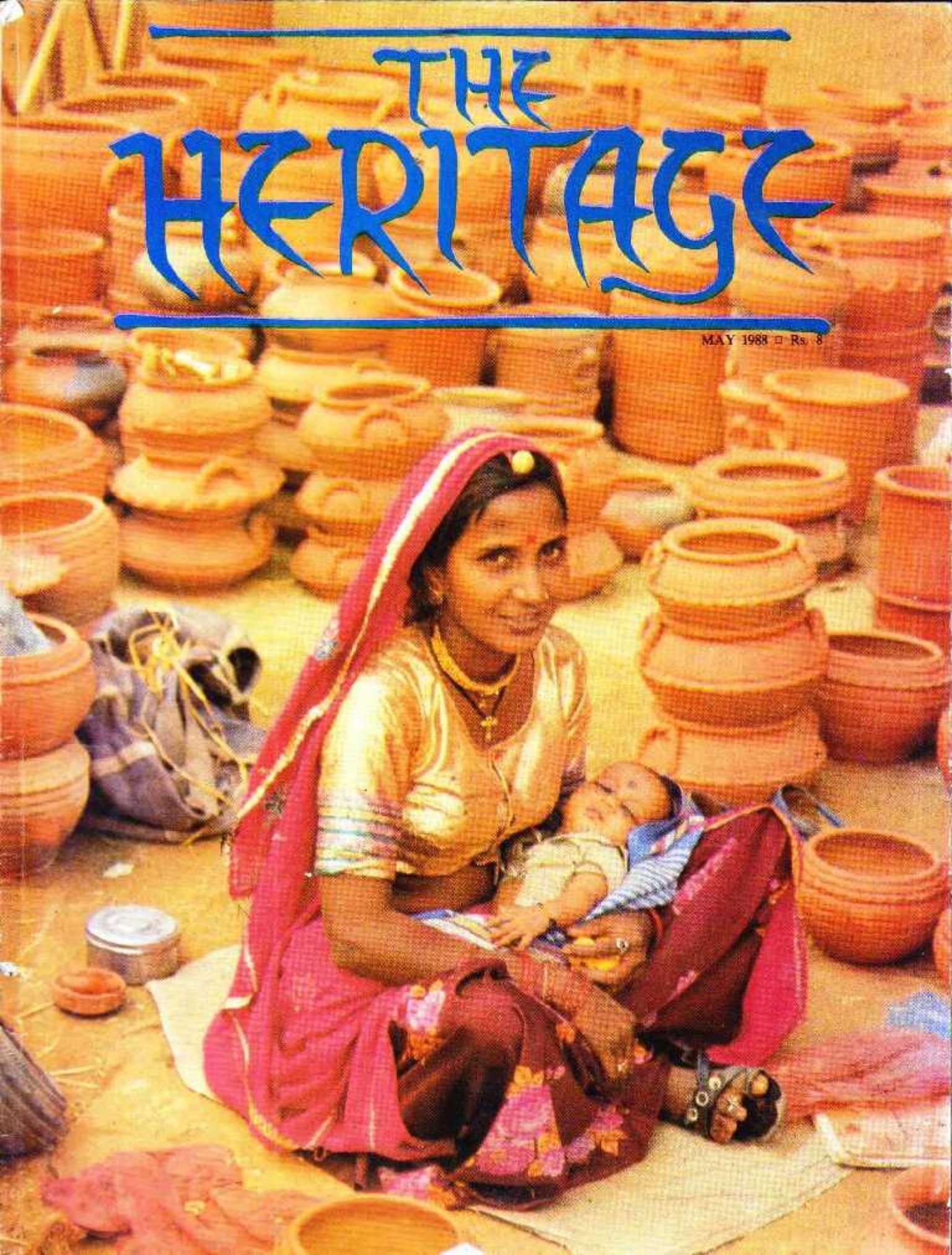
THE HERITAGE

MAY 1988 □ Rs. 8



Equally with the philosopher and the king, Indian civilisation was advanced by the potter, the weaver, the carpenter, the mason, the sculptor, the ironsmith and the goldsmith.

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MAY 1988, Vol.4 No.5.

THE HERITAGE

Features and Fiction for Today and Tomorrow

COVER

A display of earthen pots for sale by a Rajasthani woman (see Photo Feature in this issue) Photo by VIDYAVRATA

THE CONCH OF VISHNU

I refer to the drawing of a "five-fingered shankh" (January 1988 issue, p.43). The illustrated shell is neither a shankh as usually understood, nor is it the symbol of Vishnu. It belongs to the group of "wing shells" (or *Strombidae*) and is called a "spider conch" (*Lambis lambis* in Latin) and is quite different from what is known as "sacred conch" *(Turbinella pyrum)* and no conch at all as it belongs to the family of Volutes *(Volutidae)*. This *Turbinella pyrum* is the symbol of Vishnu; it is the only shell that can be seen in pictures or on sculptures of Vishnu.

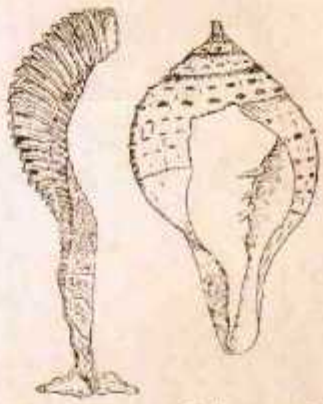
The holiness of the "sacred chank" (sansk, samkha) can be traced into dimmest antiquity. There are several legends which try to explain the origin of the special place this shell takes in Indian ritual and folklore. The following story found in the Bhagavata Purana (X, 45) may serve as an example.

Krishna and Balarama were about to leave their guru Sandipani and persuaded him to ask for his preceptor's fee *(gurudakshina)*. Sandipani, after consultation with his wife, requested the restoration of his son who had drowned whilst bathing in the sea. The two illustrious disciples agreed, saying "So be it!" and mounting their chariot, the two brothers, presently reached Prabhasa and, going near the seashore, squatted there for a moment.

Coming to know of their divine character, the god presiding over the ocean brought presents for them. The Lord said to him, "Let my preceptor's son be restored at once—the same child who was swallowed up by you in a great wave here."

The god of the ocean replied, "I did not carry away the child, O Lord! There is a great demon belonging to the Daitya class, *Panchajanya,* who lives under water in the form of a conch, O Krishna! The child was surely carried away by him."

Hearing this the Lord speedily plunged into the water but on killing the demon did not find the child in his bowels. Taking the conch that formed the Daitya's body the Lord returned to his chariot. Then going to the beloved city of Yama, Sanyamani, Sri Krishna, accompanied by Balarama, who had a plough for his weapon, blew the same



conch. Hearing the blast of the conch Yama, the chastiser of the people, offered to them worship on a grand scale, accompanied with devotion, and bending low, addressed Sri Krishna: "O Vishnu, disguised as a human being by way of sport, what can we do for you both?"

The glorious Lord said: "O great ruler, fetch my preceptor's son, who was brought here as a result

WOULD-BE CONTRIBUTORS TO PLEASE NOTE

- All would-be contributors are expected to have studied the different sections of THE HERITAGE.
- Instead of sending complete articles, please send the themes of your work to the editor.
- Articles submitted must be type-written. Please give your address in the article itself even if a letter accompanies it.
- In view of the large number of submissions received, it is not practical to return articles that cannot be used unless they are accompanied by stamped self-addressed covers.

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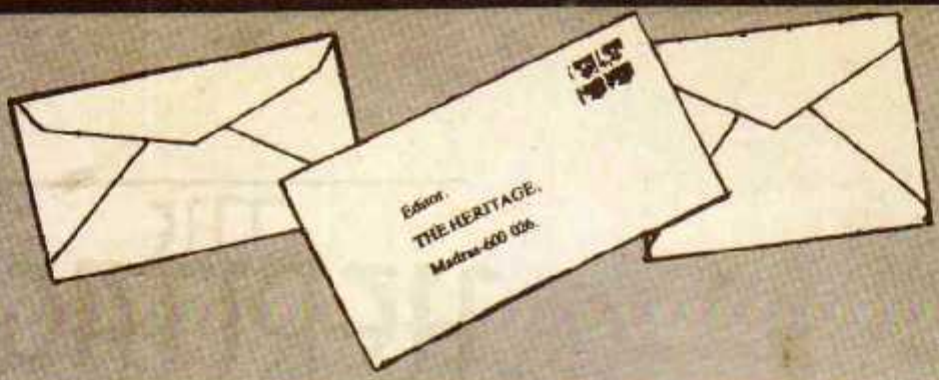

of his own karma!" Handing over to their preceptor his son, brought by Yama with the words, "So be it," the two brothers forthwith returned to their city...

It will have been noted that Sri Krishna was addressed by the god of the ocean as "Vishnu, disguised as a human being" which must mean, in fact, that Krishna's and Vishnu's chank are identical, namely the "conch" called *"Panchajanya"*. And this takes us directly to the battlefield of Kurukshetra where at the beginning of the battle the leaders on both sides blew their conches to encourage their followers and dishearten their opponents. Then Sri Krishna and Arjuna, seated in a great chariot with white horses yoked to it, blew their celestial conch-shell horns. Sri Krishna blew his conch *Panchajanya,* Arjuna blew *Devadutta,* and Bhima of terrible deeds sounded his great conch *Paundra*... that tumultuous uproar pierced the hearts of the followers of Dhritarashtra..."

Camp: Pondicherry **- Fred Pinn**

Fred Pinn is an authority on shells. Besides, he is a teacher with considerable experience in compiling educational material on several subjects. He works in London where he has built up a "Knowledge Bank" for the use of teachers.

-Editor.

"THE BIRTHPLACE OF MAN"

The article on Konkhal (March '88) made us much more aware of the significance of the Hardwar area than we were. To my knowledge, nobody so far had described Konkhal as the birthplace of man though the author has narrated the legend naturally leads us to the conclusion that Konkhal indeed was the birthplace of man from the point of view of mythology. It is a pity that THE HERITAGE should not give the full name of the author of such a good feature.

Camp: Meerut **- Roma Basu**

In using pseudonyms or mere initials, we only comply with the wish of the authors.

- Editor.

THE WORLD OF DREAMS"

The series has begun to change my attitude to dreams. I am reviewing a common phenomenon of my life in newly acquired earnest. Please continue this series till Devapriyo has said all that is of worth on this subject. The series is fascinating.

Trivandrum **- V. Jacob.**

"APARTHEID"

Thanks for the article (March '88). The word (Afrikaans) literally means "apart-hood". That apart-hood can be a political policy, is a shame. But the 20th century man has to live amidst a variety of shameful experiences—including daily massacre of innocent men, women and children while they are sleeping or eating or watching a programme. The murderers call this their political policy!

New Delhi **- K. P. Rajan**

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THE HERITAGE

BHARAT BANDH!

One of the few phrases that is proving difficult to stomach is *Bharat Bandh*. Those who use the term enthusiastically are the kind of people who do not find anything unpalatable with the name "hot dog" for the food they eat.

Does Bharat consist of shops and trucks and rickshaws that when we oblige them to stop functioning, Bharat is shut down? *Bharat Bandh* is a phrase insulting to Bharat Varsha.

A staggering amount of hypocrisy and self-deception are thriving under this phrase. It does not require any cleverness to predict the statements the Bandhists and the anti-Bandhists will make the day after—the Bandhists will hail it as a great success feigning a benevolent innocence of the possibility of any other estimate of the situation and will congratulate themselves and thank you and I for making it so; the anti-Bandhists will butter their words with a liberal amount of chuckle and pronounce the event to be a stark failure.

And, of course, there will be that part of our Press not committed to this party or that which will say that it was a 'partial success'!

The parties concerned have something to flatter themselves by. The Bandhists would be pleased with their 'achievement'; the anti-Bandhists with their 'achievement' in foiling it. But at whose cost and what cost do they find such satisfactions? What really happens? A day's default in work involves crores of rupees of national loss. But let us forget that. What is really painful is the total irrational and tyrannical treatment and violence to which the common people are subjected. Those politicians who speak that their form of protest through Bandh is 'non-violent' are either liars or too ignorant to see the reality. Thousands of men, women and children are stranded on the railway platform or the bus-terminus, bearing with innumerable inconveniences; patients proceeding to hospitals are detained midway resulting in death and irreparable damage; distressed relatives rushing to attend to near ones on deathbed fail to reach on time, thereby having to bear forever an anguish which nothing can compensate, the rickshaw-puller, the cobbler, the poor vendor who depend entirely on their daily earning starve, an auto-driver who had been emotionally moved to carry an old woman who was under a vow to perform a puja in a certain temple is beaten up. Must the organisers of such Bandhs still add insult to injury by calling their action non-violent?

Certain kinds of protest had been formulated during the colonial days and they are associated with some hallowed names. That does not entitle the present-day politicians to make a patent of these modes of protest for their satisfaction and for benefit of the rowdies. To repeat a certain practice despite a total change in circumstances, without any true assessment of its impact on the people, is not only bankruptcy in imagination, but also a demonstration of blatant arrogance and cruelty. This must stop and the politicians should evolve some new forms of protest.

When a certain organisation or a trade union launches a march or goes on strike, it is within its right and the step is often necessary, provided it is spontaneous. But no organisation or political party has a right to impose a 'strike' on the nation. Any political party which thrives by the rule of democracy cannot claim a right to deprive the common citizens of their most fundamental rights—their free movement, their access to food or treatment. But that is exactly what the Bandhists do. And they know it; they know that most of those who seem to have responded to their call have done so out of sheer fear. Still they continue in their ritual.

Dear politicians, please sit down and formulate some other means of protest, where your target is not the common man and the nation, Bharat. If you have some wish left in you for setting yourself free from delusions, some new idea for serving your purpose without confronting the common man should not defy your capacity.

LURE OF THE FALSE NIGHTINGALE

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

Isaac Asimov informs us that the newspaper, *Free Press,* offered 120 households of the city of Detroit $500 each if the inmates of the house would refrain from watching television for a month. Ninety-three of the families flatly declined the offer. Eventually only six families entered the 'test'. They survived the month all right, but the survey showed that they felt "depressed, bored and nervous" at times.

An example of how total man's surrender to new ways of lifestyle can be!

In his article that appears in this issue, Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar reflects on the situation created by technology's invasion of our life. Appropriately, he reminds us of the fabled nightingale which used to bring solace to a monarch, its subsequent replacement by a mechanical nightingale and the aftermath.

Nature and the right human relationship have been the traditional antidotes to depression, boredom and nervousness since times immemorial in the life of the average man. Television is taking their place, but deceptively. It will make man its slave in return for continuous entertainment and information, but is most likely to make him less and less of a natural man.

This is a situation in which mere reflection is not enough. We must stop this drift in our own life. Howsoever entertaining or informative the TV programmes may be, they are no substitutes for our reading and reflecting on a work of worth, for the warmth of human relationship and our remaining in meditative solitude at certain moments in our life.

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Swapan Bhandary, a nationally important artist of younger generation, has written,—'Gopal da... As poetry and paintings—the blue and yellow give rise to the green in cinema, the three are trying to enter into my paintings. This too is found in your poetry. Probably this is occasional, but this has really happened... the pictorial quality of cinema has come into the poetries and has made these poetries more poetic... With the appearance of imagery and the soul of cinema your poetry is charming... (From a letter dated 15.5.87)

A new way of thinking has attracted Mulk Raj Anand. He has written—'... I feel that our mutual interest as creativeness need some time when we can... go on saying our loud thinks for some hours'. (from a letter dated 14.9.86)... 'either you come down to Calcutta or I come to Bolpur'... (from a letter dated 19.9.86)

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YESTERDAY'S MOOD AS CAPTURED BY SHANKAR

From Shankar's Weekly (23 May, 1948), with permission

THIS MONTH IN INDIAN HISTORY

MAY 1
1886: Labourers of Chicago (U.S.A.) demonstrated demanding 8 hours of labour, 8 hours of social and cultural activities and 8 hours of rest. The day is observed as Workers Solidarity Day.
1897: Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda.
1923: Singaravelu Chettiar first observed 'May Day' in India.
1926: Jim Corbett killed the man-eating leopard of Rudraprayag which took a toll of more than 300 lives.
1960: Bombay State was bifurcated into Maharashtra and Gujarat.

MAY 2
1968: Public Provident Fund Bill was passed by Lok Sabha.

MAY 3
1764: Mir Kassim, the deposed Nawab of Bengal, supported by the Emperor of Delhi attacked Patna, but lost to the British.
1765: Clive landed in Calcutta for the second time.
1913: The first complete Indian feature film 'Raja Harish Chandra' was exhibited in Bombay.

MAY 4
1799: Tipu Sultan was killed in the battle of Srirangapatnam.
1980: The day was declared as the Coal Miners' Day.

MAY 6
1529: Nusrat Ali, the Afghan ruler of Bengal, lost to Babar in the battle on the banks of the Gogra river.
1589: Tansen, the legendary musician died.
1775: Maharaja Nanda Kumar was arrested.

MAY 7
1849: Calcutta Female School (presently Bethune School) was established in Calcutta by Elliot Drinkwater Bethune and Ram Gopal Ghose.
1861: Poet Rabindra Nath Tagore is born.

MAY 8
1954: Government of India decided to merge Chandernagar, a French possession, with West Bengal.
1963: Centenary of Indian Red Cross is celebrated. The day is also observed as the World Red Cross Day.

MAY 9
1540: Maharana Pratap of Mewar is born.
1866: Gopal Krishna Gokhale is born.

MAY 10
1526: Babar enters Agra, after his victory in the first battle of Panipat.
1857: Concrete outbreak of Sepoy Mutiny in Meerut.

MAY 11
1857: Sepoy Mutiny spreads to Delhi.
1950: The new and the ninth Somnath temple of Gujarat is opened by President Rajendra Prasad.

MAY 12
1915: Revolutionary Rash Behari Bose leaves India on the Japanese steamer Sanuki Maru, under the assumed name P. N. Tagore.

MAY 13
1648: The Red Fort of Delhi is ready for use.
1914: S.S. Komagata Maru reaches Vancouver.
1962: S. Radhakrishnan becomes the second President of India.
1967: Zakir Hussain becomes the third President of India.

MAY 15
1873: In England decision is taken to dissolve the East India Company.
1878: Young rebels of Brahmo Samaj come out and start Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.
1958: Gift Tax Act comes into force.

MAY 16
1911: Tallah Water Tank of Calcutta, the world's largest overhead water tank, is commissioned.
1960: Telex Service is inaugurated between India and U.K.
1975: Sikkim is integrated with India as its 22nd state.

MAY 17
1540: Sher Shah defeats Humayun at Hardoi in the battle known as the battle of Kanauj.
1775: The battle of Arras between the British and the Marathas is fought.
1949: India decides to remain with Commonwealth of Nations.
1976: Four Indians successfully ski down the slopes of 'Trisul' peak and put India on top of ski map of the world.

MAY 18
1974: India's first nuclear detonation is effected underground at 8.05 a.m. at Pokhran in Rajasthan desert.

MAY 19
1904: Jamshedji N. Tata dies.
1971: The first submarine base of the Indian Navy, Vir Bahu, is commissioned at Visakhapatnam.

MAY 20
1498: Vasco De Gama anchors for the first time near Calicut
1932: Renowned nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal dies.
1965: The first Indian team reaches Mt. Everest summit.

