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# Tehelka

The People's Paper

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## THE GREAT INDIAN ROPE TRICK

EVERYBODY WAS WAITING FOR MANGAL PANDEY. JUST WHAT WENT WRONG WITH IT?

SHOBHAA DÉ

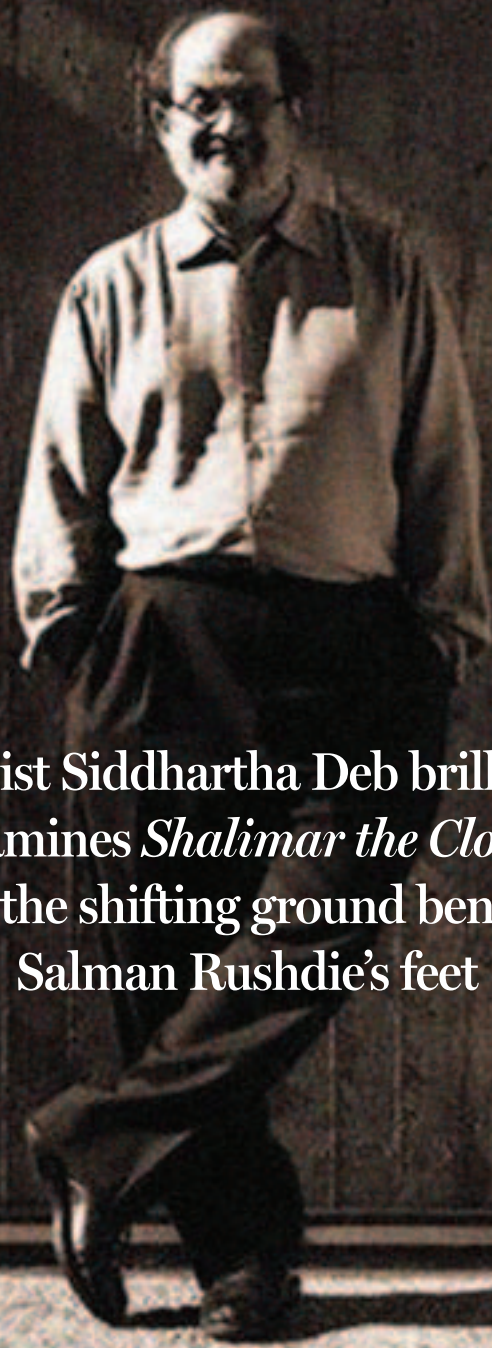
KETAN MEHTA

FARRUKH DHONDY



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## Fading Magic



Novelist Siddhartha Deb brilliantly examines *Shalimar the Clown* and the shifting ground beneath Salman Rushdie's feet

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### MANIPUR: TORN TO TORTURE BETWEEN THE VALLEY AND THE HILLS



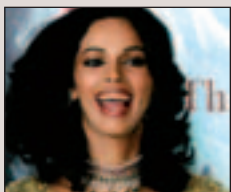
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#### CURRENT AFFAIRS

Is there a real problem between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA boss Sonia Gandhi on the Employment Guarantee Bill? **p4**

Backs to the wall, Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar take refuge in their constituencies **p6**



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The gym has become the new temple of the glamour industry replacing the beauty parlour **p15**

In the Land of Porn and Puritanism  
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THE CHILDREN OF CARNAGE, 1984 **p16-17**

#### INVESTIGATIONS

SCOT-FREE: THE KILLERS IN UNIFORM **p12**



## AAMIR, PRO AND CON



THANKS A lot for the four-page spread on my favourite star Aamir Khan (*The Star In His Trench*, TEHELKA, August 13). Khan comes across as a person who thinks, and of course he is very articulate. I especially liked his comments on being a Muslim in present day India. Like the rest of the Hindi film industry and in fact like any thinking Indian, he is obviously secular in belief and

action. Here's hoping *Mangal Pandey* goes down well with — the critics and the box office alike. I also hope Khan would learn to be more diplomatic like Shahrukh Khan, Saif Ali Khan and the likes.

LALITHA SUBRAMANIAN  
Chennai

AAMIR KHAN, in an exclusive interview to TEHELKA, says that he would have voiced his opinion on the Gujarat riots if he was a non-Muslim (*The Star In His Trench*, TEHELKA, August 13). I guess he wouldn't have had anything to say on Godhra. Aamir should be aware that it wasn't just the Muslims who were victims of the riots, even Hindus were victims. What worries me most is if a person of his stature thinks and speaks the way he does, what do we expect of the lesser mortals?

VARUN SONI  
varun.in@gmail.com

### WHY THIS CONCERN?

Why is everybody so concerned about the 1984 Sikh riots (*We, The Bloody People*, TEHELKA, August 20)? There have been many riots between the Hindus and Muslims after Partition, yet no commissions were set up after the riots, no concern shown for the families of victims and no compensation given. Is this not appeasement of Sikhs?

NARINDER K. SABHARWAL  
Gurgaon, Haryana

### PUNISH THE GUILTY

Refer to *We, The Bloody People* (TEHELKA, August 20). I am not pro-Congress or pro-BJP, but I just believe that the culprits of the 1984 riots should be punished.

M. KUMAR  
Delhi

### COURAGEOUS ACT

Most of the time we know what is the right thing to do, but we don't have the courage to do it. This courage comes from our values and convictions. Sonia knew she shouldn't be the prime minister and she had the courage to take this decision. Manmohan Singh has done a very courageous act by apologising to the nation on behalf of the Congress party for the massacre of 1984 (*We, The Bloody People*, TEHELKA, August 20). This may not be good politics but it is certainly good statesmanship. It's time Vajpayee too rose to the occasion and apologised for the massacre in Gujarat in 2002. Again, this will be good statesmanship.

PRANAV SACHDEVA  
New Delhi

### WHAT A SHAME!

Twenty-one years after the Sikh massacre, the Nanavati Commission report and the Action Taken Report are a complete letdown (*We, The Bloody*

has been caught till date. It would have been appreciated if the prime minister or Sonia Gandhi visited the victims' relatives the day the report was out.

MN AGGARWAL  
mnaggarwal@hotmail.com

### A GOOD READ

It has been a pleasure reading your paper for the past one year, and may I inform you that it is also read carefully by the youngest member of our family who will be turning 10 this November. We hope you will keep up the good work!

MEERA BUTALIA  
New Delhi

### THE 'D' WEDDING

Javed Miandad, a celebrity cricketer, and Dawood Ibrahim, a known criminal, are now close relatives (*Indecent Proposal*, TEHELKA, August 20). I did not expect a cricketer to marry his son into a criminal's family — the one who is an enemy of India. How can we forget the Bombay blasts? What also surprises me is that there is no reaction in Pakistan about this alliance. What does it show? That Pakistan considers him to be an asset?

ANUSHA SINGH  
New Delhi

### THE REAL PLOT

This is with reference to your cover story *The Hand That Swung The Lathi* (TEHELKA, August 13). After reading the

story one is reminded of Hindi movies where similar plots are hatched. Only TEHELKA has reported this story so far. Had this been reported by the media extensively, it would have helped expose corrupt politicians who use workers for their selfish gains.

VITULL K. GUPTA  
Bhatinda, Punjab

### A GREAT JOB

TEHELKA has done a great job by exposing the plot behind the Gurgaon lathicharge (*The Hand That Swung The Lathi*, TEHELKA, August 13).

A. JACOB SAHAYAM  
Thiruvananthapuram

### 'NOT MY ANHAD'

Thank you for the article *Midnight's Children No More* (TEHELKA, August 13). I would like to clarify a few things. I feel highly embarrassed at the phrase 'Shabnam Hashmi's Anhad'. Anhad would not have come into existence without the deep involvement of a lot of people including Prof KN Panikkar, Harsh Mander, Shubha Mudgal, Gauhar Raza, Kamal Bhasin, Ram Puniyani, K. Stalin, Saeed Mirza, Biju Mathew, Harsh Kapoor and many others, some of them being on the Trust and some not. Anhad cannot be and is not 'Shabnam Hashmi's'. Moreover, actor Aamir Khan did donate Rs 5 lakh to Anhad towards children's welfare and Anhad's peace and communal harmony activities. Only a part of the donation was used for the vehicle. Anhad has taken a loan of Rs 3.5 lakh from ICICI to pay for the vehicle.

SHABNAM HASHMI  
Anhad, New Delhi

## 'Did you check out the new Indian brand of administrative fabric? It is called Bombay Dying!'

DEEPINDER, Patiala, Punjab

## CONDEMNING TERROR IS NOT ENOUGH

RECENT ACTS of terror in the UK have brought forth comments from people across the globe. We have heard senior diplomats, including the ambassador of UK, comparing motives behind terror incidents in the UK and Nepal. Such comments must be attributed to their high regard for Nepal, as well as the cordial ties that Nepal enjoys with her friends worldwide.

Terrorism has been condemned by all thinking people in the strongest possible terms — a sentiment with which we could not agree more. But mere condemnation is insufficient. It would be more pertinent to evaluate actions taken by the state and the general public to see that such crimes are not allowed to be repeated.

Identifying and putting perpetrators of these crimes behind bars is easier said than done. Usually we never know how, when and where terrorists strikes are possible. Observers have also argued that the root cause of terrorism in Nepal lies in its poverty, social injustice and economic disparity. While this has certainly contributed to the growth of insurgents it cannot be taken as the root cause of terrorism itself. Terrorism in Nepal has been used by certain political groups as a means to accomplish goals and satisfy ambitions. What has been advocated by some diplomats and human rights activists as a popular support base of terrorists is actually nothing more than helpless individuals unable to flee terror and make a living elsewhere. Participants in recent retaliatory actions against terrorists in remote districts like Dailekh, Kapilbastu, Nawalparashi, Doti and Dhading of Nepal clearly bear out the fact that those remaining in the insurgency-hit villages are

mainly women, children and the elderly, who have very few choices — of either suffering the atrocities or of organising themselves into vigilante actions. Even cadres of terrorists who have left or defected from the group have confessed to being forced into joining the rebels for their own security or for those of their loved ones.

Nepal has long been poor but that does not mean that insurgency is directly related to poverty. Terrorism in Nepal grew because of the corrupt handling of political powers and because of total alienation of the common man from the political processes and governance. Issues of poverty and social inequalities can be addressed only through focussed development efforts involving the backward, marginalised and the repressed members of society whose voices had so far been disregarded. If at all they had other concerns than their lust for power and narrow self interests, political parties would carry out a deep introspection of their past performances and reform themselves to put the interest of the nation before their own. What we have seen so far does not indicate any willingness to change.

An assessment of the current situation in Nepal and recent developments like the laying down of arms by the Irish Republic Army bears out that the time is right for political parties and Maoists to come together to chart out a course for a truly democratic future of Nepal, strictly and sincerely committed to the interest of the nation rather than using the Royal Proclamation of February 1st as an excuse to regroup and reinforce their waning strengths and later to pursue their individual interests.

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news & analysis

Hold on a Hijacking

We have a policy, but who will work it and how?



BY HARTOSH SINGH BAL

IT IS good to know that this country finally has a hostage policy. But a policy is only as good as the people who implement it. Almost everyone analysing this policy has brought forth the spectre of the 9/11 attacks. As a policy it does ample posturing on a threat that this country has never faced. But it may make sense to examine the policy in light of a threat this country failed to face in a coherent manner — the hijacking of IC-814. Premise one of the policy is that in the event of a hijacking, the action taken will be determined by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and, when it cannot meet collectively, by the Prime Minister or the home/defence minister. Information that IC-814 was hijacked was available at 4.50pm on December 24, 1999. The Prime Minister was informed only at 5.20pm and the crisis management group gathered to meet only at 6pm. As a result, when the plane landed at Amritsar's Raja Sansi airport at 7pm, no coherent response was in place to tackle the situation. The lesson is obvious. The policy then goes on to state that if the hijacking takes place on Indian soil, the aircraft would not be allowed to take-off. At least on this score clear directions are welcome because at Amritsar, IC-814 was on the tarmac for a good fifty minutes. No action was taken to prevent the plane from taking off because there was no single person in-charge at Amritsar. Clearly, what the policy states is not enough. There must be a clear devolution of power from the CCS to a person on the spot. Trying to handle the problem through a collective sitting in Delhi is a recipe for disaster. IC-814 was allowed to take-off and finally ended up at Kandahar where the humiliating spectacle of India's foreign minister escorting terrorists

prior to their release was played out. The new policy clearly lays out that talks with hijackers would only be aimed at rescuing the aircraft and passengers, and if the plane is hijacked to a third country, negotiations would be conducted with concerned authorities. But as was apparent in Kandahar, the concerned authorities may not necessarily cooperate, especially when they may be tacitly aligned with the hijackers. It is in this situation that the government will really be put to test. Clear guidelines will help but there are always additional pressures at work which the government has never managed to resist. Twenty-four hour television replaying the plight of relatives of the hostages and turning backdoor negotiations into public theatre are a new element in this country. It will take will to resist the temptation to play to the gallery. The guidelines should go some way to ensuring this. But eventually what will matter is how well any policy plays out in practice.

Reading the Reds right

Tackling Naxals needs a cohesive thrust but nobody seems bothered

BY VIJAY SIMHA

ON INDEPENDENCE Day, 2005, Naxals gunned down Congress MLA C. Narsi Reddy, his son, his driver, two government officials, and three Congress workers while Reddy was inaugurating a school in Mahbubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. There are a few ominous aspects to the killings.

First, Reddy was a good man and acknowledged as such by Naxal sympathisers as well. Second, he was inaugurating a school, an activity considered positive by all sections of society. Third, the firing from AK 47s into the crowd was a change from past Naxal hits where the targets were carefully selected. Fourth, it was the biggest Naxal hit in a long time thus escalating tension between the state and the Maoists to dangerous levels.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy responded by saying the ban on Naxals could be imposed again. YSR also spoke of what he called the "Bihar effect" on the Andhra Naxals. The People's War (PW) of Andhra Pradesh and the Maoist Coordination Committee (MCC) of Bihar had merged a year ago to form the CPI (Maoist). YSR says the PW used to hit selected targets, and never ordinary civilians. The Independence Day killing, according to YSR, is the hallmark of Bihar where Naxals killed people indiscriminately.

THE EDITOR RECOMMENDS

THOSE WICKED old Wagners. One of the greats of western classical music, inspiration behind some of the grandest operas. But what about the socio-political

background of Wagner and his family? More on how close they were to the Nazis at, [www.scena.org](http://www.scena.org). The neurotic artist. Is depression good for art? Or is that just a romantic idea? What would have happened to it

if Prozac and other anti-depressants had always been around? Find out at, [www.chronicle.com](http://www.chronicle.com) And sample a few mind-boggling but interesting examples of prize-winning bad prose writing at [www.aldaily.com/bwc.htm](http://www.aldaily.com/bwc.htm)

What YSR probably means is that the influence of the CPI (Maoist) is much wider than that of the PW. Narayanpet in Mahbubnagar, where the I-Day massacre took place, was considered free of Naxal activity in the past. In that sense, the spread of the CPI (Maoist) is worrisome. Some senior Left intellectuals in Hyderabad hold the Maoists responsible for "distortions" in their ideology, which results in the murder of people like Narsi Reddy.

Some veterans now maintain scorecards. According to them it stands 184-164, 184 being the number of people killed by the Naxals since January, when peace

wavering. They have no united approach towards the Naxals, and have left it to individual states. In the past, this has spelt disaster. In future, it might well do the same.

Tear island, Fear island

India needs to keep a keen eye on events in Sri Lanka

BY PC VINOJ KUMAR

THE SITUATION arising out of the assassination of the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar is of major concern to India. Never before has the ceasefire agreement (CFA) signed in February 2002 between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) come under such severe strain.

Any resumption of hostilities would impact India, especially Tamil Nadu, which has had a refugee influx problem in the past and fresh hostilities in Sri Lanka could bring fresh waves. At present, an estimated 60,000 Tamil refugees are staying in over 100 camps in Tamil Nadu.

These refugees will go back to their country only when normalcy returns. But instead of improving, the situation in the island appears to be deteriorating. Norwegian mediator Erik Solheim described Kadirgamar's assassination as "a major setback for the peace process."

Kadirgamar, a close aide of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, campaigned hard to get the LTTE banned internationally. This is being attributed as a motive for the LTTE to have targeted him. Though the LTTE has denied its involvement.

The CFA has often been violated since Chandrika Kumaratunga's United People's Freedom Alliance won parliamentary elections last April. With hardcore anti-LTTE

elements in the new regime, most of them weighed by baggages from the past, and refusing to look to the future, it was a matter of time before the government deviated from the path of its predecessor. Under the new dispensation, the hawks in the Sri Lankan military began calling the shots.

Bleeding the LTTE through a proxy war became an option. The government began backing Col. V. Muralitharan alias 'Karuna,' the LTTE renegade, to launch attacks on LTTE cadres in the eastern districts. LTTE has lost many cadres, including Kausalyan, the political head of its Batticaloa district. For the



record, the government has maintained these part of the LTTE's internecine factional war.

In a recent interview, Anton Balasingham, the chief negotiator and political advisor of the LTTE, said, "Karuna's group is not functioning from the deep jungles of the East as Dhanapala (head of the Government's Peace Secretariat) fantasises. They are often operating from Sri Lankan military camps. By providing sanctuary and support to Karuna and his group, the Sri Lankan military should assume direct responsibility." The Sri Lankan nation should learn to deal more dexterously with its urgent concerns if it is really serious about the peace process. And New Delhi needs to keep an alert eye on events.

CARTWHEELED INTO OBLIVION

The Kolkata rickshaw should have been in the museums long ago

BY ABDUS SALAM

WEST BENGAL Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's I-Day gift to Kolkattans was to efface the last vestiges of helotry from the streets of the city. His vehicle of deliverance — the ubiquitous hand-pulled rickshaw, which along with the city's slums, squalor and Mother Teresa's charity work have hitherto constituted quintessential

vignettes of the city. Calcutta, in its transmogrification to Kolkata, looks for new signifiers of articulation — a new information technology and outsourcing hub, swanky restaurants, shopping malls and coffee bars.

Rickshaws were introduced for carrying goods in the late 19th century by Chinese traders. The Raj, in 1919, permitted passengers on them. The numbers have since swelled to about 20,000 in a city of 10 million.

It takes a geriatric at the top to topple a 100 year-old fixture: "Not



only is it an eyesore, this mode of transport is also a major hindrance to speedy movement on our roads. And one man pulling another man is inhuman." Irrefutable. The idea of man, born free, chugging another, is revolting. But

Kolkata's *bhadralok*, albeit rabidly Left, still hops on to a rickshaw for a ride. The 'human horse' is a blot on humankind, leave alone Kolkata. But some battles are subliminal. As long as the Kolkattan thinks pennywise, Lapierre's Hajari will take to the streets.

EXCLUSIVE

# WHOSE GOVERNMENT IS IT ANYWAY?

*Despite a Parliamentary Committee slamming the Employment Guarantee Bill, the government couldn't care less. With Sonia Gandhi herself changing tack, will Manmohan Singh's obduracy persist? Economist SMITA GUPTA's insider take*



Guaranteed Poverty? the poor await a new deal

IT'S FINALLY official. Thirty-one MPs, cutting across partylines, all members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development, have endorsed the main criticisms against the 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2004'. Almost each state government has favoured the correctives suggested by National Advisory Council (NAC) and the Left. It is not only those lampooned by the corporate media as "jholawalas" or the usual suspects in the Left, but MPs and state governments who want a better Bill. In a pre-emptive move, on the very same day that the House panel submitted its report, Sonia Gandhi stepped in to seize the political initiative. The government was, in any case, on the backfoot as NAC colleagues Aruna Roy and Jean Dreze took it to task through a nationwide *yatra*.

Worried at the Left's growing legitimacy (especially in the wake of the Gurgaon police brutality against workers) as UPA's conscience-keeper and greater champion of the Common Minimum Programme, and in a bid to salvage the sagging image of the Congress, Sonia Gandhi threw her weight behind some of the main correctives suggested. Her initiative was expectedly greeted by the English press with screaming headlines denouncing this so-called "competitive populism" with the Left that would hurl the country towards financial ruin.

To fulfil one of the key promises made in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP), NAC submitted a Draft Bill to the Government on August 15, 2004. The Left welcomed this but for the rather heavy financial and legal bur-

den it put on already bankrupt state governments. Yet the Bill tabled in Parliament so diluted the original NAC Draft as to make a mockery of the very notion of a guarantee. Faced with severe criticism from the Left, NAC members and activists, a Group of Ministers (GoM) was formed. This Bill was referred to Parliament's multi-party Standing Committee on Rural Development, which submitted its unanimous report on July 27, 2005.

Hailing it as "one of the most important Bills introduced in Parliament after Independence", the Committee is deeply critical of the Bill, both in terms of the process of drafting the Bill and its provisions.

## The government must explain why, despite very sound arguments in their favour, it rejected some crucial recommendations of the House panel

Given that the state governments will not only implement it but are also required to bear a part of the cost, the Committee is surprised that they were not formally consulted. It therefore invited their views, along with those of experts, organisations and individuals. Thereafter, the Committee recommended substantive amendments to the Bill.

These recommendations include universal eligibility without the below-poverty-line (BPL) criterion; individual entitlements; time bound extension to the whole of rural India in four years; irreversible guarantee without "switch off"; statutory minimum wages under all circumstances without subjective criteria for quality and

quantity of work; mandatory payment of an increased unemployment allowance; 100 percent Central funding; payment of unemployment allowance by states, except when funds are not devolved by Centre; no penal disqualification from unemployment allowance; central role to panchayats; a more flexible and gender-sensitive list of works, to be determined by states and panchayats; far more stringent punishment for non-compliance.

Sonia Gandhi suggested that the Congress Party move amendments that ensure universal entitlement for all rural adults; remove the "switch off" provisions; give a

Central role to panchayats; and full Central funding. Under pressure, the GoM has agreed to some important correctives. However, even as it concedes significant space, the GoM rejects four crucial recommendations of the House panel. It is shocking that each of the proposals rejected by the GoM emanate from state governments and women's organisations and have the approval of the Standing Committee. The first is individual entitlements, which is gender-just, fair and simple with the least possibility of corruption. The difficulties in calculating 100 days at the household level, rationing within households or resolving disputes arising from this is an administrative nightmare. The second is that

## MY AGENDA



**MANI SHANKAR AIYAR**

*Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas*

### ACHIEVEMENTS

- ▶ International oil prices doubled last year, from \$32 per barrel to \$64, but domestic consumers were shielded from its impact. The price of petrol rose to Rs 40, a marginal increase of Rs 5. For diesel, it was the same.
- ▶ An innovative pilot plan was approved by the Cabinet to reduce the gap between wholesalers and retailers of kerosene for the Public Distribution System (PDS). Complaints of diversion and adulteration of kerosene meant for PDS will be addressed by this plan and it would ensure that each block in the country has a wholesaler.
- ▶ Strategic 'oil diplomacy' saw acquisition of oilfields in Central Asia and Africa. The ONGC - LN Mittal joint venture is a success: the PSU can tap Mittal's oil properties and resources. On the diplomatic front, turning the Chinese from competitors to collaborators was an achievement.

### FAILURES

- ▶ The committee formed for restructuring oil companies has given an almost adverse report. This is a big setback, as the ministry wanted to synergise oil PSUs through the restructuring plan.
- ▶ The Petroleum Regulatory Board Bill could not be passed in Parliament. The ministry wanted its own regulatory board to check unfair competition, with several domestic and transnational companies entering the oil sector.
- ▶ Prices could not be freed from international trends, as oil import remains close to 76 percent of our requirements.

### ASPIRATIONS

- ▶ The regulatory and pricing policy will be evolved in order to maintain a healthy balance in the oil trade.
- ▶ Domestic as well as foreign oil exploration will be stepped up to increase the oil reserve and gain some control in pricing.
- ▶ There would be a massive effort to operationalise the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline and the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India gas pipeline.

KUMAR BAADAL

while a case may be made for phased implementation, the Bill must make a commitment for time bound extension to the whole of rural India, be it four or five years.

The third is the centralised and rigid definition of permissible works, which will make it very difficult to generate work quickly. It will also rule out key development activities like the construction of social infrastructure, maintenance of assets and services like sanitation, etc. Besides making it less accessible to women or creating work that reduces drudgery, it is not location-specific and robs panchayats of their initiative. There must, therefore, be a flexible and broad definition of permissible works.

The fourth plea of the states is that keeping in view their bankruptcy and specifically when the scheme is of the Union government, it should be fully funded by the Centre, unlike the present formulation, where they are expected to meet 25 percent of the material costs, unemployment allowance, administration, work-site facilities and social security. While states should be accountable and pay the unemployment allowance once the Centre has provided funds for the scheme, it should be the Centre's liability if

funds have not been devolved.

Differences over these four demands reflect a fierce debate on macroeconomics. Neo-liberal opponents and supporters are guided by pre-Keynesian fiscal orthodoxy, hinging on a scarcity of rupee resources and superiority of zero or low fiscal deficits. Unwilling to discipline the elite to mobilise resources, they prescribe a restricted scheme. In contrast, reliance on employment generation and the home market through deficit financing for non-inflationary growth in a situation of excess capacity and unemployment constitutes the main plank of the Left line of argument.

The government must explain why, despite very sound arguments in their favour, it rejects these recommendations. Sonia Gandhi has given a clear signal to check the pursuit of the increasingly anti-people and unpopular neo-liberal policies. Can UPA afford to ignore her and leave matters to the Raj-struck prime minister, who hailed the "good governance" of the British Raj in Britain? They must remember that a failure to live up to this most important promise of the NCMP might see them scurrying out of office as quickly as they came in. ▲

# On Maulana Mulayam's errand?

*The Greater Noida Authority announces an ambitious expansion plan with fanfare only to go into denial mode thereafter. Pre-panchayat election gimmick, say observers*

MIHIR SRIVASTAVA  
New Delhi

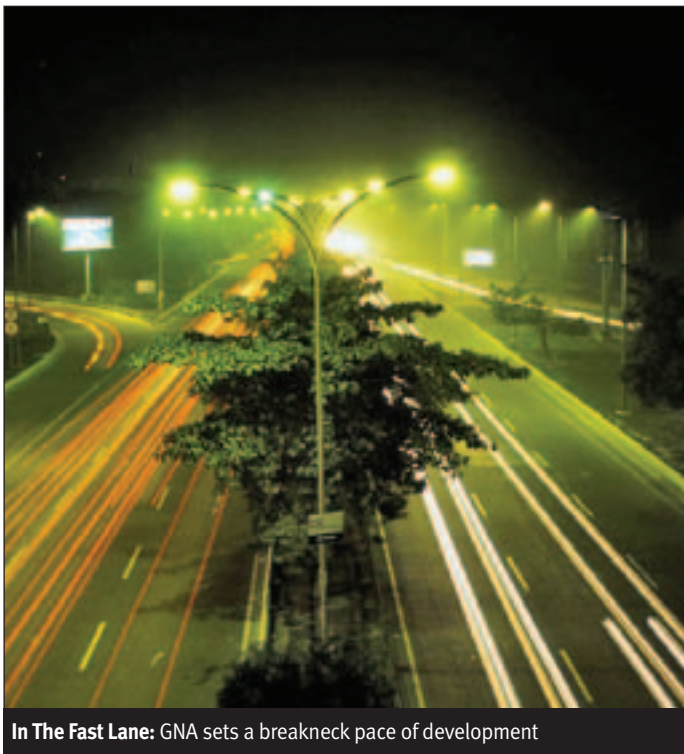
ON JUNE 23, the Greater Noida Authority (GNA) called a press conference to announce the ambitious expansion plan that its 53rd board meeting took earlier in the day. Additional CEOs, Sanjeev Saran and RCP Singh hosted the meet; the latter is also CEO of the Taj Expressway Authority (TEA), which is overseeing construction of the proposed 160 km long six-lane super expressway connecting Noida and Agra.

