within the basic script. So you can never pronounce a word wrong." If South Asia were a more culturally united region as it can indeed be, ideas such as Shakil Adilzada's are the kind that would have been discussed and debated and would have been on top of the agenda. Instead, we are forced to listen to forever more strategists speaking forever and repetitiously about all kinds of inane geopolitical topics. When will they discover *culture*?

AND NOW TO something not so nice. Indiatimes.com has been advertising itself crazy in the Indian national English dailies (for all future reference let us just say INED). And what does the ad say? "I want a song on my lips. I want curves on my hips. I want a pin in my navel. I want a man at my feet." Uh Uh. This is not the real India, but I am sure that the marketing staff has targetted it right. Quite a world away from the gentleman who is at groundlevel, is sensitive, and dares to say in Pakistan, amidst a potentially hostile citizenry, that Urdu should be written in Devnagri. His day, too, will come.



THERE ARE CERTAIN individuals who may be passable nuclear scientists both in India and Pakistan, but certainly do not deserve to be elevated to being made icons of folk culture. Particularly if you egged on your governments to go for nuclear tests, for which the Subcontinent's own history will judge you as bad, bad boys. You may be regarded as having 'made it' in modern day Pakistan if a likeness of you is painted on the back of a truck, in the six planks that are fitted vertically to keep the goods from spilling. To make a tight fit, the planks have to be placed as prescribed, which is where the image of Dr. Qadeer, Chief Nuclear Scientist of Pakistan, comes into play. The good doctorsaab may be happy to be thus displayed watching from a truck as the landscape re-



cedes, but I for one would not mind if once, just once, somebody placed the planks non-sequentially.

HERE IS A story which warmed the heart of *Chhetria Patrakar*, as it is the story of some good done by a paper, as reported by *The Pioneer*. The newspaper in question is *Phulchhab* ("basket of flowers"), published from Rajkot in the Kathiawar peninsula of Saurashtra, Gujarat. As the drought situation got worse, the newspaper announced that it would act as a conduit to provide the aqua via water-tankers to far-flung villages. It seems there are many Kathiawaris all over the globe, and they all responded with alacrity to help their home region overcome this crisis. On 24 May alone, the newspaper distributed a total of 2.6 crore litres of water in and around Rajkot free of cost, from the money sent in by readers. Over 60 to 65 water tankers a day were paid off from money received from London alone, a family of jewellers based in Bahrain donated 192 water-tankers' worth, and even members of the engineering association of the Rajkot Municipal Corporation, the very people responsible for distribution of municipal water, contributed two water-tankers. Writes *The Pioneer*, admiringly of another publication, "*Phulchhab's* involvement in the lives of the Gujarati community has been a continuous affair. It has been regularly taking up the case of the poor... *Phulchhab's* is the story of a paper with a heartline to the soul of a region." Fantastic.

A HEART-RENDING STORY from Pakistan, as reported in *The News*, is that of Shaheen Akhtar, a 15-year-old girl who died in hospital in fetters. The adolescent was put in jail to suffer rigorous imprisonment on an adultery case. She was facing charges under Pakistan's shameful Hudood Ordinance. Apparently those with whom she is charged to have had sexual contact were still at large, but the police saw it fit to put Shaheen in the slammer. She was jailed in September 1999 while in good health, but on 13 April she was taken to hospital, supposedly suffering critically from tuberculosis. But what was the sense of having the girl in fetters while in hospital, as the picture clearly shows? And now Shaheen is dead, without her family even coming to pick up her body, and only this pathetic picture to show what a young women has had to go through before she, ultimately, departed her body. But the larger tragedy is that, right across the Northern Subcontinental Crescent, from Bangladesh through the Ganga plain into the Indus plain and up into Afghanistan, women are similarly treated with animus and rage by an unfeeling male-centric society. In these matters, we just have to become more civilised like the rest of the world.



- *Chhetria Patrakar*



SANGRITA LAMA

Sabir Saab on Sagarmatha

by *Ramyata Limbu*

On the morning of 17 May, Nazir Sabir became the first Pakistani to stand on top of the world. In the bargain, the Hunza native also clinched for himself a lifetime of complimentary cuisine at Rum Doodle Restaurant and Bar, the unofficial hangout of the international climbing community in Kathmandu. Back in the Nepali capital after the climb, a sun- and snow-burned Nazirsaab, as his Sherpa friends also call him, is enjoying his conquest and his Rum Doodle Everest Summitter's ID.

"The highest point on earth and I think the highest moment in my life, too, for which I have been planning for many years," he is recorded

speaking into the camera, breathing heavily in summit footage captured on a digital videocam. He then does what most mountaineers do up there on top of Everest/Chomolongma/Sagarmatha — poses with his country's flag. There's a sparkling suspicion of tears. After the frustration of a failed attempt at Everest from the north side in 1997 and the barrage of press flak that followed in the Pakistani press, success for Sabir, a former advisor on sports and tourism to the Pakistani government, couldn't have tasted better.

In a country where the growth of the mountaineering sport has been slow, owing to a lack of patron-

age unlike the case in neighbouring India, Sabir's conquest has aroused unexpected enthusiasm. Even before arriving back in Kathmandu from the mountain, he had been feted by Pakistan's president, hailed by the local press, and a hero's welcome awaited him at home. The response and the flood of congratulatory emails arriving at the Everest Base Camp in Upper Khumbu had left the climber happily bemused. "Surprisingly enough, it has become much bigger news than I ever imagined."

Wary of criticism that accompanied the Pakistani 1997 Golden Jubilee Everest Expedition, when Sabir and five colleagues had made three

attempts before abandoning their climb at 8560m due to unmanageable blizzards, this time the climber came quietly: "No press, no sponsors, no fanfare." It was more of a personal pilgrimage. Says Sabir, "After my emotional attachment with Everest since a very close Japanese friend died in 1980, I've been thinking about this mountain, to come and pay my homage and offer prayers for all those souls who are sleeping here, nearly a dozen..."

High above the South Summit of Everest, he came across one of them—Scott Fischer—the New Zealand guide who perished in the great Everest tragedy of 1996. "Seeing his boots—the body was buried in snow—I was so shocked, but then you recover. In 26 years, I've come across so many accidents, so many close calls. Once I fell down 400 metres in an avalanche on Nanga Parbat and stopped 20m from the edge. One Japanese fell 2000 m never to be found. I prayed, God if you forgive me this time I will never come back to mountains again."

He has failed to keep the promise. Sabir has climbed four of Pakistan's five 8000m peaks—K2 (8616m), Gasherbrum I (8068m), Gasherbrum II (8035m) and Broad Peak (8047m). A recipient of Pakistan's prestigious President's Award for Pride of Performance, he is making his fourth attempt on the final 8000er, Nanga Parbat (8125m), in late June. There, he hopes to catch up with his old friend Reinhold Messner in whose company he and compatriot Sher Khan climbed Gasherbrum II and Broad Peak in pure alpine style. That was in 1982, and this autumn the Italian climber is attempting a new route on the mountain.

"Mountains are the purest and most innocent part of nature. I go to the mountains as my Mecca, my pilgrimage," says Sabir. But once he crosses 7000 metres into the so-

called 'death zone' on Everest, exposed to natural hazards, high altitude problems of all kinds, and the psychological pressure of being so far from safety, the video records everything as Sabir's romantic vision dissipates into the rarefied air—he swears, prays and curses his way to the top.

"I have a new respect for Everest. I was always given the impression of the normal route being an easy one. But I disagree. Everest came up much more difficult than my expectations, technically speaking." So far out in the wilderness once above



MINI BAIRACHARYA

"I strongly believe in the spiritual business of mountains. You and I come to this world as small particles of nature, then the world changes you in its own ways. But when you come to the mountains, you find yourself that the same small particle fits in."

the (Khumbu) Icefall, up the Lhotse face you're exposed to three-four hours of avalanche dangers." He has yet to explain to his six-year-old son Tahir that avalanches don't come from miles away but happen all of a sudden. "If you see an avalanche coming, you run, as if you fly, so you will be safe. You remember, like I ran once in the park," Tahir had advised his father at Base Camp over satellite phone.