MAY 21
1855: Bhabatarini Kali Temple of Dakshineswar is consecrated by Rani Rasmoni.
1935: Quetta is devastated by an earthquake.

MAY 22
1498: Vasco De Gama meets Zamorin of Calicut for the first time.
1545: Sher Shah dies.
1772: Ram Mohan Roy is born.

MAY 23
1984: Smt. Bachendri Pal becomes the first Indian woman to reach the summit of Mt. Everest.

MAY 24
1956: 2500th birth anniversary of Lord Buddha is observed.

MAY 25
1606: Sikh Guru Arjundev dies of torture under orders from Mughal Emperor Jahangir.
1886: Revolutionary Rash Behari Bose is born.

MAY 26
1739: Afghanistan is severed from India as the result of a treaty between the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah and Nadir Shah of Iran.

MAY 27
1957: Copyright Bill is passed.
1964: Jawaharlal Nehru dies.

MAY 28
1572: Maharana Pratap ascends the throne of Mewar.
1883: V.D. Savarkar is born.

MAY 29
1658: In the battle of Samugarh Aurangzeb defeats Dara Sukoh in the struggle for Delhi throne.
1947: Indian Standards Institution is established.
1972: Dada Saheb Phalke, the doyen of Indian film industry, dies.

MAY 30
1919: Poet Rabindra Nath Tagore gives up his Knighthood (title 'Sir') as a protest against Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

MAY 31
1977: The first Indian (army) team climbs the Kanchenjunga.

The Mysterious Mathematics

In the All Indian Senior Secondary Examinations, a mathematics question was totally beyond comprehension.

> See Mystery to Mathematics fly!
> In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave and die.
>
> —Alexander Pope

The Mask And The Man

Britain's Keele University stripped the Austrian President, Mr. Kurt Waldheim, of an honorary degree following allegations that he was involved in war crimes as an officer in Hitler's army.

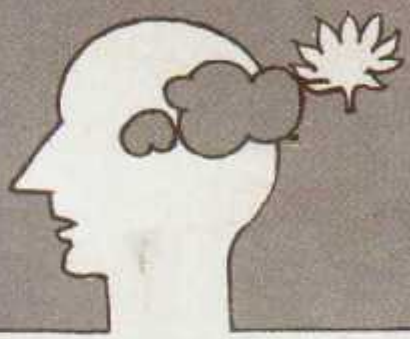
> The play is done, the curtain drops,
> Slow falling to the prompter's bell:
> A moment yet the actor stops,
> And looks around, to say farewell.
> It is an irksome word and task;
> And, when he's laughed and said his say,
> He shows, as he removes the mask,
> A face that's anything but gay.
>
> —Thackeray

No News, Eh?

A police horse bit off and ate the ear of a policeman in Southern England.

The Way Of Adjustment

Growing traffic in Indian towns requires new adjustments in old roads—says a report.



ALL THINGS GREAT AND SMALL

Is the worldwide cry by at least a few conservationists to stop man from destruction of vegetation and the life of animals, including the very small creatures, just an emotional outburst? This is what E. O. Wilson, Professor of Science at Harvard University said to the magazine ***Omni.*** *His statement is followed by that of Sy Montgomery, a writer. Both the extracts are from* ***Omni*** *Vol.9. No.3.*

If human beings were not so impressed by size alone, they would consider an ant more wonderful than a rhinoceros. That adjustment may never take place, but insects and other small creatures nevertheless deserve far more admiration and protection than they get. An ant, worm, or snail is more complicated than any machine devised by man, having been engineered autonomously during millions of years of evolution to survive in environments that are hellish by our standards. Each contains enough genetic information to fill many sets of encyclopedias.

Invertebrates are part of our national heritage. If driven to extinction, they could never be replaced. Instead, we should strive to decipher their biology and age-old history to improve our own chances of survival. We need these creatures more than they need us because they, not we, run the world. If *Homo sapiens*, a newly evolved mammal species, were to self-destruct, it would cause scarcely a ripple in the ecosystems of the planet. Perhaps Gaia, the whole of the living world, would sigh with relief. On the other hand, if invertebrates were to become extinct, I doubt that we would last ten years.

—Edward O. Wilson

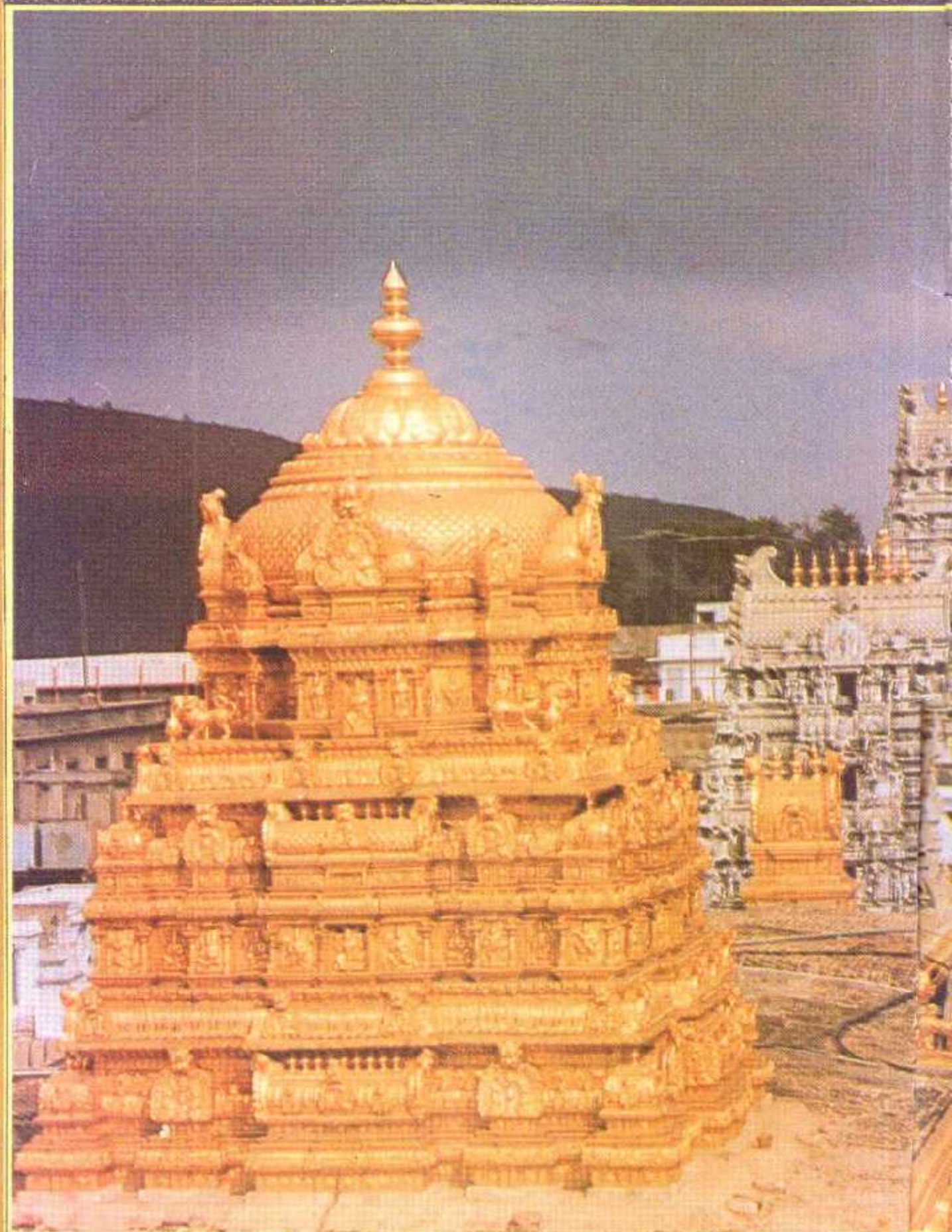
We may soon find out what the earth would be like without the pygmy hog sucking louse, the Appalachian monkey-face pearl mussel, or the eyeless crayfish. These small, spineless animals — ranging from fist-size giant crickets to gem-like butterflies with wingspans larger than a bird's—are among an estimated half million invertebrate species in danger of extinction. Because of habitat destruction, overcollecting, and predators introduced by man, the world's insects, clams, spiders, and crayfish are disappearing faster than scientists can catalog them. Invertebrates comprise nine tenths of life on Earth and form the foundation of ecological relationships. They are an integral part of the food chain and serve as sensitive barometers of the health of an ecosystem. Earthworms and other burrowing insects till and enrich the soil; bees and moths pollinate plants. And many invertebrates are important to industry and medicine...

If the species of mold from which we now derive penicillin had become extinct, more people would die today of bacterial diseases than of cancer and heart disease combined. And the disappearance of some invertebrates will rob us of some of the most beautiful species on Earth. Hawaii's Oahu tree snails, for example, have conical shells that resemble jewels: various patterns and shades of red, orange, yellow, brown, green, gray, blue, white, and black. No two shells are alike. But populations of some of this unusual snail group have dropped to only 100 individuals.

Worldwide populations of horseshoe crabs, the living fossils that fascinate children at the beach, are also declining. Dating from the Triassic period, 225 million years ago, these armored arthropods provide food in some countries. In the United States the animal is valued for its medical applications. But our appetites could threaten their existence. Millions of horseshoe crabs are killed each year by clam diggers because the horseshoe crabs eat clams...

Perhaps we have not yet reached the point where we can see splendor in a worm, a louse, or a beetle. Perhaps science has not yet uncovered the role of all species on Earth or the possibilities that lie hidden in them. But we must hold these animals in trust as a token of our belief in the future. Many scientists believe we cannot put a price tag on endangered invertebrates. While removing invertebrates from certain habitats might be defended on economic grounds, as E. O. Wilson says, "It's like burning Renaissance paintings to cook dinner."

—Sy Montgomery.



Ananda Nilayam, the gold-plated sanctum sanctorum of the Deity

Photos Courtesy: Public Relations Officer, T. T. Devasthanams

Utsava Vigraha, the idol who represents the Deity during the normal rituals

TIRUMALA

ENCHANTING SEAT OF THE LORD OF BOUNTY

The shrine of Tirupati Venkateswara, popularly known in the north as Balaji, is not only the oldest shrine of Vishnu with a record of continuous worship, but also the wealthiest religious institution in India. The Deity is also known as the Lord of the Seven Hills, for His temple is situated on Seshachala, one of the seven impressive peaks of the range known as the Tirumala Hills.

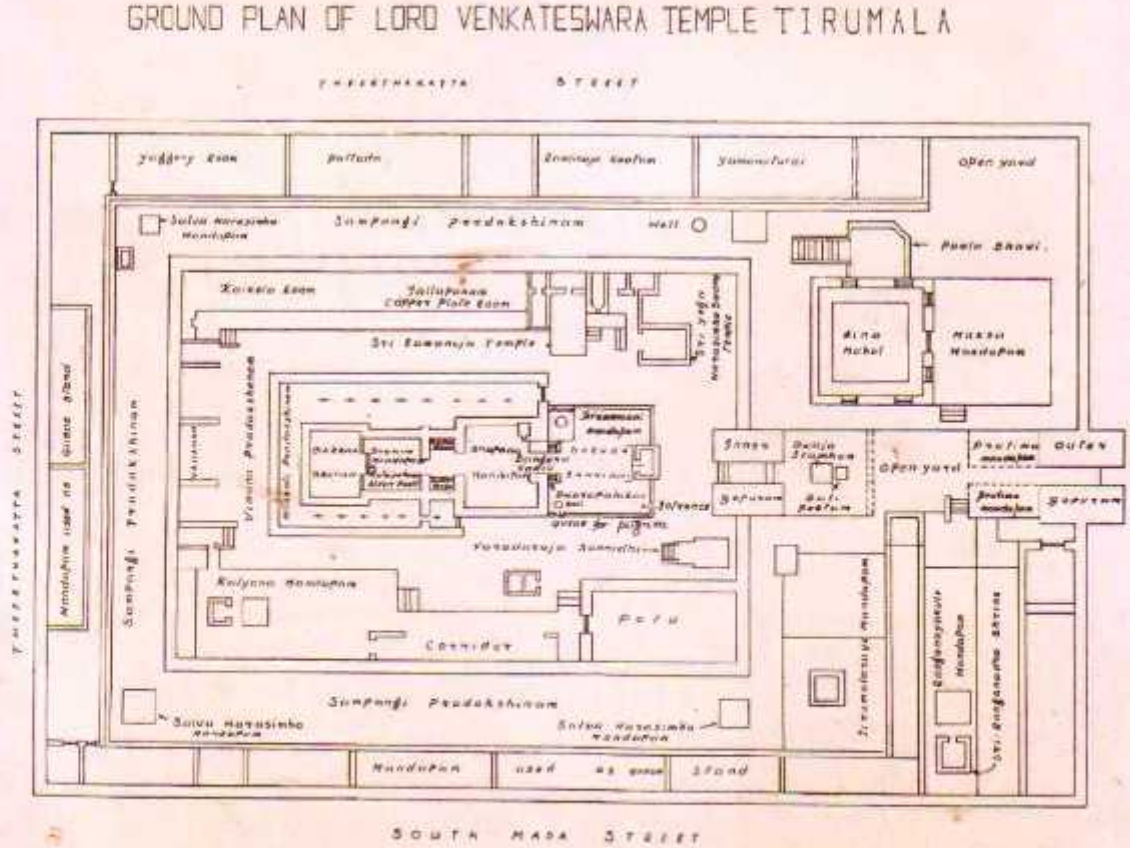
High on Vengadam's towering crest, with flowing streams in flood,
Betwixt the effulgent glory, of shining Sun and Moon,
Like unto a blue cloud in lightning drest
In all the brilliance of rainbow dight,
The Red-eyed great One, majestic stands
In dress of flowery brilliance with garland bright,
One lotus hand with fearsome disc adorned, and milk white conch (the other held).

THUS sings the *Silappadikaram*, the great Tamil dramatic epic by Prince Ilango Adigal written some eighteen centuries ago. Obviously, by then the deity, Tirupati Venkateswara, was already the centre of a renowned religious institution and no wonder that some writers view this as the world's oldest religious institution where, according to recorded evidence, an unbroken worship of the deity has continued for at least 1300 years.

Legends, of course, claim that the deity existed long before the institution's history began to be recorded. If there are no inscriptions giving the evidence of its earlier existence, it is because, for a long time, there was no temple to house the deity. Needless to say, the tradition of inscriptions was a corollary to the tradition of temple building. In fact, a lyric by an ancient devotee-singer, Tirumalisi Alvar, informs us that the deity on the hill could be seen from all directions. Perhaps there was nothing more than a bare mandapam or a roof upheld by pillars, to begin with.

But when did it all begin? Legends assert that there was no beginning so far as the deity is con-

Ground plan of the temple.



cerned! He was *Swayambhu*—self-made — and had always been there. This claim, incredible to rationalists, cannot be dismissed as wistful sentimentalism of the devotees by sensible scholars, for in it lies hidden some clue to the antiquity of the deity. It is interesting to note that this biggest Vaishnava shrine of the country (it draws a staggering 25,000 to 30,000 people daily according to a 1979 estimate), is suspected to have been a Shaiva image by some and a Shakti image by some others. Experts no doubt have established that the deity is a Vishnu image, but the dispute rests on the observation that the image does not conform to the Agama rules of a Vishnu sculpture. While this nonconformity is a fact, the fact perhaps suggests that the image had been created, before the Agama rules were framed, a pointer at its great age.

Another legend which hints at the deity's antiquity says that the rishis, terrified by the furious Narasimha incarnation of Vishnu, prayed to him to assume a different pose. Vishnu obliged them by assuming the *Saumya* pose — a figure of peace and compassion. That is to say, the image belongs to the mythical times.

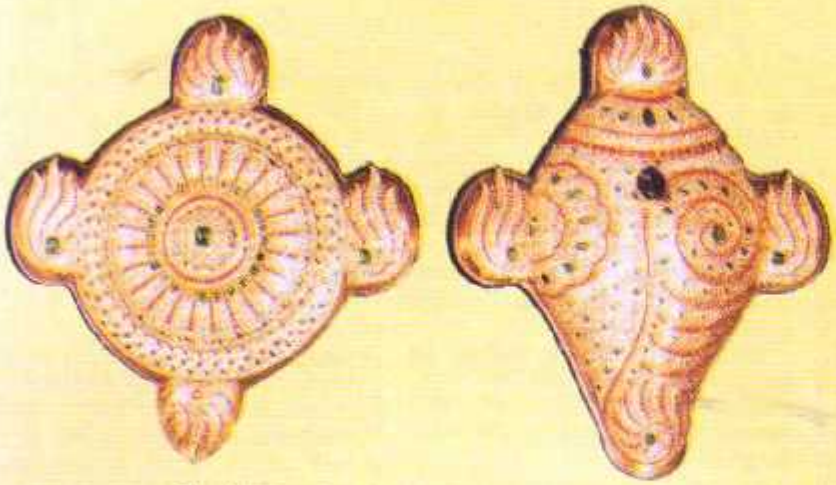
Indeed, it is impossible by anyone not to be struck by the inexplicable tranquillity and calm benediction radiated by the standing deity.

One of the several legends about the origin of the deity indicates that Vishnu heard about the place from Narada and on a visit to the place was so deeply impressed by its charming solitude that he decided to stay on! The serenity and grace radiated by the image is only in keeping with this legend — a sublime pose taken in harmony with an environment which was once remarkable for its beauty — a trait it has retained to a certain degree even to this day.

So many have wondered if ever a human hand could shape that wondrous and enchanting expression. Here is an authentic description of the image:

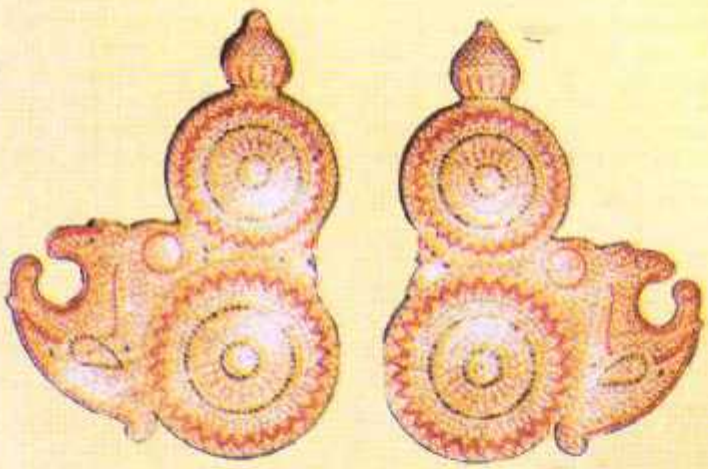
"The Lord's figure is richly adorned with flowing locks of hair or *jatajuta* and some of these locks of curly hair rest on his shoulders. The nose is delicately carved and is neither prominent nor flat. The mouth of the Lord is also exquisitely shaped. The chin and the ears are carved proportionately. The ears have beautiful ear ornaments. The chest of the Lord is magnificent in cut and size and should, if measured, be between 36 to 40 inches in width, while the waist would be between 24 to 27 inches. The neck is conch-like and the body is in the posture of a lion and exquisitely shaped. The belly

Sri Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer—one of the recent additions to the monuments.