The officials spoke of GNA acquiring 80,000 hectares for development, the notification for which will soon be made. The area covers a list of 168 villages. The initiative is set to more than triple the area under GNA, from its present 35,000 hectares.

The GNA announcement has been hailed by all quarters — villagers, builders, property dealers and officials of the GNA. The reason: land prices in the notified area will double, at the very least. Local politicians consider this a populist announcement on the part of the Samajwadi Party, with an eye on the forthcoming panchayat elections; the party has hardly created a flutter here in the past.

Now the real story.

TEHELKA is in possession of a document that clearly says the GNA board did not reach any decision in its meeting. Rakesh Bahadur, CEO of GNA confirmed this: "Expansion plans were discussed at the board meeting. But the board has to refer the matter to the state government for necessary action."



In The Fast Lane: GNA sets a breakneck pace of development

## The Greater Noida expansion plan will muddle the ongoing Taj Expressway project by increasing the price of land and create an overlap in notified villages

The buck for the conference fiasco stops nowhere. When contacted, Saran admitted that he did "brief the press about the expansion plan", but said comments should be sought from the CEO and Additional CEO RCP Singh. Singh says that there is some confusion here. "The matter has been wrongly reported in the local media," he said. Bahadur echoes him: "No decision has been taken so far and it was wrongly reported by the press."

Local dailies that published the list of GNA-notified villages, assert that there is no question of wrong reporting. They have the official version on record. A GNA insider feels what the top brass did amounts to perjury. The sole purpose was to impress political masters in Lucknow.

The present expansion plan of Greater Noida will render the ongoing Taj Expressway project unviable, because of the spiralling land prices. Moreover, many vil-

lages part of the expansion plan of GNA have already been notified by TEA for its project.

Bahadur categorically denies this. "There is no connection between the GNA expansion plan and Taj Expressway project. Who told you this," he queried. RCP Singh's account, though, differed: "GNA can go on with the expansion plan only if they get a no objection certificate from us. Then the matter will go to government. It is a long process and will take about a year even if carried out expeditiously."

The masterplan of Greater Noida entails a comprehensive package till 2011. Of 35,000 hectares notified land of GNA only about 6,000 hectare has been acquired. Acquisition of another 6,000 hectares is still on. There is a lag between claimed development and the corresponding population that has settled in Greater Noida so far.

Insiders inform that as per the master plan of GNA, the settled population by now should have been about five lakhs, but the actual number is in the region of 1.5 lakh. At this rate, it will take GNA close to four decades to develop the existing notified area.

The huge shortfall in existing commitments strikes a discordant note in GNA's ambitious plans. Bahadur disagrees: "There has been a rapid development here. The 2021 targets are likely to be met by 2008. We would soon need more land."

The situation on the ground, however, suggests the higher-ups in GNA are more intent on doing Lucknow's bidding.

# Now, spotted deer deaths in Orissa

SURENDRA PATRA  
Bhitarkanika (Orissa)

IN ANOTHER indictment of India's tardy wildlife conservation effort, more lurid details are emerging in the aftermath of the disappearance of tigers in Sariska. But this time it is the apex predator's quarry that is under threat.

Recently, residents gathering wood inside Bhitarkanika National Park in Orissa's Kendrapara district chanced upon decomposed bodies of 12 endangered spotted deer. The casualties take the toll to 16 within a month. Though park authorities are yet to confirm, it is feared that they died due to either pneumonia or an as yet unidentified disease.

The deaths have irked Orissa's wildlife experts, who see it as a rerun of 2004 when 12 spotted deer died in a very short span of time. Park Divisional Forest Officer AK Jena said, "We have sent the viscera for examination. Let's wait for the report." Scientists at the veterinary college of the Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology, who have been entrusted with the examination, said, "Last year they died of pneumonia. This year it could be the same."

Forest officials ruled out the possibility of poisoning or shortage of fresh water in the park. It is understood, however, that the park's proximity to the sea could have rendered its water saline and contaminated, and caused the mystery disease. KL Purohit, a senior wildlife expert of the state forest department, said, "We have to see that they do not vanish altogether from the state's forest." The authorities, though, are clueless.

# Hurriyat willing to talk shop with Centre

Government prepares the modalities for resuming talks

NITIN A. GOKHALE  
New Delhi



Melting Snow: Hurriyat warms up to overtures

THE CENTRE'S interlocutor for Jammu and Kashmir NN Vohra met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently and briefed him on the latest situation in the state. Vohra, who visited Srinagar a week prior to meeting the PM, has reportedly conveyed Mirwaiz Umar Farooq-led Hurriyat faction's desire to resume the dialogue.

"Despite unending killings in the Valley and Pakistan's continued support to militants, the Centre is willing to sit with the Hurriyat once again, since the prime minister is committed to the peace process," sources in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said. The talks would have resumed much earlier but for the fact that the Hurriyat leaders had ignored the PM and had instead met Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf during his visit to Delhi in March this year.

"After their Pakistan visit, however, the Hurriyat leadership seems to have realised that they cannot move forward without

talking to New Delhi; hence the desire to meet the prime minister," says an official.

Vohra and National Security Adviser MK Narayanan have held several meetings with top officials of various ministries to discuss the modalities and implications of the talks. Although the groundwork for talks has begun, the meeting between the PM and the Hurriyat is unlikely to take place before mid-September.

The Hurriyat Conference holds two rounds of talks with the previous BJP-led NDA government. The dialogue process was discontinued after the Congress-led UPA as-

## Intelligence sources attribute the new pattern of increasing use of IEDs instead of direct confrontation to the decline in number of local militants

sumed power in May 2004.

The Centre's intention to resume dialogue was indicated by Union Minister of State for Home Shriprakash Jaiswal during his recent visit to Srinagar. "If they (Hurriyat leaders) are waiting for the dates...let me assure you they will soon get the dates. The talks will definitely be held," he said.

Meanwhile, the Centre has evidence indicating that the Pakistani army has not

stopped supporting jihadi militants trying to enter Kashmir valley. Defence sources told TEHELKA that there are 53 militant camps located across the Line of Control (LoC) that are propped up by the Pakistani army.

Intelligence sources have detected a new pattern in militant activities in Kashmir. "There has been a marked decline in direct confrontation with security forces in recent months. The militants have stepped up the use of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and even suicide attacks against soft targets," intelligence sources point out, adding, "This keeps the desired level of violence going without having to risk exposing themselves."

The new pattern is attributed to the decline in number of active local militants. "More than 60 percent of militants trying to infiltrate into the Valley are foreigners. Over 35 percent of funds earmarked by Pakistan for the militant groups now go to Pakistan-based groups like Al-Badr, Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Hizbul Mujahideen Pir Panjal Range," sources in the defence establishment told TEHELKA.

Kashmir-watchers in the intelligence community claim more killings and infiltration attempts will take place. The effort is to keep the Valley on the boil, the declarations about confidence building measures and peace process notwithstanding.



Tremor in The Durbar: these visitors to Sajjan Kumar's residence were turned back as the Tehelka team was present PHOTO DHARMENDER RUHIL

# TWILIGHT BECKONS SULLIED TYTLER, SAJJAN

*For most constituents of the two disgraced leaders, their resignation is not an issue. But the party hopes the sidelined Tytler and Kumar don't add to the Delhi CM's worries.*

**VIJAY SIMHA** reports

ON INDEPENDENCE Day, Jagdish Tytler spent most of his time hiding. Tytler was cabinet minister for Overseas Indian Affairs till four days before I-Day, and had run up a list of functions he had committed himself to on August 15. But he hardly made it to any. A group of Malayali Congress supporters waited in Delhi's Kerala House so they could tell Tytler the problems faced by overseas Keralites. At 7pm, an hour after the scheduled start of the function, an emissary from Tytler's office landed up to say the former minister wouldn't make it.

A few hours earlier, a group of schoolchildren waited in Tytler's Sadar constituency for their MP. The children had performed with distinction in the annual exams, and were to be felicitated by Tytler. They returned disappointed. The only place Tytler made it to was President APJ Abdul Kalam's 'at home', an annual event where the president hosts high tea.

A few kilometres away, Congress MP from Outer Delhi Sajjan Kumar was also doing the vanishing trick. He skipped many functions and was incommunicado the whole day. He didn't even meet close associates; such was his level of discomfort. Kumar too made it to Kalam's tea, but that was it. Tytler and Kumar are today's pariahs, suddenly unwanted by Congress bigwigs who see them as an uncomfortable reminder of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Tytler was the only cabinet minister from Delhi and Kumar had won with the largest majority from the country's biggest Lok Sabha constituency, Outer Delhi. On paper, they counted. On the ground, they don't.

"Has Tytler quit," asked Laxminarain Prajapati, looking up from his round of cards at Sadar's Bara Tooti Chowk. This is the heart of Tytler land, but the recent turn of events in his life didn't matter a cent. What about 1984? "You mean Tytler quit because of that. In that case, he must be a crook," he says.

Prajapati says he met Tytler a few months ago. "We are a community of potters. We have prob-

lems getting quality mud in Delhi. So we went to see him. He told us there is no mud in Delhi. That was it," says Prajapati. Tytler's name was muddied after Justice Nanavati's report on the 1984 riots was placed in Parliament.

Nanavati said there was credible evidence that Tytler was involved in the riots. Tytler first insisted he wouldn't quit. But he resigned the next day. "I have become the victim of sustained conspiracy by my political adversaries, including from within my party," Tytler wrote to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi.

In the days afterward, Tytler gunned for Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, saying she was the "outsider who has nothing to do with Delhi but is still ruling the state, and who must be very happy with recent developments". Tytler

**Within the Congress high command, there seems to be a view gaining ground that the 1984 riots have become somewhat like the Babri demolition, an annual reminder of conscience but little else**

blames Dikshit for the affidavit before the Nanavati Commission, which got him into trouble. He wonders how the affidavit was filed so many years after the riots, and when Dikshit was chief minister.

In that sense, Tytler's resignation could be a headache for the Congress. Kumar followed a day later, sending his resignation to Dikshit as the chairman of Delhi's Rural Development Board. Not many even knew Kumar was holding the post. Nanavati had suggested some cases against Kumar be reinvestigated. But that doesn't seem to matter in Outer Delhi.

People still come in droves to meet Kumar five times a week for two hours at his

Paschimpuri, Outer Delhi residence. They are old and young men and women with problems of sewerage, drinking water, electricity supply, and the like. They hardly speak of Kumar's links with the 1984 riots.

Today, Kumar doesn't play a high profile role in Congress affairs, neither at the Centre nor in Delhi. His relationship with Dikshit is not cordial either, and there is talk of Tytler and Kumar joining hands to make trouble for Dikshit. For the moment, none of this is a bother for people like Bhupinder Singh and his wife. Bhupinder is from Moti Nagar in west Delhi, and says his family did not suffer in the 1984 riots. "Nothing happened to us. So how can I say anything on it," he says.

The 1984 riots appear to be a non-issue for many people in these areas. TEHELKA visited the Lok Sabha constituencies of Tytler and Kumar, and found that the Commission report had not made much of an impact here.

Many Congress leaders are not missing a meal either because of the 1984 riots. There was some confusion in the party after all parties thrashed the government's Action Taken Report (ATR) on the Nanavati Commission report. The cabinet had apparently cleared the ATR in 10 minutes, which is baffling. There was only a brief discussion on whether any top Congressmen were blamed, to which Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil apparently said no, adding that local Congressmen were held guilty 'to an extent'.

The cabinet then passed the ATR, prepared by Patil's officials. It was only when the Left took serious offence at the ATR that the Congress moved. Sonia got into the act, and suggested in the party's core committee meeting that the Commission's findings ought to be taken more seriously. It was after this that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in Parliament that he 'bowed his head in shame' over the riots.

Within the Congress high command, there seems to be a view gaining ground that the 1984 riots have become somewhat like the demolition of the Babri Masjid, an annual reminder of conscience but little else.

There isn't much sleep being lost in the Congress over the Nanavati Commission report. Almost all the seniors now know the party line: express shame and regret for the riots, and say that no top Congressman has not been held responsible. Individual cases will not be condoned; in any case people named like Dharam Dass Shastri and HKL Bhagat are being considered senile and unfit to be punished.

The party is beginning to get so comfortable with the 1984 issue that it has overlooked what is the strongest defence of Tytler and Kumar from a source who can be called credible. Julio Ribeiro, former police commissioner of Mumbai, and head of Punjab Police, wrote in the *Hindustan Times*, on his memories of the 1984 riots and its aftermath.

Ribeiro wrote: "I used to highlight the emotive concerns of the Sikh peasants (in Punjab) to Rajiv Gandhi and his advisors when we met in his office, which was once a month. He never responded but one day Siddharth Shankar Ray, the governor of Punjab, who I used to accompany for these meetings with Rajiv, warned me against bringing up these issues because Rajiv, he said, did not like to be told about prosecuting Sajjan Kumar and other Congress leaders.

"Sajjan Kumar's was the main name mentioned in the Punjab villages, HKL Bhagat was also mentioned frequently, but I do not remember Jagdish Tytler being accused by the Jat peasantry. In the big cities, the well-heeled Sikhs would sometimes take Tytler's name but I said I do not recall any villager accusing him by name.

"Once, when Governor Ray was not present at Rajiv's meeting, I again brought up this question of prosecuting Sajjan Kumar and HKL Bhagat to assuage the hurt of the Sikh peasantry. I said my task in Punjab would be much easier if this was done. Rajiv lost his temper and told me in no uncertain terms that he did not want to hear this again because he personally was a witness to the fact that Sajjan Kumar never left his place beside his mother's body after the assassination, and hence could not have instigated the crowds."



**Bitter Fruit:** this couple spoke of attacks on their relatives PHOTO DHARMENDER RUHIL

It's the only quote of Rajiv cited by anyone in connection with Kumar, and since Rajiv is dead the only version available is that of Ribeiro. Curiously, this is Tytler's defence too. He has also been saying that he was next to Indira Gandhi's body.

While the Congress has so far overlooked this crucial piece of information from Ribeiro, the party is banking on its luck on the 1984 issue. The names of at least two Union ministers close to Sonia, Commerce Minister Kamal Nath and Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar figure in the Nanavati Commission report. Nath and Aiyar are qualitatively more important to the Congress than Tytler and Kumar.

This is what the Congress thinking on the 1984 riots is all about. Cases may be

filed against the police officials named in the Nanavati report, some of Kumar's cases are likely to be looked at again. Tytler will have to fight his own battle, and nothing shall be linked to 10 Janpath.

The core committee of the Congress believes the worst is over, according to them, and anything from here on should only be in the nature of applying balm, or responding to 'perception' and 'sentiment', should such an eventuality arise.

Until Tytler and Kumar speak, nothing much can change in this equation. The Congress is banking on this.

In some circles, led by Dikshit, it is even believed that Tytler and Kumar have nothing to say, and are thus dispensable. Strange things have, however, happened in the Congress. They still could.

## SOME STILL WAIT FOR JUSTICE

Survivors in resettlement colonies recall how they fought against all odds in 1984

HARTOSH SINGH BAL  
New Delhi

**E**VEN THOUGH Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar continue to treat the fallout of the Nanavati report as just another turn in politics, the truth could not be more different. In every resettlement colony of the victims of the 1984 riots, there are people who have at some point testified to the presence of these men at the scene of the killings, exhorting mobs to murder. It is another matter that the passage of time and fading memory may still enable these men to get away.

At the Garhi resettlement colony in East of Kailash, Gurcharan Singh Gill has managed to set up shop as a property dealer.

He is 29, and can still remember the days of violence very clearly: "Thirteen members of our extended family were killed at the time near Sabzi Mandi. My grandmother was one of those who filed an affidavit testifying to Tytler's presence at the scene." But the case never went beyond the first hearing. The story of why this happened is illustrative of how justice has been thwarted over the past 20 years.

Like many at the Garhi resettlement site, Gurcharan and his family owe a debt to a lawyer named Bajrang Singh Dalal. Recalls

34-year-old Inder Pal, who lost his father and brother in the riot, "If you have to write about someone who did good, write about Dalal. He was a Jat from Delhi, he had nothing to do with the Punjabis or the Sikhs but he set up a camp that fed and provided shelter to hundreds of victims. He had to mortgage his own land to ensure many like us were looked after, but he never hesitated. All of us here owe a debt to him."

Not only did Dalal, who died recently, set up a relief camp, he also took up cases such as the one filed at the behest of

Gurcharan's grandmother. Recalls Gurcharan, "He had to pay a price. At the very first hearing of my grandmother's case, Dalal, who was representing her, was shot at. It was a miracle that

he survived. But after that we persuaded our grandmother to withdraw the case. There was no one to look after us and we did not trust the police. How could we be sure that the same thing would not take place again?"

Today, he says, it is just not possible for his grandmother to repeat her testimony: "She is now over 80 years old. Her memory is failing her, she sometimes forgets where her own house is located. How can she now testify against these murderers?"

**'If you have to write about someone who did good, write about Dalal. He had nothing to do with Punjabis or the Sikhs but he fed us'**

## Tender terror in Orissa

A spate of killings exposes the grime behind how government tenders are awarded

SURENDRA PATRA  
Bhubaneswar

**I**F ONE thought the murky mafia syndicate was the preserve of cities like Mumbai, think again. The tender mafia in Orissa is out to kill, with five hits in less than five months. They nearly got their sixth — civil contractor Girish Chandra Sarangi in Balasore. Sarangi survived bullets pumped into him and was admitted to SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack. The attempt on Sarangi came just three days after a young contractor, Pradeep Parida, was gunned down at Kendrapara town. Pradeep, according to

**The nexus between contractors and politicians, along with the politicisation of police are behind the killings, says a journalist**

sources, applied for a tender against 'advice' and paid the price.

The tender mafia's first victim was Muna Pati of Paradip, a port town. Muna, a ruling-Biju Janata Dal activist, was murdered in March. A month later, contractors, Subash Das and Dhirendra Sethi, were killed in Bhubaneswar. Within a fortnight, gangster Sheikh Hannan was gunned down near Stewart School chowk.

The slain contractors had their connections in place. Pradeep was a relative of

Orissa Gana Parishad's Kendrapara MLA Utkal Keshari Parida; Girish is the brother of the ruling-BJP MLA from Nilagiri, Pratap Sarangi, who is a former Bajrang Dal state unit chief. Even Hannan was brother of underworld don Sheikh Suleiman. Following Pradeep's killing, curfew was clamped on Kendrapara district. Opposition MLAs stalled proceedings in the Assembly for three days, demanding the culprits' arrest.

Incidentally, the two who shot Sarangi, met with an accident while fleeing. Locals brought Sheikh Nasir, who suffered injuries, to Jaleswar Hospital. Balasore police subsequently took custody of him. He confessed that he and one Animesh Ghosh were hired by Sarangi's rivals to fix him. Animesh was also arrested in Kolkata. The police, meanwhile, arrested two gangsters, Hyder and Anil Chotray, in connection with the murders of Das and Sethi.

Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said that "some killers have been arrested and the others would be nabbed soon. We are constantly monitoring the situation in Kendrapara." The arrests bring to light the correlation between the murders and the modus operandi of tender-fixing. As Oriya daily *Paryabekhyak* editor, Ravi Das, said, "It's no secret that the unholy nexus between contractors, criminals and politicians in fixing tenders involving crores in lucrative government construction work, coupled with the politicisation of the state police, are the reasons behind these killings." CM Patnaik was forced to admit, "We are thinking of different methods for tender invitation."



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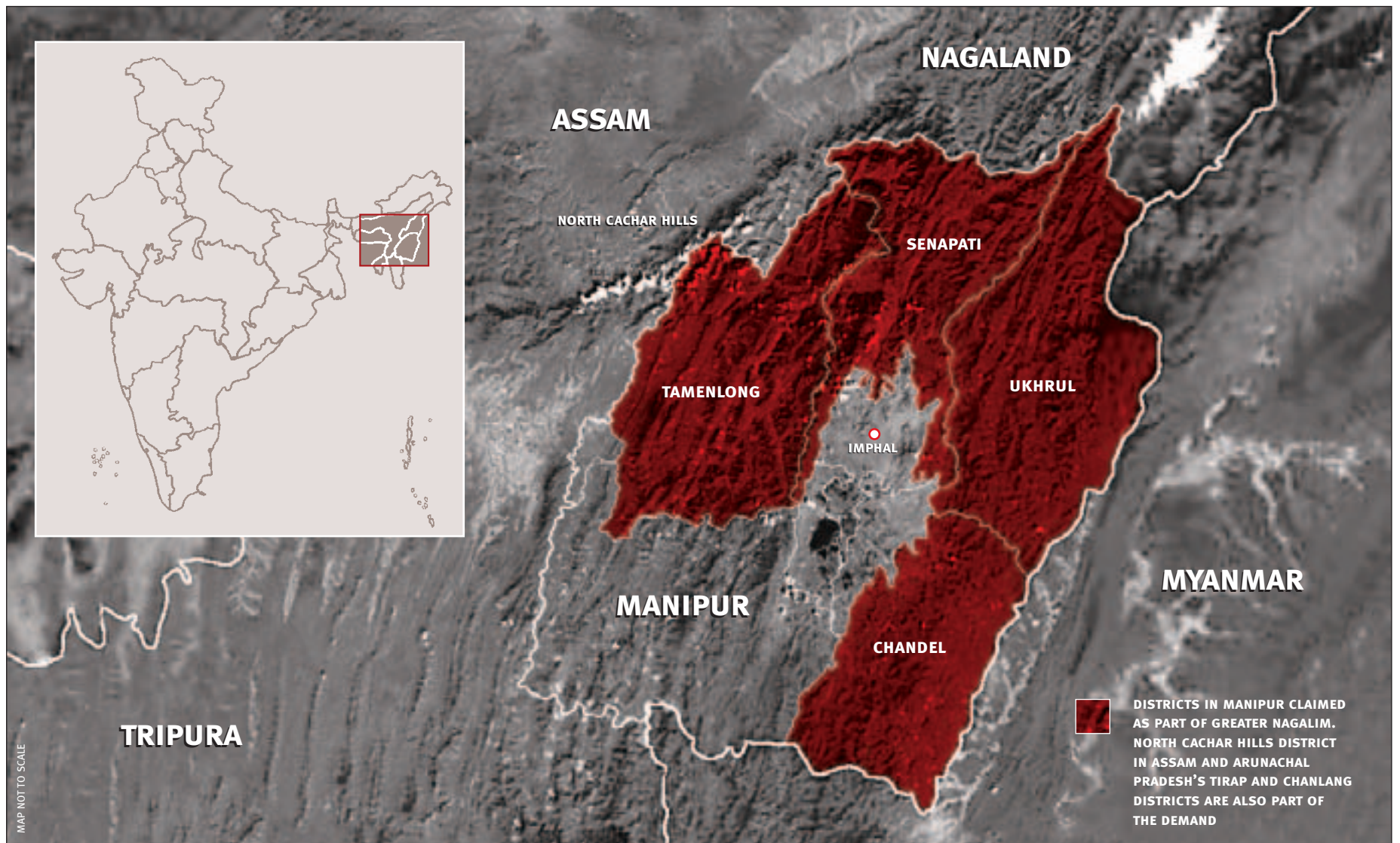
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# MANIPUR: BETWEEN THE VALLEY AND THE HILLS

*Nagas have felt discriminated against for long but they have been emboldened to voice their bitterness openly after the Centre-NSCN (IM) talks. Now, the common man is giving vent to the Nagalim idea, and the Manipuri is apprehensive*



Not A Drop To Spare: Imphal residents queue up for fuel PHOTO ROBERT SAPAM

NITIN A. GOKHALE  
Senapati, Ukhrul and Imphal

THEY SAY *Chinmi Tammi Amatani* (hill and valley people are one) but in reality treat us like foreigners,” Th. Thaiko Peter says in a dingy hotel room at Senapati, the headquarter of a district by the same name in the hills of Manipur.

A cable operator, 32-year-old Thaiko, a Poumai Naga, has very strong views on the origins of the current turmoil in Manipur. “Our Meitei friends outwardly say that we are like brothers but in their hearts they don’t mean what they say,” he tells me. RS Abel, a former pastor of the Poumai Baptist Church and now a social worker, echoes Thaiko’s sentiment. “We are discriminated against in every respect by the valley people,” Abel says and goes on to reel out several examples. “Funds meant for development of the hill districts never reach here; our boys don’t get government jobs,” he points out.

Thaiko and Abel are not alone. Among the Nagas across the hill districts of Manipur, the feeling of disenchantment against the Meitei-dominated Manipur administration is growing. Talk to students, small hotel owners, petty shopkeepers or political leaders, each one speaks the same language: it is no longer possible to live within a discriminatory system that gives undue advantage to the majority.

The bitterness has only increased after the recent happenings in the always-on-the-edge state. Chief Minister O. Ibobi Singh was playing to the gallery by declaring a holiday on June 18 for state integrity day. This day in 2001, it will be recalled, the Manipur Assembly had

gone up in flames after the valley protested New Delhi’s extension of the ceasefire with the Issak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) without “territorial limits”. More than 18 people died in the subsequent firing and violence.

The Nagas of the hill districts are angry with Ibobi Singh for what they perceive as a direct challenge to their ‘greater Nagaland’ aspirations. The All Naga Students Association, Manipur (ANSAM) immediately responded to Ibobi’s decision by launching an economic blockade on the state’s lifeline, the National Highway 39. The 52-day blockade has been temporarily suspended but the divide between the Meiteis and the Nagas of

**Among Nagas in the hill districts, the disenchantment against the Meitei-dominated regime is growing**

Manipur seems firmly in place.

The Nagas in the Manipur Hills (see map) have felt discriminated against for long but they have been emboldened to voice their bitterness more openly in the context of the negotiations between the Centre and the NSCN-IM. Integration of all Naga-inhabited areas spread across the Northeast is NSCN (IM)’s main demand now (see interview with Rh. Raising). And all over the Naga-dominated areas, the common man is giving vent to the newfound aspiration.

Listen to what Andrew KL, a social activist, says: “No development happens in Naga hills. Valley politicians and bureaucrats usurp



all the funds meant for development of our areas. The only solution to our plight is integration of Naga areas under one administrative unit." Grace Shatsang, president of the Naga Women Union, Manipur (NWUM), based in Senapati is more direct. "We really do not belong to Manipur. Integration of all Nagas is the only way to progress and development of our people," she says.