Whenever he goes up a mountain, a will is left at base camp to take care of his affairs. There is guilt in making his family suffer every time he heads up the valley. "But I can't help myself. I'm a religious person. I strongly believe in the spiritual business of mountains. It is more than just putting on crampons and going up and down. You and I come to this world as small particles of nature, then the world changes you in its own ways. But when you come to the mountains, you find yourself that the same small particle fits in."

The year 1994 saw Sabir being easily elected to Pakistan's North-

ern Area Legislative Council, representing Hunza. During his five-year term, Sabir took on the conservatives for misusing religion, struggled against corruption, and made ample noise about the traditional and sectarian problems in Pakistan's troubled north. "I think I achieved a lot, was very happy about my five years. But I think I was a misfit."

Today, the entrepreneur-turned-mountaineer is back where he belongs, running Nazir Sabir Expeditions ("Culture Tours and Adventure Outings to the Wilderness").

"Trekking started about 20 years after Nepal, so it's new, and slowly expanding. Pakistan as a destination has always enjoyed bad publicity so it doesn't help the tourism industry. But people who are especially interested in the Karakoram, in Pakistan and its culture, are coming. However, we do not want mass tourism..." About 70 expeditions visit Pakistan every year. As the number increases, so does the sums being made by government from climbing royalty. But Sabir is not for royalty. "Countries like Nepal, Pakistan in the Himalaya should go for zero royalty like anywhere else in the world. It will encourage more expeditions to come, and it is the mountain communities which will benefit."

Through international contacts, established over years of climbing, Sabir is keen to set up welfare organisations to help the people of the high Himalaya, Hindu Kush and Karakoram. That will be an expedition of a different kind, for a member of that very rare breed, the South Asian mountaineer. ▽

The Dravidian School of



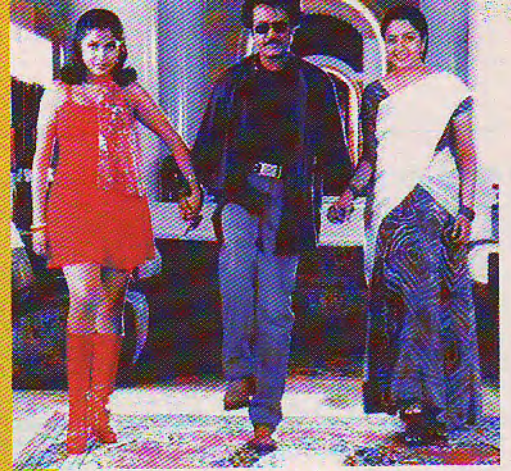
*The actress and politician:
Jayalalitha's two avatars.*



Politics and cinema live off each other in Tamil Nadu where temples have been erected to marquee stars. Here stars have gone beyond the script and influenced the nature of politics at the regional and national level. A fan club may as well be a party office.

by D.B.S. Jeyaraj

*Two more votes
for Rajnikanth.*



TAMIL CINEMA

The last election campaign in India was greatly enlivened by the active participation of movie stars. From thespian Dilip Kumar in the north to yesteryear's marquee-queen Jayalalitha in the south, a galaxy of filmstars are now visible on the electoral firmament—Shatrughan Sinha, Raj Babbar, Sunil Dutt, Rajesh Khanna, Vinod Khanna, Shabana Azmi, Pooja Batra, Nitish Bhardwaj, Vyjayanthimala, Jayapradha, Vijayshanthi, Chandrasekhar and Revathy.

This involvement of popular artistes in Indian politics dates back to the struggle for Indian independence. Back then it was more a case of singers, musicians and drama artistes involving themselves at a provincial level, where explicit and implicit messages extolling the virtues of Mahatma Gandhi and independence were conveyed to the audience. As the film industry bloomed, some films were perceived by the erstwhile British rulers as possessing seditious content. The authorities clamped down on some "objectionable" films, a notable example being the Tamil film *Thyaga Bhoomi* (Land of Sacrifice) made in

1938. It was written originally for the screen by "Kalki" Krishnamurthy and serialised in the Tamil journal *Ananda Vikatan*. The film directed by K. Subramanyam spoke eloquently against oppression of women as well as against British rule.

The advent of Independence and the early post-Independence years saw cinema and politics take different directions in North India. Though there was some political content in certain movies, there was no overt politicisation. Likewise, a few movie stars did get involved in politics but never played a pivotal role. While in recent times many are involved in election campaigns, and are essentially ornaments for the respective political parties.

However, in South India, and particularly in Tamil Nadu, politics and cinema are inextricably intertwined in a big way. The larger-than-life image of actors like N.S. Krishnan, M.G. Ramachandran, Sivaji Ganeshan, N.T. Rama Rao, and now Jayalalitha, dominated the political scene. Political leaders like the present Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi and his mentor C.N. Annadurai also came in from careers in cinema, as screen-play and dialogue writers.

Unlike in the north, Tamil film stars served as integral component of their parties. In most cases, they were the 'stars' around whom their parties revolved. Significantly, from 1967, every single chief minister in Tamil Nadu has been a personality with connections to the silver screen.

Dramatis personae

With a population of 55 million (only five million of them non-Tamilian), Tamil Nadu has the third highest literacy rate among the states of India. The state is also

home to India's original rationalist movement, started by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar). Known as the *Suyamariyaathai Iyakkam*, or Self-Respect Movement, it promoted healthy political protest against caste oppression, the imposition of Hindi as national language and superstition in religion. Periyar also founded the Dravida Kazhaghham or Dravidian Party in 1943, to which both today's ruling party and chief opposition trace their lineage.

In spite of this "Dravidian" heritage of rationalism and self-respect, it is Tamil Nadu that has allowed film stars to exercise political hegemony like no other. In 1977, M.G. Ramachandran became the first film star to take up chief ministership of an Indian state. N.T. Rama Rao followed suit in adjoining Andhra Pradesh in 1982. In North India, film personalities were elected to Parliament, but never became chief ministers or cabinet ministers.

In Tamil Nadu, MGR was succeeded briefly by his wife Janaki Ramachandran who was herself a former film heroine. Then came Jayalalitha Jayaram, MGR's 'leading' lady with whom he had starred in 30 films. She ruled from 1991 to 1996 as chief minister and is now a formidable opposition leader. As a Tamil wag put it, "MGR is the only actor chief minister who ensured that his actor wife as well as actor paramour succeed him as CM."

Even the last parliamentary election campaign had a whole crop of film stars canvassing for parties in Tamil Nadu. Presently, the DMK has Sarathkumar, Napoleon, Vijayakanth, Radhika, Thiyagu, Pandian and Chandra-sekhar. The last mentioned was also a party candidate in Dindigul, while Sarathkumar

contested for the present parliament, only to lose narrowly. The AIADMK has Ramarajan, former Member of Parliament, as also Thavakkalai, Kundu Kalyanam, Radharavi and S.S. Chandran. The Congress has Jayachitra and Maya, and the BJP stars Vijayshanthi, Gautami, Sowcar Janaki, and S.V. Shekhar, besides Vyjayanthimala who crossed over from the Congress recently.

In addition to this cast, there are others with film connections like the DMK chief Karunanidhi, who is a well-known stage actor and film script writer. His nephew and cabinet minister M.K. Maran is also a former film script writer. Karunanidhi's son and Madras Mayor M.K. Stalin too has dabbled in acting, as hero of a TV serial. State legislator and DMK propaganda secretary T. Rajendar is an actor-director. Then there is the glamorous Jayalalitha who played a role on the national stage and brought down the BJP government last year.

History as storyline

The role of cinema in the political history of Tamil Nadu provides interesting insights into present-day developments. The politics of Tamil Nadu for the past 60 years has been pervaded by notions of the Aryan-Dravidian divide. This concept itself is not very scientific and has been greatly mythologised. Nevertheless, this consciousness has helped politicise significant sections of the Tamil masses and has sustained whole political parties and movements.

According to its proponents, the original inhabitants of India were the Dravidians and it was the invading Aryans who took over the north and pushed the Dravidians southward. In addition, the Aryans also imposed their caste structure on the Dravidians, who had until then a classless society. This hierarchy placed the Brahmins on top. Dravidian ideologues maintained that Tamil Brahmins were not Tamil even though they spoke the language, but were alien Aryan relics. While its social reform platform was quite pro-



Chief Minister Karunanidhi, the flowery script writer.

gressive, the Dravidian movement's crude version of the Aryan-Dravidian interface and its venomous antipathy towards Tamil Brahmins left much to be desired.