Shankha (conch) and the Chakra (wheel) of Vishnu

The Vajra Kireeta
(the diamond crown) of the Deity



Ornament for the ears of the Deity

Diamond cover for the left hand of the Deity

Diamond cover for the right hand of the Deity

is also beautifully modelled. The Lord's image has four arms, the upper two being carved to hold the *chakram* and the conch; the *chakram* and the conch are not integral parts of the main idol. The upper right arm holds the *Sudarshana Chakra;* the upper left arm holds the *Panchajanya,* the conch of Lord Vishnu which is blown by Him in times of war. The lower right hand of the Lord is in the *Varada Hasta* pose, while the lower left hand is in the *Katyavalambita* pose. Actually the fingers of the left hand rest on the left thigh, with the thumb of the hand almost parallel to the waist-line. While the idol itself is not exactly standing in the *tribhanga* pose, the body near and below the waist has taken a slight tilt to the left and the knees themselves are bent and open slightly outwards, giving the idol peculiar grace and charm. Mother Lakshmi is carved on the right chest of the Lord in the sitting pose and is an integral part of the *mula murthi.* The *yagnopavitam* and a set of four necklaces or ornaments of the neck can also be clearly made out on the idol. The arms have armlets. The figure is depicted as wearing a dhoti from the waist downwards, while the upper portion is not covered by any dress or *vastram.* The nipples of the Lord on his chest are button-like and are prominent. There is however a *katibandham* or waist-band and this waist-band is about 2 inches thick. The legs and feet of the Lord are beautifully shaped, strong and lissome... The feet are models of perfection and have ornaments near the ankles. The Lord's image has on the shoulders marks resembling 'scars made by the constant wearing of the bow and a pack of arrows.' - *The Tirumala Temple,* by Dr. N. Ramesan, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. 1981.

The temple is situated in the Eastern Ghats, with seven hills forming a splendid sub-range constituting its backdrop and surrounding. They are known as the Tirumalai hills and their sanctity is celebrated by ancient poetry, independent of the great shrine that nestles amidst them.

These footprints mark the descent of Vishnu in primeval times atop the highest peak of the group of hills.

The hill on which the temple stands is known as the Venkatachala, commanding a height of over 3500 feet above sea level. For long, the shrine was known as the Vengadam. Five meandering ways lead to the temple, including the oldest one taken by devotees by foot and the modern motorable road.

Like all major temple complexes of India, the Tirupati complex as seen today was neither made by any single individual nor made during a specific period. Beginn-

Photos: Viman

A GEOLOGICAL WONDER

To the north-west of the shrine, a kilometre away, can be seen a rare phenomenon of Nature, in the shape of an arch in the hills, scientifically known as 'Geological Fault'. Traditionally viewed by devotees as Nature's welcome arch through which Vishnu proceeded to the site of the temple after his descent, recently it has been established that the arch is the third of its kind in the world, the other two being the Rainbow arch bridge at Utah, U.S.A., and the other at Dalradian quartzite, U.K.

The Tirumala arch, composed of quartzite rocks, has retained its position for the past 1000 million years!

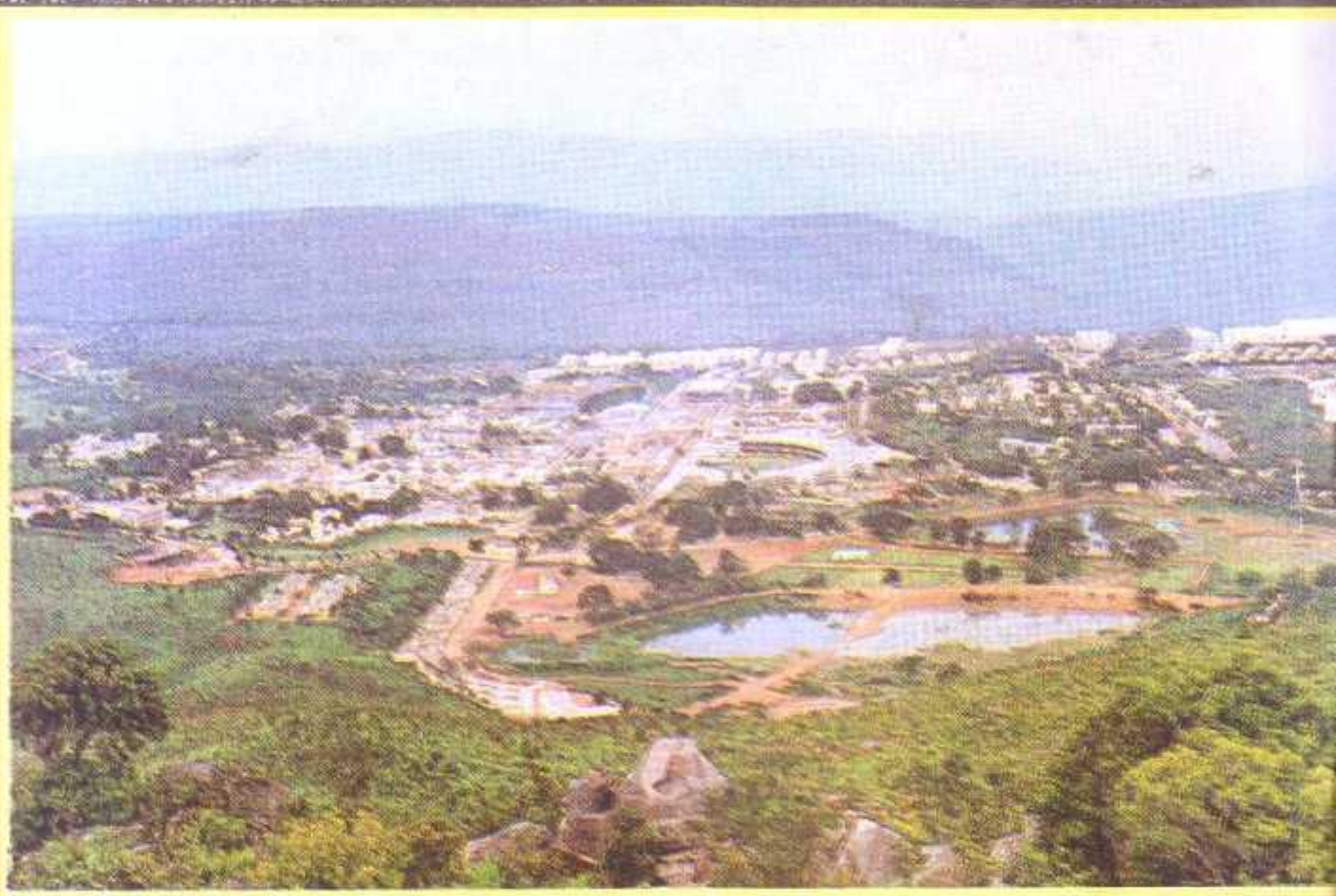
Image of Sri Garuda at the start of the upward journey

ing probably from a local chieftain named Palli who ruled over a forest-dominated domain forming the border-land between the Tamil speaking and the Telugu speaking people, about two thou-

sand years ago, to the illustrious monarch Krishnadeva Raya and the later rulers, so many kings and commoners have contributed to bring the temple complex to its present sprawling form. Historical-

Shri Krishnadeva Raya and his consorts

Image of Sri Hanuman on one of the hills which those who journey by foot can see



Aerial view of the Tirupati town sprawling below the Tirumala hill. (Photo : Viman)

The temple complex illuminated at a festive night

ly, there have been seven phases in the process of construction. The first monument worthy of being called a temple is believed to have been built by King Tondaman, as a mark of gratitude to the Lord. It was the elder brother of Tondaman, Akasa Raja, who had found Padmavati, the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, in a lotus, and had carried her to the Lord who married her. (Padmavati's shrine is situated at a distance of five kilometres from the temple of Tirupati.) When, after Akasa Raja's death, his son Vasudeva and his brother Tondaman quarrelled over the right to the throne, the Lord intervened and divided the kingdom between the two.

Major strides in construction were taken during the 8th and the 10th centuries.

King Krishnadeva Raya (16th century) who visited the temple seven times made offerings of great value to the deity, apart from adding to the construction of the temple.

The Tirupati temple and some other shrines of the area present a feast of inscriptions, numbering a thousand, for historians. They tell us not only the history of the temple under the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Vijayanagara kings and others, but also, to an extent the history of the whole region.

But the history of this remarkable shrine should not be read only in terms of its condition under great royal dynasties. It has exercised unfathomable influence over the life of the common man; it has moulded the philosophy of the life of innumerable people through saints associated with it—foremost among whom was Ramanuja. He gave the temple a sound system of worship and administration. His image is enshrined in the temple.

Sri Venkateswara's imprint on the literatures, folklore and culture in general of the south is deep. And the Lord not only brings spiritual light and liberation to the seekers, but also bestows physical and educational benefits on tens of thousands of people, through the numerous institutions run by the Devasthanam utilising the wealth the devotees offer at the Lord's feet.

— 'V'

The temple tank.

THE LAST CHANCE

A mystic who had led a spiritually sublime life and had shown many people the way of truth, was on death-bed. He saw no visitor, not even his friends, disciples and fellow-mystics.

But when a landlord, notorious for his cruelty, miserliness and arrogance came to see him, the mystic asked his attendants to let him in.

The landlord felt flattered. "How is it that you let me in when you refused to see even your friends?" he asked, certain of his own importance. The mystic would not answer his question. But the landlord kept repeating it and insisted on having an answer to it.

"Well, to be frank, I know that my friends will meet me in the world beyond when they die. But this may be the last chance for you to see me ..." explained the mystic.

KOT KANGRA — by Manmohan Melville

WHERE TIME STANDS STILL

IN THE rugged heart of the mountain state of Himachal Pradesh, at the confluence of the Bener and Majhi streams, stands the little town of Kangra. Once the capital of the surrounding areas, due to its supposedly impregnable fort. Today the modern town is a junction for travellers in this hilly region.

Tourists use Kangra as a stop-over point on their journeys to Kulu and Manali in the east, Dharamshala in the north and Dalhousie in the west. Few of them however have the time to discover Kangra's quiet charm or to visit its ancient fort called Kot Kangra.

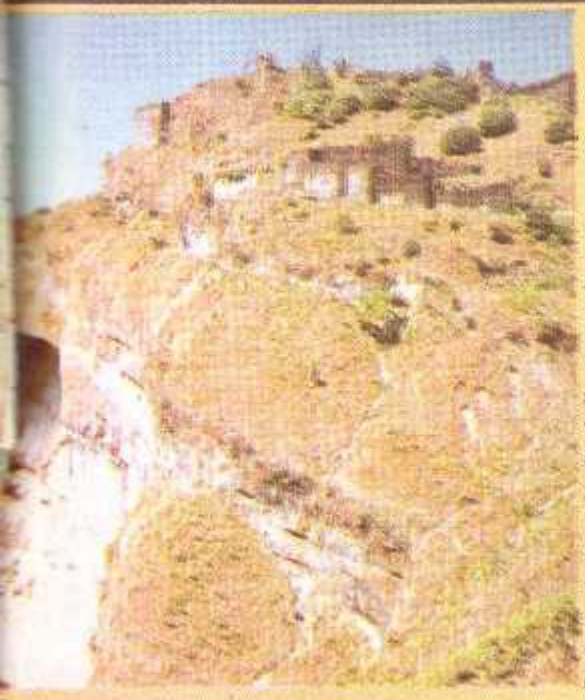
The Kingdom of Kangra was once a great hill state and the fort was the scene of many a fierce battle and the setting for tales of valour. Kangra was also a centre of learning and of traditional arts—like Pahadi painting, metal moulding and pottery.

I sat inside a dark tea-stall near the bus-stand, nibbling at an 'alu paratha', while I waited for the bus that would take me to the old fort. Outside the stall, buses rumbled to a halt, raising clouds of dust in the morning air. The owner of the stall engaged me in conversation. When he learned that I had come to see the fort, he invited me to drink a cup of tea with him. As we sipped the sweet tea, he told me the story of the origin of the name 'Kangra'.

In ancient times, he told me, an evil demon with magical powers, named Jalandar, lived in these mountains. The local people, weary of his mischief, formed a group and decided to destroy the demon. When they succeeded in killing him, they took a special precaution whereby the demon using his wicked sorcery, would not come back to life. They hacked his body to pieces and flung them in different directions. The region where his ear (kan) fell, came to be called Kangarh (Kangra).

When I caught my first sight of Kot Kangra, I stood overcome with awe. The fort was perched on the face of a sheer cliff —suspended between cloudless

The Fort of Kot Kangra—suspended between the blue sky and the blue river.



To the north the mighty Dauladhar mountain ranges.

blue sky above and a blue river below.

Whatever the origin of its name, the strategic importance of Kot Kangra is very plain to see. The kings of old had chosen this site with great cunning. Set on a hill, at a bend in the river, the fort is girded on three sides by inaccessible cliffs and commands a view of the valleys for miles around. And to the north the ever snow-capped Dauladhar range of mountains, seem to rise up as if to protect the fort by their sheer presence.

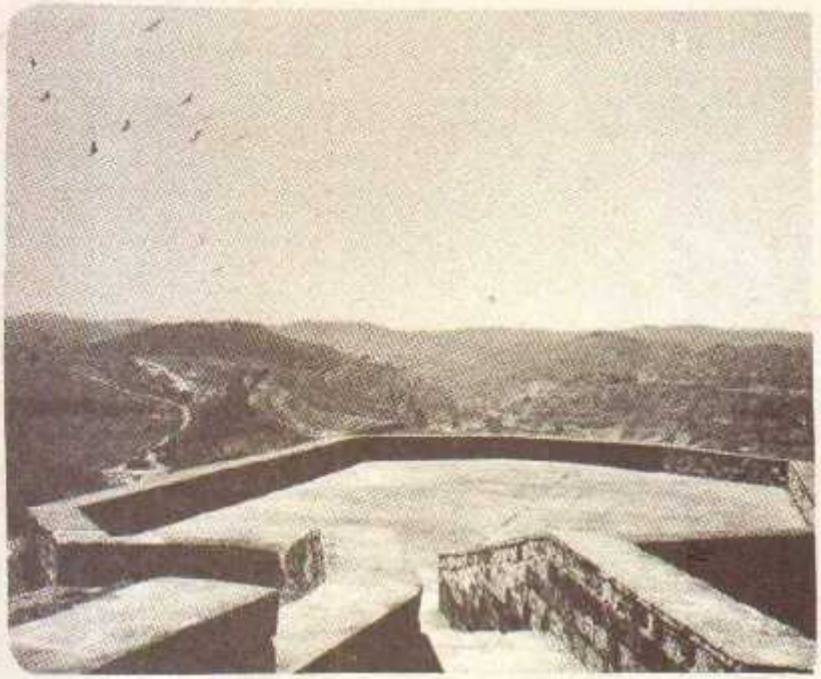
Kot Kangra has a chequered history. Due to its strategic location at the heart of this hilly terrain, the fort had always been a coveted possession. In the distant past, the lesser warrior kings of Himachal had regarded the fort as a bastion from which the surrounding valleys could be ruled. With the coming of the Muslim kings, the fort became even more important, as the Mughal rulers at Delhi realized that it guarded the road to Kashmir. The fort was held sometimes by the local kings and sometimes by the kings of Kashmir, only to be recaptured time and again by the mighty armies of the Mughal kings. Ferozshah Tuglaq, Akbar, Jehangir and Aurangzeb held this fort during their reigns. It is said that Raja Bikramjit, under orders from Jehangir, laid siege on it for a whole year, and yet could not succeed in entering it. Only when the brave soldiers within were facing near starvation, did they surrender to the invaders. The Mughals were opposed by local kings like Vidhi Chand and Jagat Singh, who spent their lifetimes trying to drive them away. They are immortalised in countless stories and ballads which are sung in the valleys even today.

In 1815, the British entered these valleys. Taking advantage of the rivalries that existed between the local kings, they annexed the region in a short time. The local kings of Kangra were humbled and they ruled their lands under the patronage of the British.

I passed under a stone arch, with huge wooden doors and entered the fort. The path was gently inclined and I passed through a series of ceremonial arches, flanked by thick, stone-walls with turrets and look-out posts set at regular intervals.

Ceremonial arches in the fort.

Ancient Temple and its intricately carved stones.



The octagonal terrace rising high.

The fort walls with turrets and look - out posts.

At the top of the fort stands an ancient temple that must have been a structure of exquisite beauty in olden times. Each stone of the temple is carved with intricate designs. The windows are supported by decorative pillars and the arches are cut in with minute artistic details. Though ruined now and covered by vegetation, the temple tells the glories of Kangra's past.

A short walk took me to an octagonal terrace, the fort's most breathtaking feature. From the terrace—which hangs into empty space hundreds of feet above the river—I could see the land rolled out on all three sides. There was a stillness in the air—as if time had stood still! As its ancient masters must have done, I stood with the breeze playing on my face, and gazed at the beauty of the green valleys below.

It was late evening when I returned to the bus-stand in the town and met my friend at the tea-stall. He was happy. He pointed to a wizened, old man whom he had kept waiting especially for me. As we drank tea, the old man played a musical instrument with a single string and began to sing in a tremulous voice. Soon a crowd gathered outside the tea-stall.

The old man sang, the stall-owner told me, the ballad famous in these valleys. The ballad narrates the age-old story of a beautiful queen—wife of a king of Kangra—who is commanded in a divine dream to sacrifice her life, as this would bring prosperity to the valley. She bravely decides to do as commanded. When the time comes for her to be buried alive, she looks for the last time at her beautiful valley and sings a touching song of farewell to the land she loves.

The old man's voice rang out into the cool night air. There was a hush about the tea-stall as the song ended. A large, full moon rose over Kangra valley. It was now drifting into a peaceful sleep.

THE HERITAGE

GLIMPSES OF JUNE '88 NUMBER

MYTHS OF COMPETITION: How far does this popular idea of surpassing the others in your field really help you to achieve excellence? A bold rebuff to the myth by Alfie Kohn.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE VALUES: Prema Sastri discusses practical ways to get over a problem which upsets parents, guardians as well as executives.

TWO REVOLUTIONARIES TURNED MYSTICS: Celebrating the birth centenary of two stalwarts of the revolutionary era, Nolini Kanta Gupta and Sudhir Kumar Sarkar.

JAMINI ROY: The great trend-setter in modern Indian Art movement. By Varsha Das.