Puni Modoli, president of another influential organisation, the United Naga Council (UNC), is more emphatic: "We have burnt the bridges (with the Meiteis) a long time ago." He justifies the economic blockade by ANSAM as a popular outpouring of suppressed anger of the Nagas. "By declaring June 18 as a state integrity day, Ibobi Singh is in a way trying to pre-empt the solution to the long-standing Naga issue," Modoli, a former banker, feels. The feeling of injustice by Imphal — both real and perceived — is uniform across the Naga Hills. No one articulates the frustration better than Ramthing Hungyo. As president of the largest association representing the Tangkhul Nagas, Ramthing, sitting in his office in Ukhrul, another Naga-dominated district, is absolutely clear that the future of the Nagas living in the four hill districts of Manipur is inextricably linked to the creation of a unified administrative unit for all Nagas in the Northeast. "We Nagas have been

separation but for someone like K. Sow Stephen, the discrimination is a reality. "As Nagas, we cannot even hope to get a job in the Manipur government unless we are prepared to pay lakhs as bribe," Stephen says explaining the reason why he chose to open a school in Senapati after completing his masters in sociology at Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia. "Our people are educationally backward since they are economically weak and they are economically feeble since we live in a state where we are treated pariah," Stephen says, as his wife, also a teacher, prepares their morning meal in the sparse kitchen.

Ask him how would the Meiteis, who would be left with just one-tenth of the present land mass of Manipur if integration of Naga areas was to become a reality would react, Stephen replies, more out of sadness than bitterness: "We cannot avoid hurting the sentiments of our Meitei friends. But did they think of our sentiments ever. If we are an integral part of Manipur, then why none of the hill districts got an opportunity to host any of the events of the National Games."

In the Imphal valley though few are prepared to believe that the Nagas are bitter and angry with the Meiteis. Says Ratan Thiyam, renowned theatre personality and perhaps Manipur's most recognisable face worldwide: "I don't feel the divide (between the Nagas and



The Only Other Route: IAF aircraft flew in with essentials to keep the state from collapsing PHOTO ROBERT SAPAM

to divide us. Culturally, Manipur is highly regarded because it is an integrated society. If someone causes injury to our inner core, our identity will be marred," a worried Thiyam told TEHELKA at his famous Chorus Repertory in Imphal.

Meitei activists also share Thiyam's sentiments. Says United Committee, Manipur (UCM) president Kansam Langamba: "Our stand on Manipur's integrity is non-negotiable. We want to integrate all communities through peace and harmony. But we observe some people trying to use the power of the gun to intimidate us. An economic blockade against the people in the Imphal valley is counter-productive. We agree that the Nagas in Manipur have a right to complain against the government's decision but not at the cost of people's suffering." College lecturer Kh. Ratan Kumar, whose small family of four lived through the economic blockade by rationing fuel and essential food items, says, "The Nagas have a grievance against the government but their blockade was against the people, which is not right."

Most people in the Imphal valley blame New Delhi for the current mess though. "By giving undue importance to some organisations and their ulterior designs, the Centre is creating a wedge between the people who have lived together for centuries," Thiyam points out.

There are others though who feel that the majority Meitei community is closing its eyes to the inevitable. "Manipur's break up is staring us in the face but politicians, social activists and leading citizens are behaving like ostriches, refusing to see the reality," says a journalist not willing to be named.

The temporary suspension of the blockade may have created a false sense of security in Manipur, but rulers in Delhi and Imphal will have to confront the reality that is Manipur today. For, physically, Imphal and Senapati are barely 60km apart. Emotionally though the people living at these two places appear about 6,000 km away from one another. The chasm is widening by the day, creating fissures that may lead to a disaster bigger than anything that we have witnessed so far.

**Historically, Nagas and Meiteis are inseparable components of the composite Manipuri society but a few people are trying to divide us, says theatre personality Ratan Thiyam**

economically exploited and socially ignored in Manipur. We have been left out of the development process in the state. It is no longer possible to live together politically with the Meiteis," he told TEHELKA.

In many ways Ukhrul provides the leadership in the Naga quest for unification since it is the home district of NSCN (IM) supremo Th. Muivah. Posters saying, "Naga unification is a must", "respect historical fact and ground reality" are plastered all over the town and in Ramthing's office. In Senapati too, the graffiti is uncannily similar.

It is no surprise therefore to find that everyone from student leader Ng. Souni to part-time government employee Nehemiah Rong is confident that a unified Naga homeland is not too far away. "Nagas are destined to come together once again," says Souni, a former president of Senapati District Students Association (SDSA).

Quiz him or Modoli on the fact that the hill districts have historically been projected as part of Manipur even when the kings ruled it, both say: "That's a myth. The kings of Manipur never ruled us but used us only to collect taxes. The Britishers put us in the Manipur state when in reality we have nothing in common. We have lived with the Meiteis but we have never felt part of the state. That is why we need to have our own separate administration. Only then we will get equality."

Modoli or Souni may have political reasons to speak the language of

Meiteis) exists. Only a section of the people might feel that way. In reality, Manipur today is wounded; we live with wounded minds and hearts. And it is difficult to predict how wounded hearts and minds would react to a situation." He admits that the state is going through multiple problems. True to his artistic nature, Thiyam compares the situation in Manipur to a mirror whose corner is broken and is therefore unusable. "Politicians are responsible for the situation in Manipur. Historically, Nagas and Meiteis are inseparable components of the composite Manipuri society but a few people are trying



## ALONG MANIPUR'S BROKEN LIFELINE

**NITIN A. GOKHALE** *travels down the National Highway 39 from Guwahati to Imphal to find that distances have grown and an uneasy calm envelops the region again*

IT IS never easy travelling in the Northeast. There is always an element of uncertainty since invariably a bandh is on somewhere; or the rail traffic is disrupted because of some IED blast; flights to smaller stations like Dimapur, Aizawl or Lilabari is a gamble. But there is always god and friends who help you no matter what the circumstances.

So it was this time, when I decided to take the Dimapur-Kohima-Senapati-Imphal route in attempting to understand the dynamics of the economic blockade initiated by the Naga students along the National Highway 39.

Getting to Dimapur from Guwahati these days is a cinch. The Jan Shatabdi, despite the perpetual threat of bombs along the track in view of the threats by militants wanting to disrupt Independence Day, chugs into Dimapur on the dot.

Along Longkumer, editor of Nagaland's newest daily, finds time to come to the railway station and take me to his house before we get to the taxi stand. Along fixes a local cab upto Kohima, Nagaland's capital. The

**Finding a ride to Senapati proves to be more difficult than I had thought. The taxi drivers' fear is understandable though. The 52-day blockade is supposed to have been lifted but they are not sure how it would pan out**

74-km distance takes more than two-and-a-half hours since the road is winding and narrow. A heavy downpour slows us down further. It used to take more time earlier but thanks to the road trip that the then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was forced to make on this stretch in October 2003, the potholes, at least, have disappeared.

In Kohima too rains are incessant. Finding a ride to Senapati, some 80 km away but in the state of Manipur proves to be more difficult than I had thought. The apprehension among the taxi drivers is understandable though. The 52-day economic blockade in Senapati is supposed to have been lifted but most drivers are not sure how the situation would pan out. Chizeko Vero, a Kohima-based reporter, comes to my rescue.

He persuades a Nepali Maruti van owner, Basant Tamang, to take me to Senapati. Tamang's only condition is that I pay him double since he would not get any



**We Don't Want No Government:** the defaced Manipur signboard on the Nagaland border



**At a Standstill:** the town square in Senapati with pro-Naga graffiti PHOTOS BY NITIN GOKHALE

return passenger. The deal clinched, we set out. It's 2.30pm.

As we leave Kohima town, I come across a signboard that reminds me that this was the road (which connects Myanmar) on which one of the fiercest battles of World War II was fought.

The battle of Imphal-Kohima theatre had in fact turned the tide against the advancing Japanese in 1944. Tamang's running commentary about the situation in Nagaland-Manipur is, meanwhile, giving me new nuggets of information. "Andarwala (meaning underground peo-

ple) se hum nahin darta hain, saheb. Unko to hum ek sal ka tax deta hai. Dar to lagta hain police aur military se (I am not afraid of the underground. I pay them an annual tax. The fear is from the security personnel)," he tells me.

As we near the Mao gate (boundary between Nagaland and Manipur), a Manipur government signboard welcoming visitors is defaced with the word Manipur wiped clean. The Nagas of Senapati district have made their intention clear: they have nothing to do with Manipur.

There is hardly any traffic on the road.

**My fellow passenger is Ricky, a young Naga student of Class X. Ricky has a dream to become a news anchor or a sports commentator. "If I get more than 80 percent marks in my matric exam, I will go to Delhi," he says, stars in his eyes**

Then suddenly, two trucks are visible at a distance. As I get down to take photographs, the truck drivers stop.

Tense, they ask me why was I taking photos. I identify myself. They relax and proudly say: "We are the first ones to travel the road after the blockade has been lifted. Bahut din ho gaya saheb, aise hi baithe the (It's been many days, we've been sitting idle)," they say and carry on.

Half an hour later, a convoy of empty trucks, escorted by Manipur Rifles personnel, is suddenly upon us. As we give way, they whiz past. It starts raining again. The road is bumpy and narrow. And it is supposed to be a national highway!

By 5.30 we are in Senapati, a small obscure square one would have otherwise missed but for the recent blockade. Nehemiah, a young part-time government employee, alerted by my SMS is there to meet me.

The evening is spent in meeting different people and getting to understand their viewpoint. All of them are surprised that someone has actually bothered to come to Senapati. The hotel room is basic but comfortable.

Next morning, I meet more people, all of them saying the same thing: we cannot live in Manipur. Three hours later, I board the rickety Imphal-bound bus. My co-passenger on the next seat is Ricky, a young Naga student of Class X. Ricky has a dream to become a news anchor or a sports commentator. "If I get more than 80 percent marks in my matric exam, I will go to Delhi," he says, stars in his eyes. We chat some more before he gets down halfway to Imphal. He takes my e-mail address and cell number.

"Can I contact you some time," he asks, hesitatingly. Why not, I tell him. It takes another 90 minutes to reach Imphal.

The 60-km distance takes nearly three hours to traverse by the bus but the emotional chasm that has developed between the two communities will perhaps take a generation to bridge, I tell myself as I check into the hotel, looking forward to a quick bath and more interviews, this time with my Meitei friends.

# 'A situation has been created in the Northeast to sidetrack negotiations'

The NSCN's self-styled home minister Rh. Raising says the outfit is willing to walk the extra mile. But no more



Waiting: Raising says they will soon decide on the next round of talks COURTESY: THE MORUNG EXPRESS

NITIN A. GOKHALE  
Dimapur

THE NSCN is angry. And restless. Eight years after agreeing to a ceasefire with the Central government, the dominant separatist outfit is fast running out of patience. Led by Issak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah and hence known as the I-M faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), the outfit has sent a clear signal last fortnight that it is not happy with the progress of the talks so far when it agreed to extend the ceasefire only for six months instead of the usual one year.

**Commitment to a negotiated settlement is unwavering so far. But if circumstances compel us, we may go back to the jungle, not to fight but to defend ourselves, says Raising**

"The ball is in the government of India's court. We have cooperated fully and demonstrated our total commitment, but in the past eight years no tangible progress has been made," the outfit's self-styled Home Minister Rh. Raising told TEHELKA in an exclusive interview.

So was extending the truce only for six months a way to pressurise the Indian government? Raising, among the top four of the

NSCN (IM)'s self-styled Government of People's Republic of Nagalim (GPRN), does not give a direct answer but acknowledges that a "situation has been created in the Northeast of late to sidetrack negotiations" with his outfit.

Raising, however, hastens to add that the NSCN(IM)'s commitment to a negotiated peace settlement is unwavering so far. He also sounds a note of warning: "If circumstances compel us, we may go back to the jungle, not to fight but to defend ourselves since many forces hostile to us are being backed and propped up by the Indian intelligence agencies." Raising goes on to reveal, "Before end of August we are planning to have a consultative meeting to decide the next date of talks with the Indian government. In that meeting will take a decision whether and how to continue the negotiations."

"Look how the democratic agitation launched by our people against the Manipur government is being suppressed by force. If this continues, we will be forced to review the negotiations process," Raising says, referring to the 52-day economic blockade of the vital National Highway 39 imposed by the All Naga Students Association, Manipur (ANSAM). The blockade (see main story) was initiated by the Naga students to protest against the declaration of June 18 as a public holiday to commemorate the 'uprising' by protesting Meiteis in 2001. "We Nagas perceive this as a challenge to our movement for integration of all Naga-inhabited areas of the Northeast," Raising says. ▲



Voices in the Capital: Naga students at a protest demonstration PHOTO BY DHARMENDER RUHIL

## 'WE ARE SEEN AS ALIENS'

### Northeastern Voices in Delhi



People I met on the campus in my college thought I was from Vietnam or China. And when I said I am a Naga from Manipur they wanted to know if I had been with a terrorist group.

TENNYSON MAO

Student from Manipur's Senapati district

People here seem to think of us as backward, culturally poor tribals. After the Dhaula Kuan rape, things worsened. It only deepens our alienation from India and makes us feel we do not belong here.

YARONSHU NGALUNG

Student from Manipur's Ukhrul district



I have heard stories but things have been fine for me. I like Delhi. I was in Kolkata earlier. Here the traffic moves faster and there are no crows. I keep to my Naga friends and nobody bothers me.

IMUTOSHI

Student from Nagaland

PHOTOS BY DHARMENDER RUHIL

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## investigations

OFFICIAL SECRETS

**RIGHT TO INTERFERE:** Amarinder Singh's media advisor BIS Chahal performs dubious roles to perfection. Last week, he was at Chandigarh's UNI office to ensure that a report quoting CMO officers was spiked. The report said Amarinder had conveyed his deep displeasure to the Centre on the Nanavati ATR.

# SCOT-FREE: THE KILLERS IN UNIFORM

Senior police officers, who were held responsible for inciting anti-Sikh violence in 1984, were not merely exonerated; they were rewarded with promotions and gallantry awards. And now, the Nanavati Commission has given them a clean chit. **AJMER SINGH** reports

THEY WERE held responsible for the bloody carnage of 1984 — for directly or indirectly inciting the killings of Sikhs. Yet, these men in uniform, protectors who turned perpetrators of crime, were rewarded with promotions and police medals. Some others, who played with evidence and were to be dismissed from service for being 'a slur on the police force', were exonerated and have since retired gracefully.

TEHELKA dug up details on police officers who were to be dismissed from service, but were instead granted promotions. The Government of India (GoI) appointed the Kusum Lata Mittal Committee in 1987, comprising Justice Dilip Kapoor and Kusum Lata Mittal, to inquire into the conduct of the Delhi Police during the 1984 riots. The report, submitted separately by Mittal in 1990, indicted 72 officers.

Yet, no action was taken against these officers.

The Justice Jain-Agarwal Committee, also appointed to inquire into the riots, scrutinised over 400 FIRs and found improper investigations were carried out by the police. However, most cases ended in acquittals.

Ved Marwah, the first police officer to inquire into police lapses, was asked to stop his investigations midway. In his affidavit to the Nanavati Commission, Marwah disclosed that he was asked to discontinue his probe even before he could examine senior police officers. Ranjit Singh Narula, retired Chief Justice of Punjab & Haryana High Court, and a witness before the commission, in his affidavit disclosed that handwritten notes prepared by Marwah were destroyed following instructions from higher authorities.

But Justice GT Nanavati, in his report, ignored all these observations and let-off the guilty. No action was recommended against the guilty officers even though there was credible evidence. The only exception was the then Police Commissioner, SC Tandon, and a Sub-Inspector (SI), Hoshiar Singh, who were held responsible for failing to maintain the law and order and for dereliction of duty respectively. However, no action can be initiated against them, as both of them have now retired.

The Mittal Committee exposed the police brutality and their connivance with criminals. Over 1,200 Sikhs were killed in the east district of Delhi. According to the committee, a DCP concealed a number of bodies and directed his subordinates to register only a few cases. Yet, no action was taken against the officers.

In all, 147 officers were indicted. The Justice Jain-Agarwal Committee also indicted many police officers. However, no action was taken against most of them (42 had either retired or were dead). As for the remaining 105 officers,



The Carnage: Sikhs venting their anger at the police inaction

the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) processed eight cases, and 97 were processed by the Delhi government. Five officers were exonerated by the MHA. In one case a cut in pension was recommended for five years, and in another case a restraint order was passed by the Delhi HC against a DCP. In another DCP's case the report was delayed, which has now been forwarded to the MHA. No action was taken in the 97 cases that the Delhi government processed. A few examples:

**SEWA DAS** Das, who was the DCP (East) during the anti-Sikh riots, is now special commissioner, Delhi Police. According to the Kusum Lata Mittal Committee report, Das was prima facie responsible for failing to supervise and

**Ved Marwah, the first police officer to inquire into police lapses, was asked to stop his investigations midway. Marwah told the Nanavati Commission that he was asked to discontinue his probe even before he could examine senior police officers**

providing leadership to his subordinates. The report said: "The conduct of Sewa Das is a slur on the name of any police force and he should not be trusted with or assigned any job of responsibility, in fact, he is not considered fit for being retained in service."

The report further said, "Sewa Das removed Sikh officers from duty who were inclined to take proper measures to deal with the rioters. The SHOs under his jurisdiction systematically disarmed the Sikhs, as a result they couldn't protect themselves. At the same time no steps were taken to provide police protection to them to protect their lives and property. Sewa Das did not keep his superior officers informed of the killings which continued under his jurisdiction, which amounted to concealment of information and failure to

discharge duties... there is no evidence to show that he took action to control the situation. The conclusion can be drawn that he knew what had to be done by him and his force is not to take any action against the rioters and killers."

"Sewa Das made blatant efforts to conceal the number of killings even when dead bodies were lying around him and he directed his subordinates to register only a few cases in each area which were illegal. The killings continued till November 5, which could have been prevented.... Sewa Das and SHO Kalyanpuri have been mainly responsible for the mass killings, Shoorvir Singh Tyagi in Kalyanpuri/Trilokpuri and Sewa Das in the

by bringing over persons to be pressurised to depose in his favour. However, this SHO is a living shame for any police organisation and the best way to get rid of him in public interest would be to take action under Article 311(2) (b) of the Constitution. This would perhaps restore some confidence in the mind of public."

**NANAVATI ON SHOORVIR SINGH TYAGI**

"SHO Tyagi has stated that he was falsely implicated by his seniors and that in both the criminal cases that were filed against him he has been discharged. The revision petitions filed against the orders of discharge have been dismissed by the Delhi HC. In view of his acquittal now no action is recommended against him," the Nanavati report said. What Nanavati fails to record is that the sanction for prosecution was not granted, which is why the case was discharged. The Mittal Committee's recommendations against "the living shame for any police organisation" still stand.

**UK KATNA** Katna who was DCP (West) during the riots is now a DGP in the Northeast. More than 900 Sikhs were killed in his area. When one victim, Harminder Singh, sought his help, Katna said: "What can we do? The dead bodies of Hindus filled in trains are also coming from Punjab".

On November 1, 1984, a serious incident took place at Samrat Enclave, Punjabi Bagh police station. Three persons were killed by a mob in the presence of the DCP. The mob was not dispersed and there was no police firing. No separate FIR was registered for murder of three persons, but an FIR was registered under Sections 411 and 412 of the IPC.

In Tilak Nagar, three FIRs were registered — against Sikhs. Major NS Phul, a resident of West Delhi, was taken by the DCP to the police station where he was beaten up, tortured and his licenced pistol snatched.

whole district. Subsequently, continuous efforts have been made by them and on their behalf to ensure that people do not depose against them. It is necessary in public interest to dispense with the services of such officers."

**NANAVATI ON SEWA DAS**

"As the departmental inquiry was held against him and he has been exonerated the commission does not recommend any action against him," the Nanavati report said. In the same report, while examining the role of Chander Prakash, the then DCP (South) and SHO OP Yadav, who were also exonerated in departmental inquiries, Nanavati said, "The contentions raised by both these officers are without any substance. The object, nature and scope of inquiry under the Commissions of Inquiries Act is quite different. It has a much

wider scope than a departmental inquiry or a criminal trial... The Commission is, therefore, of the view that it can look into the conduct..." This logic is bizarre. If Nanavati thought it fit to recommend action against Chander Prakash, then why not against Sewa Das?

**SHOORVIR SINGH TYAGI** Tyagi, who was SHO Kalyanpuri/Trilokpuri in 1984, is now ACP. More than 500 Sikhs were killed in his area. The Kusum Lata Mittal Committee had this to say on Tyagi's role: "His attempts, to a great extent successful, in obtaining affidavits in his favour by browbeating the witnesses indicate that it is highly unlikely that any witness would have the courage of coming and giving evidence against him... it has been seen that the police staff of Kalyanpuri, particularly SI Manphool Singh, have been helping Shoorvir Singh Tyagi

**SPY RING:** The inquiry into the activities of the ISI mole and the Army's 4 corps headquarters is being widened. The GOC of 21 division, under which Lance Naik Javed Khan of 18 Grenadier battalion was posted in lower Assam since July 2004, has been asked to look into the matter and report. Javed Khan and his father Hanif Khan, the spies, are both under arrest since July 12.

**GROUND REALITY:** Although Union Home Secretary VK Duggal is making a belated visit to Assam and Manipur this week, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sent two of his trusted aides, one of them an Assamese IAS officer to Manipur, to get the real ground situation report. The two officers even visited Senapati district, a place normally not visited by officers even of the Manipur government.

**FAILED OPERATION:** Two senior Cabinet ministers are dejected about being unable to save Jagdish Tytler. During one of the Cabinet meetings, they had strongly opposed any action against him and devised a strategy for a cover-up operation. Interestingly, Tytler held a meeting with senior Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee before handing over his resignation to Sonia Gandhi.

**NON-RELIANT WAYS:** The legendary Reliance clout over any ruling government does not seem to have diminished. Even as permission to clear a CBI case against Reliance Infocomm for diverting calls is pending, the company has offered largesse to relatives of those who may take the call on the case. So far, the incentive seems to have worked with the government seemingly in no mood to proceed against it.

The Kusum Lata Mittal Committee stated that Katna failed to rise to the occasion and is unfit to head a district. It recommended a major penalty against him. The additional force of companies made available to him on November 1, 1984 were not utilised, no force was sent to Sultanpuri, Nangloi and Najafgarh, from where rioting was reported. Further affidavits filed stated that a large number of dead bodies were removed or burnt with the help of police in order to destroy evidence of killings.

**NANAVATI ON UK KATNA**

Justice Nanavati said that police officers have been exonerated in departmental inquiries and therefore, no action is recommended against them. A contradiction again, for the Chander Prakash argument could have been applied here too. He was let off despite the fact that witnesses had levelled allegations against Katna.

**HC JATAV**

Jatav, who was Additional Commissioner of Police in North district during 1984, has now retired. Over 150 Sikhs were killed and scores of affidavits filed suggest that a number of miscreants

affidavits against him.

**CHANDER PRAKASH** Prakash, who was DCP South in 1984, has now retired. In South district more than 500 Sikhs were killed and according to the Kusum Lata Mittal Committee arson, loot and killings took place because of the dubious role played by the DCP and his staff in this district. In some police stations it has been quite evident that the police was actually hand-in-gloves with the leaders of the mobs with the blessings of the DCP/Additional DCP (Ajay Chadha). In some areas the police even announced that the curfew was only for the Sikhs and not for others which is indeed surprising. In respect of some police stations like Delhi Cantonment and Srinivaspuri, there are direct allegations against DCP (South) that he was openly encouraging the mobs to indulge in violence.

In the Delhi Cantonment, apart from the affected persons, Ramesh Singh Rana, SI Sagarpur division, went on record to say that the DCP (South) and Additional DCP told rioters that they

should not be present when the police was in the locality, but otherwise they could continue with their activities. The SI was also instructed not to resort to firing. To destroy evidence, wireless log books of the DCP and Additional DCP were tampered with.

Santokh Singh said the DCP ordered the police to fire on the Sikhs, who were trying to protect their vehicles from the mob. According to him, the looters who were caught red-handed by Gautam Kaul, Additional Commissioner of Police, in Srinivaspuri and Defence Colony area, have not been accounted for in the police records. They were let off even though his superior had himself caught them.

**NANAVATI ON CHANDER PRAKASH**

The Nanavati Commission asked the government to consider if action could be taken against Chander Prakash. This, despite the fact that the Mittal Committee report had observed that officers like Prakash, have no place in a disciplined force and should be dealt with in an exemplary manner. The government, however, stated in its ATR that most of the police officers have either retired or been exonerated in inquiries, hence it is difficult to initiate any action at this stage.

**AMOD KANTH** Kanth, who was DCP Central district during the riots, is now joint commissioner. This was another district affected by mob violence and a number of people were burnt alive. Kanth arrested 16 members of a family, including old women and children, whose houses were attacked by the mob. This family fired in self-defence but was arrested. The Delhi government recommended his name for a gallantry award and described this family as '16 desperadoes'. A subsequent government notification stated them to be 'miscreants' who were 'overpowered' by the police.

The family was implicated in a police case for the death of two persons killed in firing but the forensic reports gave them a clean chit stating that these deaths were not from bullets fired from their weapons. One member of the family, Trilok Singh, stated in his affidavit, that these persons (Mangal and Krishan) were killed in cross firing between the police and the military.

Earlier, the court had also given them relief stating that the firing was in self-defence. Despite receiving the forensic report, no action was taken against the guilty officials. Instead, Kanth and SS Manan, SHO, were given the President's medal for gallantry. A news item appeared in papers that terrorists have been arrested, who were firing at the police and military.

**NANAVATI ON AMOD KANTH** According to the Nanavati Commission report it did not find any material to prove that DCP Amod Kanth and SHO SS Manan had failed to perform their duties or that they had an anti-Sikh attitude. The report says the officers did not also misuse their positions in treating the families of Trilok Singh and his uncle. The vital forensic report was conveniently ignored.



**Protecting forests**

**IMPACT:** The issue of forest conservation was dealt for the first time through the Godavarman case

**N**O JUDICIARY in the world has devoted as much time and energy on forest conservation as the Supreme Court (SC) of India. Through the Godavarman case in 1996, the SC for the first time dealt with the issue in a comprehensive manner. Some of them are worth focusing on:

- ▶ The SC held that the word 'forest' must be understood as per the dictionary meaning. The court clarified that this description covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise for the purpose of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- ▶ The Act must apply to all forests so understood irrespective of the ownership or classification.

The Act prohibits the use of forest land for non-forest purposes without the prior approval of the Central government. Unfortunately, the definition of 'forests' was limited only to the government recorded forests and not to areas where forests were under private or community holdings. Due to this shortcoming some of the highest rates of deforestations were recorded in community and privately-owned forests (as against the misconception that forest felling is highest in government-controlled forests).

The first orders of the SC were sweeping and directed that all ongoing activity within any forest with-

*The SC directed that all ongoing activity in any forest without the approval of the Central government must cease forthwith*

out the approval of the Central government must cease forthwith. Illegal mining, saw mills, felling and construction activities had to be stopped immediately. As the case progressed, the court passed numerous directions:

- ▶ A separate fund should be created to finance compensatory afforestation collected in the form of Net Present Value (NPV) of forest land diverted for non-forest purposes. Agency to monitor the same be set up.
- ▶ A complete ban on the establishment of new saw mills and venner mills without the approval of the SC constituted Central Empowered Committee.
- ▶ The forest rich States be compensated by the forest deficient States for ecological services being provided by the States maintaining forest cover through the 'forest compensation scheme'.