Socio-historical reasons had enabled the Brahmins to remain the ruling elite in the state. They were better educated and dominated most fields, including the professions. In addition there was the stamp of authority provided by orthodox Hinduism. The emerging non-Brahmin elites chose to adopt the Dravidian ideology to overthrow what they saw as Brahminic hegemony. The clearly perceived position of power that the numerically inferior Brahmins enjoyed, made them vulnerable targets. The democratic process made easy the mobilisation of non-Brahmin caste groups on the basis of the Dravidian ideology.

Dravidian languages are 19 in all, of which Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada are the most prominent. Interestingly, there were few takers for the "Dravidian" ideology among the other South Indian states of Andhra Pradesh (Telugu), Kerala (Malayalam) and Karnataka (Kannada). However, it took firm root in Tamil Nadu. The original political demand of the Dravidian parties was a Dravidian state comprising present-day Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa. It later modified itself into a secessionist movement, focused on Tamil Nadu alone. It was only after the 1962 war with China that the DMK dropped its separatist demand in the interests of national unity and security. It now agitates for greater autonomy within

the Indian union.

Periyar's Dravidian movement was opposed to participation in politics. It was also very much under his autocratic control. A group of dissidents, including Karunanidhi, revolted under the leadership of Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai and formed the DMK in 1949. Starting out as a social reform movement, the DMK later decided that change was impossible without capturing political power through democratic means. In 1957, the DMK decided to enter electoral politics and secured 15 seats in the state assembly and two in Parliament. In 1962, the figure went up to 50 in the state assembly and eight in Parliament. 1967 saw it capture power for the first time when it got 138 out of the 234 seats in the state. The DMK also won all the seats (25) it contested for the Lok Sabha. In 1971, the party registered a landslide victory when it captured 184 seats in the state and 23 in Parliament. The party seemed invincible.

Screenplay and dialogue

But 1972 saw a major split. The DMK's chief vote gatherer and matinee idol Maruthoor Gopalamenon Ramachandran, or MGR, broke away from the party and floated his own that year. He named it after Annadurai and called it Anna DMK. MGR's party won three elections in succession, securing 125 seats in 1977, 130 in 1980 and 125 in 1984. Karunanidhi had to remain content as opposition leader for 11 years. When MGR died in 1987 December, his wife Janaki succeeded him. But the government fell after one month due to Congress machinations. With MGR's leading lady and then propaganda secretary Jayalalitha also staking her claim to party leadership, a split resulted. In 1989, a divided ADMK contested as two factions led by Janaki and Jayalalitha. The Janaki faction (one seat) was trounced by Jayalalitha (24 seats) but the DMK under Karunanidhi romped home the winner. Af-

ter Rajiv Gandhi's death, the Jayalalitha-Congress combine routed the DMK. Only its leader, Karunanidhi, managed to win. In 1996, the DMK was returned to power and still retains it.

The brief account of the power struggle and its results within Tamil Nadu outlines the vicissitudes of the Dravidian parties in the past years. Of interest in all this is the role played by films and film personalities. It was the DMK that first attempted to use cinema for propaganda. Annadurai had once said that if it takes 10,000 political meetings to convey one message, it only takes one single 'hit' movie to deliver the same. He and his disciple Karunanidhi set out on that venture. Films scripted by Annadurai like *Velaikkaari* and *Oriravu* were well-received, and its political content made great impact. But it was Karunanidhi who really hit it big as script-writer.

Karunanidhi developed a writing style that was flowery and alliterative, and it soon became very popular. Courtroom scenes, inquiries in royal courts in historical movies and short dramas introduced into films that had a modern setting, provided ample scope for Karunanidhi's captivating prose. His reputation had producers advertising their movies by proclaiming, "Story and Dialogue by Kalaingar (Artiste) M. Karunanidhi". When film titles were projected in the cinema halls, his name would be shown ahead of the stars and greeted with applause. There were others to follow Karunanidhi in both content and style—Aasaithamby, Krishnaswamy, Maaran and Kannadasan.

It also spawned a school of actors who could effectively mouth the lines of the script-writers. One of the early greats was the comedian N.S. Krishnan, known as *Kalaivaanan*, who made the audience both laugh and think. Krishnan was followed by a host of "Dravidian School" actors like K.R. Ramaswamy, M.R. Radha, T.V. Narayanaswamy, S.S. Rajendran (SSR) and Sivaji Ganeshan. The



Jayalalitha and MGR: the lovers who became chief ministers.

last two in particular were able to deliver the fiery prose of Karunanidhi with great conviction and style. The Karunanidhi-Ganeshan combo was a great success, churning out money spinners like *Parasakthy*, *Thirumbi Paar*, *Manohara*, *Kuravanchi* and *Raja Rani*, which ran solely on account of the dialogue and delivery.

Personal differences arose between Ganeshan and Karunanidhi, and Ganeshan crossed over to the Congress. To make up for Ganeshan, Karunanidhi, whose dialogues were increasingly getting political, weaned an actor from the Congress camp into the DMK fold. This was M.G. Ramachandran, until then a popular hero playing swashbuckling action roles.

When the DMK began using actors for political propaganda, the Congress leader Kamaraj dismissed them derisively as *Koothaadigal* (performers). Congress stalwarts argued that those wearing make-up should not enter politics. But the Congress had to soon change roles and rely on people like Sivaji Ganeshan and Kannadasan who had crossed over from the DMK.

Reelpolitik

Even as filmstars were used for political propaganda, they were using politics for their personal advancement. M.G. Ramachandran himself was constructing and consolidating a personal political base. Even when he starred in films not written by DMK ideologues, the lines he got carried hidden political meaning. An example was the constant reference to the rising sun, the DMK symbol. In colour productions, he would wear the party colours, black and red. Gradually, MGR's screen persona started reflecting the DMK's image. The difference between reality and make-believe blurred, while he continued to pull crowds. As Annadurai once said of MGR, "*Sollukku pathu latcham. Mugathukku muppathu latcham.*" (One million votes for his speech. Three million for his face.)

In his roles, MGR always took up

for the underdog, fighting oppression and injustice. He took special care to project a social message in most songs, and took care to act in different roles so that different segments of the population could relate to and identify with him. The movies, titled simply but astutely, in which he played lead roles include *Padagotti* (Boatman), *Meenava Nanban* (Fisherman Friend), *Thoilaali* (Worker), *Vivasayee* (Agriculturist), *Rickshawakaran* (Rickshawalla) and so on. These occupational groups began treating MGR as one of their own.

So powerful and lasting has been the MGR legacy that, 12 years after his death, the crowd cheered madly when Sonia Gandhi merely mentioned his name at an election meeting in Tamil Nadu.

A unique feature of the relationship between the movie stars of the Indian south and their fans was the proliferation of fan clubs. These clubs would hold special pujas in temples whenever a new movie of their matinee idol was released. M.G. Ramachandran probably encouraged the phenomenon of fan clubs from late 1940s onwards, and the clubs ended up as a well-knit federation that counted its membership in the millions. The clubs held annual conventions and also participated in social service projects.

When MGR entered active politics, his fan clubs were in turn politicised and soon became an indispensable component of the DMK propaganda machine. Meanwhile, S.S. Rajendran's fans too were involved in politics for the DMK, and were countered by Sivaji Ganeshan's fan clubs which campaigned for the Congress. Both spheres mutually reinforced each other—film popularity providing political mileage and political positions strengthening film popularity.

It was not long before they were rewarded with political office. M.G. Ramachandran was made first an Upper House member of the state legislature. Later he contested the state Assembly elections directly and won continuously until his death.

S.S. Rajendran also contested the Assembly polls and won; he was later elected to the Rajya Sabha. Sivaji Ganeshan, too, was a Rajya Sabha member for the Congress party. By now, a host of film stars in Tamil Nadu were involved in politics during election time, but not wielding the same clout as the leading stars.