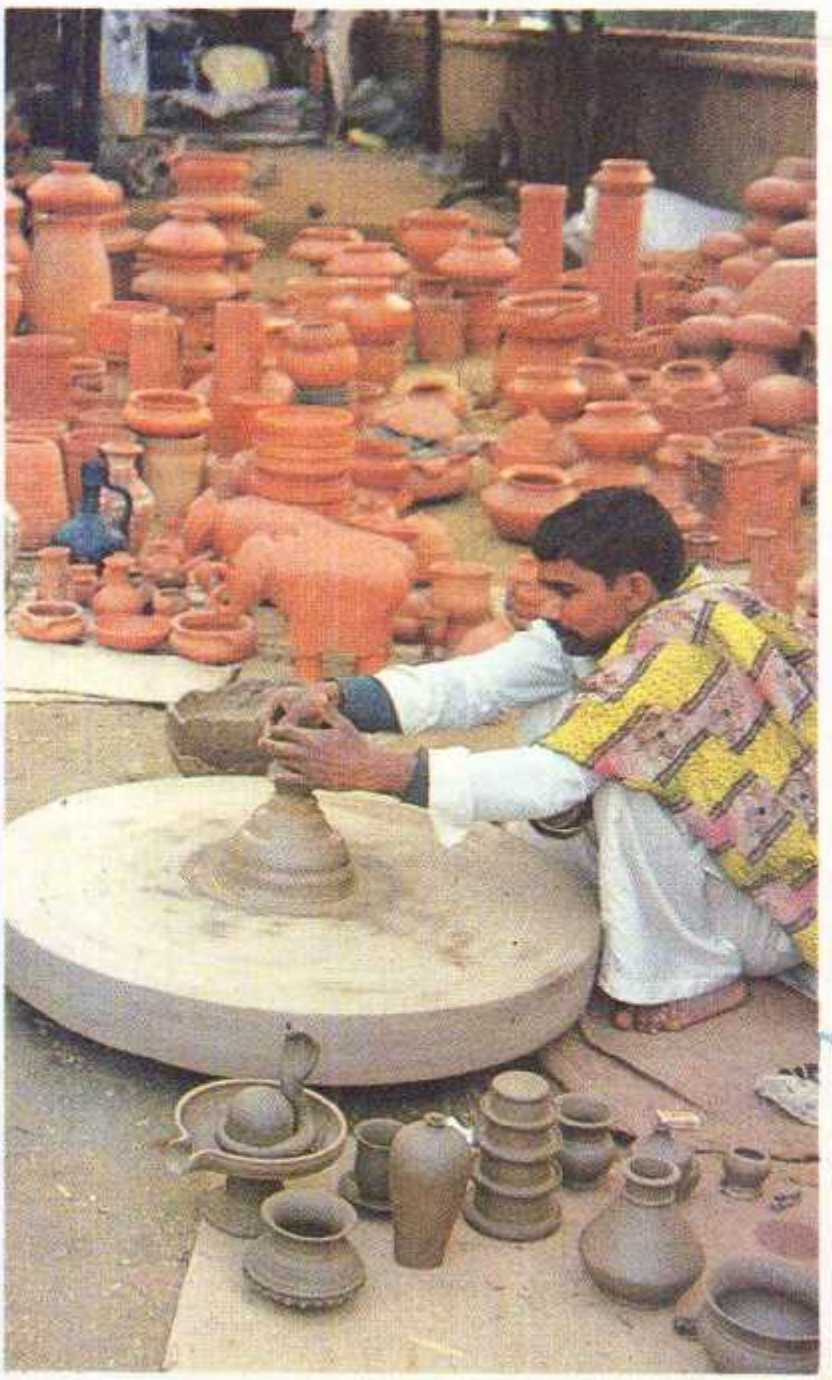
DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL: The only novel by Toru Dutt, the genius who died at the age of twentyone carving a permanent place for herself in Indo-Anglian literature. Written originally in French, the English translation is by Prithwindra Mukherjee.

And other features and fiction.

"WHO IS THE POTTER, PRAY, AND WHO IS THE POT?"

Photos by Vidyavrata

—Omar Khayyam; Fitzgerald

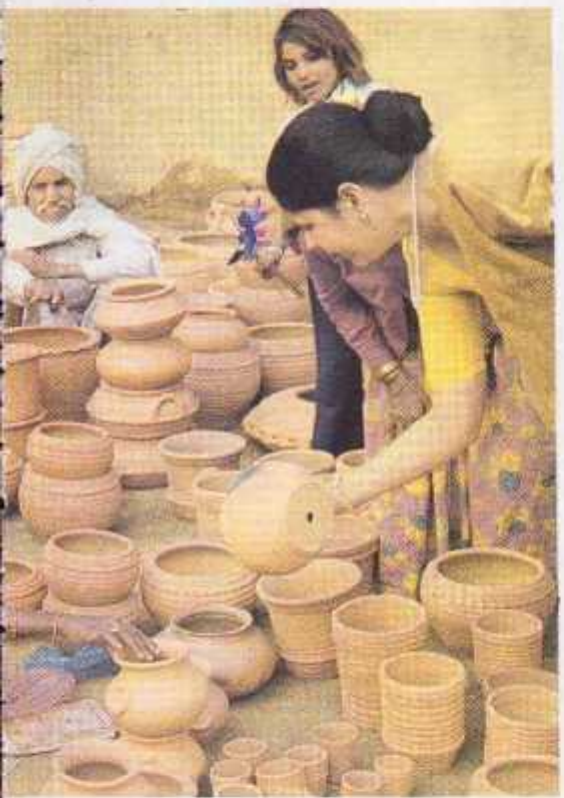


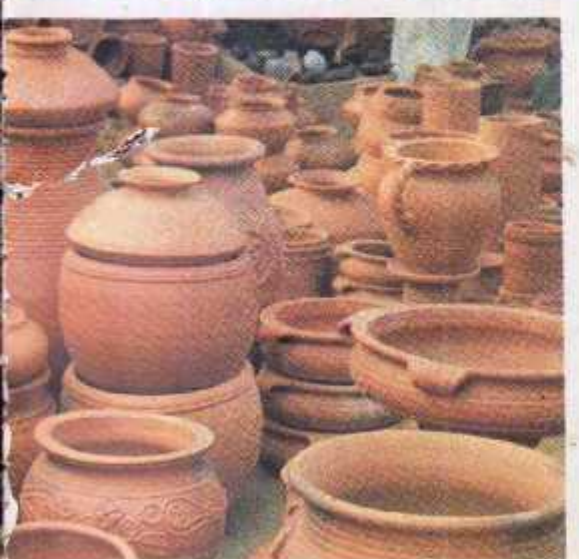
It is not surprising that the pot and the potter should be used by mystics and poets in a symbolic sense, for the use of pot marked a decisive stage in the development of civilisation. Archaeologists and historians read volumes into the types of pots unearthed.

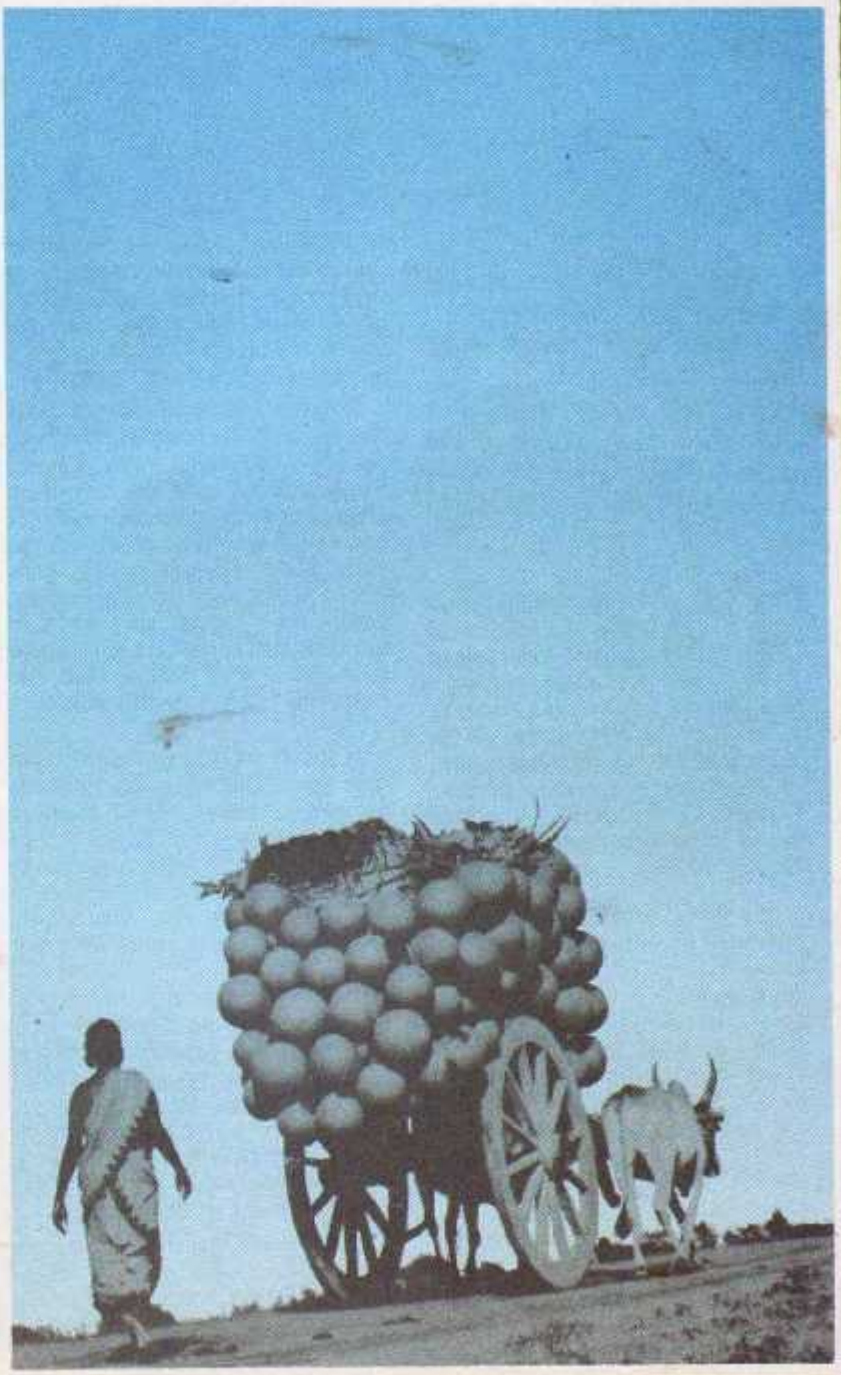
The pot has a special significance in Hindu mythology, for on occasions Lord Ganesha, who is to be worshipped at the beginning of all important rituals, is represented by an earthen pot. The appearance of Lakshmi from the ocean during its great churning, with a pot of nectar, is well-known.

The emergence of an earthen pot from the revolving wheel, when observed, always appears to be more than a mere physical phenomenon. The potter submits his vision and will to the creative force inherent in Nature and that force does the magic.

The earthen pot and the earthen oven are still the choice of the rural folk, against the modern metal cooking range. Deriving from Sanskrit, the word *Ghata* means both the pot and the human body. In the breakableness of the earthen pot the folk-philosopher sees the transitory nature of the human body.







THE VOICE OF SPRING

by M. Krishnan

" Now, when the roving moon is out,
and the soft south-wind blows,
when sleep is fled, and koels announce each watch of the night—
this is no time for stories!"

THAT is a fairly close rendering of a celebrated Tamil poet's response to his feminine companion's request for a story. Naturally, much of the terse unrest of the poem is lost in the translation, but I give it to you nevertheless because it mentions the koel — the bird does keep calling periodically, on moonlit nights.

No other bird figures so prominently in our lyric poetry and love-songs. In the north, another cuckoo with a no less insistent voice, the papiha, shares such poetry with the koel. The papiha is also there in the south, less commonly, but in the south it is only the koel that is featured, even in folksong and cinema-songs. It is the Voice of Spring in our poetic traditions.

Spring, in our torrid country, arrives early in March, with the advent of summer. The mango flowers, great forest trees burst into prodigal bloom, the nights are dewladen and the days scorching, with the dust rising from the parched earth: birds nest — and the voice of the koel, silent over the cold weather, is heard again.

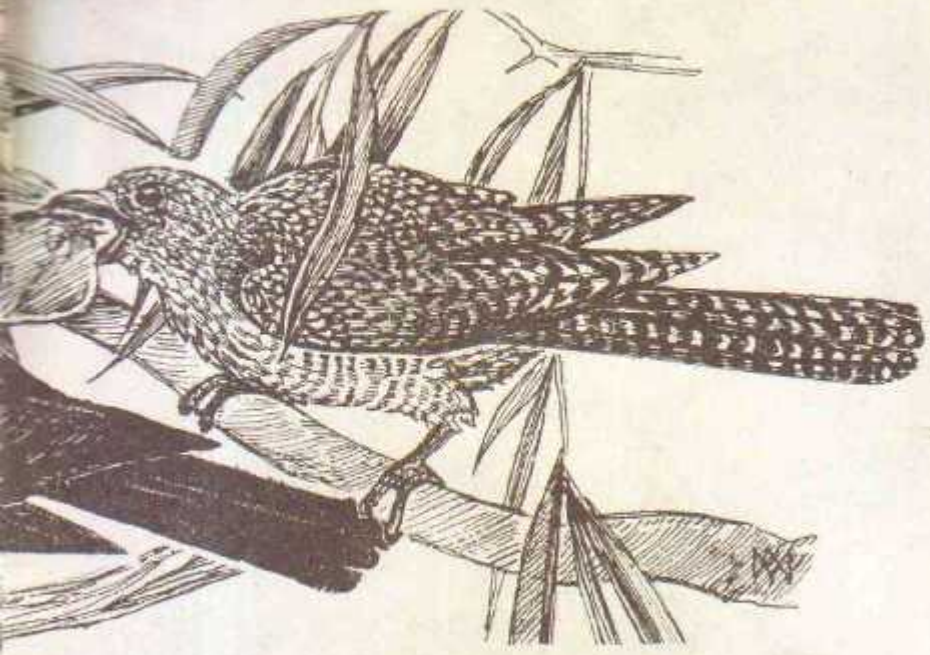
For over three decades I have listened to it, and watched the bird, for koels abound in many parts of Madras City, and are common where I live. Their earliest calls are not the fluted crescendos of the cock, but a series of quickly stuttered 'kecks' and the hen's thin, high 'keek', heard very early, in the hour before dawn: brief, muted crescendos may follow, but the birds are not yet in full voice.

It is late in July or August that they are in full voice. Early in the mornings, many cocks may be heard calling, not fluently but almost ineptly, with the rising notes suddenly cracking squeakily — are these the first-season cocks, tentatively rehearsing the song that is in their blood? By September, the pre-dawn air literally throbs with koel-calls — it is vibrant with rapidly piled on 'gluigs', fervid, quick hen-calls, and torrents of 'kekarees', clear and full-bodied for all their urgency, and the rich-toned, reiterated, flawless crescendos of many cocks calling almost in competition.

Till November the koels are highly vocal: then, with the north-east monsoon, their voices fade away. Naturally, for it is from mid-June to October that most crows nest, the unwitting foster-parents of koels still in the egg and just hatched, and the love-songs of the koels necessarily follow the peak nesting of the crows.

Birds, as a class, are not notable for their intelligence, as the higher animals are. They go mainly by compulsive instincts (innate, unreasoned urges and skills that need no practice for their effectiveness) which, on the whole, have survival value in varied circumstances — otherwise, the birds would have perished long ago. Few instances of the smooth and perfect efficiency with which instinct can replace intelligence, and skills acquired by experience, are more illustrative than the life history of the parasitic cuckoos, of which our koel is one.

Birds, of course, are also capable of limited intelligence, and among them some are more intelligent than the others: crows are among the most intelligent of birds. When nesting, they are highly intolerant of koels, and will chase away any that come too near their nest — is this because those extraordinary creatures, the koels, are not averse to feeding on the eggs of other birds when opportunity offers? So, when the hen koel is ready to lay, the cock flies close by the nest of a pair of crows, which instantly take off in hot pursuit of the thieving intruder — and the hen lays her egg in the



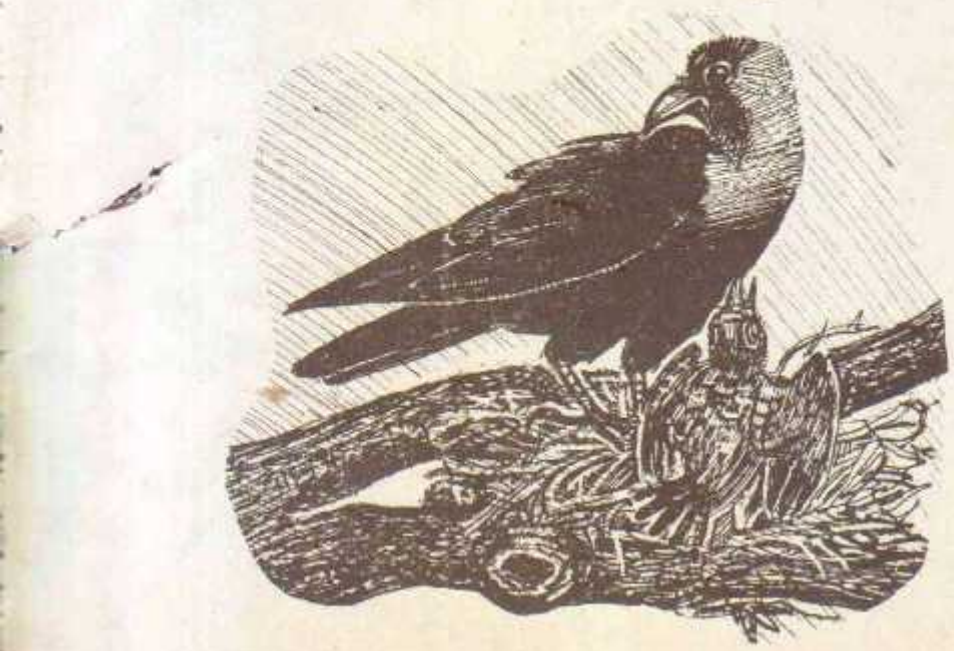
unguarded nest, removing one of the crow's eggs at the same time. The koel's egg is smaller than that of the crow, but otherwise resembles it, being much the same blue-green in colour, speckled with brown. The crows, returning from seeing the intruder safely off, do not notice the substitution, and incubate and hatch the foisted egg. The nestling koel does not bear a close resemblance to a crow's nestling, but is nevertheless nurtured with loving care by its foster-parents till it can fend for itself and flies away — to hoodwink a pair of nesting crows in its turn, when adult and moved to propagate its species. The entire adroit manoeuvre seems so cunningly designed and deliberate, but is purely instinctive and assures the posterity of the koel.

Even otherwise, the koel is a remarkable bird. Many people do not know that the cock and hen look altogether different. Both have bloodred eyes and lead-grey beaks and legs, but while the cock is a sleek, glossy black all over with a greenish sheen in the highlights, the slightly larger hen is speckled, streaked and barred dark brown and white, as shown in the head-piece.

Most perching birds have three toes pointing forward and one behind, but the koel (like the parakeets) has a reversible outer front toe, so that the bird can grasp the twig it is on either with two toes pointing forward and two backwards, or in a three-and-one grip.

Nor is that all. Perhaps the strangest thing about the koel is what it can and does eat. It has a highly distensible gape and gullet, and can swallow sizeable chunks when it wants to. Its fare is highly varied, and includes the hairy caterpillars the very sight of which causes an intense irritation to us! And among its favourite fruits are those of the poisonous yellow oleander, fatal to man and beast.

Thevetia peruviana (to give the name by which it is known to botanists in India — the name has now been changed to *Cascabela thevetia,* though) is a native of tropical South America, now widely introduced into our country, where its yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers are offered to our household gods (this plant is also shown in the head-piece). The milky, gummy juice in its green-wood and leaves and squat, somewhat pyramidal fruits contains the alkaloid, thevetin, which is highly toxic. Many in our country have committed suicide by eating two or three of the fruits. Many times I have closely watched koels consume 3 or 4 of the squat drupes within the span of 15 minutes, with no subsequent regrets. In assessing this amazing feat it should be remembered that toxicologists consider the body weight of the consumer of poisons taken in by mouth relevant, besides the actual quantity of the poison consumed. And the koel, with the light-boned economic build of a bird, cannot weigh even a hundredth as much as an average human being!