The Godavarman case also became the forum for taking up urgent issues on wildlife protection. In response to the Tiger crisis, the SC issued notices to the Ministry of Environment and Forests for setting up a National Wildlife Authority to effectively monitor some of the major Tiger reserves facing crisis. In respect to the issue of poaching, it directed for a CBI inquiry on a letter petition bringing to light some recent seizures of leopard skins.

Unfortunately, the rigorous implementation of the orders are now being blamed for tribal unrest, naxalite violence and underdevelopment. Nothing can be further from truth.

*The writer is a Delhi-based environment lawyer*

**DCP Amod Kanth arrested 16 members of a family, including women and children, who fired in self-defence. Kanth was given a gallantry award by the Delhi government**

apprehended by the residents were let off by Jatav.

According to the Kusum Lata Mittal report, "The role of HC Jatav, Additional Commissioner of Police (Delhi range) during the riots has been questionable, partisan and inexcusable. He was obviously in sympathy with some local leaders and disinclined to take action against the culprits. He demoralised the Sikh officers under his charge by ordering their transfers and the substitutes sent miserably failed to control the situation. For an officer of his seniority and experience, displaying no will to act when riots were spreading in the capital of the country is indeed deplorable. Such an officer is not fit to be retained in a disciplined force."

**NANAVATI ON HC JATAV**

Justice Nanavati recommended no action against Jatav despite witnesses filing



**Black Cloud:** Sikh properties were targeted during the riots



editorial



SANKARSHAN THAKUR

THE TEHELKA VIEW

### THE AAM AADMI NEEDS AN ATR

**A** SHOWPIECE METRO rendered a shambles by two days of rain. A wannabe metro where the need for daily bread still keeps thousands yoked to the handlebars of hand-pulled rickshaws. A legislator and several of his party gunned down by recalcitrant Maoists in a frontrunner province. An explosion as menace's daily mark of attendance in a fire-ridden province. In the Capital itself, the unsettling resurgence of a leprous blot on collective conscience — wounds unhealed, justice undelivered, faith un-restored. Twenty-one years after enacting a horrendous episode on our own, we believe that one reluctant head rolled and another hung symbolically in shame make occasion for applause.

Scan the front pages following 58 years of Independence. They speak of chaos, misery, strife, peril, unrelieved disquiet. And we haven't come to the bad news yet, so inexorably bad it makes news no more. The distant slowburn in the Northeast. The wretched darkness of the heartland. Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, claimed

in turns by flood and famine, forgotten by the rest. Mount the new apogee the Sensex reaches each day and you probably cannot even locate that black Bimaru hole. But it's there, a formidably unempowered congregation of the UPA's constituency, the *aam aadmi*, once a winning slogan,

now under threat of morphing into a defeated metaphor. No, Prime Minister, even in the neon-lit blaze of the Market, it is difficult yet to discern the threshold of the great leap you speak of; that beam doesn't cast itself far enough. Yes, Prime Minister, the real hurdles are within. They lie everywhere. They maroon that frayed ledge called Metro India. That's what you are mandated to fight off.

That will not be done, as the custodians of Mumbai did, by blaming God. That will not be done by running away from a cohesive policy on how to tackle Maoist activity, as the Centre has chosen to do. That will not be done by refusing to invoke the law where it needs invoking. Or by shying away from effecting policy where it needs effecting. Concern for the *aam aadmi* is not a carrot to keep the Left pacified with. Neither can it become the platform for politicians and experts and activists to expound their profound differences from. Concern for the *aam aadmi* is an undertaking that requires an action taken report. Only then can we begin to approach the threshold of a leap.

*What happened under the Congress in 1984 doesn't compare to any pogrom*

# How Different is Rajiv from Modi?

**I**T IS a simple question. What after all is the difference between Narendra Modi and Rajiv Gandhi? And it has a simple answer. Really, none at all. Compare the riots in Gujarat and the massacres of the Sikhs in 1984, in both cases the State stood aside while organised mobs murdered and looted. The evidence indicates this was deliberate. In Gujarat the right conclusion has been drawn, none other than Narendra Modi could have ensured this complete dereliction of duty by the police. Why should it have been different in Delhi? The argument in Rajiv's defence is that others may have been keen to implement what they think he wanted done. But it is difficult to see how men like Jagdish Tytler and HKL Bhagat on their own could have ensured the collusion of the Delhi Police in the violence. It is difficult to believe that for three long days the prime minister of a country could not see what was happening around him in a capital directly administered by his government.

In an otherwise admirable speech, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told Parliament, "The report is before us, and one thing it conclusively states is that there is no evidence, whatsoever, against the top leadership of the Congress party. That lie, which has over the last 21 years been used to poison the minds of the Sikh youth, stands nailed conclusively." The first part of the statement is true, the second a lie. The report is an imperfect document and Manmohan Singh is saying nothing that he has not said earlier. In September 1999, while contesting the South Delhi Lok Sabha seat, Manmohan accused the rss but claimed the Congress as an organisation had no role in the 1984 violence.

In the wake of the Nanavati Commission report, this must be contested. The anti-Sikh violence of 1984 indicts the Congress as an institution. It was not the act of a few isolated individuals. Even as far as individuals go there are others such as Kamal Nath whose role was more than suspect and who have been let off only because Nanavati did a half-hearted job of assessing evidence. But the evidence against the Congress as an institution goes deeper.

Consider the advertising campaign the party ran in the national elections that followed the carnage. It was a communal campaign, clearly pointing to the Sikhs as a disloyal and terrifying community. The campaign held that it was only the Congress that could protect the nation from the threat the Sikhs held out. Not even Modi has so cynically asked for votes over the corpses of those murdered in the riots.

Done with the election campaign, the Congress never made any consistent



HARTOSH SINGH BAL



Mr Clean? did he stop his vandals?

### The Congress never attempted to weed out those associated with the violence

attempt to weed out those associated with the violence. The naming of Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and HKL Bhagat by Nanavati surely comes as no surprise. The real surprise is that Sajjan Kumar is a sitting MP of the Congress, that Tytler was a minister in Manmohan's government, that HKL Bhagat enjoyed a successful political career curtailed only by his failing health.

Even the events leading up to Tytler's resignation from the ministry bear this out. On every occasion that Sonia Gandhi has looked at the advisability of continuing with men like Tytler in the party, there have been others like Kamal Nath who have advised against action that would send the wrong signal to the country.

The problem is not restricted to how

the Congress reacted to the riots. Caught up in the violence in Punjab, the country preferred to wish away the events of 1984. There was a pattern to the manner in which witnesses were intimidated. The police took no notice and the judiciary came nowhere near to playing the role it has in the wake of the Gujarat carnage. Over a period of time witnesses were coerced into modifying or withdrawing their testimonies.

None of this would have changed if the violence in Gujarat had not taken place. The events unfolding today, unfortunately, have become possible only because another carnage took place. This is a belated attempt at justice, and it will fall short. Twenty years after the event the memories of the presence of Tytler or Bhagat at the scene of the riots remain but the details are not as sharp.

This delay and this failure is more reason to re-examine the image of Rajiv Gandhi. To remember him for ushering in new technology is no better than commending Modi for economic growth in Gujarat. It may well be true but it pales into insignificance when compared to what he allowed to take place. What the Congress did in 1984 bears no comparison to any other orchestrated pogrom in independent India.

*The Indian Express* Editor-in-Chief Shekhar Gupta has recently written, "These were no communal riots of the kind you often see, or saw in Gujarat, where neighbours turn on neighbours. In every locality, from tony Panchsheel Park to the Govindpuri slum, the killer mobs came from elsewhere. Somebody had got them together, told them where to go and target the Sikhs. Most important, they were promised the police won't interfere. And that was a promise Delhi Police kept for a good 72 hours."

He goes on to suggest that these were not "Hindu-Sikh riots but Congress-Sikh riots". But he stops short of indicting the top leadership of the party. The question remains, who else could have held off the Delhi Police for 72 hours, who else could have delayed the deployment of the army. And the answer places Rajiv Gandhi squarely with Narendra Modi.

**T**HERE IS space for virtues like national mythology in all societies. But that has to be treated around the idea of a myth. It is not unusual for societies to create myths. And so, there will always be space for people like Mangal Pandey, Ranjit Singh and Rana Pratap.

All societies invent myths and symbols for a specific purpose. It becomes frightening when myths are created for dehumanising society or to target a particular community. Once it is casteist or communal, the whole thing becomes rather unfortunate. Then you create heroes to counter other heroes. In a true historical sense, icons like Rana Pratap cease to be national heroes.

Ketan Mehta's recently released film on Mangal Pandey is not entirely based on historical facts. A director always interprets facts in his own way, uses his imagination and then makes a representation of



MUSHIRUL HASAN

culture  
vulture

### Why demolish a myth when it's useful?

a character in that light. If Mangal Pandey becomes a symbol of resistance to tyranny, foreign rule, social evils and a force of national integration, then why not welcome such characterisation? There are myths about Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi.

All that is said about her is not correct or historically sustainable. But the myth helps. She is portrayed as a valiant freedom fighter. She had Muslim soldiers in her army. If all this helps in unifying the

We must rescue that image, that representation to unify the nation

country, there shouldn't be a problem in how someone is represented.

The debate over whether Mangal Pandey's revolt was inspired by nationalistic fervour or whether he rose against the British for entirely personal reasons, the whole thing over whether he should actually be considered a national hero, is something that will apply to many leaders and freedom fighters. But it's not good to be so cynical. Why expose the myth if it helps? Why

not do the same for others if it is for the larger good of the society and the country? Play with history in your artistic representations if it serves humanity. And it is not the first time such a thing is being done in India.

These images of freedom fighters like Mangal Pandey, such as the new film has created, are colonial imagery, a representation of the colonial milieu, the angst against imperialism. We must rescue that image, that representation to unify the nation. There are several like Mangal Pandey who represent a certain sentiment whose story has been and will be told in many different ways. For example, there is Tipu Sultan, who is a hero for people in Karnataka. And I am sure elsewhere too. It is difficult to say that he was not driven by nationalism.

If a film is made glorifying him as a national hero, I don't think there should be any problem.

NANDINI  
CHANDRA



# Mallika and The Body Factory

*The gym is the new temple of the glamour industry, branching off from the beauty parlour. But the makeover is accessible to only those who can afford it*

THE AMUL advertisement which has renamed Mallika Sherawat as the playful one is a vindication and a tribute to her blitzkrieg performance at Cannes. There was body display as well as unheard of phrases like the need to go over "unexplored anthropological ground". Enough to produce a frisson down the more circumspect industry spines if not an actual crisis in civil society. Bagging a role in the Indian version of the internationally acclaimed *Vagina Monologues* at Prithvi Theatre, playing *My Short Skirt*, which appropriately takes off on the myth that short dresses invite trouble added more feathers to her plume.

The fact is that women who have unabashedly fulfilled the market requirement for skin shows through respectable channels (the beauty and cosmetics industry) have been made to account for their on and off screen actions as much as those who have arrived through more suspect means. The uncanny manner in which Aishwarya Rai finds herself sharing the same platform as Mallika Sherawat is perhaps some indication of this. However, to the more flamboyant Mallika Sherawat, it appears, has fallen the greater task of proving that a female actor is not a slut for renting out her body for a certain genre of films. As argued earlier, the case against her strangely is not that the lady showeth too much, but that she talks too much, and hence I turn to her for a fitting defence.

In a chat show a fellow guest tried to put Mallika down by saying that the greatest icon of sensuality in Hindi cinema, Rekha, never needed to show her cleavage. Mallika firmly put him in his place not only through her superior knowledge but also by acknowledging his need to be mean to her

This rests suitably upon establishing a historical forcefield within which women have been projected and viewed in a certain way. For instance, in a chat show hosted by Manish Malhotra, fellow guest Kunal Kohli tries to put her down by saying that the greatest icon of sensuality in Hindi cinema, Rekha, never needed to show her cleavage. Mallika firmly put him in his place not only through her superior empirical knowledge but also by graciously acknowledging his need to be mean to her, as part of the expected reaction towards women whose sexiness derives from their wit and not simply the cleavage.

Taking a cue from Mallika's look back into



Global Stardom: Mallika Sherawat with Jackie Chan and Korean actress Kim Hee-Son at Cannes earlier this year AP PHOTO

the past, one must recognise that the sex tagged heroines of today are not necessarily part of a B-grade brigade. In terms of their class origin, there is no straight cut logic anymore, arriving as they do from the erstwhile Soviet bloc, the elite modelling bandwagon and the more wannabe dance schools that have mushroomed in the twilight zones of the metropolis. Also, the much touted collapse of the heroine and vamp figure brought about by Zeenat and Parveen in the late 70s and early 80s also does not hold water in the present context as the moral gulf has returned with a vengeance to create a wall between those who take off their clothes as the role demands and those who do it seemingly gratuitously. What lies behind this completely vague and arbitrary divide? One must take a look at the dissimulation of the A, B and C categories that existed prior to a certain global churning in order to check out the manner in which a class war is being fought in moral terms.

What has changed in the last few years? For the first time, one is able to count a significant number of female directors/producers than just glamorous pin-ups. But sadly, this is also the time when the lower-class female junior artiste disappears completely. Jill Misquitta's film *Clap-Trap* has shown how even in the early 90s, they were finding it very difficult to withstand the exploitative tactics of the casting agents. Unlike their male counterparts they were not even organised and were forced to cut each other out of whatever background space was available to them. More often than not, they had to double up as bargirls and prostitutes. What is more, the newer breed of female filmmakers, choreographers and art directors may have played a direct role in making them completely invisible. Art direction has assumed such an important role in contemporary Hindi cinema that it cannot afford to let even a one-bit role spoil its glamourised totality through the revelation of any flabby-

shabbiness. There might indeed be a link, however tenuous, between the disappearance of the junior artiste and the replacement of the Silk Smithas and Deepika Chikalias, who by all means belonged to different genres of skin flicks, by the girls who now appear in a more or less monolithic genre of the sex-boiler.

Add to that the arrival of the item number, which contributed in a significant manner to the exit of the pretty faced A-grade heroine who had let herself run to flab, someone like Manisha Koirala. Increasingly, it became difficult for the A-grade heroine to appear in dance numbers unless she had taken care to trim her thighs. A picture of Tabu in the redoubtable *Punjab Kesari* in the mid-90s, for instance was captioned "*Tabu ne charbi chatwan li*". The urgency and ease with which heroines like Rani and Kajol have proceeded to shed flab is a result of this brutal surgery. Mallika Sherawat again becomes instrumental in drawing attention to the end of the "naturally sensuous" feminine ideal. Apart from insisting that her appearance is a "package" manufactured in the factory of beauty, she undermines this ideal by constantly drawing attention to the anxiety that is produced by the fact that technology ultimately results in a mass-produced homogenised form. In other words, the old idea of a beauty as the odd one out, catching the unerring eye of the hero no longer holds. Instead, we have an even cast of bodies moulded to standard size and shape in the gym factory, where earlier it was the face that had launched the thousand ships.

The entry of the body beautiful, chiselled in the gyms and health clinics that have mushroomed all over the urban Indian landscape, changes all that. The revolution in gym technology has effectively splintered the body into a thousand parts, each of which demands a separate exposure. Consequently, there is individual pride in in-

dividual parts, be it abs or thighs. This reinvention of the body is completely oblivious to any sense of alienation from the idea of a person as a whole. In other words, it does not warrant a split between the mind and the body, far less place the mind above the body. While the flaunting of the sexy body is an in-your-face syndrome in tandem with the times, yet when heroines tell us that they will wear this, but not that, it implies a regression into the redundant debate of the mind over the body. In other words, it implies a panic-driven need to redraw class boundaries in times when sweat and toil are no longer working class prerogatives.

In fact, increasingly, one hears of heroes and heroines insisting on doing their own stunts or nude scenes as the case may be. Scions of the *filmi* elite take pride in doing the menial routine, the job of the clap boys and the odd-job girl despite having diplomas from film institutes in the US, as a ladder to making it on their own. As a result, the working

The arrival of the item number girl also contributed in a significant manner to the exit of the pretty faced A-grade heroine who had let herself run to flab, someone like Manisha Koirala. Increasingly, it became difficult for the A-grade heroine to appear in dance numbers unless she had taken care to trim her thighs

class finds itself more and more sidelined in the unskilled labour corps and is denied any scope of making it as actors, fight masters, set designers or dance choreographers in the long run as used to happen in the film industry earlier.

In fact the widespread obsession with the body is ostensibly carried out in the name of health and fitness. If it were not for articulate heroines with a refreshingly non-giggly manner of speaking, we would never know that the gym is the new site of the glamour industry, branching off from the old style beauty parlour on one side and shooting into a training in exotic dance manoeuvres on the other. But the makeover is accessible to only those who can afford to pay the monthly gym charges, if not the cost of personalised health trainers and dieticians. And so, the seeming democratisation of the glamour industry is at best an eyewash signature of global capital, where the body has been reinvented to claim spaces that had hitherto belonged to the working class.

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# THE CHILDREN OF CURRAGE, 1984

STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT ▶

**HARPREET SINGH, 28**

Family lived in Nand Nagar, where his father was killed by a mob and he was thrown into a fire. He burnt his hands and legs.

**Education:** Dropped out of second year, BA.

**Occupation:** Currently does not have a job.

**INDERJIT SINGH, 21**

Lived in Vinod Nagar. His father was attacked, chased onto a nearby highway and killed. Inderjit, the youngest of three brothers, was 11 months old when he was wrenched from his mother's arms and left to die. He was found after three days.

**Education:** Class X.

**Occupation:** Drives a school van.

**GURPREET SINGH, 24.** Elder brother of Inderjit

**Education:** Class X.

**Occupation:** Drives a school van.

**GURBAKSH SINGH, 27.** Inderjit Singh's eldest brother

**Education:** Class XII.

**Occupation:** Drives a school van.





Photographed at Garhi, New Delhi, on August 15 by **GAURI GILL**

**RACHPAL SINGH, 20.** Born six months after the riots his family lived in Shakarpur. Rachpal Singh has been told his father, two of his father's brothers, and his grandfather were killed. There was a family function at the house and were the first to be attacked. The rampaging mob went about attacking the family and their relatives saying they were celebrating Indira Gandhi's assassination.  
**Education:** Doing his BA.

**VIKRAMJEET SINGH, 26**  
Family lived in Ajit Nagar. Grandfather attacked and then killed, when his mother tried to intervene, he was burnt to death.  
**Education:** Graduation.  
**Occupation:** Was working for a few months at a call centre and was forced to leave when his mother had a paralytic attack.

**AVTAR SINGH, 25**  
Family lived in Trilokpuri, block 13. Father and uncle killed after tyres were placed around their necks and set on fire.  
**Education:** Class IX.  
**Occupation:** Works as a driver.

**MANJIT SINGH, 20**  
Was only a month old at the time, does not know where the family lived. Has been told seven members of the family were killed while in an autorickshaw driven by his father.  
**Education:** Class IX.  
**Occupation:** Driver. Mother has brain tumour and is on leave from her NDMC Class IV job.

**SARABJIT SINGH, 27**  
Family lived in Uttam Nagar. Father was killed by the mob.  
**Education:** Class IX.  
**Occupation:** Unemployed for the past three years after being thrown out of a job in Guru Harkishen Public School. Harjinder Singh Khanna, the Malviya Nagar representative, told him how long could they keep invoking the 1984 riots.

**RAJINDER SINGH, 24**  
Family used to live in Malkaganj. Has no idea about what happened as his mother refuses to talk about those days.  
**Education:** Class X.  
**Occupation:** Driver.

## engaged circle

## SOCIAL CONTRACT

MALLIKA SARABHAI  
Artiste

TODAY THE most serious issue is the attitude of 'I, Me, Myself': the world only exists for 'my' convenience and to help 'me' get ahead. The rest be damned. And to do so, anything goes. As long as the results (usually in trillions of rupees and power) are achieved, I become a hero to be celebrated by the

media, to be known and glorified. It is this attitude that I aim to change through my organisation Darpana based in Ahmedabad. It intends to make people sensitive, to make them appreciate ethics and values and the things that really count, through dance, performance, writing, speaking.

## SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

*Persecuted by the police and terrorised by the accused, it seems a lost battle for the minorities in Gujarat. Will the Nanavati-Shah Commission give them justice?*

NAVAZ KOTWAL *thinks the prospects are bleak*



Going Berserk: people storm houses during the Gujarat riots

AFTER THE Godhra killings and the carnage that followed, 4,252 FIRs were lodged. Of these, 2,120 cases were closed. In August 2004, the Supreme Court asked the Gujarat police to form a Grievance Committee to review all these cases and open those in which investigations were not properly conducted. A director general of police was supposed to take charge of these cases and give a quarterly report to the court. The first such report was to be submitted within 90 days. A similar report had to be put up on the Internet. However, there seems to be an iron curtain as far as authentic information on these cases are concerned.

There is a general view in Gujarat that the carnage, like the anti-Sikh violence in 1984, was a sudden outburst of public sentiment. And thus, there is virtue in 'forgiving and forgetting' and getting on with life in the hope that things will improve. But if the past shapes our future, don't we deserve a democracy based on rule of law and justice?

It has taken the abiding concern of the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the extraordinary tenacity of a few individuals and NGOs to keep the 'justice issues alive' in the cases that arose out of the Gujarat carnage. It has taken almost three years for the cases to be reopened. This, in itself, must be considered a huge failure of the policing system. This is because, earlier, the perpetrators of violence seemed to enjoy complete immunity from the criminal process.

However, now, those among the accused who have been identified, face the possibility of arrest. Faced with the prospect of having to answer the legal system, the accused have resorted to using the time that the legal process takes to intimidate witnesses and to use the justice system to counter attack. They are aware that the local courts are slow and vulnerable to subtle and unseen pressures; the Supreme Court is far away and overburdened and the NHRC's oversight has weakened and is intermittent. Besides, the local police can be equivocal; political influence will sway much of how the police react while the

political regime is defiantly defending its role in the massacre and may still protect the 'accused' when push comes to shove.

The district of Dahod had seen several such incidents in the days between February 28 and March 5, 2002. A number of omnibus FIRs were lodged but all cases were closed before the end of 2002 itself. After the Supreme Court's order, a few of the cases have been reopened, the statements of victims are being taken, *panchnamas* are being performed and reinvestigation has begun.

Very few of those who lost their loved ones, property or livelihood have taken up the fight for justice. Most have recon-



ciled themselves to their inability to find justice and have moved on, grateful that they are alive and able to pick up their lives again, despite the trauma in an environment of terror. Many have compromised by making bargains with perpetrators. In a system where there is no guarantee of satisfaction, 'compromise' seems a pragmatic remedy.

Almost a month ago, a Hindu *baraat* was passing near the masjid area in Jhalod. The *baraatis* were from Halol town in Panchmahals district. When the *baraat* approached the masjid the band stopped playing the music saying that they would cross the masjid and then start. The *baraatis* got annoyed and demanded that the music should start immediately. In a drunken state they started abusing the Muslims, splashed alcohol on the masjid and provoked the Muslims into a face-off which ended in a scuffle; few broken tube lights and some ruffled feathers. Everything was over in 20 minutes and the *baraat* moved on.

No one imagined that there was more to come. At about 1pm that night about 1,000 people of the town went to the police station and lodged an FIR. The complainant was the bride's brother. He said that the *baraat* was passing by the

masjid, the music had stopped, the *baraatis* were feeling hot and splashed their faces with water. Some water fell on the Muslims there and they started abusing. He claimed he recognised 14 people in the mob who were armed with hockey sticks and knives. And they beat up the groom. He alleged that the mob snatched gold chains and rings, tube lights were broken, the *baraatis* were beaten up, women were harassed and gold worth Rs 33,000 was looted. The FIR was lodged under sections 147, 148, 149, 427, 395, 397 of the IPC.

The police that night visited the house of Rahimbhai who is a member of the community and asked him to hand over the accused persons. Rahimbhai was not aware of the incident and since there had been a death of a Muslim he asked the police to come back in the morning. When the police came back again to his house they told him that if four of the accused would surrender, the police would handle the case, release the accused on bail and dilute charges. Rahimbhai and other community leaders trusted the police and handed over four of the 'accused' persons.

These four were no doubt present when the incident had taken place but the description of the incident was totally false. Four days of police remand was granted. Their bail application was denied in the sessions court. Then they moved the high court for bail, which was granted, but on the condition that they will not enter the local limits of Jhalod police station without the prior permission of the court till the charge sheet is filed. There are reasons to believe that the FIR was filed with mal-intentions. It is unlikely that the bride's brother, who should be waiting at home to receive the *baraat*, was at the site. And if he was not at the site, how could he identify the 'rioters and looters'?

Two of the names mentioned as accused in the FIR *do not exist*. One is an 85-year-old man who can barely see and needs help to walk. Four of them were in Dahod, 40 km away attending to their sick brother who died in hospital that same night, while another was at work that night. For sure, all of the 14 persons charged will have to face trial, and if convicted, will face rigorous imprisonment for 10 years or life.

The Muslim community in Gujarat is exhausted of having to face this non-stop harassment. Community leaders feel that they too can be implicated in false cases. They constantly say, "We are being punished for no reason. We burst a firecracker and we are accused of bomb blasts. We have not slapped anyone, but are being accused of murder."

Will the UPA government, the Left, the Nanavati-Shah Commission and the Supreme Court give them justice? Is there a way out of this dead-end? ▲

## AMIT SENGUPTA

do  
bigha  
zameen

## Mafia Democracy

DON'T ASK me why it must go on, but it must go on. And I find nothing morbid in it. If I find anything, it's resilience. The resilience of the hardworking, doggedly honest Sikhs, lowest in the Sikh hierarchy, who were massacred, and the resilience of the brave Sikh women, who held their make-shift refugee homes in alienated zones of stunning loss and fear, relentlessly holding onto their memories and their belief in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and the steadfast conviction that one day they too will demand and get justice in this unhappy, unjust democracy.

Many of them have been silenced by the local Mafiosi then controlled by the Congress in Delhi's Sadar, where Jagdish Tytler called the shots, and in east Delhi and outer Delhi, the bastions of HKL Bhagat, the local politico-don in sinister dark glasses, and Sajjan Kumar, the flamboyant Jat invader, who, with his muscle men and mob power could actually refuse to be raided or arrested. Every news report and independent report, especially the first path-breaking PUCL/PUDR report *Who are the Guilty?*, marked their visible and invisible involvement in the organised massacre of Sikhs in Delhi, November, 1984; but they scuttled every move to judge or misjudge them, despite huge protest marches, media coverage, the sense of terrible shame and barbarism which the country experienced. The Big Tree's

*Why does the judicial process become so slow when it comes to the massacre of innocents and how come most eyewitnesses turn hostile, as in Narendra Modi's Gujarat?*

incestuous, small seedling, Rajiv Gandhi, was as heartless as his illustrious home minister, the late Narasimha Rao, who also later proudly presided over the Babri Masjid demolition. Bhagat was given the I&B ministry; and let's not forget Shabana Azmi, with Bhagat presiding over the inauguration of a film festival, as she tore him to pieces when nobody else dared to utter a word.