The popularity of MGR within the party and state caused major convulsions. In a bid to counteract the phenomenon, Karunanidhi encouraged his son M.K. Muthu to enter movies. The father, while in office as chief minister, wrote the story and dialogue for Muthu's first film *Pillaiyo Pillai* (Oh, What a Son). Muthu Fan clubs were set up overnight, with father Karunanidhi's backing.

MGR, realising what was in store, engineered a split within the party on the grounds of corruption charges against the incumbent regime. Incidentally, MGR did not have any problems in setting up new party structures—he merely converted his fan clubs into party branches.

The MGR phenomenon was no doubt unique, and his mystique continues its hold over Tamil psyche even today. Before his death, he had come to personify the aspirations of the common people but as more than just a symbol. As political leader, he was also seen as a vehicle for realising their dreams.

The all-India release

Jayalalitha symbolises the transition from the MGR era to the present. It was MGR who had, as chief minister, introduced his former leading lady into politics. As propaganda secretary of the party and Rajya Sabha member, she soon established her power base within the party and emerged as an extra-constitutional authority in the state.

Jayalalitha went on to become chief minister and ruled from 1991 to 1996. She too set up a fan club network called the *Jayalalitha Peravai* (Federation). Her reign was marked by unbridled corruption, abuse of power and a vulgar display

of ill-gotten wealth. Her downfall came in 1996, when several cases of corruption were filed against her. But she was far from out, and in the previous general elections, the coalition led by Jayalalitha won handsomely in association with the BJP.

Jayalalitha thus emerged as a key player on the national scene and enjoyed immense power. Yet the events that followed were akin to a cheap masala movie where the vamp makes everybody dance to her tune. In a bid to get the cases against her dismissed, Jayalalitha brought extreme pressure to bear on the BJP government at the centre by regularly throwing tantrums. Finally, in alliance with Sonia Gandhi, she brought down the very same BJP she propped up earlier. She is now aligned with Sonia but there are signs of cracks in this alliance.

Thus, the peculiar Tamil phenomenon of movie politics affected national politics as a whole. This

may have been cinema's high point, as far as politics goes. But with the dilution of Dravidian politics over the years, there is some expectation that the dominance of cinema in politics will get progressively weaker.

This possibility, however, may be offset by the increasing Rajnikanth hype in the state. The rationale for Rajni's entry into politics is simply opposition to the politics of Jayalalitha. (In a recent hit film, he even had a female character largely modelled on Jayalalitha.) Rajnikanth is the reigning Tamil superstar, whose hold over the masses is reminiscent of MGR's. He has a massive fan club behind him, which is exerting enormous pressure on him to enter active politics. Though not actively involved in politics, Rajnikanth openly appealed to voters in 1996 and 1998 on behalf of the DMK alliance. At present, he has adopted a neutral stance because

the original alliance between the DMK and the TMC (Tamil Maanila Congress) broke up.

Unlike the earlier Dravidian filmstar-politicians, Rajnikanth has a spiritual streak in him and takes his religion seriously. Analysts predict that if he enters the fray it may be on a Hindu nationalist platform, either in alliance with or as an integral part of the BJP.

Given Rajnikanth's current popularity and the continuing scenario of filmstars dominating election campaigns, there is every likelihood that Tamil cinema will continue to hold sway over the region's political future. Rajnikanth, however, signifies more than a mere continuum. The bus conductor from Bangalore is a shining example of individual achievement. Only that when he enters politics, he should not be selling those tickets.

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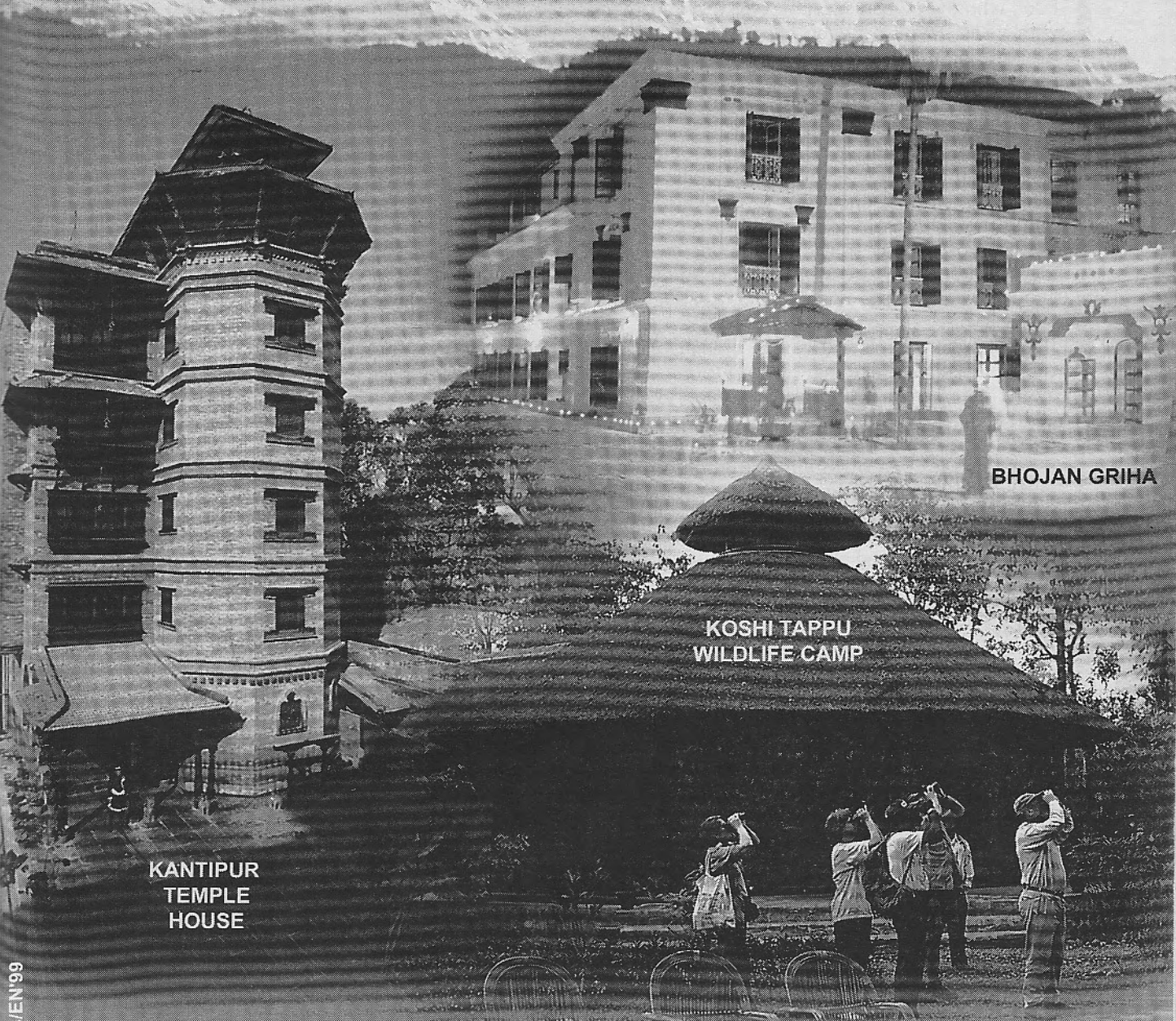
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RAJESH PILOT (1945-2000)

A 'national' leader

A **BOY** born to a poor Gujjar family used to cut grass from the great lawns around New Delhi's India Gate monument, to feed his family's buffaloes. He supplied milk in little cans to VIP bungalows where ministers and Members of Parliament were ensconced. In the end, he came to occupy one of the bungalows himself, as a youthful stalwart of the Congress Party.



COURTESY OUTLOOK

This boy-who-studied-under-the-streetlamps-made-good story was no myth. It was lived by Rajesh Pilot, who died when a jeep he was driving collided with a Rajasthan Roadways bus on 11 June, robbing his party of a rare breed of a leader. Pilot, who took his name after service in the Indian Air Force, was a national leader of India who was unique because he had dynamism, integrity, as well as a mass base.

In a moribund party given to a culture of sycophancy before the altar of dynasty, Pilot provided a fresh breeze. He spoke his mind, knowing that while the short-term exigencies of inter-personal rivalry would deny him the positions he wanted, the long term turn-of-wheel would be in his favour. Unfortunately, he was not to live long enough for the wheel to turn.