Desi-Lychee.

SUMMER'S DELICIOUS AND DELICATE GIFT : THE LYCHEE

by James B. Masih

DEHRADUN is not only known all over India for the Basmati variety of rice but in summer people flock to this place to relish the luscious lychee fruits (written also as Litchi, Lichee, Leechee and Lichi).

The tree known as *Litchi chinensis* of the Sapindaceae family is supposed to have originated from the Luchu island of China. It primarily bears fruit during the summer months, grows in gravel soil and requires a subtropical climate. It is abundantly found in southern China and moderately chilly areas of north India.

A full grown tree reaches a height of about 35 to 40 feet with a broad round-shaped top of glossy green foliage. The leaves are 2 to 3 inches long and the flowers are rather small and unattractive. The fruit is oval, 1 to 1½ inches in diameter with a brittle rough covering, dark-red in colour, enclosing a milky white translucent fleshy interior and a single seed. The tree does look striking with clusters of 5 to 15 fruit each resembling large strawberries.

There are four popular varieties of lychees. *Naphelium Chinese* has a thin brown scaly shell with a long seed inside. *Calcuttia* usually ripens two or three weeks earlier than the others. *Bedana* has a small seed and a thicker layer of flesh. Whereas *Desi* grows fast and gives a better yield.

In olden days only the feudal landlords used to grow this tree. But now the fruit has got a commercial value and people possessing gardens with lychee trees auction the baghs (a bagh usually consists of about 10 trees) which fetch them a handsome amount.

Bedana Lychee.

Lychees for sale.

Lychee is the favourite fruit of the people of southern China where it is supposed to have been cultivated for the last 2,000 years. A Chinese statesman Chang-Chow-ling of the 8th century composed a poem praising lychee as the most luscious of all fruits. It was on lychee, that the first published work exclusively devoted to fruit culture, was written by a Chinese scholar in A.D. 1056. In the province of Kwangtung the annual lychee crop is said to yield thousands of tons of fruit.

People with surplus lands cultivate lychees as it does not require much care and attention. Then after 5 to 6 years when the trees bear fruit the owners make good profits. Today the lychee has become one of the main foreign exchange earners among Indian fruits.

The lychee orchards are also sometimes leased out to professional buyers known as "Bag-ban" (Kunjras) who take charge of the gardens between February and March when the trees have just blossomed. In April they put up their huts there till the end of the season in early August.

To safeguard the lychees from the menace of birds and bats the Kunjras hang a stone-filled canister high up in the tree. Pulling a rope tied to the canister they raise an alarm to scare away the winged relishers of the furit.

Despite a good margin of profit this trade provides only seasonal employment to a small number of people.

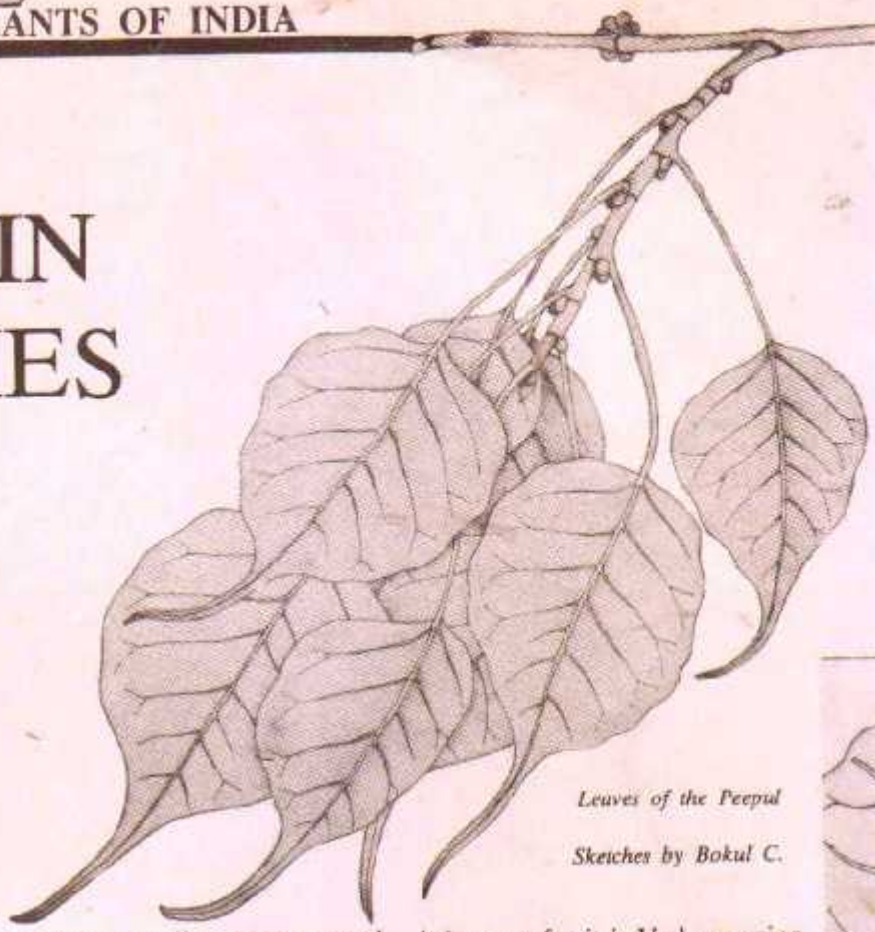
Kunjra family at work. Women packing fruit.

THE TWIN MAJESTIES

Banyan And Peepul

by Richard Pearson

"ashwattha sarvavrikshanam..."
"I am the Ashwattha among the trees..."
(Gita X, 26)



Leaves of the Peepul

Sketches by Bokul C.

ACCORDING to the botanists it is Peepul *(Ficus religiosa)*, and not the Banyan *(Ficus bengalensis)*, which is the Ashwattha. They, of course, belong to the same family and are closely related.

My question is whether the Ashwattha mentioned in the Gita, is it not the Banyan? Did not our sages of old compare this creation to Ashwattha with its roots growing in heaven (ether) and its branches extending downwards to earth? You must have noticed that it is the Banyan whose roots form in the air and grow downwards to earth.

In any case, both Banyan and Peepul are sacred and imposing in their grandeur. We usually know a tree to be sacred because of its ancient association in worship or prayer. But in order to experience or to fully understand the sacredness of a tree, we must try to feel again the basic experience of early man, living a simple life reduced to the elementary needs of existence which allowed him to commune with Nature. For, our expression, is it not the result of our inner life of dreaming, introspection and a quest for a deeper reality or transcendence?

When you see a Banyan, do you not experience a sense of vastness? Are you not seized with that mystic experience of the One becoming many and indissolubly united with all His creation? The Banyan expresses the symbol of unity very well.

What intrigued me most as a child was the fact that the seeds of Banyan—and of Peepul too—were so tiny for such large growth! The small, round, red fruits contain masses of seeds, each as small as a grain of sand! To a simple mind which believes everything in the universe to be a divine creation, it is a profound revelation!

Lord Buddha attained his goal of enlightenment under a Peepul (Bo) tree where he sat for meditation and conquered *Mara*.

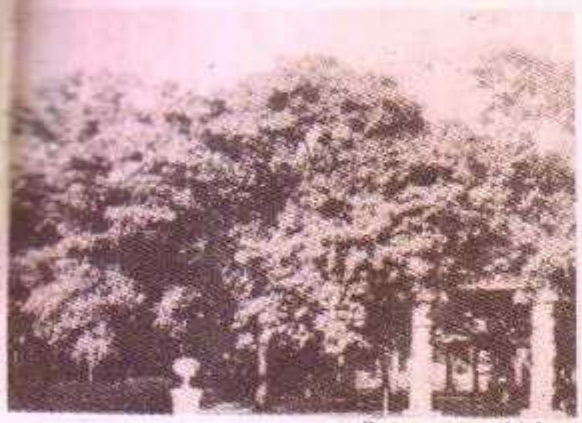
There are indeed more than a hundred varieties of *Ficus*, ranging from the widely consumed Fig to the Banyan, named Krishna's Buttercup where each leaf has its two "wings" folded back and joined together, forming a cone or cup.

How has the name Banyan come to be adopted? The Sanskrit name for it is Vad, meaning the oldest and most respected. It is believed that the tree was brought by the Banyas —the tradesmen—to the Persian Gulf, and hence acquired there, the name Banyan.

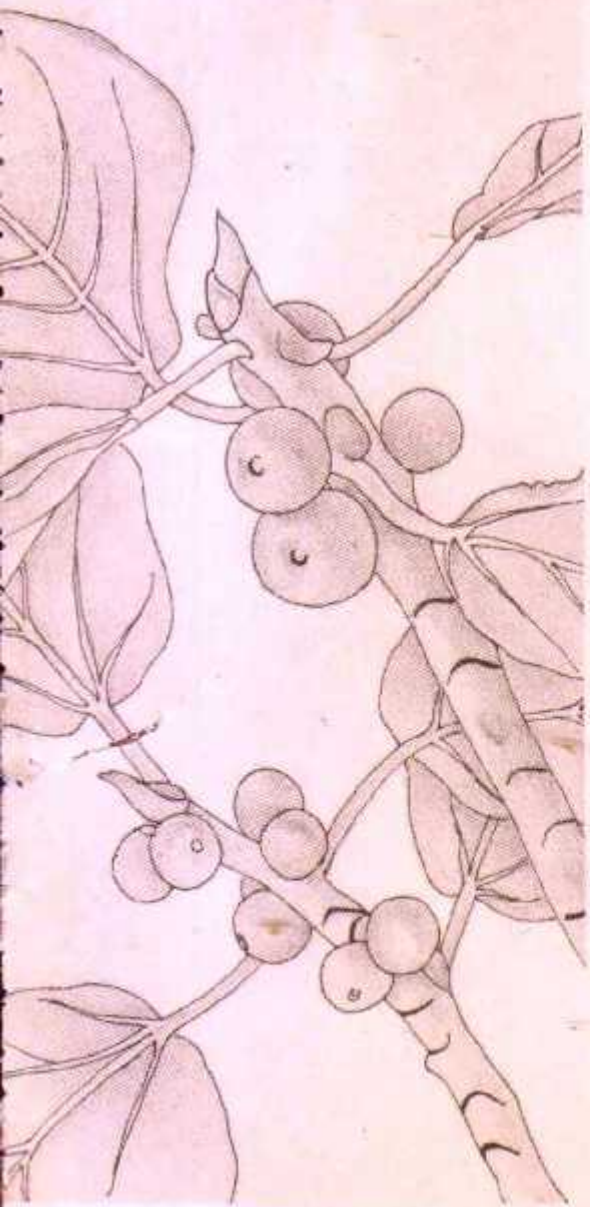
The Banyan and Peepul seem to be growing naturally all over the plains, but are native to southern and western India as well as to the sub-Himalayan tract.

One of the largest of the Banyan trees is said to have a circumference of 600 metres and it is said that 20,000 people can take shelter under its shade. The Theosophical Society, in Adyar, Madras has a very large tree, which must have been very impressive, though now, it appears sick—probably poisoned by the nearby polluted water of the Adyar river.

There is also a magnificent specimen at the Calcutta botanical gardens which is supposed to be the largest in Asia, though only about two hundred years old. With its numerous pillar roots, this giant tree encompasses an area of about 900 feet in circumference. It seems it is difficult to locate now the original



Banyan tree at Adayar



Leaves and fruit of the Banyan

trunk of this tree.

The Banyan hardly sheds its leaves but the Peepul is completely bare by the time the North winds have finished blowing by mid-January or February, according to the change in the climatic conditions. After that, the new leaves appear either rosy red or pea-green. The tree is a delight to behold and when the breezes play among the leaves there is a rustling that reminds one of the patter of an approaching shower! Note that in all the members of this large tropical family each leaf is protected by a delicate bract either pale green or rosy pink which falls to the ground as the new leaf unfolds.

The birds crowd round during the fruiting season—Mynas, Parakeets, Bulbuls, Babblers. Even then, the ground is covered with the dull red coloured fruits. Such is the bounty of Nature.

In the case of the Banyan, the fruits are a beautiful bright red—a tempting colour for both birds and squirrels. It seems the seeds are not digested for they still abound in the droppings of the birds that have eaten these fruits. And it is most probable that the seeds that have passed through these feathered friends germinate better, perhaps supplied with their additional natural "fertiliser." In any case, the seeds do germinate on Palmyra trees and later, grow gradually downwards to the earth, surrounding the trunk of the Palm as they grow together. As time goes by, the Palm is completely covered and in the end may even dry up. In towns they grow well in crannies of old walls and on abandoned buildings.

The Peepul has medicinal properties too. The fruits are laxative and the seeds cooling; and the milk from the young shoots is locally used for treating diarrhoea. The leaves and young shoots are purgative; an infusion of the bark is given internally for scabies.

As for the Banyan, the milky juice or latex as it is called, is applied externally for pains, rheumatism, or lumbago.

The fruit is tonic and cooling. An infusion of the bark is tonic and is used in dysentery and in diabetes.

In general, the leaves of both Peepul and Banyan make good fodder and the wood, though not so strong, keeps well even under water and is, therefore used to make wells.

The roots of Banyan are regularly cut in some parts and chopped into tooth-sticks of about 6" long. People use them to clean their teeth by chewing one end of the stick until the fibres remain, making it into a tooth-brush. They are indeed effective since they contain tannin which is a cleansing element and good for strengthening the gums.

Scanning the Peepul leaf

The long hanging roots are so strong that they are used as swings by the children of the village. Look for the glistening white or pink root tips when new growth occurs: they absorb moisture from the air!

The leaves are sometimes dried and stitched together to form plates for serving food.

Like many large trees, the Banyan and the Peepul are supposed to be the home of spirits, that is to say, that souls in transit, leaving their body may take refuge in these trees. Hence people hesitate to cut them.

Well, their grandeur cannot but impress you in some inexplicable way, and the heart is filled with a respectful silence in worship of their Master Creator!

Four of the cards which had the most significance in Carole Beckley's reading. (From left to right) The Ace of Disks or Pentacles—shows a helping hand from someone. The Nine of Cups which is upside down and indicates concern for future happiness. The Three of Swords, also upside down, this shows that there will be no disappointments ahead. The Queen of Cups indicates an emotionally stable person.

CAN THE TAROT REVEAL THE FUTURE

Every phenomenon that defies a rational explanation is not necessarily spiritual. There are many layers of realities and several kinds of laws incomprehensible by intelligence. While this is an undeniable fact, in every age there are charlatans who take advantage of this fact. They claim mastery over some hidden laws and often bamboozle the believers. There are hundreds of formulae followed by such people. One of them is reading the Tarot Cards.

But do all those who carry on such so-called supernatural trades only exploit our vulnerability? Perhaps not. There are practitioners who take their capacit, seriously and they believe in the formulae. A prediction made may prove true. If it does, at worst it is a coincidence; at best it is merely the unfoldment of a knowledge. All knowledge is there somewhere—may be in the consciousness of the 'customer' himself!

*We give below an interview with a practising British Tarot reader, **Ron Wheatley**, who claims nothing fantastic. He was interviewed by **Carole Beckley**. This is just to inform our readers on this popular and widely referred to phenomenon and we do not vouch for anything.*

—Editor.

THESE days Ron Wheatley is more careful with his predictions. He laughed: "Now I know better than to spell out these situations—it could land me in hot water. But I would never lie about what I read in the cards."

Ron has been interpreting Tarot cards for seven years and his remarkable accuracy means that his appointment book is always full.

He said: "Considering that I have taught myself to read the cards, I am quite surprised at how often my predictions come true. Many of my clients write to me and say how the readings have been spot on."

It was with this recommendation that I approached Ron's house in Welling, Kent and with feelings of trepidation, rang the doorbell.

Inside I could hear a jolly chime echo through the house. Dark-haired Ron, 40, looking really quite normal, ushered me into the "reading room". A faint oriental aroma filled the air but I never discovered exactly where it came from.

Black candlesticks snaked up the walls. Plates showing astrological star signs and packs of Tarot cards cluttered the table tops and a sculpture of Merlin the magician presided over all.

Carole looks at the spreads of cards. The Death card had made an unwelcome appearance but Ron says this only means that someone should be forgotten. In Tarot an interpretation can be entirely different if a card is placed upside down.

Ron offered me the "hot seat". As I was engulfed in the soft, low chair, Ron sat in a high, hard-back, immediately putting me at a disadvantage. I felt decidedly inferior.

I know little about the Tarot cards, except for the faint recollection that there is a nasty Death card buried somewhere in the pack. So Ron explained the rudiments.

"There are 78 fortune-telling cards in the Tarot pack, 22 are trump cards. There are four suits —pentacles or discs which represent money, cups which stand for emotions, swords which mean your state of mind, and wands which you can read as career, hobbies and psychic development.

"I shall give you several different spreads which will include your tree of life, a card for a month and your astrological chart. Then, if you have any questions, I will do spreads relating to them."

"Tarot card readings are like a jigsaw puzzle. I give you all the pieces but I don't have the picture on top of the box. Hopefully we can fit all those pieces together."

It all seemed straightforward enough and so without further hesitation I picked a card.

Ron threw his hands in the air (I soon discovered that he was fond of gesticulating). "You have chosen the Emperor. This will be your key card. The Emperor stands for a person who is very much involved in a career and you will find yourself greatly influenced by this person in the next 12 months."

I racked my brains to think of someone who could fit the bill but no one really suited the description. Ron explained: "You should relate to some of my reading straightaway. But obviously you won't understand all of the predictions because they haven't happened yet. In most cases my customers tell me if it is likely or possible that these things are going to happen."

I tried to concentrate, in spite of Ron's waving hands.

"I see in spreading the cards that you have the Queen of Cups. This card shows that you are quite an emotionally stable person. But the next card, the Nine of Cups, is upside down and this shows some concern for your future happiness.

"The Three of Swords is also upside down and this says that whatever that concern is it will pass, because this shows no tears or disappointments ahead. And the Ace of Pentacles shows that you will soon have a helping hand from someone."

I accepted that this *might* be my situation. But before I could express the slightest bewilderment Ron was off again.

He dealt the astrological spread—12 cards which relate to the star signs. I noticed that the Death card had made an appearance. Ron said: "Don't worry, this does not necessarily mean that someone is going to die. In your case it shows that you have to forget someone or something."

The cards revealed further upheavals like a move of house, which I hadn't planned on, and breakdown of communications with a partner. On a high note Ron said I should have no money problems.

Ron's wife, 36-year-old Pat, explained: "Once Ron starts a reading he doesn't like to be interrupted because it breaks his flow."

Silence. The cards were shuffled and cut again. The month by month spread again showed that by September I would have moved house.

I didn't feel particularly enraptured by what the cards had predicted—nothing very jolly seemed to be in store. Ron said: "I don't see that there is anything for you to worry about because by January you will feel much more contented and your life will be calm and balanced."

That was really encouraging news!

I asked Ron about some of the clients who visit him. "I suppose 80 per cent of my customers are female and 20 per cent male and they are from all age groups, although I don't have very many elderly people.