The entire political establishment chose to block justice: and this followed with the VP Singh regime backed by the BJP and the Left, the HD Deve Gowda regime supported by the Left with the CPI choosing to be inside, and then the BJP-led NDA government, which also included the saffron socialists and the Akalis. If the Congress milked the anti-Sikh propaganda to capture the Hindu votes in 1984 (every Sikh taxi driver was a suspect, as their pre-election ads proclaimed — who designed these vicious ads, which ad guru?), the BJP promised instant justice to mobilise Sikh votes — but did not move an inch to provoke the idea of justice.

If the judicial process can so quickly pronounce judgments on Parliament attack case or the Rajiv Gandhi murder case, how come everything becomes so slow when it comes to the massacre of innocents and how come most eyewitnesses turn hostile, as in Narendra Modi's Gujarat? If this is not Mafia Democracy, what is?

Think about it: 21 years is a long, long time. Perhaps the prime minister, not a stereotyped politician, should reconsider if reforms with a human face have anything to do with such deliberate absence of rehabilitation and justice when it comes to those hit by State-sponsored violence. It's like shutting the relief camps in Gujarat when 1,00,000 damned people had nowhere to go: surely this is the stuff of poetry which our Great Moderate and Poet, ex-PM Atal Behari Vajpayee, can write about in his retreat near Manali one of those times! But 21 years after, the promise of a new life? It stinks.



*A discord is brewing between community leaders and the government over the actual population of the Puthirai Vannars. While the government claims that it is less than what they claim, the community leaders allege 'false' statistics*

# Caught in the numbers game

PC VINOJ KUMAR  
Chennai

THESE IS no clear information on the population of Puthirai Vannars. According to Irusan Ragupathi, the state president of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Washermen's Federation, they are about two million. In over four decades, Ragupathi has submitted hundreds of petitions to top politicians including chief ministers and prime ministers, urging them to save his community from slavery and bondage.

In all his petitions, he has been stating that there are two million Puthirai Vannars in the State. "This figure was originally given by M. Ethirajulu, a Hindu Vannar, who also took up our cause, when he was Member of Legislative Council in the Tamil Nadu Assembly in the sixties. Ever since I have been maintaining that," says Ragupathi.

But other community leaders say their population might not be that high. Their estimates vary between four lakh and five lakh. In one of the statewide surveys conducted by a team under activist TM Prakash in 1996, the population was estimated at 4 lakh. "According to our estimates then, there were over two lakh Hindu Puthirai Vannars, one lakh Christians and 75,000 Muslims," says Prakash.

Ramnad and Virudhunagar districts reportedly had the highest population of about 18,000 and 16,000 respectively. Christians outnumbered Hindus in Tiruvannamalai and Villupuram districts. Contrary to official claims that Vannars are not found in Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli dis-



Faraway Land: a Puthirai Vannar habitation in Alampoondi village

tricts, the team enumerated about 9,000 members of the community in Kanyakumari alone.

The largest Puthirai Vannar habitation was found in Virudhunagar district, near Sivakasi, where there were about 600 persons from different families living together. Such large congregation of Puthirai Vannars in one place is not common, though in places like Velankanni Nagar in Tiruvannamalai district and Fathimappalyam in Villupuram district some families live together. "Normally, there are just one or two Vannar families in a village," says Imayam, author of *Koveru Kazhudaigal*, a Tamil novel on a Catholic Puthirai Vannar family, which was published in 1994.

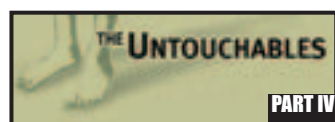
A survey conducted by Ramnad-based SB Udhaya Kumar's Puthirai Vannar Marumalarchi Peravai in 2001 estimated the population at about 4.5 lakh. However, according to government records the number is far below all these claims. As per the Census of 1961 and 1981, the population of Puthirai Vannars is

a meagre 9,698 and 17,962. Community leaders and activists are enraged at what they call 'false' statistics of the government.

"Any statistic of the government on Puthirai Vannars cannot be relied upon. The officials don't do proper enumeration and list the Vannars as other dalit sub-sects. No wonder their number is so low," says priest-activist Arul Valan.

Indeed, the problem is deep-rooted, crying for a solution. Says A. Arumugam, an office bearer of the Adi Dravida Hindu Puthirai Vannar Welfare Association in Madurai, "I am a Puthirai Vannar and it is stated so in my school certificate. But the government has issued Hindu Vannar (backward class) community certificates to my children. I have approached many officials for relief, but they have done nothing about it."

Thanks to the bungling of government officials, there are thousands of Puthirai Vannar families, where parents are Vannars and children are Adi-Dravidas, Pallars, or Arunthathiyars — at least as per government records.



**'Any statistic of the government on Puthirai Vannars cannot be relied upon. The officials don't do proper enumeration and list the Vannars as other dalit sub-sects. No wonder their number is so low'**

— ARUL VALAN, PRIEST-ACTIVIST



End the Evil: Jamuna Bai, whose eye was affected during the Bhopal gas tragedy demonstrates against the Dow Chemical Company of US, in New Delhi AP PHOTO

## Remember Bhopal

### AN APPEAL TO READERS

Pankaj Giri, a tea vendor, refused to bribe the railway police. He was thrown out of the train near Agra. He lost his legs. Sheikh Allauddin, a conscientious sub-inspector, took on Shahabuddin, mafia don of Siwan. He was maimed. TEHELKA took up their cause. Readers responded with amazing passion. The funds helped Pankaj and Allauddin start a new life. TEHELKA appeals to its readers to donate for the BGMUS, so that the Bhopal gas victims and Abdul Jabbar can resurrect their struggle against all odds. Please send in your cheques favouring **Abdul Jabbar, Convenor Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan** to Tehelka M-76, 11nd floor, M-Block Market, Greater Kailash-II, New Delhi-110048.

## Shadow Lines

THE DALIT VOICE  
PART III



### The Eye Sore



Desraj Kali  
Journalist

THE TENSION in Talhan reached a crescendo when a BSP activist, Vijay Kumar, was killed in police firing and an indefinite curfew was declared. The boycott of dalits was implemented in other villages also. Dalits were rendered homeless from the panchayati land and the land allotted to them by the Indira Awaas Yojna. This became a controversial issue in every village in Punjab.

There are many homeless dalits, who even today, haven't got possession of their plots. In fact, unfair means are being adopted to drive away dalits from their permanent place of stay.

In Kangiwal, near Jalandhar, 40 dalits were granted allotment certificates on April 24, 2001. These certificates were given by the development and panchayat officer. But till date, not even one family has been

### *Dalits were prevented from going to the toilet by fenced fields*

able to live peacefully in any of the houses. They are threatened every day that they would be asked to leave some day or the other. As a result, there is always fear in their eyes. There has been an enquiry into this matter but to no avail.

In Dhirpur, Jalandhar, 14 dalit families were allotted small plots in 1974, but they have not received any such plot. Instead, the land has been captured by miscreants. When dalits tried to forcibly capture the land, it led to a clash.

One such instance is that of village Todawal of Kapurthala district. Here dalits had to face social ostracism. In Ghugshor village, when dalits tried to make their presence felt, they were prevented from going to the toilet by fenced fields.

It is sad that plots of land which were to bring happiness in their lives have become a reason for their sorrows. Dalits constitute the majority in many villages: how can the landlords, police and government terrorise and degrade them like this?

The writer works with Navan Zamana, Jalandhar

To be continued

THERE ARE about 73 rain water harvesting (RWH) projects that have been set up in and around Delhi, for about four to five years now yielding tremendous results. A number of case studies prove its success.

"The Panchsheel Park Residents Association in New Delhi invested about Rs 8 lakh for the installation of an RWH system over 95 acres, and the average cost per household was only Rs 500. And today, the water table of the area has maintained itself for the 4th consecutive year where all other parts of south Delhi face severe water deficiency" — *Salahuddin, Centre for Science and Environment*

"We always believed a school to be an institution that sets examples and influences society in the most positive ways. This is why when the whole of Delhi was facing massive water shortages around 1999, our school set up the RWH plant with the help of CSE and the Central Government Water Authority, and we were in fact one of the first institutions in New Delhi to do so. The amount of awareness and sensitivity it has generated amongst the students has been overwhelming and now the whole project is completely monitored by students" — *Madhu Bhatnagar, Deputy Head of Sri Ram School, New Delhi*

"The year 2002 had been stressful, with Delhiites reeling under a major water crisis. But we have been spared now. We are using water frugally, but there is enough for us to feel comfortable" — *Kulbhushan Oberoi, Chairperson, Oberoi Education Society commented, for Mira Model Public School*

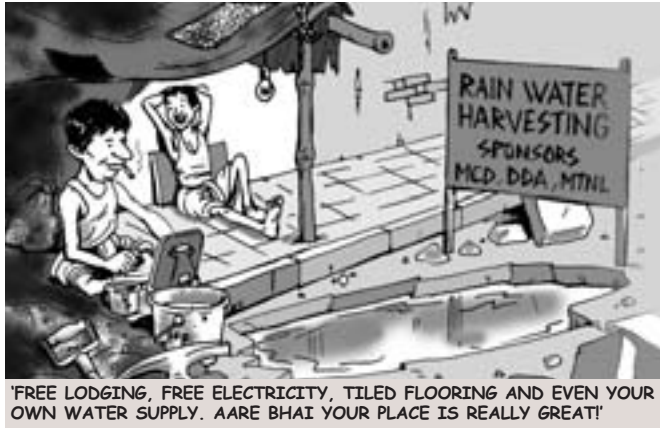
"No one knew what rainwater harvesting was all about when we decided to take it up in our college. As the work began the students grew curious and wanted to know more about it. Now everyone wants to adopt it" — *Aruna Ludra, lecturer, Janki Devi College for Women*

"We have actually recorded a three-metre rise in the water table within one-and-a-half-years! This is very exciting" — *Prof PS Srivastava, Dean, Faculty of Science, Jamia*

## HELPLINE: WATER

# Rain, rain come again

Catching running rainwater from various sources can help us capitalise on a vast water resource and solve water woes. **DIVASHRI SINHA** finds out how



DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

### Hamdard University

With New Delhi receiving an average of about 611mm of rain annually, and a rain water harvesting potential of about 450 billion litres, this figure can take care of about 35 percent of Delhi's demand of 838 million gallon litres per day. Many such cases are available to illustrate the system's advantages.

### What is rainwater harvesting?

Rainwater harvesting is a system by which rain is caught from all kinds of surfaces such as rooftops, gardens, roads, pavements, etc, and is purified and re-used for daily purposes. It can be used to perform two basic functions: a) Recharging groundwater sources for later use; b) Storing rainwater for immediate use and consumption.

### Why do we need it?

With groundwater levels reaching dangerous lows it has become imperative for citizens to look for alternative sources of water, or the situation will grow from bad to worse very soon. This system has been operational in the developed countries for over a decade and have successfully managed water conservation.

By catching running rainwater from various sources we can cap-

italise on a vast water resource and generate hundreds and thousands of litres of water every season that can help solve water woes. For example, a water tanker that brings water to your homes from unknown sources and unclear sanitation standards cost about Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,500 for about 10,000 litres of water. The RWH system gives you the same quality of water that you put into it without any extra cost.

### What are the conditions that impact the structure of the apparatus?

The harvesting system depends on the following factors:

- ▶ Amount of annual rainfall in the given area.

At an average, all areas where the groundwater level is more than 8 metres below the surface, groundwater recharging mechanism is advised to ensure that the water table is maintained for later use. Whereas those areas where the table averages between two and eight metres can go in for the storing device for cleaning and storing the water for use.

- ▶ Demand for water generated.

The demand for water along with the available catchment area determines the size of the storage facility that is used. In

building complexes and residential colonies, residents in the same building pool money and benefit from the water that is saved on their common rooftops. Thus forming an economical and easy maintenance harvesting system.

### The materials and cost incurred during the whole installation and maintenance procedure.

If the residence is in a condominium complex or a bungalow 75 to 80 percent of the RWH system is already in place and only the plumbing needs to be re-oriented and the whole RWH mechanism is attached to the storm drain network that has already been established.

This mechanism will bring rainwater down using closed PVC pipes directed towards a sump (pit) and a simple three-part filtration unit consisting of sand, brick jelly and broken bricks.

Where sumps are unavailable old wells can be cleaned and used or new baby wells (2ft/16ft diameter) can be constructed based on soil structure. For storing water for immediate use, the pipes bring down the water passing through a very small filtration valve containing wire mesh, small pebbles, etc, leading into large storage Sintex tanks placed at convenient locations for frequent usage. The water is then treated with chlorine tablets or boiled for drinking purposes.

Depending on the kind of model in your household and the terrain, the average cost of setting up an RWH system varies between Rs 2,000 to Rs 20,000.

### How does one ensure maintenance and quality standards?

Since groundwater is replenished, care must be taken that leaking sewage pipes do not contaminate the recharge pit, etc, the filtration plant if cleaned frequently removes foreign matter, giving you safe usable water from your rooftop. The system should be cleaned twice a year preferably before and after the monsoon and does not cost much.

The Delhi government has assured to provide experienced staff for the annual cleaning and maintenance of storm water drains, etc, for all complexes that have taken the RWH initiative. ▲

ROXANNE DAVUR CONZ

## UNSUNG HEROES

*She is the animal lover 'Donkey Amma', a woman in a man's world*

**A**NIMAL ACTIVIST Roxanne Davur Conz has been living in her veterinary hospital — her Ooty home — alias 'no-water, no-electricity shack' for the past four years. Her garden is home to donkeys, horses, dogs, cows, cats, and lots of creepy crawlies. Locals call her 'Donkey Amma'.

When she started out, there was no registered animal organisation in the Nilgiris. "Today, the animal husbandry department has approximately 40 veterinarians in the district but most of them had no knowledge of any animal except a cow, and even then, in my experience, mainly to put it down," says Conz.

An agency in the UK offered her funds for a mobile clinic but she had to go through the local administration for confirmation. "First, the collector's office sat on the application, then demanded compensation, then queried my right to funding, then wanted photocopies of my school reports, then wanted me to buy them the FCRA law book (to clear funding regulations from abroad); then the animal husbandry jumped in with their queries. So I made a duplicate copy, sent it to Delhi and got



### *Animals, like women and children, are considered commodities here'*

permission in 20 days. However, the animal husbandry was still sending me letters that I will not get permission," says Conz.

It all started seven years ago when she brought home a wounded donkey she named Jeabelle. And then a lock-jaw horse named Angel was brought to her, both of which she nurtured back to health without being paid for. "I am prepared to deal with any animal but I work mainly with cats, dogs, horses, ponies, donkeys, monkeys. I have also started the animal birth control programme for street dogs," she says.

As the Animal Inspector for Nilgiri District, she faces a cruel task. "I am normally beaten or harassed by men who have had their animals confiscated, as mainly it is not the business of a woman to interfere in a man's business. It is 'a god given right' that men can beat up women and children for any reason. It's called tradition," she says, smiling a spoof.

What's next on the cards for the legendary 'Donkey Amma'? "I am in the process of moving and should have a super educational centre in Ooty soon. Animals — like women and children — are considered commodities here. It is known that there are several issues, but the one line — do unto others as you wish others to do unto you — might help people think a bit more about what they're doing."

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TANAZ K. NOBLE

## circleofhope

IRENE O'BRIEN

### MEERA'S MELODY

It is not often that artistes find space for presenting experimental work. But Underscore Records, a joint venture of classical singer Shubha Mudgal and tabla maestro Aneesh Pradhan, believe in creating such a creative, imaginative, musical space. As a result, they have come out with a unique multilingual collaborative experiment in association with author Kiran Nagarkar. Their album, *Unorthodoxies: Reimagining Meera*, brings together prose, poetry and music which reinterprets the traditional Indian storytelling form, while telling the incredible story



of Meerabai. Shubha Mudgal sings verses written by the 16th century saint-poet Meerabai and Kiran Nagarkar reads passages from his award-winning novel *Cuckold*, which tells the tale of Meera's husband Prince Bhojraj of Mewar. Needless to say, Underscore, a quiet venture to tap unexplored themes and unknown artistes, is scoring and soaring in terms of popularity. Here's wishing Shubha and her team great luck and great music in the days to come!

### ANIMAL FARM

Every evening, if you stand outside Siri Fort in New Delhi at around 9pm, you'll find Mudita Chandra with tiffin boxes serving food to a dozen or more dogs. That's milk, bread, eggs, and on lucky days, rice, chicken bones, Daliya. "My dogs," she calls them. And feeds them everyday. That is, barring those rare days when she runs short of food, steals food from the house and promptly tells her mom that she was "extra hungry" that day. Chandra is an animal lover. It started one day when she came across a buffalo in deep pain, lying alone on the road, after being bitten by a dog. "The owners were waiting for her to die," says Chandra. So she called Friendicoes, an NGO, "to help the animal". Although she's not part of an NGO yet, Chandra plans to start one sometime, "On a nice big farm, with lots of animals." That's a dream worth chewing about.

business&economy

BUSINESS WATCH

Luxury hotel brand Westin International of the United States is coming to India at a premium price. Vatika Hospitality Private Ltd would thus be paying Rs 203.50 crore as management fee to Westin over 20 years for its proposed hotel and service apartments in Gurgaon.

Vatika will pay an additional Rs 78.24 crore as licensing and publicity fee for the same period. This is apart from paying the technical assistance fee of Rs 1.1 crore.

Industry watchers feel that this is not a small price for bringing the Westin brand to India for the first time.

# Centre corks states' new high

Liquor industry majors influence policy to keep a tight check on the Indian wine industry

TEHELKA BUREAU  
New Delhi

THE CENTRE and the states have jointly drafted a blueprint to wean alcohol consumers away from hard liquor to soft ones especially wine. The blueprint has been conceived to make wines affordable by restructuring numerous state levies on liquor.

The blueprint could also bring down liquor prices across the board if implemented like value-added tax under the guidance of the standing committee comprising representatives of the Centre and state governments. The prime initiator of the blueprint, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) is busy seeking public comments on the draft excise policy and model state excise act and rules. The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has, however, harped on the old Centre-state tussle over industrial liquor licensing to derail the blueprint. And the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) relied on distorted facts dished out by DIPP and endorsed by other ministries at a meeting recently to indefinitely defer a decision on applications by two wineries seeking hike in foreign equity investment.

FIPB found the Centre-state row over liquor licensing pending before the Supreme Court as appropriate justification to set aside the applications filed by two companies of Maharashtra-based Sula Vineyards group.

Analysts tracking the manipulations in liquor policy say that the reforms blueprint simply cannot take off as long as DIPP hides behind the legal stand-off. What is more shocking is that DIPP makes no distinction between hard liquor and fruit-derived wine for relaxation of ban on issue of industrial licences for setting up new units or for expanding existing ones.

The unintended beneficiaries of the status quo are the existing manufacturers especially the United Breweries group that holds the largest market share in the spirits and beer segments. And the unintended victims are consumers especially the poor who consume spurious liquor and suffer the consequent after-effects. That the DIPP controls mindset can be gauged from the fact that the Maharashtra government has aggressively pursued a grape processing policy since 2001 that encourages wineries through tax and other incentives.

Before delving further into the hurdles in implementation of the blueprint, one needs to know the contours of the proposed reforms. The blueprint, prepared by the Joint Working Group (JWG) of Central and state officials, acknowledges that states are free to set their own policies/taxation regimes.

The states currently levy a plethora of duties and fees and at rates that differ widely. The imposts include excise duty,

sales tax, turnover tax, brand/label registration fee, import/export fee, vend fee, gallonage fee and licence fee.

The JWG recommended that states should collect revenue from the liquor industry through excise, sales tax, licence fee and brand registration fee. And these imposts should be imposed at uniform rates.

It has recommended excise duty of 20 percent on ex-factory price (EFP) of wines compared to 75 percent on beer, 100 percent on country liquor and 140 percent on Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL). It has recommended a similar sales tax pattern.

The JWG contends: "It would be desirable to give preferential treatment to wine and beer, with regard to licensing of manufacture and sales and duty/fee concessions." The group has proposed setting up of a Wine Board and National Institute of Wine and Beer to give impetus to grape cultivation and processing and farming of

licensing of liquor sector is governed by Industries (Development and Regulation) Act. Moreover, it is bound by a 1975 Cabinet decision banning creation of additional capacity for alcoholic beverages except in 100 percent export-oriented cases. MoFPI has taken a similar stand on the 1975 Cabinet decision.

FIPB lapped up these half-truths at its meeting on August 3. What DIPP and other ministries did not disclose was the fact that the ban was relaxed in April 1988 by permitting creation of additional capacity for manufacture of alcohol from materials other than molasses. The other materials from which alcohol can be produced include foodgrain and sugar beet. This relaxation was followed by lifting the ban on creation of fresh capacity for production of beer in February 1989.

These relaxations were withdrawn at different points of time following behind-the-scenes lobbying by existing players, who felt threatened by emerging competition. The states have, however, followed their own industrial licensing policy. Thus, both Sula companies — Samant Soma Wines Limited (SSWL) and Nashik Vintners Limited (NVL) — operate with licences issued by the state government.

FIPB/DIPP's common stance on the applications of these companies is that foreign direct investment upto 100 percent is allowed only in those liquor companies that hold licences under the IDR Act. FDI is not permitted for funding expansion of capacity. Nor is it allowed under the automatic approval route. SSWL and NVL have both separately stated that they have existing minority stake of 3.53 percent and 2.24 percent respectively under the automatic route. The Reserve Bank of India has not yet issued confirmation accepting the allotment of shares to foreign investors. Both companies have sought FIPB approval to hike foreign stake to 32.5 percent each.

As regards the legal stand-off, the Supreme Court ruled in January 1997 that potable alcohol industries shall be under the exclusive control of states. Subsequently, the Centre explored two options for either amending the IDR Act to honour the apex court ruling or to implead as a party in another liquor case pending before the Supreme Court. Later, in another case before the Supreme Court, the Centre filed in November 2002 a counter-affidavit defending the Kerala High Court ruling that licence under the IDR Act is essential for establishing an alcohol unit. The apex court is yet to give its verdict in this case.

FIPB thus noted that the matter is sub-judice and the applications from the Sula companies cannot be considered. The champions of reforms wonder when did the Supreme Court ask the Centre not to encourage the wine industry which is directly linked to agriculture? ▲



A Direct Link: thousands can be employed at vineyards

**To make wines popular, a joint working group has suggested doing away with multiple state levies to make it less expensive**

crops that serve as raw materials for brewing beer. It points out that consumption of wine and beer would grow at a fast pace in the country. If adequate domestic capacities are not created, imports would eat up local growth opportunities.

The wine industry with an annual production of half a million cases is tiny compared to beer (84 million cases) and liquor with 112 million cases. The blueprint thus provides for adequate protection to the wine industry from competition from imports. Noting that robust wine and beer industry can lead to commercialisation of grape, barley, hops and other crops, the JWG says wine-making has contributed significantly to the growth of local economies in Chile, South Africa, Australia and the US.

The opportunity for Indian horticulture to ride piggyback on the fledgling wine industry has been frustrated by DIPP's anti-liberalisation stance. DIPP has argued that



NARESH MINOCHA  
**fireworks**

## TRAI reinvents mobility

THE TELECOM Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is belatedly doing loud thinking on introducing mobile number portability (MNP). This is a facility that would help a subscriber to retain the existing cellular mobile telephone number while replacing the inefficient telecom operator with a competitor. MNP should not be confused with the roaming service. Roaming simply confers temporary operational freedom to a touring subscriber at a higher price. MNP enables telephone owners to permanently change their service providers. MNP is only one of the half-a-dozen types of portability that a subscriber can enjoy to get value for money from telecom operators in the age of seamless communication services.

Another portability that is more relevant for the country is the need to give freedom to subscribers to retain their existing numbers while changing from a wired service provider to a wireless service provider. This is called fixed mobile service portability (FMSP).

Number portability helps consumers to opt for the most efficient service and facilitates reduction in tariff through competition. It accelerates the convergence between fixed and mobile telephone services.

Fundamentally, number portability intensifies competition. It is, therefore, dreaded by existing operators especially the ones that have cornered the largest share of the market through early bird advantage and marketing gimmicks. They stand to lose a large percentage of customers if they are not the most efficient or don't match the competitive tariffs. It is thus not surprising to find that service provider-friendly TRAI is moving at a snail's pace on the issue. TRAI first toyed with the idea in

*Number portability is dreaded by existing operators especially the ones that have cornered the market through early bird advantage and marketing gimmicks*

1998 and unilaterally decided that portability should be introduced at an "appropriate time". Last month, it released a consultative paper on MNP. This is just a half-hearted step towards introducing portability only in the mobile telephony segment. TRAI has not proposed any timeframe for introducing MNP all over the country, leave aside ushering in FMSP.

It must move from ad hocism to long-term planning. TRAI ought to have issued a blueprint for the introduction of all types of portability in phases. It should learn long-term planning from Telecom Engineering Centre (TEC) of Department of Telecommunications. In 2000, TEC had recommended the introduction of number portability by 2004 and universal personal telecom number portability by 2009. Had TRAI prepared such a blueprint, it would have saved time of all stakeholders on discussing its consultative papers. The plan would have served as a wake-up call for inefficient operators such as Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL). The largest provider of wired telephony, BSNL is the biggest beneficiary of TRAI's decision to delay indefinitely introduction of FMSP. The delay would help BSNL retain dissatisfied basic service subscribers.

FMSP is a crucial enabler for the economy to reap full benefits of convergence of services that TRAI started with combined licensing of basic and cellular telephone services in October 2003 under the unified access service licence. It is absurd to allow service providers to offer cellular and basic services through a single window and simultaneously deny the consumers the benefit of changing from basic to cellular and vice-versa.



therefore shared an affinity with the man against whom he would demonstrate that evening outside the British consulate. He was curious about my interpretation of Rushdie, and our conversation, cutting across class and language barriers, was in keeping with Calcutta. "Why demonstrate against Rushdie?" I asked him. "Our mullah asked us to," he said. "This man Rushdie insulted the Prophet."

It was the kind of scenario later to send American neo-cons into a frenzy. They would have been even more impressed by the surroundings in which our conversation was taking place. The kebab shop was in the predominantly Muslim neighbourhood of Kalabagan, a place of twisting alleyways and low houses where great slabs of beef hung from hooks in butchers' shops across from the restaurants. I lived in a hostel nearby and came to the neighbourhood for its cheap meals, often walking past a small group of men prostrating themselves on the narrow lane as they went through their afternoon or evening prayers. Two years later, when the Gulf War broke out, the streets of the neighbourhood would be festooned with pictures of Saddam Hussein. But these impressions present only a partial picture. The neighbourhood was near College Street, the busiest stretch of bookstalls in Calcutta. If the kebab shops fed my body, the College Street bookstalls — many of them run by Muslims — supported my reading habits. And Kalabagan was capable of containing other identities: there was the Hindu dairy stall where I got my mug of evening milk as well as the *sanskar samiti* with a single black hearse that was sent out periodically to carry Hindu corpses to the burning ghats. The neighbourhood offered, in other words, the kind of cosmopolitan cultural mix often cited by Rushdie as inspiration for his omnivorous style. An early example is the self-conscious pronouncement of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*:

Note that, despite my Muslim background, I'm enough of a Bombayite to be well up in Hindu stories, and I'm very fond of the image of trunk-nosed, flap-eared Ganesh solemnly taking dictation!