The most recent and running *cause celebre*, of course, was Pilot's willingness to put himself up as a candidate for the party president's post after Sonia Gandhi had decided to take over the reins. In a political arena where the open declaration of intention and ambition is frowned upon, he unhesitatingly declared on BBC's Hard Talk that he would like to be prime minister some day.

Whether he would have been able to revive the democratic traditions of the more-than-century-old

party, and rejuvenate its ranks to present a viable liberal alternative to the right-wing Hindu-centric BJP, will now always remain unanswered. But there can be no doubt that he tried, and that he would have been the one.

The hands-on, direct approach was always visible even in Pilot's years of wielding political power. As Minister of

State for Internal Security, he entered into dialogue with discontented Kashmiri leaders. In the words of one senior official who worked with him then, "Rajesh Pilot was the only Central leader who could walk boldly into downtown Srinagar and militancy infested parts of the Valley, mixing with people, ascertaining their views."

The talk of the future of Kashmir is once again hotting up, and just a day before he was killed, Pilot had spoken to the press strongly opposing a proposed scheme of partitioning Kashmir on religious lines into Jammu, Leh-Ladakh and the Kashmir Valley. At the other troubled end of India, Pilot had initiated talks with militants in the Northeast and helped the negotiations along even while out of power.

Clearly, here was a man who understood the hopes and aspirations of all India. As stresses and strains of rising aspirations buffet the nation-state of India, Rajesh Pilot's would have been a presence to guide a country where the term 'national leader' has become an anachronism. Pilot's drive and energy were infectious. He liked to get things moving even if he disturbed the status quo and ruffled a few feathers in the bargain. Characteristically, on the fateful day of the accident, Pilot was at the wheel.

- **Mitu Varma**

FOR THE besieged Christian community in India, there was more bad news last month, although at least this one had nothing do with Hindu fundamentalists. In a sad turn of fate, Alan Basil de Lastic, the Archbishop of New Delhi, met his end in a car accident in the Polish capital of Warsaw, on 20 June. The late Lastic was also the president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India.

ALAN BASIL DE LASTIC

Final calling



In what were to be his last days, the man of the cloth was terribly concerned about the wellbeing of his flock, given the rumblings of violence against Christians by extremist Hindu groups. In his last interview, the priest had told the

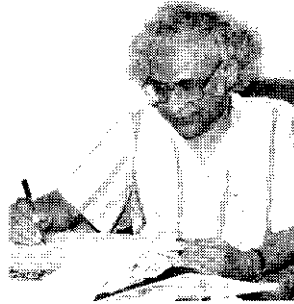
magazine *Outlook*, "Today I feel ashamed to be an Indian. When I see what is happening to the Christian community I worry about India's future."

One of the last meetings of the priest was with the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, when he led a delegation of the Christian community to apprise the leader of the wrongs being perpetrated on India's Christians. Whether that meeting would go some way in reining in the saffron fundamentalists, is anybody's guess. If it does, at least up there, Alan Basil de Lastic, would not feel ashamed of having been an Indian.

AZIZ SIDDIQUI (1934-2000)

Boy from Hyderabad, Deccan

A FATAL heart attack on 7 June in Lahore deprived Pakistan of a journalist and human rights activist who was a guide, mentor, and inspiration to so many. Aziz Siddiqui, Joint Director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and a former editor of two national dailies, was a staunch supporter of India-Pakistan peace and forceful opponent of the nuclear policies of the two countries.



Away in Dubai for five years editing the *Gulf News*, Siddiqui returned to Pakistan in 1985 to edit *The Frontier Post* in Peshawar. This small-town newspaper shot to prominence for the quality of its copy, and as the biggest irritant to the military regime of General Ziaul Haq. Siddiqui and his family were harassed and their house raided by government intelligence. He was forced to resign in 1988 when the owners could no longer withstand pressures from the Zia government.

On 20 February, he wrote in his column: "If it reads the lay of the land correctly, Islamabad should offer no grist to BJP mills. There is no cowardice in helping cool down the temperature a bit. The worst thing that can happen just now is for the Indians to be given an excuse to cross the international border or the line of control. We may be able in that case to 'teach them a lesson', but we should not be too keen on any 'lesson' that may come our own way. Let's face it, we can afford a war—any kind of war—much less than the Indians. The bravado of the so-called *jehadi* groups will also therefore have to be curbed. Islamabad has to be wary about piling new pressures."

After Zia's death, and the election of Benazir Bhutto as prime minister, in 1989 Siddiqui was appointed editor of *The Pakistan Times*, by then a government newspaper. True to form, he continued to criticise official policies he saw to be misguided. He resigned, along with I.A. Rehman who was chief editor, when the Benazir government was dismissed in August 1990. Crusading lawyer Asma Jhangir was quick to welcome both the stalwarts to join the HRCP. Journalism remained Siddiqui Saab's first love, one that he left reluctantly only because there was no room for someone like him. In a press that thrives on speculation and unsupported reportage, Siddiqui's analytical abilities and balanced presentations were prized.

Born on 26 January 1934 in Hyderabad, Deccan, Aziz Siddiqui did his Junior Cambridge from Hyderabad Deccan Grammar School and Intermediate from Lucknow, completing his Bachelors and Masters after moving to Karachi. He started his career as a school teacher in Karachi, and also worked with the Government of Pakistan in various publishing and research capacities till joining the *Pakistan Times* as assistant editor in 1967.

When he passed away at age 66, Siddiqui was at his intellectual prime, as was clear from his introduction to the latest HRCP annual report, which he used to compile and edit. He wrote, "The forces of status quo and retrogression are still strong and can become stronger, while the process of people finding their voice is slow. But this process can be speeded up, and it makes a difference because it has a ripple effect. Improvements in the state of human rights in the next decade, and even in the direction this country takes over that period, will depend on that more than on any other factor. It will depend, in short, on the basic good sense of the people finding a way to assert itself."

An active trade unionist, Siddiqui went on a hunger-strike in 1970 to press for better wages for journalists, and against the repressive Press and Publication Ordinance of 1963. He was fired, along with colleagues like I. A. Rehman, Tahir Mirza and Abdullah Malik. The expelled newsmen were re-employed in 1971 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's newly elected Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government. Siddiqui agitated against the management of *Musawaat*, the PPP mouthpiece, and was jailed in 1974 for his efforts.

When a journalist colleague went to him and expressed her frustration that no amount of hard work seemed to make a difference in the long run, Siddiqui Sahib looked up bemused, held his pipe away, and replied, "*Phir kiya karain? Hathyar daal dein?*" (So what should we do? Surrender arms?) Siddiqui Sahib himself never surrendered arms, writing with courage and conviction on what is wrong with Pakistan today.

During Gen Ziaul Haq's regime, Siddiqui's was a regular presence in the protest rallies on The Mall of Lahore. When the protest movement shifted to Karachi, he went to the port city. His wife Shahida, a teacher, supported him in his unionist crusade and participated in the rallies.

- Beena Sarwar

Peace season in Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir's activists dare to prefer a 'just' peace to peace without justice.

by *Tapan Bose and Rita Manchanda*

Why didn't you Indians come before?" demanded the young Kashmiri lawyer. He was addressing a room packed with civil society activists from various parts of India who had come to Srinagar to enter into the first-ever dialogue with their counterparts in Jammu and Kashmir. After 11 years of silence and deepening distrust, educationists, doctors, psychologists, journalists, film-makers, human rights workers, social and political activists, lawyers and retired civil and armed forces personnel, had come as concerned citizens to link up with the activists of Jammu and Kashmir fighting for justice, peace and human rights.

Such an angry outburst was to be expected, for many of the activists who were in the forefront of struggles for substantive democracy and human rights in India, had incongruously chosen to remain silent on injustices suffered by Kashmir's civilians. "Why have you come now, to rub balm on the wounds made by your security forces," asked a Kashmir University teacher. What the Kashmiri activists wanted was not relief but partnership against the all-engulfing violence.