Carole Beckley's auragraph. By picking coloured pencils from a box, without looking, and colouring in each part of the figure diagram Ron can determine other qualities of a person.

"I don't want to boast, but I can tell you some of my success stories, which are a little bit out of the ordinary." I urged him to carry on.

"One woman asked me whether or not she should invest her money. In the cards it showed that she should definitely invest and I said that she would be wise to go ahead immediately.

"She decided to ignore my advice and a few weeks later she called me to say that had she taken it, she would have been a very rich woman."

"Then there was an 80-year-old woman who came to me for a reading and the Tarot kept showing the Cups and affairs of the heart. The cards seemed to be saying that she was to marry. It sounded rather unlikely but I asked her if she had had a marriage proposal. She had!"

"I suppose there is one case that really sticks in my mind. A young man came to see me and he wanted to know about his career—he had been offered a job on an oil rig and he wanted to know what the cards said."

"The cards showed that he must *not* take the job. It is unusual for a reading to be so categoric, but in every spread they emphatically revealed that the job was wrong for him."

"The man had been very tempted to take the position because the money was so good, but he decided to heed the Tarot and turn it down. A month or two later the oil rig flipped over and several people were killed."

Ron devotes 30 to 40 minutes for a session and this also includes an auragraph. He explained: "I have a drawing of a figure which represents the material self, surrounded by the spiritual self. By picking coloured pencils from the box, without looking, and colouring in each part I can determine other qualities of a person.

"The auragraph usually coincides with the readings given from the interpretation of the Tarot cards. But there are always exceptions."

"I remember one woman who came to me and she thought she was pregnant. The readings did show that she might be expecting a child but in the auragraph there was no pink, which usually indicates a birth. I told her that she wouldn't have a child."

"She rang me a few days later to say that I had been wrong and that a doctor had confirmed that she was pregnant. I heard months later that she had had a miscarriage."

Pat brought in a cup of tea and explained how both she and her husband had become involved with Tarot and prediction.

She said: "I went to see a medium because I thought I was going round the bend. I thought that our flat was haunted and I kept having these strange experiences."

"The medium was so helpful that Ron and I decided to find out more about the psychic world. We started to go to Spiritualists and we bought quite a few books about psychic related subjects. Then I bought a pack of Tarot cards. But I decided that it was too complicated and put them away in a cupboard."

Ron went on: "I'd never been very interested in the cards, I only thought of them as a game and I didn't really take it too seriously. But one day Pat and I really wanted to know whether someone was coming round to finish a job they'd promised to do. So I got the cards out and tried experimenting, just for a joke."

"I practised on my daughter, Derren, and son Alexis and I seemed to be quite good at it. I found that if I ignored all the theoretical instructions and just concentrated on my own interpretation the readings were quite precise."

"It was very exciting, so I began to read the cards at every spare moment. I started by doing postal readings for friends. Although these are more difficult because you cannot see the person, the results are more valid and honest because you cannot be influenced in any way."

"I eventually decided that, as my job had no real purpose—I was an estimator for an upholstery firm—I should give it up and become a professional Tarot card reader. I have had no regrets."

"I must admit that generally more people come to see me when they are low or depressed and that they want to hear that something good will happen."

"Sometimes the cards only seem to show a long, dark patch ahead, but what I will do is keep on spreading the cards until I can see a light at the end of the tunnel. Then I can give a more hopeful reading."

The doorbell jingled its tune, announcing the next client. As I prepared to leave Ron said: "Make sure you let me know what happens. I'd like to know if you move."

Since I love my present home, I am praying that the cards have got it wrong.

AN EASTERN SCIENCE

According to occultists, the system comes first from the East, probably from Chaldea. After the destruction of the seat of learning in Alexandria, the adepts of all countries converged upon Fez in Morocco and made it the pivot of their esoteric science; since they spoke in many tongues, they decided to create a set of common symbols which all could understand and in which their truths could be pictured. 'As a skeleton for their invention the wise men chose the relatively simple system of numbers and letters afforded by the Qubalah' (S. Mayananda, The Tarot Today). The Hebrew alphabet consists of 22 letters and these placed upon the 22 Paths of the Tree of Life gave a combination of bases for correspondences. By this system of a pack of cards containing four suits of 14 cards each and 22 trumps unconnected with the suits and called the Major Arcana, ideas could be exchanged without the necessity of either the spoken or the written word.

***Man, Myth & Magic** edited by Richard Cavendish. Marshal Cavendish, New York.*

Descent of hope (Painted stork at nest building) **Photo : R. Dev**

DREAMS THAT REVEAL (2)

by Devapriyo

"Let us learn to dream, gentlemen, and then we may perhaps find the truth."
—Scientist August Kekule

After relating the significance of dreams in history, the author has so far covered the intriguing roles time and space play in dreams and has given examples of dreams that reveal either the future or the past. He reflects further on this particular kind of dreams, in this fifth article in the series.

WE HAVE already seen that all revelatory dreams are not necessarily significant. They are sometimes nothing more than a preview of an event. Why should an insignificant or ordinary occurrence of the future should at all be revealed is a different question. The fact that the future can be seen through dreams is an important enough proposition.

Important or unimportant, much depends on how the knowledge of the future, revealed through a dream, is utilised. The classic example of a premonitive dream interpreted wrongly though cleverly is the dream dreamt by Calpurnia, Julius Caesar's wife, on the eve of her husband's assassination. Shakespeare's depiction of the incident may not be a factual report; nevertheless the way he has depicted it accurately shows the thin line that exists between a genuine interpretation and a perverse one.

Caesar tells Senator Decius, one of the conspirators who has come to fetch him to the capital, that he had decided against moving out of his home because Calpurnia had evil dreams about him:

She dreamt tonight she saw my statue,
Which, like a fountain with a hundred spouts,
Did run pure blood; and many lusty Romans
Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it;
And these does she apply for warnings, and portents,
And evils imminent; and on her knee
Hath begged that I will stay at home today.

With an uncanny presence of mind Decius gives a convincing twist to the lady's dream of plain forebodings. He says:

This dream is all amiss interpreted!
It was a vision fair and fortunate!
Your statue spouting blood in many pipes,
In which so many smiling Romans bathed,
Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck
Reviving blood, and that great men shall press
For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance.
This by Calpurnia's dream is signified.

Caesar is instantly taken up by the interpretation of Decius because it perfectly satisfies his ego. Poor Calpurnia is heard no more! The loud noise of mischievous flattery has silenced the shy but true voice of goodwill.

History makes a sarcastic comment on an illustrious contemporary of Caesar, the great orator and statesman Cicero, in regard to the latter's attitude to dreams.

Cicero always ridiculed those who believed that dreams had some significance. But one night (that was before Caesar's death) he dreamt of a young man who descended from the blue along a golden chain. The features of the young man impressed him very much.

And what a pleasant surprise it was for him to meet the young man of his dream at a public function the very next day. He felt that the young man was a man of destiny who would be at the helm of affairs one day.

Cicero became very friendly with him. The young man was none other than Octavius, Caesar's nephew.

Cicero, a lover of democracy, naturally did not like Caesar's rise to dictatorial power, though he played no part in the conspiracy to finish Caesar off. After the murder of Caesar he became active to mobilise the political parties of the time to some sort of a unity to ensure reintroduction of a healthy political system. But the course of events was against his idealism. In the civil discords and rebellions, the Caesarians were emerging powerful. Cicero was disgusted.

In the political polarisations of the time, Octavius and Mark Antony were in one camp and they were cashing in on the fallen leader's glory. Mark Antony was a sworn enemy of Cicero. Sure that Cicero will create problems for them, Mark Antony caught him while he was even deserting Rome. He was killed and his head and right hand were put up for public exhibition.

If Cicero had not become a friend of Octavius, he would have perhaps been spared of this sad fate. A friend turned a dissenter surely incurs greater wrath of the ambitious. Any way, Cicero paid the price for following a double standard in regard to dreams—asking others not to be influenced by them but himself acting under the influence of a dream.

A dream belonging to the category of premonition was dreamt by Bishop Joseph de Lanyi on the night of 27 June 1914. In his dream he read a letter the text of which was this: "Your Eminence, dear Dr. Lanyi, my wife and I have been victims of a political crime at Sarajevo. We commend

ourselves to your prayers. Sarajevo, 28 June 1914, 4 A.M."

The news of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, reached the bishop the next day. The incident triggered off the World War I.

If such misfortunes are revealed rather directly, fortunes too can be revealed albeit indirectly and interestingly. Here is a case cited by A. Lang in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics:*

An Eton friend asked Colonel A.B., 'What is the Latin name for the south-west wind?' 'Favonius,' was the answer. 'I dreamed that a horse with the Latin name of the south-west wind won the Derby, but, when I wakened, I could not remember the Latin name.' The friends found no Favonius in the betting, and none, on the Derby day, was coloured on the card. But it was announced that 'the Zephyr colt' had just been named Favonius. The friends naturally backed Favonius, which won. It is clear that the well-known Zephyr (west wind) colt had, in the dream, suggested the south-west wind by its Latin name, which, when awake, the dreamer could not remember.

There are numerous instances of scientific facts being revealed through dreams. The most celebrated case of this kind of our time relates to the laws of the chemical transmission of nerve impulses discovered by the physiologist Otto Loewi. The discovery secured him the Nobel Prize in 1936. His own statement:

"The night before Easter Sunday of (1921) I awoke, turned on the light, and jotted down a few notes on a tiny slip of thin paper. Then I fell asleep again. It occurred to me at six o'clock in the morning that during the night I had written down something most important, but I was unable to decipher the scrawl. The next night, at three o'clock, the idea returned. It was the design of an experiment to determine whether or not the hypothesis of chemical transmission that I had uttered 17 years ago was correct. I got up immediately, went to the laboratory, and performed a simple experiment on a frog heart according to the nocturnal design ... Its results became the foundation of the theory of the chemical transmission of the nervous impulses."

It is relevant to recollect here the experiences of the Indian mathematical genius, Srinivasa Ramanujam. He had said that solutions to problems were revealed to him in his dreams by the deity he worshipped, Goddess Namakkal.

"Let us learn to dream, gentlemen, and then we may perhaps find the truth," said another scientist, August Kekule, the celebrated discoverer of benzene. No, he did not refer to dreams in any figurative sense. He had really dreamt the clues to his discovery. The veteran told an assembly of scientists; "I turned the chair to the fireplace and sank into a half sleep. The atoms flitted before my eyes... wriggling and turning like snakes. And see, what was that? One of the snakes seized its own tail and the image whirled scornfully before my eyes. As though from a flash of lightning, I awoke. I occupied the rest of the night working out the consequences of the hypothesis."

The image of the serpent inspired in the scientist the truth of the structure of the benzene molecule, six carbon atoms forming a ring with the hydrogen atoms attached at each point.

What inspires such dreams?

GAUTAMA'S FIVE DREAMS

*When the Tathāgata (Gautama) was not yet wholly awakened but was awakening, he had five great dreams. He dreamt that the world was his bed of state, that the mountain Himālaya was his pillow; this meant that he was becoming fully awakened. Then he dreamt that grass came out of his navel and grew till it reached the clouds; this meant that he would proclaim the noble doctrine of the eightfold path as far as gods and men exist. He dreamt that white worms with black heads crept up over his feet to his knees; this meant that white-robed householders would find life-long refuge in him. He dreamt that four birds of various colours fell at his feet and became pure white; the four classes of society (**varnas**) would take up renunciation and find release. And, finally, he dreamt that he walked on a great mountain of filth but wasn't dirtied by it; this meant that he would receive robes, alms, lodgings, and medicine but would not be attached to them.*

—Anhuttara Nivaya

I SHALL WAIT

Since dusk, I stand
By this road, waiting
For a bus.
Buses, red and green, run
On the road
Packed and closed.

Long I have stood –
My hands weak
And my legs stiff.

I lift my hand;
They do not stop –
pass, hurling at me
a cloud of dust.

The night is young. Yet
I shall wait – there
may come a bus that will
pick me up.

Sitaram Ballav Goswami

DIALOGUE OF WIND AND FIRE

Lord of the pendant isle set in peacock-blue sea,
monarch of all demonic power
Lankasura, the giant-headed intellectual,
master of music, fierce devotee of
the trident, the third eye, the Isa
meets
Maruthi, the blessed Hanuman,
in search of Sita, the earth-become fire, the seed of fire.
The chosen emissary of the primate kings,
Vayuputra
meets
the masked, ten-headed sanyasi feigning
power over Rama's bow-born love.
And then
Lanka is aflame
burning like one lamp
and the sea, all-aglow.
Hanuman dips his fire breathing tail
into the ocean
that shudders as if whipped
and
in mid-air turns his cautious eye to see
the cradle of an island afloat calmly
wombing the earth-mother's child.

C.N. Srinath

NAMELESS IN AVANTI

Would it make any difference if I were to say
I belong
To Avanti and not Magadh?
Of course it would!
For then you would be acknowledged
As one belonging to Avanti
And you'd be compelled to forget Magadh.
And yet ....
You would not be able to forget Magadh
Nor would you be able to understand Avanti
In spite of having spent a lifetime there!
And then
You'd tell yourself over and over again –
'I belong not to Avanti but Magadh' –
But no one would pay any heed to your words.
You would mutter –
'I'm telling you the truth
I really belong to Magadh and not Avanti'
But it would make no difference!
You would continue to remain
Unacknowledged by Magadh
And unrecognised by Avanti.

Srikant Varma

Translated from Hindi by Swapna Dutta

THE LATEST WITNESSES TO FLYING SAUCERS

THE MYSTERY NEVER SUBSIDES!

IT was one in the afternoon on June 6, the story goes, when something roared out of the sky in Dundy County, Nebraska. It looked like an immense, blazing meteor, but when it hit the ground, it skipped over the earth for about half a mile before it disappeared into a draw.

Local cowboy John Ellis and his crew rode furiously towards the mysterious object. And as they approached, legend has it, they saw pieces of machinery scattered along the path. The pieces were so hot, they claimed, that the surrounding grass was scorched, preventing the cowboys from getting anywhere near the site.

One newspaper account even stated that where the object touched the earth, the ground was sandy and bare of grass. "The sand was fused to an unknown depth over a space about twenty feet wide by eighty feet long," the story claimed, "and the melted stuff was still bubbling and hissing." Even more incredible, the story went, when cowboy Alf Williamson stared at the object his face blistered, and his hair was singed to a crisp.

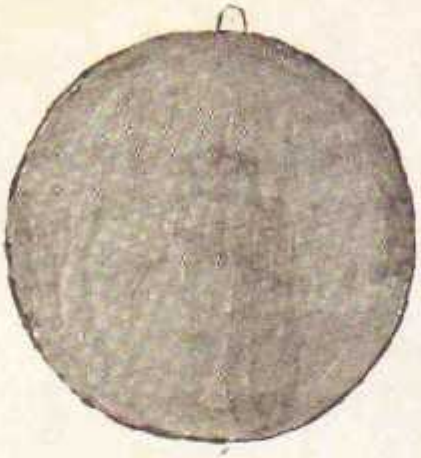
The next day investigators allegedly came to the site and found one object resembling the blade of a propeller screw and another resembling a wheel. The vehicle itself proved to be cylindrical, 10 feet in diameter and 50 feet long. It was composed of a remarkably light but tough metal.

Another crashed-saucer story? Perhaps.

But what makes this one so remarkable is that it is supposed to have taken place in 1884. The story appeared in a June 1884 issue of the *Nebraska Nugget*, a weekly newspaper published in Holdrege. The same story was reprinted in the *Lincoln Daily Journal* on June 8. The editor of that paper even went so far as to suggest that the object was a "vessel belonging originally to another planet."

Omni, December '86.

Since then hardly a year has passed when some reports about the UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) being sighted by some people somewhere in the Western world has not been reported in the press. In fact, a sophisticated monthly like the OMNI (U.S.A.) has a regular column entitled "UFO Update" to report about the latest 'incident' or research on the subject month after month.



Two of the paintings . . . all 20 were almost identical.

Is there anybody out there?
These pupils say there is!
For they are the witnesses to it.

Are UFOs real – something tangible and perceptible like the spacecraft? It is believed that although they are real, they are not what they seem. A paradox that scientists, astronomers and ufologists are endeavouring to unravel since the last four decades.

Way back in 1940s when the first UFOs of the present age were sighted, they were assumed to have originated from somewhere on earth. But reports gave clear indication that no nation on earth could be responsible. Nor was there justifiable evidence to support the ingenious theories – that they came from the Himalayas, long reputed to be the source of secret wisdom or from Antarctica where still unexplored regions provide a dubious foundation for speculation.

What is still more fascinating is that observers claim to have encountered the occupants of the UFOs – entities described as extra-terrestrial beings, ambassadors from an inter-galactic power.

There are hundreds of cases of this bizarre phenomenon on record today therefore they cannot be just dismissed as mere fantasy or as simply a fabrication. On the other hand not a single case could be justified to be based on solid fact and provide a satisfactory answer to the scientific mind.

It is not our purpose at the moment to enlist the numerous encounters of our earthmen with such mysterious objects. Let us confine ourselves to the latest incident of this nature.

A class gave its teacher an unearthly shock when they announced: "Please Sir, we've seen a flying saucer."

At first deputy head Bruce Nutter shrugged off their out-of-this-world claim.

But then he had second thoughts of a serious kind about the "heavenly" visitor to St. Joseph's junior school.

Then the class of 10-year-olds were told to produce a painting of what they had seen. All 20 came up with almost identical drawings.

Now UFO investigators are probing two sightings of a mysterious object which is said to have hovered over the playground.

Sighting *Number One* was during midday break when the round red and silver object about 80 feet across and glowing brightly, appeared to buzz a helicopter above the school at Leigh, Lancs.

Sighting *Number Two* came two nights later. Youngsters at a Youth club next door saw a similar visitor hover above the school and shine red, white and blue "laser beams" onto the playground.

Then it roared off "like thunder" at an amazing speed.

Mr. Nutter, said: "I have questioned the children closely and there is no chance that they are involved in some kind of conspiracy."

Pupil Claire Mellroy, 10, said: "It was really scary."

BLACKMAIL

by Ajay Rai

HE IS an alien, convicted of murder. Those who know him believe that he is quick, sharp, smooth, educated and well informed and very polished in his talk and behaviour. He knows all there is to know about the modern techniques of crime. Called a genius, albeit a twisted one, he is in a class by himself. One is tempted to wonder if such a convict will ever be lodged in the jail again. For a long time, he blackmailed the jail authority into letting him enjoy all the benefits strictly forbidden by the jail manual. As newspapers have often reported, he has been seen wearing jeans instead of jail uniform, sitting in front of the jail Deputy Superintendent, sipping tea while senior officers are kept standing. He is also known to be hot on selling drugs like mandrex. In a complaint made by an aggrieved official, it was mentioned that he "sits in the warrants office for long hours and also tries to manipulate with warrants. He often comes to the main gate and peeps through the window and it seems he enjoys official sanction."

When a senior official objected to his activities, he threatened him, saying, "I shall see you at the proper time!"