This was the idea of Rushdie I had in those days: an engaged, irreverent writer who took his material from all traditions and set his work against authoritarianism. I was disappointed by the man going off to demonstrate against Rushdie because he had uncritically accepted the assessment of his mullah, who no doubt had not read the book either. Needless to say, I hadn't read *Satanic Verses* myself — no copies were to be found in the shops, and the book was banned soon after — but I didn't consider this a problem. If the worker had his certainties, I had mine. I had read and admired Rushdie's earlier novels and thought I possessed a particular understanding of literature, of its work of resistance against tyranny and dogma; I had a specific sense of Rushdie as a voice determined to write from the margins. In those days, Rushdie's books appeared to be books, not events, as standing at an angle to the history they were narrating, inserting new registers and ideas about the Third World into the homogeneous body of novels in English.

Rushdie's new novel, *Shalimar the Clown*, demonstrates pitilessly how wrong this idea was. This novel stands not at an angle to history, but at the centre of it. A paean to hybridity, it nevertheless subjugates all its material identically to the empty bustle of Rushdie's later style: *E Pluribus Unum*, as it says on the dollar. And it treats Kashmir as a kind of outpost of Hollywood; there too it's money and looks and spectacular ass-kicking that are the overriding values.

It is hard these days to sense Rushdie's involvement in his material. Readers will share my hesitation at accepting Rushdie's latest manifestation as a voice for the cause of Kashmiri liberation

*Midnight's Children* and *Shame* helped create the impression that Rushdie cared about history and the way it both liberates and oppresses. In the earlier novel, especially, Rushdie created a protagonist whose fortunes mirrored the condition of a nation coming into its historical own. Saleem Sinai — born, like independent India, on the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947 — may have been an exaggerated metaphor, but it was his metaphorical nature that gave him an urgent sense of selfhood. His body breaking up as he narrated the sundering of India, Sinai

# The Seer's last sigh

A new novel by Salman Rushdie is not a quiet thing, to be taken up in a moment of intimacy when the reader reciprocates the labour of the writer, the private act of reading reflecting back the solitary task of writing. The Rushdie novel appears in a convoy, behind barricades and police lines, with outriders and bodyguards, its image controlled by public relations handlers, its message broadcast over loudspeakers. Each new novel by Rushdie, no matter how significant or trivial as a literary object, brings with it other narratives: the fatwa imposed by the Ayatollah; the cover photo of Rushdie with Bono; copies of *The Satanic Verses* being burnt in nameless Third World countries; Rushdie threatening a New York journalist with a baseball bat. A Rushdie novel, like its author, is a public figure, its thingness easy to lose in the sound and the fury. It takes an effort of will, therefore, to step back from the roar and think of the books, to recall the early intimations of the wrong turn taken by this once-talented writer, to remember the pointless controversy that consumed people who had more crucial battles to fight.

For me the transformation of Rushdie's work from a promising group of early books — *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and his first collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands* — into a succession of hectic events began two decades ago, in a Calcutta kebab shop, where I met a man who detested Rushdie without having read a word of his. He was a daily-wage worker, a small man with a pockmarked face who asked me if I'd heard about the author who had written a book insulting Islam. I am not a Muslim, but the worker didn't seem particularly interested in my religion. He could tell I was a college student, someone who had a relationship with books and the English language, and who



Since *Midnight's Children* for the literary world, and the fatwa for the rest, Salman Rushdie has towered high in the popular imagination.

Reviewing his hyped new book, **SIDDHARTHA DEB** takes on the grand myth about this iconic writer

was a character being destroyed by the very history that had created him and endowed him with promise. At the time, his dilemma rang true to me, someone who had grown up in the 80s and experienced the Indian State as a far more authoritarian entity than the newly liberated nation recalled by my parents. As for Rushdie himself, a Londoner who left the Indian subcontinent as a child and had little direct experience of the place, his claims to what he called an "imaginary homeland", a nation-state of the mind, were easy to accept.

But it is hard these days to sense Rushdie's involvement in the material he chooses. Readers who have followed his trajectory — his roles as radical Third Worldist, Muslim apostate, aspiring rocker, cosmopolitan New Yorker and neo-con arguing in favour of intervention in Iraq — will share my hesitation at accepting Rushdie's latest manifestation as a voice for the cause of Kashmiri liberation.

The cause itself is just, and perhaps Rushdie is doing no more than returning to his early role as a critic of authoritarian states. But how did Rushdie get back there? What drove him to take up a people damaged by colonial policies and the post-colonial Indian State's brutality while withholding the same empathy from Iraqis subject to an imperial American project? In such paradoxes, Rushdie resembles his friend Christopher Hitchens (to whom Rushdie's last collection of essays, *Step Across This Line*, was dedicated), except that Hitchens' case is simpler, consisting of a quick crossing over from resistance into power, from struggling in a woolly way for a utopian future to basking in the hegemonic present. If Rushdie's transformations seem more puzzling, it is because he worked with the imagination, unlike Hitchens. Nor was he, at least when he started out, a jaded Englishman.

Rushdie provides an answer of some sort to such questions in *Shalimar the Clown*. Because subtlety is not one of his preferred modes, he presents his case before the novel has actually begun, in a dedication made out to his "Kashmiri" grandparents, and in two epigraphs: one a quote from Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali, the other from *Romeo and Juliet* wishing "A plague on both their houses". The houses of course are India and Pakistan, and the sentiment would ring true if it had come from Shahid Ali, who, until his death in 2001, produced a powerful and melancholic body of work around the brutalisation of Kashmir. From Rushdie, however, such a reaction is an overkill, especially since the terrain of the novel is not so much a hard and actual Kashmir as that of his simultaneously overheated and undercooked imagination:

At twenty-four the ambassador's daughter slept badly through the warm, unsurprising nights. She woke up frequently and even when sleep did come her body was rarely at rest, thrashing and flailing as if trying to break free of dreadful invisible manacles. At times she cried out in a language she did not speak. Men had told her this, nervously. Not many men had ever been permitted to be present while she slept. The evidence for this was therefore limited, lacking consensus; however, a pattern emerged. According to one report she sounded guttural, glottal-stopy, as if she were speaking Arabic. Night-Arabian, she thought, the dream tongue of Scheherazade. Another version described her words as science-fictional, like Klingon, like a throat being cleared in a galaxy far, far away. Like Sigourney Weaver channelling a demon in *Ghostbusters*.

All the signposts of Rushdie's later style are present in the opening pages of the novel: the pedestrian sentences, the pop culture references lashed to orientalist imagery, the blocky characterisation, the banality that assumes naming the protagonist "India" will achieve symbolic resonance. Because that is what the 24-year-old woman glottal-stopping through the night is called. India lives in Los Angeles, and the name is an overwriting of her original name Kashmira, an identity that she will reclaim by the end of the novel.

But she might as well be called Lara Croft:

These days she had herself firmly in hand. The problem child within her was sublimated into spare-time pursuits, the weekly boxing sessions at Jimmy Fish's boxing club on Santa Monica and Vine where Tyson and Christy Martin were known to work out and where the cold fury of her hitting made the male boxers pause to watch, the biweekly training sessions with a Clouseau-attacking Burt Kwouk look-alike who was a master of the close-combat martial art of Wing Chun, the sunbleached blackwalled solitude of Saltzman's Moving Target shooting gallery out in the desert at 29 Palms, and, best of all, the



All the signposts of Rushdie's later style are present in *Shalimar the Clown*: the pedestrian sentences, the pop culture references lashed to Orientalist imagery, the banality that assumes naming the protagonist 'India' will prove resonant

archery sessions in downtown Los Angeles near the city's birthplace in Elysian Park, where her new gifts of rigid self-control, which she had learned in order to survive, to defend herself, could be used to go on the attack.

I won't profess to understand most of the references in this passage, but this much I get: besides that India kicks ass, she's rich, discontented and the illegitimate daughter of an American diplomat and a Kashmiri woman. She also doesn't know who she is. This affliction is shared in varying degrees by most of the principal figures in *Shalimar the Clown*, although their characterisation is never convincing enough to make it clear if this matters. India's father Max Ophuls is another Rushdie hybrid, a haute-culture Ashkenazi Jew from Strasbourg who starts out as a French Resistance fighter and then becomes an American diplomat and the head of US counter-terrorism. By the time the novel begins, he is well past his prime. His role is confined to presenting an expensive car (I forget what make, though Rushdie expends reams of prose talking about it) and dying on his daughter's doorstep, head nearly severed from neck by his Kashmiri driver — the eponymous *Shalimar the Clown*.

Much of the novel, therefore, occurs as a flashback, retracing the past. It takes us to a Kashmiri village, Pachigam, where India's Hindu mother Boonyi frolics with *Shalimar*, a Muslim and son of the village headman, before they get married in the ecumenical tradition of Kashmiriyat — a blending of cultures and religions. The story then moves to the city of Strasbourg, where Max undergoes his initiation into the French Resistance. Happening to be "a man of movie-star good looks and polymathic accomplishment", Max emigrates to the United States after the war, "choosing the burnished attractions of the New World over the damaged gentility of the Old". Max is not immune to the attractions of old cultures, however; his posting to India produces an affair with

Boonyi and an illegitimate child. Max's British wife adopts the girl and heads back to England, Boonyi is dispatched to Kashmir, while Max himself returns to America and moves from the pleasantries of embassy cocktail parties to practising a more sinewy form of diplomacy, supplying arms and cash to loyal friends of America, some of whom happen to be the mujahideen in Afghanistan. Rushdie passes over all this rather quickly. Having set his revenge plot in motion, he concentrates on *Shalimar's* induction into a network of Islamist terror, which will eventually take him to Los Angeles to face Max and lead to a final encounter with Max's bereaved and angry daughter.

The English novelist Tim Parks, reviewing *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* in the *New York Review of Books*, had written that the further he progressed with the novel, the more he felt that its most formidable enemy was not "evil fundamentalism, but simply a moment's attention on the part of the wakeful reader". In this case, the wakeful reader will do well to ponder over the rapid-fire sketch of Max. There is no irony to the initial presentation of Max as a larger-than-life figure, the telescoping of his great courage, good looks and tremendous learning. (In Rushdie's scheme of things, one suspects, an individual's participation in the Resistance would be much diminished if he or she were ugly, stupid or rustic.) And because Rushdie starts out so admiring of his Max, it's hard to understand the reasons for his fall, or what it means when Max then rises from disgrace in India to visions of a new world order as head of counter-terrorism.

As with Max, so with the other principal characters. Boonyi is the most beautiful woman in the village, *Shalimar* the best performer of the traditional art of comedy and tightrope-walking, and India/Kashmira is played by Angelina Jolie. In this book, as in almost every Rushdie production from *Satanic Verses* onwards, all characters come in the size of Bollywood cutouts on a Bombay street. All actions take place on a world stage. Stardom infects every pore of the story.

When characterisation fails, it is still possible for the other constituents of a novel to assert their strength: story, language, narrative technique, ideas, setting. *Shalimar the Clown* doesn't do very well in these terms, although it is perhaps not quite as execrable as *Satanic Verses*, *Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury*. This qualified success is due entirely to the sections set in Kashmir, where something of the horror of lives subject to state terror comes through in spite of Rushdie's writing. The background is real enough: the general discontent of the Kashmiris leading to an insurgency against the authoritarian Indian State in the late 80s; the marginalisation of the secular, nationalist and largely indigenous Kashmiri groups by fundamentalist outfits controlled by Afghan and Pakistani jihadists; the forced expulsion of Kashmiri Hindus as the liberation movement became increasingly sectarian; and the presence of nearly half-a-million Indian troops who have killed, raped and tortured their way through the mountain state often compared to paradise in Persian poetry.

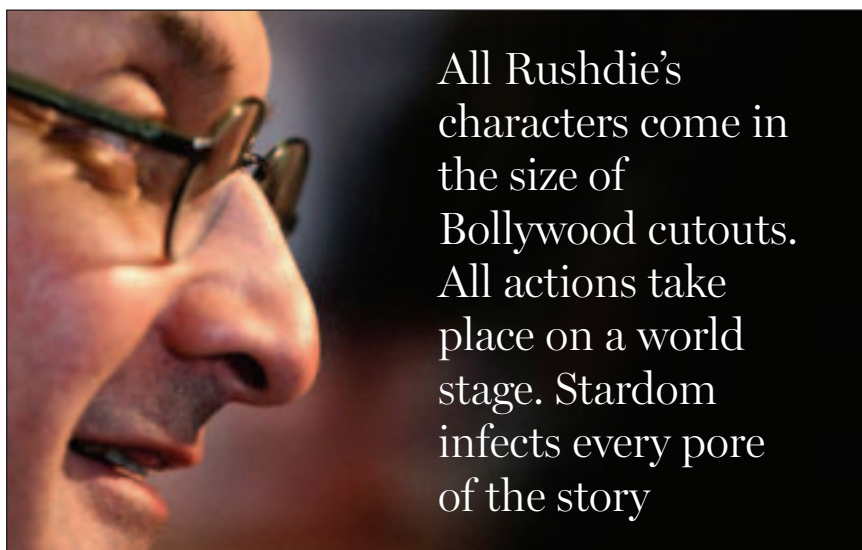
But what Rushdie does with this material is unsatisfying. For him, Kashmir doesn't seem to be particularly different from Los Angeles. In spite of a self-conscious narrator — Rushdie's narrators are always self-conscious — there are no changes of register to indicate the shifts in time and place. Kashmir is as transparent as Los Angeles, Delhi in the sixties as open to the authorial gaze as Strasbourg in the forties. Rushdie sits at the centre of the panopticon, with everything under survey.

This equal opportunity for place and time is by no means always an aesthetic fault; it is one of the central tenets of realism, which demands the even gaze and impassive control of material. But Rushdie isn't a realist writer in most other ways:

interiority, descriptive detail, plot movement or form. He prefers heavy symbolism, slapstick comedy, authorial digressions, shapelessness — faults that have been covered up before western eyes by his references to a putative subcontinental tradition of non-linear storytelling.

But supposedly oriental forms won't do as an explanation for the lazy expositions, the self-indulgent digressions, the increasingly mannered rendition of Indian linguistic habits and the ridiculous metaphors. Consider this account of Max's falling in and out of love with Boonyi, a liaison crucial to the story because it leads to India's birth and *Shalimar's* journey of revenge:

None of Max Ophuls's amours ever lasted very long before he came to India. Boonyi had been different. This was "love," and the nature of love was—was it not?—to endure. Or was that just one of the mistakes people made about love, Max got to wondering. Was he cloth-



All Rushdie's characters come in the size of Bollywood cutouts. All actions take place on a world stage. Stardom infects every pore of the story

ing an essentially savage, irrational thing in the garb of civilization, dolling it up in the dress shirt of endurance, the silk trousers of constancy, the frock coat of solicitude and the top hat of selflessness? Like Tarzan the ape man when he came to London or New York: the natural rendered unnatural. But under all the fancy apparel the untamable, unkind reality still remained, a feral thing more gorilla-like than human. Something having less to do with sweetness and tenderness and caring and more to do with spoor and territory and grooming and domination and sex. Something provisional, no matter what sort of treaties you acceded to, signed marriage contracts or private statements of accord. When he began to speak in this way the matador Edgar Wood understood that the bull was tiring and sent in the picadors, or to be precise, the picadoras. The beauties he aimed at Max were carefully selected from the upper echelons of Delhi and Bombay society to make Boonyi look bad.

This is a passage written to be quoted by an uncharitable reviewer — or a wakeful reader. One understands Rushdie's amours with King Kong and Tarzan, but does Max share his love? We don't know. As for the dress shirts, silk trousers, frock coats and top hats, these might tenuously be connected to Max's Strasbourg upbringing, but even so: are dress shirts enduring? Are top hats selfless? And Tarzan: is he nature, red in tooth and claw, or is he culture reinvented as nature, an exemplar of the inside-out colonial trick of which Kim, Lawrence of Arabia and Kurtz are other instances? The passage is meant to be from Max's point of view, but that matters little to Rushdie. He isn't showing us how Max thinks, but how Rushdie thinks. And more and more, Rushdie thinks not by imagining things, but by accumulating names for them. Take the next paragraph, where you hear the author's voice, unfettered by character: "[T]o be precise, the picadoras." What such language achieves, ultimately, is a suffocation of the characters. When they need to breathe and find their lines — and of course they could have funny lines, full of puns and malapropisms, if it was in keeping with their personalities and situation — they find the author shoving them aside so that he can continue with his aggrandising self-display. A gorilla becomes a bull in the space of a few lines, but Rushdie is always Rushdie.

Now the ideas are just frantic gestures at the bigness of life in a capitalist metropolis. Rushdie seems to hope if he points at enough objects, we won't notice he gapes the same way at it all

This technique of digressions, authorial self-intrusions and linguistic doodling began in *Midnight's Children*, but there Rushdie was doing it for the first time. The anarchy of his voice worked in accord with his ambition in that novel: to create a kind of archive for experiences and stories that hadn't been registered in the West. His language — crackling with puns, neologisms, Bollywood songs, advertising slogans, village proverbs and drawing-room jokes — considered itself a perfect match for the bewildering social world it was depicting. It worked because it was attached to character. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie used a narrator who was given to self-dramatisation, but who also knew the limitations of the method. When Saleem Sinai discovers his ability to get into people's minds, he indulges himself fully and then pauses:

Because the feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; that the thoughts I jumped inside were mine, that the bodies I occupied acted at my command; that, as current affairs, arts, sports, the whole rich variety of a first-class radio station poured into me, I was somehow making them happen...which is to say, I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift. 'I can find out any damn thing!' I triumphed, 'There isn't a thing I cannot know!' Today, with the hindsight of the lost, spent years, I can say that the spirit of self-aggrandizement which seized me then was a reflex, born of an instinct for self-preservation.

The self-aggrandisement remains, but the talent for entering into other minds, on which the pride of self-aggrandisement



was based, has vanished. So has the awareness that the multitudinous realities drawn upon by the author are not mere raw unshaped material but possess an agency of their own.

No writer should assume that his or her language will be completely equal to the world being written down. One doesn't have to be committed to realism to appreciate the Flaubertian sense of the novel as a place where the *mot juste* meets the sheer inadequacy of words. But Rushdie would disagree. To understand the inadequacy of words is to force oneself to work harder as a writer, and to make oneself think with greater clarity about the material being used. The novel where it became obvious that Rushdie had exhausted his talents, that he had entered into the illusion that there wasn't a damn thing he couldn't know, makes this statement in its opening pages: "Let's put it this way: who has the best tunes?" The devil, came the answer, and it seems that the natural tendency of Rushdie's devil is to riff, to make lists, to be clever; that, for him, is singing. We understand this much from *The Satanic Verses*, although little else is clear in that novel concerned largely with its own cleverness.

Where Rushdie is impressed by his promiscuous appropriation of a wide range of material, the reader is likely to be defeated by the lack of meaning. Eliot Weinberger, in his essay 'A Month of Rushdies', pointed out that in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie combined two separate novels he had been working on earlier. One was a contemporary story about immigration,



the other a fantasy about the origins of Islam; it was the latter that would become the controversial element. But *The Satanic Verses* offers more than just 20th century immigration and seventh-century Arabia; it has protagonists who are symbols of good and evil, Bombay highrises and London squats, Muslim villagers who decide to walk to Mecca and Sikh terrorists who want to blow up aircrafts, Bollywood films and television shows. It sounds imaginative, but in reality represents a failure of the imagination. There are frantic attempts at making *The Satanic Verses* a complex allegory, but none of the narrative strands has much to do with any other; their only link is Rushdie's hyperbolic language. As for the Jahilia sections, the portions that distort Islamic tradition, they serve no point at all.

*The Satanic Verses* made Rushdie a cause celebre in the West, but it possesses none of the courage usually displayed by heresy. Heretics believe in something. They have a case to argue, a different interpretation or idea, and they devote as much effort and thought to the alternatives they propose as they do to the tradition they challenge. But having read *The Satanic Verses*, there is nothing in it I could present as an alternative to the worker who had been so outraged by Rushdie that day.

When people like that worker figure in the novel, they do so as caricatures who act at Rushdie's command. As for the sections where his faith is made fun of, they happen to be boring as well as blas-

phemous, a case of bad art meeting bad faith. The devil may well have the best tunes, but not if we judge him by *The Satanic Verses*.

It is a safe bet that if the Islamists had left Rushdie alone, the book would have been forgotten. But the external events of a fatwa, international negotiations and book burnings came to the rescue of the novel, making it seem something more than it was. This might explain the sense of self-importance Rushdie has exhibited since then, believing that he is uniquely poised to interpret large world events and that he can convert the trivial and banal into the significant by a sort of Midas touch. From *The Satanic Verses* onward the novels largely tend to run together, stylistically barren and superficial in their exploration of ideas. Rushdie has things to say about celebrity status; about pop culture; about Greek and Indian mythology; about violence and catastrophes; about love and sleeplessness. But they don't add up. The ideas in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* are not so much ideas as a set of frantic gestures at the bigness, the fastness, the diversity of life in a capitalist metropolis. Rushdie appears to hope that if he points at enough objects, objects of enough variety, we won't notice that he points and gapes the same way at everything.

*Shalimar the Clown* leaves one equally baffled about Kashmiris, Indians and Americans, though it does tell us a lot about Rushdie. That Rushdie should have decided to

The *Satanic Verses* made Rushdie a cause celebre but it possesses none of the courage usually displayed by heresy. It offers no alternative view. It is boring as well as blasphemous, a case of bad art meeting bad faith

write a novel about Kashmir and then reduced it to a kind of video-game climax in Los Angeles makes one suspect that he no longer knows what to do with the raw material he gathers. *Shalimar the Clown* will possibly be lauded — for its discussion of OJ Simpson, for its description of (or list of words about) the San Quentin prison, for its seeming understanding of the "Kashmir problem", and for its apparent grasp of the ways in which international terrorism functions. But that would be to accept the novel as an event; it would be tantamount to watching it go by in a motorcade, only to lose any sense of its importance as the tail-lights recede in the darkness.

The writer is the author of the novels *The Point of Return* and *Surface*, both published by Picador in India



IN DEFENCE

# The Profane Farishta

*Salman Rushdie's political significance is as key as the literary. Unless the faithful learn to look at their idols as fallible, they will always find one like him intolerable*

Dilip Chitre

AM A Salman Rushdie fan and the reasons for this are not purely literary. I regard him as a fellow-Bombay/Mumbai/Bambai writer (that Big City can be divided by more than three languages); and I still regard Mumbai as my home despite having exiled myself from it.

Bombay/Mumbai speaks many tongues even in English and anyone who grows up in its pluri-lingual air develops a keener ear for real-life as well as literary polyphony. Rushdie leads the Bombay reader into the by-lanes of familiar sub-texts. They appear familiar because both the mundane city of Mumbai and its literary models have blurred but bewitching boundaries.

I am not really interested in Rushdie's citizenship and other chauvinism-related issues or the false perspectives such ideas create. I'm in-

Rushdie is a Dark Age genius taking potshots at the sacred from the profane but illuminated point of view

terested in speculating on his formative years in Mumbai and how they connect with his creativity as a writer — his style, his choice of themes, the characters and incidents he invents, the way his narratives are peopled and propelled, his awareness of a multi-layered society, and so on.

In my view Rushdie's major works so far are

*Shame, Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses, and The Moor's Last Sigh*; and I would include *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* in this list as a minor classic for minors of all ages. These are the books that I re-read to focus on their detail, proof that I treat them as works of art that, after an initial impact, draw one closer to their deceptive, chameleon-skin surface, for more and often artfully concealed clues.

But it is Rushdie's confrontation with Islamic fundamentalism in *The Satanic Verses* and the fatwa issued against him by the Iranian Ayatollah that has made him a prime terrorist target. Now that he has become an object of fascination throughout the civilized world because he is hit-listed by the same kind of fanatics that were able to bring off 9/11 and other sick spectacles of contemporary history, Rushdie lies cast in extra-literary perspective. Many of his fellow writers feel uncomfortable about that. Some envy him his

best-selling notoriety. Others pay undue attention to the pompously ignorant remarks he made (by implication) about contemporary creative writing in Indian languages in his anthology *Mirrorwork*.

But Rushdie, as I see him, is more like those Dark and Middle Age literary geniuses who took potshots at the sacred from the profane but illuminated point of view. He is more like Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Sterne, Joyce, and Gunter Grass if we take our own time from World War I to the present as a new Dark or Middle Age waiting for a Renaissance.

Those who create icons find themselves surrounded by demons. That is the predicament of all orthodoxy and fundamentalism. Rushdie invited the wrath of Muslim clerics and fundamentalists, who love terror for terror's sake, by treating Prophet Muhammad as a historical human being, and the Divine Revelation of the Quran as just another text open to

interpretation. Thus, to devout Muslims, Rushdie is Iblis, Satan, and Beelzebub — the Devil himself. He is the scapegoat of the faithful, not a martyr or an exile in perpetual flight.

Even non-Muslim Indians will find Rushdie intolerable if they cannot see religion as a man-made construct, much like poetry and art, secular ideologies and philosophy. If you were to question Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Adi Shankara, any of the saints and bhaktas, kings like Shivaji, or even great leaders such as Gandhi or Ambedkar who are icons to millions of the faithful in India, you would pay the price in spite of all your Constitutional guarantees.

As for Rushdie's appeal for Islamic reforms to an imaginary global Muslim audience, I do not know whether Gibreel or Iblis is prompting him. But as a human being I suppose he contains both, and as a fiction writer he is not afraid of using them as Messengers from the Unconscious embarrassed into Light.

We should not forget that Rushdie has as much political as aesthetic significance in our struggle towards a global civil society. Part of the foundation of such a utopia is an understanding that everything we humans believe in and do is historical to us. But this also means that there is no history but a cluster of contested historiographies; that there is no religion but a plurality of faiths; and that we are, as a species, moved by our fantasies and myths as much as by our rationality and our analytical faculties. Such a utopia, of course, would have no violence and no use for power: the two engines that drive our world.

*The writer is a Marathi poet and essayist*

## LOVE AND DEATH IN A DEAD LANGUAGE

*Shalimar the Clown will have a completely different resonance in Kashmir, his original home*

Basharat Peer

HAROUN AND the Sea of Stories, the first book he wrote after the fatwa, marked Salman Rushdie's return to his original family home: Kashmir. The Valley of K. Rashid Khalifa, his protagonist, a legendary storyteller, a Shah of Blah, whose spiralling narratives remind one of Rushdie himself, on reaching the valley, explains the names of the valley to his young son. 'Kache-Mar' can be translated as 'the place that hides a sea'. And Kache-Mar, 'In the old tongue,' Rashid admitted, 'was the word for "nightmare".'

In 1990 when *Haroun* was published, Kashmir, the place that hid a sea had become a nightmare. And Rushdie shared the plight of his ancestral homeland. For many years after that both Rushdie and Kashmir lived with the fear of death, in the shadows. Rushdie behind the drawn blinds of an unknown London house; Kashmir in the multi-floor wood and brick houses where lantern wicks were lowered. Both dreading knocks on the door.