The tone for this meeting of Kashmiri activists and professionals from various parts of India was

set by an elegiac poem by G N Gauhar contrasting the fabled beauty of the Valley with a land now become barren, houses burnt, children killed, and a place where women no longer laugh. The Kashmiri participants did most of the talking, for it was their voice, silenced for so long, which had to be transported. Their problem was the systematic denial of justice by the Indian State and the total collapse of all social delivery systems. New Delhi may insistently claim that the UN Security Council Resolution on plebiscite was no longer valid, but as the J & K Bar Association Chairman, Zafar A Shah passionately avowed, most Kashmiris still believe that the political status of Jammu and Kashmir was not a settled issue. Even now, he said, the hearts of the Kashmiris could be touched "if India would fly its national flag at half mast for a fortnight in recognition of the suffering of the Kashmiri people".

Victim's perspective

The "victim's perspective" was necessarily different from that of the "non-victim", as was clear from the two days of remarkably candid exchanges in Srinagar, on 10 and 11 June.

Parveena Ahangar, sometimes

stoical and at other times passionately emotional, spoke of the trauma of families who lost their members to the void. An uneducated housewife, Parveena is the founder of the Association of the Parents of the Disappeared. After her young son Javed had disappeared, she mobilised other similarly bereaved women to make a collective demand for justice



from the Indian state.

For most of the participants from various parts of India, this was their first exposure to the human face of the Kashmir story. The killing of Rafiq Bakal, a local shopkeeper of

Lal Chowk, by the Border Security Force under very questionable circumstances, brought home the nature of arbitrary terror which stalks ordinary civilians in the very heart of Srinagar. As they commiserated with the dead man's young wife and elderly mother, educationist Lalita Ramdas and Admiral Ramdas, former chief of the Indian Navy, tasted the rage, frustration and the overwhelming sense of insecurity of civilians. "Sister, in how many houses will you weep," said an elderly relative to a weeping Lalita Ramdas.

The meeting in Srinagar was organised in the belief that there could be no significant political movement forward unless the struggle for human rights and justice in Jammu and Kashmir was linked with the struggle for human rights and justice in the various parts of India.

Among other things, the Srinagar meeting of 90 civil society members, deliberated on how to help community level activists in Jammu and Kashmir to cope with the traumatic impact of violence on their society. A Jammu and Kashmir Federation of

Civil Society Organisations (JKFSCO) was established, in an effort to rebuild the social capital which has been destroyed by militant extremism and state terror. The Federation represents about 20 civil society groups representing business and commercial interests, lawyers, doctors, teachers, environmentalists, human rights activists, women and child rights activists, writers, poets, and trade unions of Jammu and Kashmir.

In a place where the government agencies ruthlessly suppress any popular expression of dissent and where militant organisations are suspicious of every civil society initiative, forming an independent organisation such as this was of course fraught with risk. Reciting the list of human rights activists killed in Kashmir, senior advocate G N Hagroo candidly admitted that they would never have dared to speak up, let alone organise a civil society meeting, without the demonstrated solidarity of civil society groups from the various parts of India.

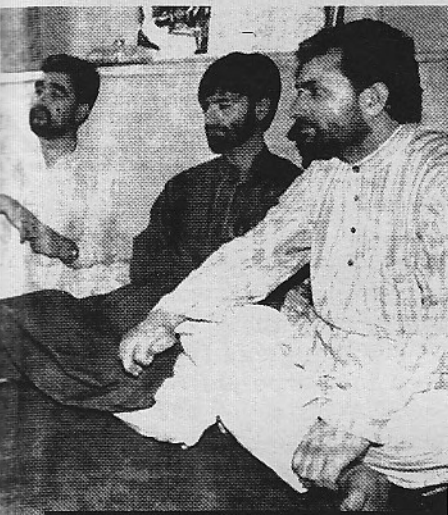
Since 1990, when the upsurge in popular protest morphed into militancy, the 'Kashmir issue' has been appropriated by militarised nationalism on both sides of the border. In Pakistan, the religious right appropriated the arena, claiming that "protecting the honour of Muslim brothers and sisters and recovering their homeland from foreign oppressors" was the "sacred" duty of every Muslim, and therefore, that of the Pakistani State. In India, both the religious right and the secular nationalists projected the struggle of the Kashmiri people as an assault on the integrity of the nation and/or its secularism. These external considerations so forcefully impacted Kashmiri polity that the struggle got militarised, and popular opinion was left out in the cold. Elsewhere in India and Pakistan, the activists struggling for substantive democracy and genuine reforms shied away from engaging with the Kashmiri struggle, anxious to avoid entrapment in the manipulative politics of militarised nationalism.

This was how the Kashmiris were left to suffer for themselves.

Clearly, there is a peace season brewing in Srinagar. Just a week before the Federation was formed, there was a 'track two' conclave in Srinagar attended by political leaders, retired foreign secretaries, and journalists associated with influential Indian publications. At the same time, the demands for autonomy from India were being pressed forcefully by Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, even though this was seen by Kashmiri activists as a cynical attempt to divert attention from his government's incapacities.

The Srinagar civil society initiative was significant also because it emphasises the importance of democratic process in realising a 'just' peace at a time when there is a growing number of interventions to impose a peace *without* justice. For example, there was common cause among the participants against a partition-based settlement for Jammu and Kashmir. Veteran editor Ved Bhasin and the ideologue of Kashmir's multiple identity, Balraj Puri, both vehemently opposed any division along "religious, sectarian or regional lines". Indeed, the bloody partition of the Subcontinent was never far from the thoughts of those present, since no region of Jammu and Kashmir is without a minority.

The decision by the Kashmiri activists to set up a federation to speak in unison for justice and human rights is, both bold and ambitious. The Srinagar meeting recognised that reconciliation requires the victims and survivors to be heard, and that their stories, their emotions, and the facts on the ground be acknowledged. There has to be the space created in our minds to hear and be moved by Naseem Shafiq's poem of the lament of a Mother and Seven Daughters whose only son/brother was taken away by the security forces, in the midst of a wedding revelry. Why? Because there was too much gaiety, too much noise. ▽



THE ASIAN AGE

A different kind of a dialogue:
Jagadguru Shankaracharya Swami
Nischalanand Saraswati talking to
Jammu and Kashmir Liberation
Front leaders (from right to left)
Javed Mir, Yaseen Malik and
Bashir Bhat.

Little

THANK YOU for finding us. We, the little people, will continue to be amazed at every fresh glance that comes our way—because we are not in the business of collecting eyeballs. That's the job of big magazines and bigger newspapers, with big marketing wisdom and big money. We, with none of the above, are happy with just your mind.

Sure, it's tough to find these days, you can't quite remember where you put it last. Never mind. It'll come back to you, by and by.

You'll need it. The minds-free, automatic nirvana that we have got used to is a sexy but badly-constructed lie. Reality is infinitely less sexy, embarrassingly more persistent. It seeps through in the shape of the stereotype beggar-urchin at the stop lights, the bright, depressing fervour with which we are assured that the beggar-urchin is an irrelevant stereotype, the small, everyday incidents which urge us to turn the other way, if not the other cheek, the little single-column items buried in the newspapers which tell the real story of our part of the world.

We can't afford slick, mass-produced dreams. So we have decided to make our own demotic version. Feel free to join us.

FROM THE INTRODUCTORY EDITORIAL IN *THE LITTLE MAGAZINE*, NEW DELHI.



Lest there be any confusion the reader should know that, by an act of Parliament passed in 1976, there is one and only one allowed road-map, prepared by the Curriculum Wing of the Federal Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan.

The usefulness of having a national curriculum was soon recognised by General Zia-ul-Haq. In 1981 he decreed that henceforth Pakistani education was to be totally redefined and history rewritten according

to his vision of Pakistan. From now on the struggle for Pakistan was no longer to be shown as a victorious struggle for a Muslim homeland. Instead, it was to be depicted as the movement for an Islamic state run according to Islamic law. Even if it conflicted with reality, the heroes of the Pakistan movement—Jinnah, Iqbal, Syed Ahmed Khan—were to be projected as Islamic heroes. Furthermore all subjects, including the sciences, were to be speedily Islamised.