Things came to such a pass that the convict became almost the uncrowned king of the prison spreading his reign of terror (for those who opposed him faced his wrath) to every nook and cranny of his small concrete walled kingdom! While all this was going on, the jail Superintendent turned a blind eye to everything. Instead of punishing the prisoner, he provided him with still more luxuries, e.g. the 'king' could meet his girl friend in the privacy of a room. For a long time, the hue and cry raised by the newspapers did not have any effect. It seems the Superintendent too led a charmed life. As long as he was not touched by higher authorities, the 'king' could not be harmed in any way. Days passed. Then one fine morning, the Superintendent was transferred, and with that ended the prisoner's golden days.

Among the sinister forces contributing to the complexities of modern life is man's false idea about happiness, leading him to his taking wrong steps to achieve it. The consequence is his fear. And blackmail thrives on fear.

The prisoner, we know him by the name of Charles Sobhraj, does have a charmed life. Son of a Vietnamese mother and an Indian father, he is reported to have escaped from many top security prisons in the world. Drugging, robbing and sometimes murdering his victims, he has a long chain of criminal convictions. Before his remarkable jailbreak and equally remarkable re-arrest, Sobhraj enjoyed unbridled power in the Tihar Jail where he was and is lodged. How could he do this?

The answer lies in Sobhraj's letter to the then jail Superintendent: "I know too many things about corruption in jail and also have enough evidence in my possession to prove the allegation of corruption against you ... "

He is reported to have got this evidence by recording the statements—pointing to the series of corrupt acts— of the jail Superintendent with "the help of a highly sophisticated recorder which Sobhraj had tied to one of his knees." And using that evidence as a weapon, he blackmailed his way to supremacy in the jail.

This is not an isolated case. Wherever there is corruption, there is blackmail. Almost every jail has its Charles Sobhraj.

Now, take another example.

Dhanbad happens to be the only place in the country where minerals including coal worth rupees one crore are produced everyday. Bharat Cooking Coal Limited which operates 87 mines accounts for over Rs. 300 crores worth of minerals produced in the region. This is big money confined to a relatively small area, a great temptation to unscrupulous elements out to make a fast buck. Since fairness of means takes a long time to bring success, the foul ones are too often found more expedient. An insignificant chowkidar becomes a 'crorepati' mafia king. That he can achieve this goal with such ease only proves the existence of rank corruption. Hundreds of tribals, working in the fields come under his thumb. Every one of them is compelled to 'join' one or more of the existing trade unions and pay a regular membership fee. Nobody dare refuse, for the consequences are rather heavy. "Obey or suffer!"

There are other ways too. Getting political patronage through money, men and misuse of authority, those gangsters ensure their safety and almost always get away with their criminal blackmail. The significance of this becomes evident when a newly posted official becomes 'inconvenient' by putting his foot down. Almost always such officials are transferred virtually overnight, for no administrative reason, failing which muscle power comes into the picture. Take for instance the case of a mining engineer who, alongwith his wife, was brutally attacked by the hoodlums. His fault? Prior to the attack, he was visited by a particular contractor. Brandishing a revolver, this fellow wanted him to pass the highly inflated bill. The engineer refused, and suffered the consequences. The incident brought memories of such blackmails when "half a dozen engineers and other officials were beaten up by hoodlums demanding that they should be marked present even when they were not working in the mines." These officials were 'foolish' enough to refuse

—and paid the price.

Many however are not so 'foolish' and so "coal valued at over Rs.50,000 is daily taken away illegally by the gangs for sale in other parts of the country." To keep such 'cooperative' officials happy, the gangs go out of their way in looking after their comforts and interests. However, such gestures are only velvet gloves on the iron fist, which strikes unfailingly whenever an obliging official decides to be moral and honest.

These too are not isolated cases. With slight variations, both the types are found in almost every part of our public as well as private lives.

Blackmail and Extortion

Often defined as "any payment extorted by intimidation or threat of injurious revelation or accusations" blackmail includes coercion into a particular action, statement, etc. The origin of the word goes back to some centuries and is perhaps taken from the French word *Maille*, which meant a 'small coin', or 'certain rent', paid to men of influence on the border for protection against brigands with whom they were allied. The Gaelic word *Mal*, meaning 'a rent', and the German word *Mahl*, meaning 'a tribute' too are related to the word Blackmail. English Common Law does not recognise the word Blackmail. It defines it still more narrowly, saying, extortion is the "unlawful taking, by virtue of his office, from any man, any money or thing of value that is not due to him, or more than his, due, or before it is due." Thus limiting the crimes of extortion to the act of 'officials' demanding 'with menace'. Closely related to British Law, the Indian Penal Code, too, avoids using the word 'blackmail': "Whoever intentionally puts any person in fear of any injury to that person, or to any other, and thereby dishonestly induces the person so put in fear to deliver to any person any property or valuable security, or anything signed or sealed which may be converted into a valuable security, commits 'extortion'." (This is Section 383). Depending on the severity of the crime, the punishment can go up to imprisonment for life.

It is very difficult to point out the difference between blackmail and extortion. Yet extortion may be considered a wider crime, incorporating blackmail. For the act of extortion is not complete unless property is actually obtained, whereas blackmail depends on the intent to extort.

The Genesis of the Legal Viewpoint

The history of the legal recognition of blackmail and extortion goes back to the Laws of Athens, which permitted any respectable citizen of good repute to prosecute a criminal. Unfortunately, this legal sanction gave birth to a class of 'sychophants'—a term so familiar to us in the present context of political blackmail and extortion—"who not only extorted money from the guilty whom they threatened to accuse of a crime but from innocent persons as well." As it happens in such cases, this class increased both in number and influence and a stage came when many, even wealthy and influential people were driven away to escape being blackmailed. Though there were laws against these sychophants too, their administration was left to "voluntary accusers which for reasons of expediency were seldom if ever forthcoming." The fact that blackmail was punishable only when accompanied by violence further complicated matters. Even now, blackmail is very rarely accompanied by violence.

Roman Laws too recognised the rights of a respectable person to prosecute a criminal, accused of showing disrespect to Rome or the Emperor. Unfortunately, as always, this right and the laws related to marriage and celibacy became instruments of exploitation in the hands of the unscrupulous who "by threatening to accuse their victims of violation of these laws extorted tribute." Roman officials, especially the provincial governors, became notorious because of their habit of threatening to impose some hardship, such as "the quartering of troops upon the provincials" to extort "money, estates and works of art from them."

It was perhaps the German Law which for the first time made the attempt to commit extortion—blackmail—a punishable offence. Today most countries have quite explicit and elaborate laws defining extortion and blackmail and their punishment. Unfortunately however very rarely if ever convictions take place. As one specialist says: "It is very difficult to prosecute the crime of extortion successfully. The threats are usually subtle, almost always verbal, and even when proofs exist, the witnesses are frequently intimidated and judges fearful of giving an unfavourable decision. In the same way, prosecution for blackmail too is exceedingly difficult, even though in blackmail, unlike ordinary cases of extortion, the threat must be written, the source of the threat being usually anonymous. The person threatened cannot afford to make known the existence of the threat, particularly when the threat is to expose a moral dereliction."

The knowledge that he would not be prosecuted makes the blackmailer confident of getting away with his crime and its rewards with impunity. Mr. K belonged to the so called high society. He had his eyes on the beautiful and vivacious wife of his colleague. She however would not even look at him. Incensed, Mr. K started digging into her past. After spending a huge sum of money on private detectives, Mr. K came to know that in her college days she had had some affairs and also she took drugs. She had however kicked off the drug habit and, though the affairs were long

since dead, she was still too sensitive to the subject and had kept it a well-guarded secret, from her children. When Mr. K confronted her with the facts and his proposition, she had no alternative. She remained Mr. K's mistress till his untimely death in an accident. Though still beautiful, she lost all her vivacity. Mr. K got away with his blackmail sure in his knowledge that he would not be exposed. It was another matter that fate, that sternest of all judges, intervened and he died at the young age of 37, bringing to an end an otherwise brilliant career.

The lady in question was really lucky that the torture did not last longer. The law could not help her, since it seldom reaches those in such situations. It is only when blackmail results in more 'serious' crimes like murder that it is likely to act with speed and expose and punish the culprits. But then the victim too gets 'exposed'.

What makes Blackmail possible?

It is the corruptibility of our social, economic and political organisation which gives birth to and nurtures blackmailing and extortion. For example, racketeering and blackmarketing cannot exist unless the concerned administrations are either unable or unwilling to provide the needed protection against it. That such unlawful activities not only survive but even flourish is a symptom of a still larger problem.

Collecting funds by political means is nothing new. Almost every politician has, sometime or the other, done so by exercising his political authority, often illegally. And people have paid, because they know that if they do not do so they might lose their property or livelihood at the hands of these politicians, who have the power to frame laws which can make or mar the donor. As one authority says: "In political life the 'shake-down'

practices of unscrupulous legislators are common; some party organisations frequently sell immunities of various sorts for campaign contributions." There are "innumerable forms of extortion practised by some administrative officers in the enforcement of certain legal regulations and penal statutes" which are the direct result of corruption in political life. Corrupt politics produces criminals who are hardened enough to commit violence and murder. And they get away with it!

According to one specialist: "Society provides so extensive a variation between social convention and commonly practised private conduct that opportunities for blackmail and extortion are exceedingly extensive. Any increase in the severity of penal laws increases the danger. Perhaps the most frequent manifestations relate to matters of sex relations and the multiplicity of new laws affecting morals accentuates this form of blackmail. The various local regulations concerning prostitution often loosely drawn can be and have been extensively used. Prohibition laws likewise provide the means for blackmail."

There is provision of severe penalty for rape, but the place of women in society remains vulnerable. While the rapist most often gets away with his crime, the woman can be subjected to blackmail later. Society condemns prostitution but allows for the enjoyment of its fruits. And if by luck or sheer effort a prostitute is able to give up the life of 'sin' and is aspiring to give herself a respectable life, she can still never be at peace. Her past life hangs on her head like the proverbial sword of Democles. Society does not provide any security against the kind of blackmail to which she can be exposed.

Closely related to this situation is the advent of the 'spicy' magazines devoted to yellow journalism. They are the 20th century contribution to the threat and subsequent execution of blackmail and extortion. It will be an interesting study indeed to find out the secret of how many scandal sheets, with hardly any circulation, manage not only to survive but thrive too.

Society's double standards produce many other kinds of blackmail which are too subtle to be easily identified. How many girls, for instance, are married off to men twice—sometimes thrice—their age, simply because their families could not pay back some paltry sum which was taken as a loan, and which was used as the instrument of blackmail: "Pay or marry?" How many have become hardened criminals because they could not or would not succumb to the blackmail and extortion of the so called high priests of society? How many have had to lead a miserable life in a wrong profession, only because they became victims of subtle blackmail by their guardians? The list of such questions can be long.

Then consider the institution of 'loan-sharking'. Lending money at exorbitant rates of interest is one of the largest sources of revenue in organised crime. A typical victim is a person in serious financial straits who cannot give the surety needed to get a loan from 'legal' sources like banks. Very often, in attempting to discharge a heavy short-term monetary obligation, this person undertakes another more formidable financial burden. What

guarantees the loan-shark the return of his money or whatever he wants is the implied threat of physical violence, should the debtor default. A case in point is the gross exploitation of miners in the Dhanbad region. Though paid well, the miners—mostly tribals—often run short of money due to their drinking habits. An offer of loan is made, and accepted. The miner takes the loan and agrees to pay an interest which is as high as ten percent a week! There is no question of nonpayment. The muscle men of the loan-shark ensure that. This is not all. Once in his clutches the victim is 'persuaded' to subscribe to various unions run by the loan-shark or his boss. These tribals also become victims of sexual exploitation.

In a more subtle way, the same seems to be true of Bombay's tinsel world where banks seldom if ever extend credit. Many a film producer has fallen axed by such loan-sharks.

Espionage too has a close relationship with blackmail; there are very few willing spies. The old 'husband game' is one of the oldest ruses. The male victim is angled into a compromising situation when he is surprised by the so called husband of the lady. He can appease the husband in only one way—by doing his bidding. Since the victim is often an official in a sensitive job and a respectable family man, he cannot afford a scandal. Often, the threat is accompanied by promises of riches. Hardly any Secret Service is innocent of the crime of blackmail. People who would otherwise never betray their country are trapped and blackmailed into spying for the country's enemy.

Then there is the blackmail involved in kidnappings. Called by many as the ultimate crime, kidnapping revolves round the simple principle of blackmail: "Your money or this life." What makes it really horrifying is the remorseless premeditation, preplanning and ruthlessness, and

Blackmail flourishes in a society where the citizens are aloof from each other and where the relationship among people is mechanical.

the way the victim suffers or dies for no fault of his. But as the famous case of Patricia Hearst proved, kidnapping no longer remains the simple crime of money but has become, instead, a powerful weapon for political blackmail. Most of the acts of hijacking and terrorism have made blackmail a day to day terror.

What is the solution?

The blackmailer comes in many disguises. Besides the traditional ones who threaten the disclosure of some unsavoury, dark secret if their demand is not met and the kidnappers, and hijackers, there are blackmarketeers and hoarders who hold the whole society to ransom. The police at many places too are not far behind. The way they blackmail the law-breakers into paying them regular bribes is too well known. What makes it really bad is the way society—without whose support the police can do nothing—makes it impossible for the law-breaker to reform himself. The police and our socio-legal machinery are some of the biggest obstacles which have to be overcome if an unfortunate person wants to rehabilitate himself or herself.

One is thus compelled to conclude that blackmail and extortion are basically societal in origin. The pleasures of being in the limelight is a strong element in the American society. It can produce such horrible and macabre kidnapping as that of the Lindberg baby. The child was dead and buried all the while the negotiations were going on! Though we shout at the top of our voices about the need of wider perspectives regarding sex, we are extremely conservative when it concerns ourselves. Disclosure means disrespect and subsequent expulsion from the society. It is this fear which makes the violator so susceptible to being blackmailed. Surely the majority of blackmailing and extortions is connected with sex and what a particular society thinks about it.

The collective apathy for the victims of all kinds of blackmail —for those who are exploited on account of some earlier mistake as well as those kidnapped by dacoits or terrorists, our reluctance to co-operate with the investigating authority, provide the fertile ground for the crime to thrive. Unless we develop an attitude when we view the dignity of the victim of the blackmail as equal to our own dignity, the crime shall continue to prevail and, with our society growing more and more sophisticated and complicated, shall even spread. Blackmail flourishes in a society where the citizens are aloof from each other and where the relationship among people is mechanical. The menace can be eradicated with the cultivation of positive and healthier values. If that is a distant proposition, at least a firm stand against scandals and sensationalism, can go a long way in discouraging the crime. Simultaneously, of course, the law enforcement and vigilance machinery have to be more sound and corruption-free.

Are we living today hypnotised by some kind of standardised illusion, by a scream of Everlasting Nay?

Literary Values in an Age of Technology

by Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar

A seminar convened by the Sahitya Akademi on this theme was presided over by the author. The following are extracts from his presidential address.

THERE is this to remember about literary values: being basically human values, if also often doubled with the spiritual, these values—truth, goodness, beauty, charity, sufferance, compassion, loyalty, love—do not date with the passage of time, for these values and verities, being innately spiritual, are absolutes, not changing relativities. Thus all great literature is contemporaneous, and Sita, Andromache and Desdemona are contemporaries. Valmiki and Vyasa and Kalidasa, Homer and Sophocles and Shakespeare, speak to us almost as they spoke to their audience centuries or millennia ago. But yesterday's current technology can become today's obsolete dust-heap technology. And rapid technological advancement also implies equally rapid technological obsolescence. Technological growth is verily like a restless kitten maddeningly chasing its own tail, the tail here being one-up-manship, the pursuit of speed, comfort, status, power, pleasure, conspicuous consumption; and the faster the gyrations and the forward leaps, the more futile the exercise, and the more lacerating the stabs of frustration and defeat.

To return to literature, since it is intended to be communicated, an audience is necessarily indicated. Let us look at two classic scenarios illustrative of the rapport between the writer and his audience. First, then, the *Ramayana*. The TV serial is very much in the news as part of the Sunday Morning Agenda in the lives of millions of viewers in India, but let me go back to Valmiki and his times. As the story is traditionally handed down, having received the subject from Narada, stumbled on the *anushtup* measure as a reaction to the hunter killing a Krauncha bird at the moment of his dalliance with his mate, and received godspeed from Brahma, Valmiki composed the *Ramayana* in 24,000 slokas, and taught the young anchorites, Lava and Kusa both to recite the poem and to sing it to the accompaniment of the Veena. And the boys recited and sang it before a gathering of the forest Rishis and ecstatics. And what were their reactions? This report is from the Bala Kanda, canto 4:

"On hearing it, all the ascetics, their eyes swimming with tears, their hearts filled with wonder, applauded them (Lava and Kusa), saying 'Excellent, Excellent!" Lovers of righteousness, they were extremely pleased, and they praised the singers ... saying 'Ah! how sweetly they sing! And the verses are even sweeter than the song. Though it happened long ago, we seem to see it all taking place before our very eyes'...

"So pleased was one ascetic that he got up in his place and presented them with a pitcher; another of great repute gave them tree-bark. Yet another pre-

sented them with a deer-skin. A great sage gave them a girdle of grass... A sage gave them a sacrificial vessel, another a head load of wood; and others among the assembled sages were happy to bless them, wishing them long life. They, who always spoke the truth, said, 'Marvellous is this history, as the sage tells it. It is the supreme stand-by of poets. It has been perfectly executed in all its parts ...'" (Translation by N. Raghunathan)

There is a further recital too by the same minstrels, now in the Naimisa forest at the time of Rama's *asvamedha* sacrifice. Sages and seers, Rishis and Kings, princes and ministers, and the great mass of the 'common people' of Ayodhya, all make the vast congregation, and evening after evening, Lava and Kusa recite the *Ramayana* of Valmiki in instalments. And what was the nature of the audience participation and response?

> As more days followed, one fateful evening
> the involved rhapsodist twins wafted the surrendered congregation
> to the Asoka pleasance.
> Once had a daughter of Mithila wept
> confined to the petty space under the Simsupa; and ten thousand
> pairs of eyes now streamed forth tears.
> A monkey had made a spectacular
> leap, setting Lanka on fire; and ten thousand listeners now enacted
> those feats in their minds again
> ...
>
> (*Sitayana*, p. 637)

This kind of splendid equation between the Writer and his Audience is by no means altogether obsolete even today, although on a smaller scale and with varying degrees of dilutions and excrescences. The point is Valmiki does manage to speak to us, however muted or mauled his voice before it reaches the audience.

For another scenario, let us turn to ancient Athens. Past the Homeric Heroic Age, there was the Periclean Age when Greek Tragedy reached its incandescent heights. How did Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides reach his audience, with just a few actors as the links, the conduits, the paracletes? Two thousand five hundred years ago, and what a scene'. In the evocative words of C.E. Vaughan:

"The brilliant sky of Greece. Imagine a vast concourse, thirty thousand men and women assembled beneath it, to watch not a horse-race, not a football match, but a presentment of the mightiest forces that can rule the will of man, gathered in mortal struggle for the possession of his soul. Imagine this mental conflict set forth with all the charm that majestic language and music, the noblest spectacular effect, the deepest associations of religion have the power to give. Imagine the multitude ranged tier above tier, round three quarters of a vast circle; the eyes of all fixed upon a stage far ampler than any we have seen, and beneath it an altar round which the Chorus either stands, or moves in stately measures, doing honour to Dionysus, the god of inspired dance and song and action, taking part in the dramatic movement of the tragedy, involving divine and human justice upon the deeds and words of those whose destinies are at stake before their eyes."