The 'situation' in Kashmir killed much more than people. It destroyed ways of life, customs, traditions, and language too. The militancy added new words like crackdown, hideout, torture and informer and arrest to the Kashmiri vocabulary. But the Kashmiri language and the pre-conflict Kashmir that it conveyed were dying and continue to die. The language, which the government had

chosen not to teach in the schools of Kashmir, had become a mere argument for the separatists, an English phrase: linguistic colonialism, spoken in houses where children were told to speak in Urdu or English.

Like Kashmiri, Rushdie too had begun to falter with the *Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* failing to match the genius of *Midnight's Children*. Kashmir had forgotten him after *The Satanic Verses*, his name was not spoken aloud there, not even in the garden café where they still point at a table under a Chinara tree and say, "Rushdie used to sit there." Yet he did write in the western press, when Kargil happened, when, after the parliament attack, a war seemed inevitable: "Kashmir for the Kashmiris" is an old slogan, but the only one that expresses how the subjects of this dispute have always felt; how, I believe, the majority of them would still say they feel, if they were free to speak their minds without fear."

Was that it? Had Rushdie left Kashmir like the foreign correspondents who visit the Valley when the possibilities of war or peace between India and Pakistan are high? It seemed so till I read his latest novel *Shalimar the Clown*. Rushdie was back again in Kashmir describing it like an eyewitness. Through the story of the Bhand Pather actor, Shalimar the Clown, who after being cuckolded by his wife Boonyi Kaul, steps across the Line of Control and

joins a pan-Islamic terrorist group, and spends years practising the art of assassination before murdering the man his wife left him for: a Jewish resistance hero, American ambassador to India turned counter-terrorism chief, Maximilian Ophuls.

Between Shalimar's theatre and death Rushdie takes us through the many worlds that make Kashmir. The harmony of Pandit-Muslim relations of pre-militancy Kashmir, the exodus of the Pandits ("Kill One, Scare Ten"), the crackdowns, the search and destroy operations by the soldiers, the rapes and the arson. The words an arrested militant saw on a torture chamber wall in the army camp Rushdie describes as Elasticnagar (it stretches like elastic, ever-expanding): Everybody Talks.

Besides that *Shalimar the Clown* brings alive words from the dying Kashmiri language, the way only Rushdie can. He names his female protagonist, Boonyi, Kashmiri for a Chinara tree, introduces the world to the Kashmiri cuisine, *waazwan*, the Banquet of Thirty Six Courses Minimum, its creator, *waza*, the chef, and the wedding rituals of burning proprietary seeds, white Isband flowers like an *aarti* in front of the bride and the groom. He reminds one of the stories Kashmiri grandmothers told about the forests. *Un Poshe Teli, Yeli Van Poshe* (Forests come first, food comes second), a saying known to every Kashmiri as the words of the patron saint Nund Rishi, and attributed in

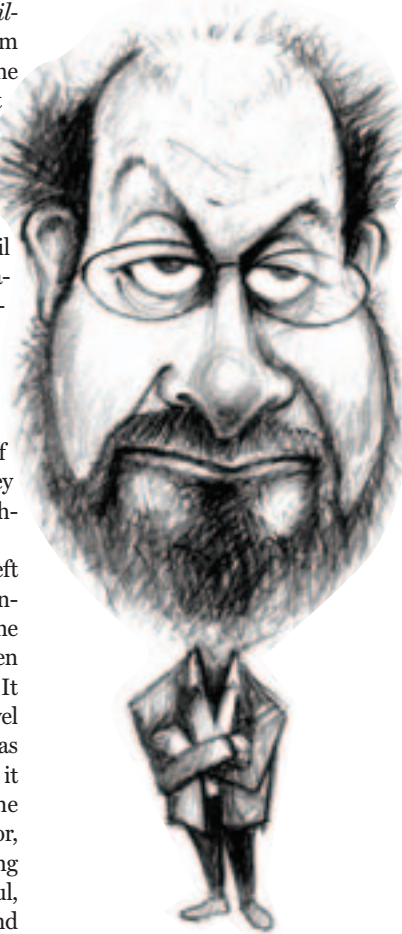
Rushdie's book to a Gujjar prophet-ess Nazrebaddoor (evil eye-off).

He takes one back to the childhood tales of Potslov the cunning fox, Ponz the monkey, and Haput the black bear. And a phrase which has been buried under the sand bags of memory and barely comes up in conversations again in Kashmir, a phrase that referred to a dislikeable person, literally a bitter-herb — Rasashud. In his hands, Rasashud becomes the apt nickname for an army informer whose identity is re-

Literary opinion on Shalimar may vary, but in it, Rushdie returns bits of the imperilled paradise to Kashmiris

vealed in the Bhand village, Pachigam. The chorus of children repeating the rhyming nicknames at Rushdie's naked spy can still be heard anywhere in rural Kashmir: Watal-nath, Gopi-nath! Watal-nath, Gopi-nath!

Masters of literary criticism may have varying opinions on the literary merits of *Shalimar the Clown* but the Kashmir Rushdie creates sounds and smells like the Kashmir that exists. In fact, he returns bits of the imperilled paradise to us. Anyone living there, who will read the book, will tell you so. ▲



## arts&amp;culture

IN THE LAND OF  
**PORN AND PURITANISM**

**A**S AN INDIAN teenager growing up in New Delhi in the 80s, I learned everything I knew about sex from Hollywood. Movies, and later, rock videos taught me to kiss, to seduce, and even to desire. At a time when good girls didn't even hold hands, and every interaction with a boy was overshadowed by the ever-present fear of shame, just the sight of Madonna asking men to justify her love felt exhilarating.

Living in a culture that values silence in these matters, most middle-class Indians turn to America for not just the images, but for the very vocabulary of sex. In our imagination, America is synonymous with sex, be it as a symbol of Babylonian excess or guilt-free pleasure. The land of the untrammelled libido, where anything is possible with anyone.

In recent decades, American pop culture has done its best to live up — or down — to its reputation thanks mainly to the mainstreaming of pornography. Once carefully hidden behind a curtain at the back of a video rental store, porn has now become as ubiquitous as apple pie, and so has its sexual sensibility. Where once the sexy negligee would have sufficed, strip clubs and threesomes have become *de rigeur* for bored couples looking to spice up their sex life. Women strip for self-esteem; anal sex is just another item on the menu in the bedroom; and making out with another girl is just the quickest way to grab that cute guy's attention. Or at least that's the America you see when you turn on the television or pick up a magazine.

Living in this media-driven world, it's easy to forget the other America — the nation built by puritans as their haven in a corrupt world. Hovering behind the omnipresent images of gyrating, thong-clad dancers is a vast continent of repression that floated briefly into sight when Justin Timberlake unveiled Janet Jackson's pierced nipple during the Super Bowl last year. The widespread outrage sparked by the incident was a rude reminder of that other nation of believers for whom sex is still the original sin.

Contrary to its Hollywood-earned reputation as the purveyor of all things sexual, puritanism is built into the very DNA of the US. Founded by Calvinist pilgrims fleeing the decadence of Europe, America has over the centuries retained its status as the prude of the western world, a country where adultery is still big news, be it Bill Clinton or Brad Pitt.

Americans are more likely to marry, raise a family, and stay faithful compared to, say, folks in France or Sweden. In this country, even porn stars like Jenna Jameson just want to meet the right guy and get knocked up. We may be on the brink of a brand-new millennium, but the great American Dream remains stodgily domestic in its vision of the happy nuclear couple with their requisite two kids, all living together in a big old house.

While the sexual revolution of the 60s transformed popular culture — paving the way for the Kylie Minogues and Christina Aguileras — much of American life remained stubbornly traditional, especially in vast swathes of the heartland and in the south, where people still married their childhood sweethearts; Sundays was meant for church and football; and men went to work daily, leaving the women to tend to the kids at home.

This America constituted what Richard Nixon referred to as the "silent majority", one increasingly unhappy with the in-your-face



*For Indians, America equals sex and 'cool'. But the images of popular culture only sell an idea. There is no real sexual freedom in America. Welcome to a nation of cultural schizophrenia*

**Lakshmi Chaudhry**

SEX, MONEY  
& POLITICS

1

immorality of the free love hippies. While future generations went on to embrace the very freedom rejected by their parents, the sexual revolution of the 60s also laid the foundations for the resurgence of the Christian Right. Over the next three decades, the cultural backlash fuelled the Religious Right's spectacular rise to power, which they used to contest every measure of social progress, be it abortion or the birth control pill.

Today — 40 years after the sexual revolution — the other America is alive and well, its citizens living in an alternate universe, with their own radio, television, books, movies,

*America is torn between God and Mammon. Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson rose to stardom selling their bodies while proclaiming their virginity*

and music, brought to them courtesy a multi-billion dollar Christian entertainment industry. They gather in tens of thousands in giant mega-churches that are like mini-states, take care of their parishioners' every need, be it job counselling or childcare. This America made *Passion of the Christ* a giant hit and returned George Bush to the White House in 2004.

Within days of the poll, TV screens were plastered with religious leaders declaring the triumph of social conservatism. It was time to take America back to its traditional ways:

make abortions illegal; reinstate anti-sodomy laws to crack down on homosexuality; and censor sexual content, on TV or in the classroom. The first target in this strategy of radical change is abortion, the single most contentious social issue in America today. But while the rhetoric focuses on protecting the "life" of the fetus, the real aim is to increase the negative consequences of sexual activity outside marriage. For evangelical Christians, abortion is a symptom of the greater disease of sexual immorality.

It is why they also support abstinence-only sex education in school since talking about sex to kids can only lead to one thing: kids having sex. The Department of Health under the Bush regime has been pushing a "sexual awareness" drive claiming, among others, that condoms do not prevent sexually transmitted diseases, and that abortion raises the risk of breast cancer. It's the latest in a decades-long crusade, which includes lobbying schools to omit books by Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and William Styron on grounds that they contain objectionable sexual content.

Children have always been a priority for the religious Right, but they have recently become more vocal about extramarital sex between adults. Even though the US government has grudgingly approved the use of RU-486 or the 'morning after' pill — years after it was freely available in Europe — even basic contraception is under fire. A group called Pharmacists for Life now refuses to fill prescriptions for the birth control pill saying it

violates their religious beliefs. Last month, Senator Rick Santorum stated the Christian conservative stance on contraception: "It's harmful ... to have a society that says sex outside of marriage should be encouraged or tolerated. Birth control encourages that."

The only kind of sex that is legitimate in this America is between a man and his wife.

While most Americans don't support the Christian Right's agenda, many parents share its moral outrage at a popular culture that shows no signs of recognising any limits. The outcry at the sight of Janet Jackson's nipple in the midst of a football game underlined their sense of powerlessness in a market culture that sells promiscuity to their kids as the ultimate badge of cool.

The US media describes the vast sexual gulf between the two Americas as part of a culture war, where the values of sexual freedom and morality are competing for the nation's future. This description elides the reality: these images of sexuality are less about freedom than profit. Popular culture in America is driven by what sells. Nothing sells like sex.

The choice to take pornography mainstream was made by firms looking to expand their consumer base by making it "okay". It is now a \$10 billion industry that sells directly to customers in homes and hotel rooms, brought to them by mega-corporations like General Motors, Marriott and Time Warner. No coincidence that the rise of porn has been accompanied by a boom in plastic surgery, as women go to beauty salons and under the knife to reshape their bodies to fit the porn aesthetic. Behold the Brazilian wax and double-D breasts. The fashion industry churns out skimpier clothes to better reveal these manufactured bodies with personalities to match.

It was only a matter of time before everyone else jumped on the sexual bandwagon. Celebrities now hawk their sex tapes to boost their visibility and bank balances. Bikini-clad babes wrestle in mud in beer ads. Reality shows stock up on contestants ready to display their wares. As the images grow more explicit, they compete to titillate an increasingly jaded audience. That's what Janet and Justin were trying to do with their PR stunt until it went sadly awry.

America is a nation torn between God and Mammon; its inability to make peace between the two creates a form of cultural schizophrenia, where uber-sexualised pop nymphets like Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson rose to stardom by selling their bodies even as they loudly proclaimed their virginity. Twelve-year olds banned from learning the ABCs of sex through malls to buy thong underwear to go with their low-rise jeans, and teenagers engage in oral and anal sex to be faithful to their virginity pledges. The consequences of this perverse version of sexuality are clear in its twisted message to young girls: Don't be a slut, just make sure you look like one. That is more obscene than any kind of pornography.

Held hostage to religious morality in one, and chained to the corporate bottom-line in the other, sex isn't free in either America. The Indians who look to America for answers for sexuality will likely find a cautionary tale instead. Globalisation has brought with it our own version of the culture war, where we too are being asked to choose between the commodified sex on our TV screens and the morality of religious nationalists. Whatever the answer to our predicament, there's one thing I know for sure: It's not in Hollywood. ▲

# GOD & i

PERIZAAD ZORABIAN  
Actor



I COMPLETELY believe in god. He is my strength, my faith and my belief, something that keeps me going. It's just a feeling inside you that gets you through life. I have a very personal, matter-of-fact kind of relationship with god. He is someone you can be yourself with.

I don't see god as a person. In

Religion sees things as black or white. I don't associate god with it

fact, I see god as a power, as an aura, as a phenomenal energy. Religion tends to put everything

in black and white. It's either this way or the highway. But life has a lot of greys. I don't associate god with religion.

Mixing politics with religion is the nastiest and most cruel thing to do. It is the most criminal thing that anyone can do. In politics, religion is used to justify all the crimes

one has done. And the people who use it for this purpose are weak.

What I don't like about my religion — Zoroastrianism — is that people from other religions are not allowed into the fire temple. When I die, why can't my spouse or my friends come in to pray for me? It's not fair. I don't think it's right.

**T**O MILLIONS across India he is the comic villain in innumerable Bollywood blockbusters, or an idiosyncratic character — the type obsessed with moustaches — in memorable Hrishikesh Mukherjee films. Most of these millions are quite unaware that this more public face of the great thespian is possibly the least illustrative of his career. A career which spanned five decades from the 1950s to his death in 1993, a career which contributed greatly to the birth and development of a new idiom of theatre in Bengal, a career marked by his undying commitment to a revolutionary political ideology even when it turned sour for its very proponents. Utpal Dutt's life was punctuated by resounding success and equally resounding failure, political controversy dogged his footsteps just as he doggedly held on to his beliefs in the face of vociferous and sometimes violent opposition, his work till date is praised, panned, copied and emulated. A dramatic life for a man who deserved no less, a man who strode through the world of Bengali (and Indian) theatre like a colossus, a man who is finally — 12 years after his death — getting due recognition from a state government that he had, arguably, helped into power through the unflinchingly Communist ideals of his theatre.

Conceived and coordinated by the West Bengal Youth Welfare Department across six venues in Kolkata, the four-day festival (August 19-22), starting on the day Dutt died in 1993, features some of his best-known plays presented anew by a cross-section of directors and theatre groups from the state. The festival includes a seminar on Dutt's approach to creating theatre, the screening of a variety of his film work, both as an actor and director, an exhibition of photographs of his theatre, and the release of a volume of essays by and on Dutt.

West Bengal in general and Kolkata in particular are known to be 'theatre-mad'. It is the birthplace of the unique Group Theatre movement, both a product and integral part of the Left's campaign against the Congress-led state government in the 1960s and early 1970s that brought it to power. Today, Group Theatre comprises hundreds of registered groups, rules the theatre-scene in Kolkata, for better or for worse. Theatre was used as a revolutionary tool against British rule as far back as *Nildarpan* in 1875. In such a scenario what makes Dutt's theatre so special?

Dutt, says Shishir Sen — one of the coordinators for the forthcoming festival — is one of the most imposing figures of the people's theatre movement. After Shishir Kumar Bhaduri, the two towering writer-director-actors of Bengali theatre were Shombhu Mitra and Dutt. In the latter's case, theatre was not restricted to the British tradition of the proscenium alone. Dutt's horizons extended to the semi-urban 'folk' form of Jatra and street theatre. Apart from his work in Hindi films, he was a well-respected actor and director in Bengali films too. Dutt brought a fiercely political dimension to all his work, sometimes at the expense of alienating friends and creating unnecessary enemies. What defines him, though, and places him in a league of his own



Rebellion Time: a scene from *Kallol*, on the Naval mutiny of 1946 in Mumbai

## STAGE OF GREATNESS

*A festival in Kolkata belatedly honours Utpal Dutt, the master of revolutionary theatre and spectacular productions, on his 12th death anniversary*

Vikram Iyengar

was his willingness to take risks, to dare what no others would, both in terms of the theatre where he was constantly experimenting with form and content or in terms of taking on the establishment. His pathbreaking work, often heavily (and even rightfully) criticised, gave rise to trends that others have followed during and after his lifetime.

To Dutt, taking his theatre to a mass audience was vital. The Left-oriented political theatre targeted the educated intelligentsia, those who were possibly already 'converts' so



was known for hosting visually extravagant productions. Dutt responded to this history and created spectacular productions with a strongly political core. His scale was cinematic, the stage was a canvas for what he wanted to communicate.

He filled in that canvas with meticulous detail through large casts, scrupulously conceived, designed and executed sets, breathtaking lighting and carefully chosen background scores. Whether it was the deck of a World War II warship in *Kallol* (1965) com-



I Can Do Shakespeare too: Dutt in *Othello*

Festival coordinator Shishir Sen calls Dutt one of the most imposing figures of the people's theatre movement. Dutt said, 'If

I throw a shoe in the air, at its fall it will turn into an actor'

to speak. For Dutt, this was not enough. In the hope of attracting a more 'traditional' theatre audience, he took on the bastion (albeit fading) of Bengali commercial theatre and leased the Minerva Theatre to produce all his shows. Minerva stands in Beadon Street — the heart of what was Kolkata's commercial theatre district. Incidentally, though closed to the public for some time, this is the venue for the inauguration of the festival, which will also see the renaming of Beadon Street as Utpal Dutt Sarani. Minerva, a proscenium complete with all the machinery of theatre,



Coming Together: Dutt (centre) in *Saat Hindustani*

plete with gun turrets and waves lapping at its base, or the climactic scene in *Angar* (1959) where the dark coal mines slowly fill with water drowning the miners within while politicians mouth platitudes above, Dutt's astonishing theatre succeeded in attracting a cross-section of audiences that perhaps eludes Group Theatre to this day. All this, created in an age where the technology of theatre was still in its infancy. Dutt's scenic design continues to be a benchmark for directors and designers across India.

Asit Bose, a close associate of Dutt and a former member of the director's Little Theatre Group and later People's Little Theatre, points out that this panoramic vision, this ability to work with an ensemble cast and get the best out of each person was where Dutt's genius lay. He recalls that Dutt used to say: "If I throw a shoe up in the air, at its fall it will turn into an actor." Dutt created some of his most memorable productions with a largely untrained and non-actor cast, some of which are copied faithfully and completely unimagi-

natively by amateur groups even today. The theatrical vision, however, eludes them.

After the Minerva project fell through due to various reasons — not least among them political differences with the official party line — Dutt turned his attention to the Jatra, a melodramatic operatic form with themes from history and mythology and a rural and urban audience of thousands per show. He came in first as a playwright-director, and then as an actor as well. Dutt's involvement revolutionised the Jatra. With new plays such as *Rifle*, *Jallianw-*

*ala Bagh* and *Delhi Chalo*, the content became more political, more 'relevant' to contemporary society, though still taking from traditional sources. His direction explored, developed and challenged both the form and the performers like never before. In a typical gesture of defiance, he undermined the snobbish attitude that elite audiences had towards Jatra and paved the way for several other Bengali stage and film actors to enter into this exciting world of performance. When Dutt returned to the proscenium, he brought with him new approaches imbibed from Jatra that caused him to shift from realism on stage to a form of expressionism in plays like *Suryashikar* and *Tiner Talwar* (both 1971).

However, Dutt's adamant political pose, sometimes childish in its obstinacy combined with an almost arrogant self-assurance, was a big factor for his decline whether with political parties who were modifying or even denying their previous stances with the changing times and their own changing fortunes or with his own company members, some of whom began to see this pose as a hindrance in developing their theatre further. Even the audiences began to lose interest, relegating his stance once considered to be radical to the realm of tired rhetoric. Considering that practically three generations have either seen the Left Front in West Bengal into power or grown up under its influence, and observed the propounded oratory of Dutt's theatre slip into familiar political complacency and hypocrisy in reality, this trend is hardly surprising.

What, then, can justify a festival of Utpal Dutt? Bose agrees that much of the political sting of his approach are not relevant today. What made an Utpal Dutt production unique was his capacity to make any world event from any period resonant for a contemporary audience. So, his plays must be open to reinterpretation in and for this age. It is this spirit of exploration and pioneering vision that is Dutt's legacy and must be saluted. Personalities like him are either revered or feared. Neither attitude proves helpful in learning from, them. Such a festival, Bose hopes, will help bring a new generation of theatre workers and audiences closer to this great man.

We live in an age when revolution seems outdated and forms of imperialistic control are more insidious. Acceptance is the norm. In an interview for the Nehru Shatabdi Natya Samaroh (1989), Dutt said: "There are people who say political plays have no effect. I don't agree. They strike within, and though the impact may not always surface, it has far-reaching reverberations ultimately." Perhaps it is time to let those reverberations speak. ▲

society&amp;lifestyle



# THE GREAT

*Everybody was waiting for the big saga on the Mutiny. Now the bloodbath is on. Just what went wrong with Mangal Pandey? Who's going to own up to the mess?*

**THE TAKE**

minty tejal



## Arise ye all... the Rising is here

FILM: MANGAL PANDEY - THE RISING  
DIRECTOR: KETAN MEHTA  
STARRING: AAMIR KHAN, RANI MUKHERJI, TOBY STEPHENS,  
KIRRON KHER, AMISHA PATEL

ON AUGUST 11, I saw *Mangal Pandey - The Rising* at a well-attended premiere in Mumbai. The response to the much-awaited film was tepid. I heard no wild cheers or laughs or gasps through the movie. An attempt at clapping petered out as the fancy crowd shuffled away quickly.

Like me they seemed embarrassed. After *Lagaan*, this? Damn. Well okay, you can't produce a masterpiece every time, but why hype it so much?

As an average film, *Mangal Pandey* is okay, but as a big budget Aamir-Rani-Ketan Mehta-Bobby-Rehman va va vroom masterpiece, it's a poor effort.

*Mangal Pandey* is neither history nor entertainment. It neither educates nor amuses. Instead, like a boring lesson, it plods along. A title at the beginning says the film is folklore, but by the end it's more like folks-bored. Aamir is expectedly brilliant, with a steely look and wiry frame that mesmerises you. Except Aamir doesn't seem to be the hero, Toby Stephens does.

The rough voice of Om Puri guides us through

Aamir is expectedly brilliant, with a steely look and wiry frame that mesmerises you. Except Aamir doesn't seem to be the hero

the film. Unfortunately the extensive use of voiceovers distracts from the pace. The settings are too stagey with little zing. The screenplay by Farrukh Dhondy, who last scripted the 'masterpiece' *Kisna*, is limp. The dialogues are too wordy; the music by AR Rehman is as poor as the picturisations. The action, in parts, is good.

The only love affair that truly works is the one between Gordon (Stephens) and Pandey. The Brit company officer and Indian sepoy have a special connect. They fight bloody-battle together, wrestle with fierce affection in the village *akhara*, drink *bhang*, nurse each others' wounds, play pranks and engage in lengthy conversations in broken Hindi. The warrior thing I guess.

Rani Mukherji lights up the screen in her very first appearance and stays incandescent through her few scenes. Kirron Kher is tantalising, but like Rani, wasted. Amisha Patel, well, the less said the better. If they had allowed her to be burnt on the pyre, the movie wouldn't have missed a beat. Three days later nothing from the film stays with me — except Aamir's moustache.

Mangal a mangal, mangal a mangal, mangal a bungle, bungle a bungle ... oh.

Sadly, life in Mumbai too has been a bungle. The torrential rains in Mumbai exposed all claims of Shanghai. In 24 hours, the carefully applied mascara swiftly ran down Mumbai's seductively packaged face to reveal an ugly old hag inside. Decaying and rotting. It was gross enough to turn me off going to see further garbage in cinema halls. Hence there was no take for a bit. Now I'm back!


**SHOBHA DÉ**

GENERALLY SPEAKING, turkeys don't have names. This one does. It's called *Mangal Pandey*. Ketan Mehta has finally done what I long suspected he would (what took you so long, honey?) — he's laid an egg. A rather expensive egg (Rs 30 crore, did I hear?). But that's his problem. As far as the *aam junta* is concerned, there ought to be a several *anday ka omelette* on the faces of all those who hyped *Mangal...* to the skies and beyond. Imagine... the initial secrecy. The keeping-everything-under-wraps. To say nothing of the attempts to 'ban' *desi* journos from international press shows. What was all that about? Did the makers really think *phirang* presswallahs are such *gadhas*, they'd actually fall for this amateurish mish-mash?

Nobody would've come down this heavily on the movie, had it not taken itself so damned seriously. The only thing that was rising within me was my temper as the relentless hoodwinking carried on

Hello! *Mangal...* ain't *Ben Hur* or *Gladiator*, and even those Hollywood spectaculars were torn to shreds. Wrong move, fellas. The white man already has his burdens — he doesn't need to add a trite Bollywood film to the baggage.

Why is 'MP' such a dud? Before taking it apart as a poorly structured narrative, let me just say that it falls flat on its face mainly because the filmmaker's cold-blooded manipulation and intrinsic insincerity show up in virtually every frame. Nobody likes to be made an *ullu* or a *bandar*. A film that resorts to every stale device in the movie-maker's hand book, is doomed from the word go. It's the old 'Indian rope trick' all over again. Or worse, it's what we imagine the West is dying to see, since we are convinced audiences haven't moved beyond 'Sabu, the Elephant Boy'. While that may be true, it's sad that anyone would actively want to cater or pander to those tired clichés. Which is why we are forced to endure that cringe-making opening scene featuring pseudo-Baul singers on elephant-back, followed by similar icky shots of a painted *haathi* trumpeting, Brahmins bathing in a holy river, yogis meditating on holy ghats, a Smita Patil look-alike baring a boob to breastfeed a *gora baccha*. Give me a break, guys. This is a bit too twee. And as fake as those *nautch* girls who look like they've been borrowed from Mumbai's dance bars. What next? Naked *fakirs* errrrrrr copulating with the *mamsaab* who spends those long, torrid summer afternoons sweltering under a hand-pulled *punkah*?

It's like Ketan and gang parked themselves at Mumbai's Phillips' antiques to carelessly study old lithos from the Company period and copy a few details for their cinematic pedigree. Heaven knows who defined *Mangal Pandey's* bizarre movie track but I doubt the culprit will own up and assume responsibility now that the blood bath is on. Nobody (not even yours truly) would've come down this heavily on the movie, had it not taken itself so damned seriously. The only thing that was rising within me was my temper as

the relentless hoodwinking carried on and on. This is not epic filmmaking. It is faking the Big "O"... all noise and grunts, heaving and panting, and little else.

There is also the other all-out attempt to project Aamir Khan as the greatest actor ever born. Sorry guys. Good try. But...

By rationing roles and leveraging his short supply into a fat fee, Aamir has managed to pull it off so far. But after the debacle of *Mangal* it isn't going to be that easy. He's smart enough to figure out as much. No wonder he has reportedly signed three films very quickly before 'MP' arrived at a cinema near you... and bombed.