Two decades later, the mindset of the Zia era, and the release of a pent-up religious rage, continues to be reflected in Pakistan's currently enforced curriculum objectives [see Box] for primary school children. Sadly, while many Pakistanis are aware that there is something wrong with the nature of our schooling, only a few have access to public documents such as those reproduced here and which expose us to international shame, condemnation, and ridicule. [Interestingly, in the foreword, this Curriculum Document acknowledges that "support was provided by international organisations, in particular UNICEF, USAID, GTZ, and World Bank". Shame on them!]

Consider the impact of the national curriculum objectives on a 12-year-old child in his last year of primary school. Instead of a future that is joyous, and a peaceful country that offers hope to all, he is told that life is actually about battling invisible enemies. Fear is ever-present because beneath every stone lurks a venomous snake and Pakistan is under the siege of sinister forces which the child must learn to acknowledge, identify, and fight to death. What mental space can remain for this child's innocence when he or she must learn to make speeches on *jihād* and martyrdom? And what scope exists for being tolerant and accepting of beliefs other than your own?

Consider the kind of people the national curriculum seeks to install as role models. They are not scholars and poets or scientists, nor people like Abdus Sattar Edhi or others who have struggled for the rights of others. Instead they are policemen, national guards, and soldiers. The child must collect their pictures, revere them, perhaps kiss them. His visits to police stations—where rapes, tortures, and deaths in custody occur so routinely as to be unremarkable—is expected to imbue him with the spirit of humanism and patriotism. Is a greater perversion of human values really possible?

Some of the curriculum objectives present more than just a slight difficulty of implementation. To "demonstrate by actions a belief in the fear of Allah" certainly left me stumped, but surely some wise reader can think

Menace of education

FROM BRAIN size and hair colour to the shape and texture of toe-nails, every characteristic of an individual is totally determined by just two twisted strands of human DNA. A similar cultural DNA—a society's education system—contains within it the detailed genetic blueprint determining what that society is destined to become tomorrow. Forward oriented or fixated on the past, democratic or authoritarian, egalitarian or elitist, peaceful or violently engaged in civil strife—the choice between such options is made when one generation passes on to the next one its values and preferences.

So what are the values currently being transmitted and communicated in Pakistan's schools? Obviously there is some variation across rich and poor schools, between villages and cities, and across provinces. But the basic road-map is provided by the school curriculum.

Eid in Hindu kingdom

Happy Eid
Sulking, We Work
Biryani Missing
Muttonless
Boiled Vegetables in a Hindu Kingdom

A HAPPY EID GREETING SENT TO A BANGLADESHI COLLEAGUE BY A SRI LANKAN WORKING IN KATHMANDU.

EXCERPTS FROM CURRICULUM DOCUMENT FOR CLASSES K-V

National Bureau of Curriculum and Textbooks

Federal Ministry of Education, 1995, Government of Pakistan.

At the completion of Class-V, the child should be able to:

- "Acknowledge and identify forces that may be working against Pakistan." [pg 154]
- "Demonstrate by actions a belief in the fear of Allah." [pg154]
- "Make speeches on Jihad and Shahadat." [pg154]
- "Understand Hindu-Muslim differences and the resultant need for Pakistan." [pg154]
- "India's evil designs against Pakistan." [pg154]
- "Be safe from rumour mongers who spread false news." [pg158]
- "Visit police stations." [pg158]
- "Collect pictures of policemen, soldiers, and National Guards." [pg158]
- "Demonstrate respect for the leaders of Pakistan." [pg153]

in trains, how to demolish places of worship, they even exchange notes on surgical methods of extracting truths. But for some reason our officialdoms just don't see eyeball to eyeball.

All this cloak-and-dagger-in-the-back is nothing new to Nepali politics either, as poor Bhimsen Thapa found out to his grief. The extreme intrigue of the Nepal durbar in the 19th century is probably what kept the East India Company away, and spared us from being turned into a hill-station connected to the plains by a toy train.

The Company took one look at the conspiracy theorists in

Kathmandu, and said let's get the hell out of here, these guys are pros. Same with the Tibetan Army: they rode in as close as Nuwakot and then suddenly turned right around and galloped back to their high plateau. No point, they must have reasoned, trying to conquer a country that is so spooky.

But Calcutta did win the right to place a reagent in Kathmandu, the express purpose of which was to meddle, interfere, divide and rule. The present occupants of a partitioned Lazimpat carry on this grand tradition. And that was fine with everybody until the Other Guys wanted a piece of the action as well. Nepalis sort of got caught in the middle.

Be that as it may, and notwithstanding how we ourselves thrive on intrigue, it is a great honour to play host to such skulduggery. What deserving recognition of our ancestral conspirators that Nepal today can proudly call itself a hotbed for every intelligence agency worth its salt.

But I must say this. I have serious doubts about the IQ of foreign spooks who are reading these words over my shoulder even as we speak. (They also can't hold their drinks, and have bad breath.)

If the intelligence agents of one particular friendly country of one billion people located south of the border whose capital city is made up of two words beginning with the initials N and D were not oxymorons, they would have realised by now that their so-called secret report has actually united Nepalis like nothing else.

Not since ZeeNews revealed to the world that Mr Tamrakar was a hijacker have Nepalis bonded so well. Where are you, Binny? Haven't seen you around lately.

KUNDA DIXIT IN FUNNY SIDE UP
ROM NEPALI TIMES, KATHMANDU

of ways to grade a child on this. How it is possible to "be safe from rumour mongers who spread false news" is also beyond my intelligence to answer. As for the requirement to "demonstrate respect for the leaders of Pakistan", one presumes that on the morning of the 12 October 1999 coup, a model student had to present evidence of respect for Mr. Nawaz Sharif, and in the evening for General Musharraf.

PERVEZ HOODBHOY IN "THE MENACE OF EDUCATION:

WHAT ARE THEY TEACHING IN PAKISTANI SCHOOLS TODAY?"

FROM THE NEWS, 11 JUNE 2000.

I, Yes, I

THERE ARE people right here in Kathmandu who are miffed that Indian intelligence left out their names from the list of Pakistani agents in Nepal. They are hurt, their credibility has been shattered. Not being on this list means the Indians don't take you seriously. And if the Indians don't take you seriously in this country, you ain't nobody.

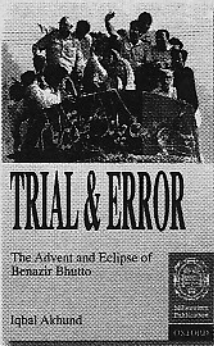
People take extreme care of their reputations around here. And there is nothing that bolsters a person's standing more than having it whispered in the Kathmandu cocktail circuit that you are a spook.

Welcome to the Kingdom of the Paranoid, where the national game is I Spy. We still have a clipping of a headline in an imaginative Kathmandu tabloid that once alleged that the then Indian Ambassador was a Pakistani double agent.

I really can't understand why, when ambassadors have diplomatic impunity and spies work so well together at the people-to-people level, their governments are at each other's throats. Extremists on both sides read the same text books: how to cause mayhem



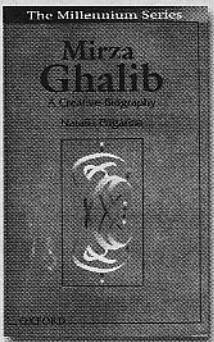
Books Received



Trial & Error: The Advent and Eclipse of Benazir Bhutto
by Iqbal Akhund
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000
pp xviii+346
ISBN 0 19 579160 6
Price not mentioned

Iqbal Akhund, who was Adviser on National Security and Foreign Affairs in Benazir Bhutto's first cabinet, describes the challenges and opportunities that faced Benazir's government during the 20-month transition from a waning dictatorship to an incipient democracy, and examines its successes and failures.

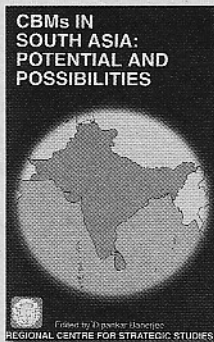
The book tries to strike a balance between the unrelenting criticism of Benazir's political adversaries, the adulation of her followers, and the disappointed hopes of her well-wishers.