That's called making a smart move. If nothing else, Aamir will be able to keep himself in gravy for the next 10 years regardless of the box office fate of his next film. So.... What went wrong with *Mangal Pandey*? I'd say it's the vision thing. Whose vision was it? Ketan's?? Aamir's??? Someone else's??

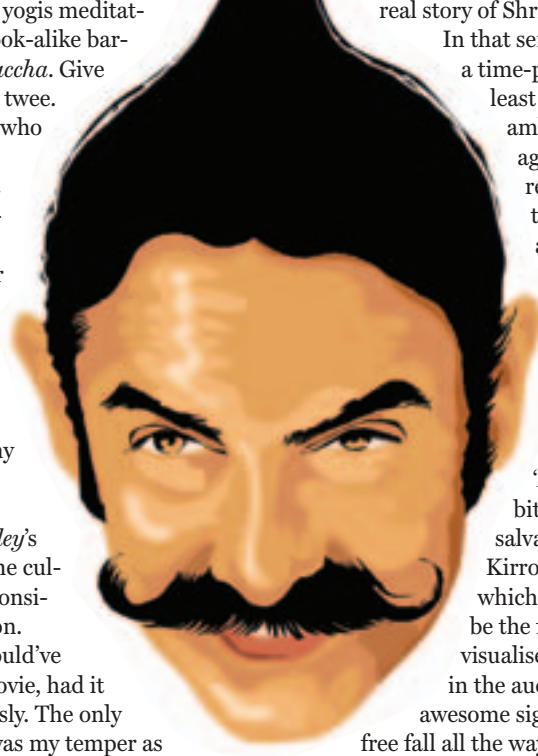
The movie, allegedly, went through several edits. Khan asserted his right to undertake his own snip-job (thanks to a clever clause in his contract). Apparently, other brains got into the act as well. Off with their heads, audiences are saying. There is no real story, no emotional connect, no cohesiveness, no nothing in this multi-crore *khichdi*. The love affair seems to be between the two principal actors (Aamir and Toby). Which is not such a bad thing, since the only erotic/amorous sequence in the movie features the two men mud-wrestling, if you please. Poor Rani Mukherji playing Heera the whore, has never looked this unattractive, making one wonder which *gora* or *kala kutta* would put down good money for this tootsie. To make matters still worse, the costumes and styling are totally off, with everything looking like it has been pulled out of Manoj Kumar's attic.

But the real reason why *Mangal Pandey* makes one angry is because it tries to fool people and insult their intelligence. It completely lacks sincerity of purpose and is a farcical attempt at recreating a

A film that resorts to every stale device in the movie maker's handbook is doomed from the word go. Pseudo Bauls on elephant back, Brahmins bathing in holy rivers... Give me a break guys. This is a bit too twee

small slice (very small!!!) of history. Read Rudrangshu Mukherjee's masterly book for the real story of Shri Mangal Pandey.

In that sense the film is no different from a time-pass 007 entertainer which at least doesn't pretend to have any lofty ambitions. What the two share is aggressive marketing. It doesn't really matter what audiences think or say, or even if they stay away. The money is already in the bank. If slithering snakes and gypsies, swarthy Brahmins and untouchables, smarmy *sahibs* and natives don't do it for you (or the *goras* it was primarily designed for), then baby, it's time to yell 'Halla bol'. The bullet has been bitten. So.... what is it that might salvage Ketan's folly? Perhaps Kirron Kher's mighty cleavage, which, for many viewers, turned out to be the film's biggest revelation. I can visualise several male members (ummm, in the audience, silly), rising to that awesome sight. For the rest, alas, it was a free fall all the way.



# INDIAN ROPE TRICK



The critical response in India has been almost savage. But there is not much consternation in the other camp. Director Ketan Mehta — parrying gently — and scriptwriter Farrukh Dhondy — much more scathingly — tell SHOMA CHAUDHURY why



KETAN MEHTA

*'The nasty reviews in India stem from resentment about the film's incredible opening'*

**You've nurtured the idea for 18 years. Has Mangal Pandey turned out the way you wanted?**

I'm very happy with the film.

**How had you conceived Mangal? As a romantic, maverick, or a grand national hero, a metaphor?**

As a symbol, a spirit of freedom. More than a character, I saw him as a starting point for a movement in the country.

**Do you think the more powerful story of an individual was lost in trying for a grand scale? It lacked spirit, intimacy.**

You're saying the film didn't work for you, but there are others who got emotionally involved and said they cried in the film.

**The reviews in India have been very critical.**

Only some reviews. Almost deliberately nasty. I think because the film's had an incredible, in fact historical, opening. More people have seen this film in the first four days than *Lagaan*, *Dil Chahta Hai* and *Mela* put together.

**Reviews in the UK and US have been kinder.**

"Kinder" makes it sound like charity. The reviews in the UK and US have been more positive. For one, people came without expectation, no Aamir or Ketan baggage, and were surprised. For another, the movie there was in English so we didn't require the voiceover. That made a difference. **This is an Aamir Khan - Ketan Mehta film. People should expect a high bar from you.**

Yes, but in this case, perhaps it has prevented people from experiencing the film without preconceived notions. You — and many others — were anticipating something you did not get. I am too close to take a dispassionate view of it. **A disappointing feature of the film are the clichés — the Holi song, the elephants, sati scene etc.**

(A bit exasperated) What is clichéd about a Holi song? Isn't there Holi every March? Wouldn't it be celebrated in a cantonment? Would there be *bhanga* and colours or not? What's exotic about a Sufi *qawwali* — it creates mood. **Not Holi or the qawwali per se, but coming from you, the way it was handled and picturised seemed too pat.**

"Coming from you" feels like a whip. Almost every film I've done has celebrated Indian music. The Holi song is a moment the film needs, it would get too grim otherwise. When I made *Bhawani Bhawai*, they called my musical interventions Brechtian alienation devices, now they're calling it clichés.

**What do you think are the strengths of the film?**

Incredible performances by Aamir and Toby. Great ensemble performances as well. The art direction, sets — all of it was phenomenal. I think the film offers a wider vision of the world. It is contemporary, ambitious.

**What do you think are the film's weaknesses?**

I'm too close to it yet, you should ask me in a couple of weeks. But perhaps the voice-overs may or may not work.

**Why are none of the ancillary characters fleshed out? Neither Rani nor Amisha make impact. You don't really care for Mangal, not the love stories, not the loss of friendship.**

Each character has been painted in bold strokes. That's how they were conceived.

**There have been a lot of rumours about differences between you and Aamir and Farrukh and Bobby.**

In any film process, a writer comes with his own vision but the final output is a product of discussion and argument. Why do people insist on turning a positive thing into a negative? **Would you agree the film is historically flawed? Mangal is given great nationalistic rhetoric, Tanya Tope comes seeking his help... If you could take so many liberties, why not flesh the character out some more?**

Nobody has recorded that they specifically did not meet. There are references to sepoy and nobility establishing con-

What is clichéd about a Holi song?

Isn't there Holi every March? Would *bhanga* and colour not be there? These are just preconceived prejudices

tact. There was definitely a sense of a united uprising, a large subterranean rebellion. This film is a dramatisation of that. We are only fed the British version, but there were mendicant

musicians roaming the countryside, carrying stories and preaching rebellion. I believe the sepoy represent a grassroot peasant rebellion. The idea of India begins there. I really believe that we have granted too much to England-returned lawyers and the Indian National Congress. The grassroot idea of India began in 1857.

**Would you say there's been a publicity overkill?**

I don't know what you mean by that. The publicity drive has meant that we have managed to reach out to the largest number of people ever. Each multiplex is showing 15 shows a day, the normal would be 4-5 a day. The revenues earned and sheer number of people who have seen the film in the first week is unprecedented in the history of Indian cinema. It is a way of beating piracy — to get the maximum number of people into the halls in the first week itself. And mere curiosity cannot sustain a film for four days. This has been running to full houses. It's done incredible business.

**Does the film stand in danger of falling between two stools?**

We wanted to marry a historical with folklore. The film announces that intention at the very outset. We wanted to honour both the oral and written traditions.



FARRUKH DHONDY

*'If you don't feel involved in the trials of Mangal, you are a beast. Rot in your beastliness'*

collections will show what the public think. **Would you say the film's fallen between two stools in India? The critics don't like it, nor the front-benchers. It's neither serious, gritty historical, nor out-and-out masala romantic.**

Indian cinema doesn't have two stools, it has 44! There are no critics in India — the writers on film are mostly people who want to join the industry but don't have the nous. Indian cinema is in crisis because it doesn't know what works. *The Rising* points to what does work. The public and the British critics, real writers and critics, by the way, have supported it with ticket sales and in print.

**There has been a lot of talk about conflicting visions for the film — yours, Ketan's, Aamir's. Whose vision prevailed finally? Do you think the film now runs in many directions?**

The film runs in too few directions! I would have wanted the film to embody the script and complete the stories that we started. The conflicts are the product of Bollywood gossip. We — Bobby, Ketan, Aamir, me — were as good a team as I have encountered in film in the world.

**People are saying Toby is the real hero in the film...What do you think?**

Toby, who plays William Gordon, has a role

to play but Mangal Pandey's story is the real McCoy. Why do these people rush in where even fools would fear to tread?

**One of the disappointing things about the film are its clichés — the Holi song, the nautch girls, the sati scene, the elephants.**

The songs are the creations of Javed and Rahman. Make of that what you will.

**The flaws being talked of are the absence of an**

The songs are the creations of Javed Akhtar and AR Rahman.

I was not responsible.

I did not write them in.

Make of that what you will

**emotional involvement with the character of Mangal as well as the historically flawed nature of the film: Tanya Tope coming to Mangal to ask for help etc...**

If you don't feel involved in the trials of Mangal, you are a beast. Rot in your beastliness. The history of the story is true to my ideological intuition. Mangal gives Tanya the reply I would have given the feudals in the Mutiny. **You were quoted somewhere saying, you write scripts not for creative satisfaction but money. Would you say this attitude is showing**

**up in both Kisna and Mangal Pandey? How do you reconcile it with your other writing?** The public of India will vote with its feet and with its reluctance to buy TEHELKA or make it as successful as *The Rising*.

**An outsider to Bollywood, you seem to be second-guessing its formula — the songs, the nautch girls, the kaala kutta dialogues...**

The nautch girl, Holi etc, sequences are songs. Surely your 'critic' can say something more intelligent about my writing to formula? Concentrating on the inclusion of songs, not my responsibility, is lazy if not brainless. **There is a controversy brewing about the way the Raj has been portrayed in the film...**

The Raj can take it, unlike Indian nationalists who want to be seen as virtuous and 'secular' without knowing what they're talking about. Live in half-bakedness, die in half-knowledge.

**A good press in UK, but panned here. Why?** Indian 'critics' have never written a decent word of criticism. They have no sense of values because they are followers of the formula, the box-office and their little spites against industry people. Your critical industry is like a Mughal court in its deteriorating days with backbiters and ambitious no-hopers who have no larger idea of India, of film, of art or of what the changing nature of portrayal should be. I can quote chapter and verse from their so-called 'reviews' — but life is too short.

**Do you think the publicity overkill and hype has worked adversely for the film?**

No. The film deserves the attention it gets.

**S**TORIES ABOUT Ram Gopal Varma buzzing around in showbiz circles, take on the piquancy of an urban legend. Apparently a moneybags producer approached him once to sign him as director for his fledgling production company. He made the grave mistake of asking to see the script for approval before the funding could be discussed. RGV, or Ramu as he is called, did not change his usual bland expression. He called his office tea boy and told the producer, "If I need script approval, I will take it from him, he knows more about cinema than you do." Needless to say this film was never made — not that it stopped producers from approaching RGV with increasingly lucrative deals.

Another story goes thus: an actor had been summoned for a meeting (and when Ramuji calls, actors go!). He waited patiently in the office for a couple of hours. Then Ramu emerged from his cabin, said he'd be back in a few minutes and vanished. After a while the actor, a bit annoyed, asked a flunkey to call Varma on his cell phone and ask when he'd return. Ramuji was at home watching a DVD, and had no intention of coming back!

Then there are stories of how he walks in his office garden talking to plants, or that his megalomania has started reaching dangerously high levels. Remaking *Sholay* as Ram Gopal Varma *Ki Sholay* — hilarious!

Still, if a filmmaker is as successful as Ram Gopal Varma, has almost single-handedly kept a parallel movement going against the Bollywood genre of "family dramas and NRI romances" that he abhors (and says it to Karan Johar's face); if he employs a whole lot



Where is the Ghost?: Urmila Matondkar in *Bhoor*

**I hate intelligent women. if i want intelligence, i will read a book**

*Maverick filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma says he makes films for the multiplex audience and doesn't care a damn about the villages.*

*His urban tales of amoral violence and sex are getting a bit repetitive, but without him Bollywood would lack some of its zing*

Deepa Gahlot



Shooting Straight from the Hip: Varma

of unknown actors, new technicians and fresh directors; if he churns out dozens of films at a time from his funkily designed headquarters called The Factory (no irony intended); if he's called India's Quentin Tarantino by admiring scribes — who is going to begrudge him his eccentricities?

On one side is the Bollywood conveyor belt, with their songs in the Alps and fantasy storylines, and on the other is the RGV film which is set in grim, unattractive locales, often does without songs and has actors who look like they have walked in from the streets of back-of-beyond towns. When he has 'done' Bollywood as in *Rangeela* (successfully) or *Daud* (a spoof that failed), he has given his own twist. He said in an interview to *Time*, "With my films, I'm targeting the urban multiplexes, the sophisticated media-savvy young crowd...I couldn't give a f--- for the villages."

Over the years, he has zeroed in on his audience — predominantly urban Indian (and hang the cash rich NRIs that the Chopras, Johars, Bhansalis pander to) — and with his own trial and error methods, keeps up an equal balance of hits and flops. With his controlled budgets and quick turnover, even his flops recover their money, and that attracts enough partners (like *Kay Sera Sera*, Sahara One, Entertainment One, UTV, etc.) to keep up a steady pace of production. He had once formed a company with Shekhar Kapur and Mani Ratnam, which disbanded after *Dil Se*, but proved that he had made it to the top rung of filmmakers.

"The Factory is an infinite and inex-

haustible manufacturer of creative ideas. It's a cult system that intends to go beyond what has been accepted in every...way," says his website, putting forth his mission statement.

After rediscovering Urmila Matondkar, Antara Mali, Rukhsaar, Manoj Bajpai, Aftab Shivdasani, Fardeen Khan and others, Ram Gopal Varma's biggest achievement is that he has introduced the maximum number of new directors through his films — never mind that except for Prawal Raman nobody has directed a second film for The Factory; many of them, off the record, crib that he gives them breaks but takes away their ideas and creative control.

However, even his worst critics give him credit for being totally devoted to cinema. He claims he has no friends; his divorce from his wife is a memory buried in old gossip columns. He said in an interview to *Screen*, "I reserve my emotions for the cinematic experience. So when I'm happy, I hear violins and when I'm angry, I hear drums. Somehow, I don't attach that much importance to life. And this is indicated in my daily routine."

RGV is a self-taught filmmaker (he once ran a video library in Hyderabad and learnt cinema from watching movies), who made an impressive debut with the Nagarjuna-starrer *Shiva*. Early in his career, he was enthralled with Hollywood genres, and tried to emulate the ones he liked — the road movie was turned into *Daud*; the classic Hollywood musical into *Mast* which didn't quite work; the chiller as *Kaun* and horror flick as *Bhoor*, which did.

Till he rehashed his own *Shiva* (a nice guy forced to become a don) and pared it down to *Satya*, setting it in lower-middle-class Mumbai that nobody wanted to go into, and

saw his biggest commercial and critical success. With success, he says, he stopped making films for viewers and started making them for himself — which means frequent revisits to the underworld to probe the nature of organised crime. He seems to have an adolescent's fascination for violence, using it in his films in a casual, amoral fashion that can disturb.

While his Factory keeps trying out different genres — *Love Ke Liye Kuchh Bhi Karega*, *Darna Mana Hai*, *Gaayab*, *Vastu Shastra*, *Main Madhuri Dixit Banana Chahti Hoon* — Varma himself keeps going back to the equation between power and violence, including his latest *Sarkar* and the earlier *D*, directed by Vishram Sawant. The bloody trail continues in *My Wife's Murder* (by Jijy Phillips) and *James* (by Rohit Jugraj) in which he introduces Mohit Ahlawat — as his favourite kind of a strong, brooding, hero personified by Nagarjuna in *Shiva*, Chakravarti in *Satya*, Ajay

Devgan in *Company*, Randeep Hooda in *D*, Abhishek Bachchan in *Sarkar*. And also newcomer Nisha Kothari as his favourite kind of under-dressed, teen fantasy sexy heroine, in the Urmila-Antara mould.

Since *Satya*, *Company* and *Sarkar* have been his biggest hits, he is now ac-

cused of getting into his own repetitive formula or filmmaking, even as he plans a big budget multi-starrer *Ek* — the kind of filmmaking he has avoided so far, staying with the small and safe kind of films; though *Sarkar* had him use the superstardom of Amitabh Bachchan for the first time. He is capable of surprising the discerning audience with the reflective and stylish *Naach* — the failure of which must have scared him off personal cinema. But, in spite of his flops, the

With success, Varma says, he stopped making films for viewers and started making them for himself — which means frequent revisits to the underworld

Body Intelligence? Antara Mali in *Naach*



biggest stars in India today, would kill to work with him — it's quite another matter that he is one of the lucky ones who can do without stars.

The self-confessed maverick and loner, is however, a smart media manipulator; whether it is by virtue of giving really

Varma says he has no friends; his divorce from his wife is a buried memory. He has said, 'I reserve my emotions for the cinematic experience. When I'm happy, I hear violins, when I'm angry, I hear drums'

quotable interviews, or having a coterie of media friends at his beck and call, RGV is constantly in the news. He is never scared of speaking his mind and doesn't care who he offends. The spat with Aamir Khan (he had made fun of Aamir's meticulousness and smirked that a junior artist in *Rangeela* had given a more spontaneous performance) is already down in movielore, and the two still refuse to speak to each other.

Who he signs (Mallika Sherawat at last count), which film he is starting, finishing, dropping, what he thinks of this or that, everything is fed to the media in byte-sized pieces. But his personal life is only speculated upon and that he keeps firmly under wraps, though he is spotted with Antara Mali (who is



Killing Scripts: Chakravarti in *Satya*

writing and co-directing *Mr Ya Miss* for the RGV banner) at suburban restaurants, and foreign holiday spots. Nobody gets a straight answer to this question. When his romance with Urmila Matondkar was talked about, he was equally guarded. What he does give out, when the question of women comes up is cheeky quotes like "I hate intelligent women, if I want intelligence, I will read a book." Perhaps that's why in his crime films, women are relegated to silent suffering wives and mothers, or saucy item numbers. Bollywood's beauties are willing to be items in RGV's films — sometimes it's a shortcut to success, as Isha Koppikar's *Khallas* number proved.

Filmmaking is risky, speculative business, and his recent films show that the sense of wonder and fun that had marked some of his earlier films (*Rangeela*, *Daud*), is giving way to a cool, calculated style of filmmaking, aimed to please his target audience (his films do best in the Mumbai and Nizam circuits), with violence, sex and careful craft measured out in pre-determined doses.

Still, it cannot be denied, that without Ram Gopal Varma and his cinema, Bollywood would lack some of its zing. One of his directors Saurabh Narang (*Vastu Shastra*) is working on a book about Ramu, based on extensive interviews with him. It is bound to be readable — for the one thing Ramu does as well as making films is talking about them! ▲

# TO DIE FOR

Asha, Ratan Bai and Uttamchand chose to fast unto death in the Jain belief that it brought salvation. The law calls it suicide, but the officials are loath to step in. Through the lens of PRAKASH HATVALNE in Madhya Pradesh



An individual needs the permission of a senior monk for the ritual of voluntary death. Only those suffering from an incurable disease or old age are allowed to do so, not people with worldly responsibilities

ASHA JAIN, 60, died on August 4, in Vidisha, 56 km from Bhopal. She had not eaten for 47 days, and was so weak that she could not sit up without help. People thronged the room for a glimpse of the starving woman who lay on a white cloth on the floor. They looked on, awed, at the woman who had embraced a slow and voluntary death according to a ritual in the Jain religion, called *sallekhana* — the ritual of attaining *moksha* or salvation. As per the Jain scriptures, the individual undergoing *sallekhana* abstains from eating while simultaneously engaging in meditation: the belief is that it helps achieve the purification of the soul. It is a patient wait for death to secure release from the pains of earthly bondage.

Asha's funeral — termed *mrityu mahotsav* or celebration of death — was attended by Hardaya Mohan, the president of the Sakal Jain Samaj, along with hundreds of Jain followers.

In July, 75-year-old Ratan Bai also died while undergoing the same ritual in Ganj Basoda, a small town in Vidisha district. In 2001, Uttamchand Jain did the same. Fasting unto death is seen as one of the most holy rites of Jainism, which dates back to the 6th Century BC. The significance of *sallekhana* stems from the fact that it is believed to be able to release the soul from an endless cycle of birth and death.

Asha's son Dharmesh says, "My mother had started preparing for *sallekhana* much earlier. In the past three months, she had stopped the intake of all cereals and solids."

However, observing the ritual is not a matter of choice. It is necessary for the individual to get permission from a senior Jain monk to do so. Only those suffering from an incurable disease or the ravages of old age, are allowed to undertake *sallekhana*. Moreover, a Jain cannot perform the ritual if he or she has any worldly responsibilities to fulfil.

Jain nun Kiran Godre, who supervised the *sallekhana* of Ratan Bai described the ritual

as "a way of ultimate purification of the soul".

In recent times, such acts have come in for some questioning. Those who do so point out that, technically speaking, such acts amount to suicide, and suicide is illegal under the law. But the police do not interfere with a practice seen as sacred by the community. Local officials fear that any intervention would create avoidable strife. The practice continues, cocooned in the collective memory of a people and their beliefs.



**Renunciation Mode:** (Clockwise from top) Ratan Bai, 75, ministered to by nun Kiran Godre; supported by relatives Asha Jain, 60, pays heed to a monk's wisdom and, below, her funeral procession. Those who perform this ritual are cremated in a seated position; Uttamchand Jain lies before his guru's portrait to accomplish his last journey with grace





**ANITA NAIR**  
WRITER

## why high society stinks

AS A child growing up in a little suburban town, I was part of that heaving burgeoning bulwark that constitutes the greater part of India's opinion makers — the feet on the ground, upright middle-class....

It was a perfectly nice place for a child to be. Our mummies didn't smell of Chanel but neither did we know the odour of rotten eggs that so accompanies a marriage gone wrong. Our daddies didn't puff on pipes or swathe themselves in burgundy velvet dressing gowns. Instead they covered themselves with a spotless white linen mantle of respectability that prevented them from doing the wrong thing ever... It was essential that honour or was it appear-

Who are we to segregate society and then condemn them as being a black hole of all that is corrupting?

ances be maintained at all cost. If ever a life was held up for scrutiny, the middle-class tolerates no deviation, no subversion...and is quick to condemn and cast aside.

As a child, my world seldom came into conflict with this suburban idyll. The worst I could do was to be cheeky. Then the hormones popped their hydra heads and middle-class dictates were brought out to squash these surges that advocated rebellion. Read that as staying out late, hanging out at the club with boys, reading unsuitable books, even experimenting with substances that were there to be experimented with... Very often, these dictates were accompanied with a rider — All that is fine for the high society folks! Not us!

Naturally I was curious. Who were these high society people whose lives seems to have neither censors nor dictates? A classmate was deemed high society. Her father

went for walks with another high society neighbour's wife. Her mother drove a Premier Padmini, wore sleeveless blouses, referred to her husband by his name and liked an occasional gin and tonic.

Today, I realise how little times have changed in the past 20 years when I left my teens and suburbia behind me. It occurs to me that there is very little difference between the moral custodians of the little town I grew up in and anyone — urban, suave, educated, erudite, etc who assumes that high society stinks... And it is the hot headed teenager in me that surfaces with: How sanctimonious! How presumptuous and how utterly judgemental! Who are we anyway to segregate society and then condemn one section as being a black hole of all that is base and corrupting? What is this high society conduct that so comes up for criticism? Conspicuous consumption? Deviation from accepted moral codes? Clothes that reveal contours? Are these the reasons why we condemn high society with the reek of day-old fish? Or is it that we presume that they are a callous lot, incapable of a single charitable thought and with an iron-shod heart that lets them walk away from suffering, or is it that we are certain that they take advantage of someone else's vulnerability and are incapable of sharing largesse or welcoming the lesser privileged amid their midst? Or is it that we see a lack of graciousness? But then, I see this everywhere. Not just among the high society!

As a postscript; this blatant dislike for the high society, this censorious gaze we cast upon them, is it because we think when they look at us, they find us wanting? Reflected in their eyes, do we see ourselves for who we truly are? Inhibited and strait-laced, floundering in a cesspool of respectability, so afraid of what the world may think about us....

## vanityfair

**IRENE O'BRIEN**

### PET SHOP BOY

Maneka Gandhi believes in forgiving and forgetting. Once furious with the cast of *Kaal* for having exploded crackers at the Jim Corbett National Park, she called them 'bad boys'. Today, one of the bad boys, actor John Abraham, has suddenly found a place in her good books, thanks to the PETA ad. Abraham can be seen sloganeering: 'Give Birds their Freedom'. Such has been its impact that Maneka has asked him to inaugurate Incredible Moment, a photography exhibition to be held in New Delhi, the proceeds of which will go to People For Animals. For Maneka, it is all about the money rather than the means. "People like buying photographs. We're good at selling them and try to keep the price at a level where everybody's happy. The buyer is happy as it turns out to be a bargain, while we are happy because we get enough money for our hospitals." Business as usual, huh?



### PLAYING MAMA

While novelist Salman Rushdie is making news for having won a place in the Man Booker Prize long list for fiction this year, his wife Padma Lakshmi has gone the spiritual way. Model-turned-actor Padma Lakshmi is busy shooting in Morocco for her latest venture *The Ten Commandments*. And for a change, the lady will not be flaunting her assets, but will play the role of Moses' adopted mother, Princess Bithia. The dusky actor is excited, as she will be sharing the screen with veteran actor Omar Sharif of *Lawrence of Arabia* fame. It will also star Naveen Andrews of *Bride and Prejudice*. The film is slated for a 2006 release.



DEEPTIMAN TIWARY  
Desi Talk : Roy

### NOTHING INDIAN ABOUT IT

In an article published recently by *The Guardian*, author William Dalrymple discloses why Arundhati Roy, the author of *The God of Small Things*, considers herself different from her contemporaries. "I don't feel part of a pack," says Roy. "I grew up on the banks of a river in Kerala. I spent each day from the age of three fishing, walking, thinking. If you read other Indian writers most of them are very urban: they don't have much interest in air or water. They all went from Doon School to St Stephen's and then on to Cambridge. Most of them don't even live here: Rushdie, Seth, Amitav Ghosh: they're all abroad, while I've never lived anywhere except India." Perhaps, this candid confession will throw light on the farce that is 'Indian' writing: written almost entirely by the diaspora.

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