Mirza Ghalib: A Creative Biography
by Natalia Prigarina (translated from the Russian by M. Osama Faruqi)
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000
pp xiii+361
ISBN 0 19 577945 2
Price not mentioned

This biography is based on the life and work of Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) who was arguably the greatest Eastern poet of the 19th century. Here two main motifs interweave—the poet's destiny, and his creative work. Seemingly ruled by fate and predetermination, the circumstances of his life resemble the plot of

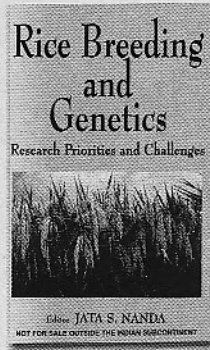
a detective story. His poetry reveals itself as a wonderful testimony of harmony, spiritual power, inner freedom, and intellectual capacity. The author acknowledges Ghalib's role as that of a frontrunner of modern literature in the Subcontinent, and believes that he represents classic world culture.



CBMs in South Asia: Potential and Possibilities
Edited by Dipankar Banerjee
Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, 2000
pp 183
ISBN 955 8051 13 6
Price not mentioned

This book is an outcome of a workshop held by the RCSS in January 2000. The first section of the book examines confidence-building measures in both the South Asian and Western contexts, highlighting all its pros and cons. The second part addresses

the military dimensions of the CBMs. In analyses by former and serving military officers from India, Pakistan and China, they examine from a practical perspective the nature of existing measures and their effectiveness. The next two sections, written by three senior experts from the region, bring out the enormous possibilities that economic engagement can bring to each country of South Asia. The last part culls the views of the participants at the Workshop, on their impressions about the potential and possibilities of CBMs in South Asia.



Rice Breeding and Genetics: Research Priorities and Challenges
Edited by Jata S. Nanda
Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 2000
pp viii+382
ISBN 81 204 1392 X
INR 850

This publication compiles research priorities in the field of genetics and plant breeding in order to enhance rice production to meet future challenges. With contributions from scientists of international repute, the book enumerates past achievements,

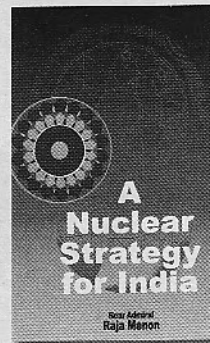
future prospects and possible approaches in the field of rice breeding and genetics.



From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report
Sage Publications India Private Limited, New Delhi, 2000
pp 277
ISBN 0 7619 9466 1
INR 295 (cloth)

The Kargil Review Committee was not set up to conduct an inquiry but to examine the sequence of events and make recommendations for the future. The report consists of 14 chapters, variously dealing with the historical background to the Indo-Pak conflict over Kashmir, to the role of the electronic and print media in dealing with the war. It also deals

with the Simla Agreement, India's Intelligence framework, and the budgetary trends in defence. This report is an important document for all those working in the fields of international relations, strategic and defence studies, and history.



A Nuclear Strategy for India
by Raja Menon
Sage Publications India Private Limited, New Delhi, 2000
pp 316
ISBN 81 7036 930 4 (India—Hardbound)
81 7036 937 1 (India—Paperback)
Price not mentioned

Perhaps the first effort to articulate a coherent nuclear strategy for India, the book begins by providing a framework that rests on a theory of international relations in which the use of force is postulated. Admiral Menon then discusses the experience of Western countries in acquiring tactical nuclear weapons and Indian criticisms of Western nuclear doctrines. This is followed by a discussion of India's journey into acquiring nuclear weapons which presents a coordinated analysis of the roles played by the military, the scientific establishment and diplomats combined with the technological and economic dimensions. The next two chapters are devoted to strategy, and the last chapter locates India's nuclear strategy in the international environment in the light of the 1998 nuclear test. The book will be of use to all those interested in the nuclear debate, strategic and military studies, international relations, science and technology studies, and contemporary Indian politics and diplomacy.

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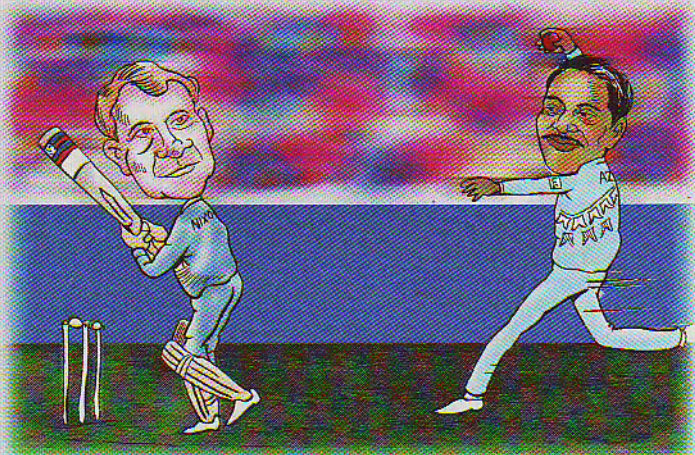
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As sure as taking it there yourself

RABIN SAVANI



Azhar, you need spin. (You need me.)

I am an intern at a PR agency. I also have select modelling experience. However, why I am writing to you is because I think I can help you. My experience at PR is limited. Fifteen days at the agency, but then I have a flair. Just like you once did.

You are the Richard Nixon of cricket. And my guess is that you are smart enough to know that. Yet, Azhar why do you let yourself fall into one media trap after the next? This way, just like Nixon, you will never win. Images stick, more strongly than charges. See how JFK could do no wrong; Nixon, poor guy; even his pet dog didn't like him.

The media has only you in mind when they talk about the ugly face of Indian cricket. The evidence against you is about as strong or nebulous as it is against Jadeja, Mongia and Kapil. Then why only you? Listen here:

Jadeja's image is of a spirited, charming sportsman, one who would have definitely taken the money, but not initiated the exchange. Jadeja has been able to reflect some of his mentor – Kapil Dev's – image. Furthermore Jadeja is royalty, and 'they' don't get their hands dirty.

Mongia is seen as the unhappy, suspicious kind, who knows he has done wrong but wants to do more of it. A true captain's boy, he did whatever his then captain or vice captain (you and Jadeja) plotted.

Kapil's is a story of sentiment and values gone

wrong. His image is that of the fallen idol, who forces upon the public a reluctant acceptance that nothing, in truth, is sacred. There is no anger, just a sense of sadness.

Azhar, you are the guy everyone wants to nail. The Fall Guy. You fit the bill. Married to a "seductress" who snatched you from your faithful first wife and kids, you are a self-professed lover of all things fast and beautiful – watches, cars, suits. You hate the media for hating you, and your carefully cultivated disgruntled persona is not helping any. You must realise that you are not in charge of public opinion, they are. And so you remain the Salim Malik of Indian cricket. Had you employed a team of spin-doctors, could you have emerged as the Wasim Akram of Indian cricket instead?

Would the charges have flown as thick and fast had you smiled and rejoiced in victory, and played with your kids in the viewing gallery at Sharjah?

This charge of religious persecution that you have levelled implies that the adulation you received was fake, and that cricket fans look at antecedents and religion rather than actual performance. Now this shows scant respect for the feelings of the average fan. You are saying that your fans liked you as long as you scored, now they hate you

because you are from a minority.

Nevertheless, it does seem that you get hit every time you open your mouth. Now, Kapil too says what he wants, but he just does not get the same flak. Gavaskar knew very well that he was admired, but never loved. So he stuck to not saying much, and didn't take on the media. You might say that Gavaskar and Kapil will get away with it because they are Hindus. But the betting mafia in Dubai cares as much about religion as the average cricket fan wilting in the sun in Eden Gardens.

Everything you do exaggerates your indifference, including the "all of you hate me anyway" posture. The fact is we Subcontinentals do not like sportsmen wearing Armani suits, gold watches and wasting their "youthful energy" on a tall film actress. Sport is pure, yogic, almost Spartan. Kapil has more wealth to splurge, yet the Haryana Jat wears his wealth in Switzerland, not Bombay. Why Azhar? Surely you've got to be asking yourself that.

What you need is a spin-doctor. I don't think it is too late. I can do wonders, and restore your image back to what it was after you scored three hundreds on a trot. Give me a try Azhar. Call me on that cellphone.

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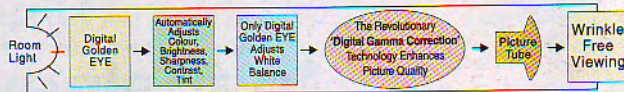


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