The audience was limited in terms of space and time. The play was not staged in a thousand theatres simultaneously. Or seen by millions of TV viewers all the world over. But in the production of an *Agamemnon*, an *Oedipus*, a *Medea*, there was an intensity, a totality of experiential education. The audience took it all in, and knew that something was happening to them. A citizen, a *rasika*, was not the same after witnessing a great Greek tragedy as he was before. The playwright, the actors, the vast amphitheatre, the thirty-thousand strong attentive audience, the background of sky and horizon, and the electrically—or poetically—charged passage of time : the ensemble was a priceless fire-ordeal resulting in a cleansing, an awakening, an inner spiritual illumination. The katharsis of pity and terror was a transcendence of the emotions, something akin to Sita's reaction to Hanuman's testimony : *amritam vishasamsrishtam*—the poison that is nectar as well.

Two thousand five hundred years after, and where are we? Life remains basically unchanged : in Eliot's words—

Birth, copulation, death :

That's all, that's all, that's all... *Anityam asukam lokam*. The touch of tears in mortal-things; as Virgil put it, *sunt lacrimae rerum*. A rational animal perhaps, but Man remains *anitya Purusha*, though aspiring for *nitya*, some form of immortality. In his anxiety and ingenuity, with his cleverness and perseverance, he has used his intelligence to gain a gradual mastery over his surroundings, to make inroads into Nature, and make Nature and Nature's laws subservient to him. From inquiring into the nature of Reality, and trying to locate his place in the circumambient universe, he has in course of time allowed speculation to take a 'practical' turn. Now the short-term aim was to study isolated phenomena without bothering about their integral relation to the Whole, the warp and woof, the home and womb of all. *Para vidya* or knowledge of Reality should be the base plank, the safeguarding and sustaining power behind *apara vidya* or the lesser knowledge of multitudinous phenomena. Backgrounded or underwritten by *para vidya*, the 'lower' or lesser knowledge would neither be wasteful nor prove pernicious. But without the 'higher' knowledge, the lower *apara vidya* will be mere *avidya*, the poison of ignorance. *Para vidya* aspires after the "single truth comprehensive and universal in the light of which the whole of existence would stand revealed and explained both in its nature and its end" (Sri Aurobindo). *Para vidya* being Knowledge integrates spirit and matter, the One and the Many, and carries the corrective or antidote to the traps and delusions of *apara vidya*, the miscellany of half-truths and falsities and perilous deviations.

But since the 13th century and more particularly since the 17th, the shift in the Western world and now everywhere almost is to

quarantine *para vidya* apart, and concentrate on the surface and transitory phenomena with a view to exploiting such piecemeal knowledge for the 'practical' purpose of serving Man's unending appetite for waste, comfort, amusement, self-indulgence and the innumerable concerns of peace and war. In the words of J.A.V. Butler :

"Scientific progress began to be made in fact when it was thought worthwhile to study apparently trivial phenomena, without relating them to the whole background of knowledge". Philosophy, which was a rounded entity before, now split into two: Mental and Moral Philosophy—and Natural Philosophy. The latter—what we call Science—became amoral, and gave free rein to its curiosities, prepossessions and inventive ingenuities. We have thus been witnessing the impressive 'march' or Rake's Progress of Science. The new orthodoxy also believed that it was legitimate and necessary to aspire for 'progress' and 'development', and this could be achieved only through the orgies of piecemeal scientific discoveries and their prompt 'practical' utilisation. Although Man was part of Nature, it was thought legitimate for him both to have increasing knowledge of Nature (i.e. science) and to be able to exploit and manipulate Nature (i.e. technology) to his own imagined advantage. Nature from being Mother Prakriti now became Man's property and servant, a resource to be exploited without limit so as to pander to his endless hunger for self-indulgence.

As the Rake's Progress gained in pace and preferred to see no distinction between even the amoral and the immoral; and as we see today, science and technology that were the commandeered servants yesterday are now fast becoming our tyrannical Masters. The old Frankenstein story, of course, but now not a mere story, but a horrendous fact of everyday actuality.

To return to the problem of literary values in an age of Technology, while 'values' are unchanging, the technological milieu is changing constantly. It

is said that, in the modern world, scientific knowledge (even if it may be only of a piecemeal nature) doubles itself every ten years, and contemporary technological advance maintains at least this rate of growth. I was a student of science (that is, of Physics and Chemistry) over 60 years ago, and during the last six decades and more, scientific knowledge has increased perhaps hundred-fold, and there has been a similar explosive growth in technology as well. In Valmiki's time, in Sophocles' time, people carried in their memories significant writings or compositions. There were presently hand-written 'books' in parchment or palm-leaves, but these were necessarily few. It is said of Socrates that he could be lured to almost any distance with the promise of a new book. But since the invention of printing and the subsequent revolutions in the communication media, we have witnessed during the last few centuries a variety of innovations : printed books, printed newspapers and periodicals, the telegraph and the telephone, the gramophone and the motion picture, the talkie and the wireless, the radio and the transistor, the loudspeaker, the TV, the cassette, and the video-cassette. Nor should we forget the rise and social and political power of mass communication today. Increasingly the attention is shifting from the importance of the creative art in literature and the fine arts to the newer and newer sophistications of preservation and communication, storage and retrieval.

It was in the sixties that the Canadian thinker, Marshall McLuhan, promulgated the *sutra* : "The medium is the message". The same event, say Laocoon's struggle with the serpent, is rendered differently by the poet and by the sculptor. The difference must be still greater when we come to the modern electronic media of communication. Just as the printing press moved humanity from a listening to a reading culture, now TV, computers and other dissemination media are taking us from a print to a visual culture. And we are warned that the Book may become obsolete!

Between the Middle Ages and today, certain scientific discoveries or hypotheses have revolutionised Man's view of himself, and thereby affected (for the worse) his view of himself and to some extent his literary values as well. The Copernican revolution in the 16th century made the earth no more than one of the smaller planets of the Sun, and not the centre of the Universe as imagined before. In the 19th century, Darwin traced the descent of Man, not from God, but from the Ape. Man was not the crown and roof of creation, but a minor milestone in a blind evolutionary race, caught in the 'isthmus' of a middle or muddled state. And in our own century, Freud turned the notion of Man as a Rational Animal upside down by maintaining that the 'unconscious', like the hidden iceberg, was the more important factor that determined the zigzag course of human lives. This progressive dehumanisation of Man has necessarily imposed a modification or revaluation of the inherited values that governed human life both individually and in the aggregate.

Consider for example the new sophistications in communication technology. While they seem to promote communication between the writer and his audience, they also create their own perversions and complications. A poem broadcast on the Radio carries the voice rhythms to the ends of the world. But how many

do really care to hear them in the right responsive mood, and with what results, are questions that admit of a wide range of answers. A story may be televised, and both the storyteller and the tale may be seen and heard as though in complete immediacy. Yet it is very much of an illusion, for a dream has more life than a TV show. The Mike makes it possible for a speech to be heard by many tens of thousands, but actually the scattered audience, although sitting in their room, may be talking only to one another, treating the speech as a kind of atmospheric embellishment. The video-cassette may be played as a ritual, or left in the drawer untouched for months or years. What's important to remember is that this straying away from the natural, personal, immediate to the mechanical, sophisticated and impersonal is a flight from Truth to falsehood, from Reality to illusion, from life to death. T.S. Eliot's words are profoundly relevant here:

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Have brought us farther from God and nearer to the dust.

Let me recall a story that projects verily the grammar of this predicament. In Anderson's famous tale, 'The Emperor and the Nightingale', the Emperor of China finds a great deal of pleasure and solace listening to the Nightingale from his garden, and accordingly he cherishes the bird and lodges it in a golden cage. Presently the Emperor of Japan sends a royal gift to the Chinese Emperor. It is a toy nightingale made of gold. When the screw is wound up, the toy nightingale sings. It sings the same song again, in exactly the same manner. And so on, again, and again, and yet again. Everyone is delighted. Refusing to compete with the toy golden nightingale, the brown living nightingale disappears unnoticed into the garden. The toy nightingale is now lodged in the golden cage and admired by all. But a machine is a machine. The machine fails one day. Repaired, its music is rationed—once a week, once a month, once a year. Then, the inevitable :

" ... all that came from the bird was a whirring and a squeaking, a rasping and a grinding, which set the Emperor's teeth on edge". Then even the whirring and the squeaking stopped. The toy and its golden glow were a mockery, an insult, a glittering futility. Now the Emperor falls ill—the illness gets worse and worse—and still no nightingale's music to effect the cure of the Emperor's malady. The Ministers think the Emperor will die during the night. In his loneliness and wretchedness, the Emperor moans : "If only my brown bird were here to sing to me..." And there the bird flies into the room through the open window, and sings divinely. The Emperor rallies at once, and feels reborn, while the Angel of Death slinks away.

Isn't this story the parable of the lure of modern technology, and its failure in the spiritual realm, and its preordained eventual collapse? A machine, fabricated by human beings, apparently living on its own in terms of self-perpetuation, is vulnerable all the same. The live bird, the small brown Nightingale, is a child of the Spirit, a medium for the communication of spiritual values. But the golden toy nightingale is a lure and a trap, a standardised illusion, a scream of the Everlasting nay.

Because a thing is new, because it is sophisticated, because it can be mechanically operated by another machine, let us not unthinkingly or blindfoldedly opt for the machine, for this Homo Technologie, this Yantra Purusha, this terrible death-carrying Frankenstein. Let the humanities thrive. Let the brown bird live its free life in the garden. Let us sing the Song of Life when Death is around. Let the Bird of Good Omen affirm and reaffirm the humanities and the sanctities. Let it sing and decree the Everlasting Yea ....

The problem boils down to this : Man the microcosmos is an integral and unseverable part of the macrocosmos. This unitive view is wholesome, it is holistic. But to assume a vivisection of Reality and try to exploit parts of the whole without thinking of the possible consequences is to be criminally short-sighted. It is the way of lunacy and the road to annihilation. For man to view himself as of divine origin, and with a divine destination, is to act with a sense of global or total responsibility. But to allow oneself to be viewed as thing of nought, as less efficient than a computer, as more expendable than a horse or a machine, will be to permit a reduction or decline of literary values from the human and the spiritual to the animal and the mechanical. It can never be too often emphasised that what is wonderful is not the TV set, not the L-P record, not the video-cassette; what is breathtaking and soul-elevating is the human voice, the human personality, the writer's or artist's mind and heart and soul, the unique creature about whom Hamlet rhapsodises :

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"

His is the music, the poetry, the painting, sculpture or feat of architecture; his is the aspiration, the ardour and the achievement! To transfer our admiration from Man the creator to Machine the copy, the cheapener, the perverter, is to miss the essential Truth, and embrace the shining falsity. Man—the man of science, the man of technology—has been taking Nature (Prakriti) for granted, has almost given God the Purusha his dismissal, and has accustomed himself to the worship of the new gods—the Steam Engine, the Automobile, the Dynamo, the Aeroplane, the nuclear Reactor, the digital Computer. But there is a Truth that we should not forget. Thoreau said after a brush with Nature in the raw in mid-nineteenth century:

"... while man is part of Nature, he is not the lord of Nature. Nature may indeed smile on man in the valleys, but there are also places where man is not wel-

come. In short, there are limits. Man is still very much a part of Nature, but he is only one part; he is not everything. Nature will support and nourish him, but only if he respects and acknowledges the limits."

Thus far and no farther: thus far and no farther with our agenda of brigandage, our inroads into Nature, our atrocities of environmental pollution. A step farther, some more faltering, or human failure, and an explosion with its chain-reactions can abolish the human adventure.

The challenge to the man of letters today, in the face of careering technology and galloping mechanisation and increasing dehumanisation, is to reaffirm the perennial human values and spiritual verities, and be himself undaunted by Yantra Shakti and its thousand forms and manifestations. What needs to be done is to create situations and opportunities that will bring writers and the right audience—a fit audience though not perhaps many—and eliminating or at least minimising the intervening and distorting technologies. When technology—whose competence or might is neutral, being in shackles to political or military power as happens only too often—succeeds in calling the tune, even then all that the man of letters should do is to be himself, and refuse to be overawed. Indeed, the man of letters is our sole insurance against the steady devaluation of language by perverse political usage in terms of double-think and cheap-think, frail-speak and false-speak. To be able to use language in its native purity and strength, releasing its coiled serpent-power, is the writer's prerogative alone. The writer's voice is his own, a gift of God; and it is not for mortgage to a Caesar a commissar or a Cabal

Let us hug no illusions about our exponentially advancing technological paradise. Forgetting for once the galaxy of Nobel Eminences in science and of the wizards of technology, let us bear in mind that the super-spectre of our Atomic and Space Age is the stark possibility of a nuclear war and the Finis of the human odyssey on the earth and perhaps the

crash of the planet itself. If you fed all available data (the number of nuclear warheads available for deployment, their annihilatory capabilities, the number of the chronic trouble-spots, and so on) into a Gargantuan computer, says Gracia Robles, the Mexican statesman and Nobel Peace Laureate, the omniscient one would warn you that, should the world situation continue like this, then sooner or later, and unavoidably, there would be witnessed a nuclear holocaust and the destruction of mankind.

The human values, the literary values, the spiritual values that we need in this Age of Technology should have the potency to meet this current challenge to humanity's very survival. The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram issued a grave warning twenty years ago:

Men, countries, continents:
The choice is imperative—
Truth or the abyss.

All humanity must give the Grand Refusal, No, to the nuclear scientists and technologists, and the whole brood of politicians and militarists, who have been sustaining the Cold War, bleating about deterrence, yet feeling too paralysed to be able to turn away from the precipitate highway to the Abyss. It is no doubt gratifying that the accredited leaders of USA and USSR—Reagan and Gorbachev—have taken a decisive first step towards articulating the NO. It should be much easier for men of letters to refuse to be brainwashed by the negations of the Age of Technology, and swear by Truth, the truth of human brotherhood, the truth of the spaceship, Earth, being humanity's common home, and the truth of the possibility of the human race exceeding its present limitations and cantering towards a fair future. The creative writer today should dare to be himself, and declare like W.H. Auden :

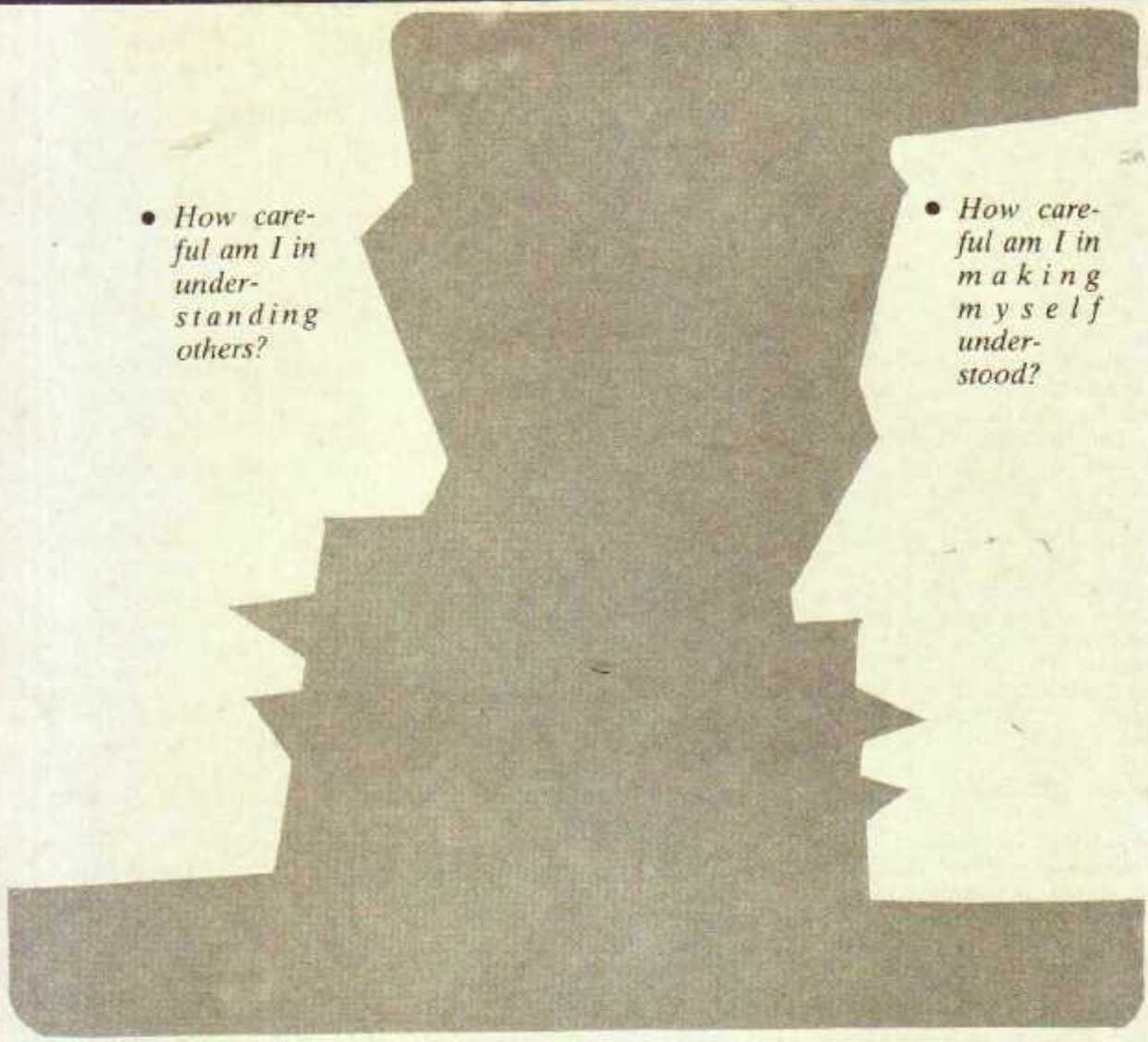
All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
And the lie of Authority:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone ...

The truth is human brotherhood, and the 'folded lie' is the seductive road to the Abyss. Hence Auden's climatic line : "We must love one another or die"

Indeed, in a cosmos like ours with its interpenetrating unity and harmony, there is no 'other' (person, nation, or race). The other fellow is more than neighbour or even brother; he is myself. And a nuclear offensive in one direction will provoke massive counter-offensive, accomplishing 'mutually assured destruction', a joint or collective dive into the Abyss. In this human—in this world—predicament, writers who dare to "undo the folded lie", dare to affirm the ambrosial Truth of Life, who refuse to be scared or hypnotised by Authority, weight of numbers or noise of propaganda, such writers can very well be the pioneers of the future. Beyond fire, and electric fire, and solar or nuclear fire, there is the spiritual or fundamental Agni which is the source of all, and this Fire is man's soul-power, and it is the special privilege and vocation of the writer today to dare to rise to these highest heights :

He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's night,
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's greater law ...
The higher kind shall lean to lift up man.
Man shall desire to climb to his own heights.
The truth above shall wake a nether truth;
Even the dumb earth become a sentient force.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, XI, i)



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIO

by Prema Sastri

Harmony in Families— Styles of Communication—

TOLSTOY begins one of his novels with the observation, "Happy families are all alike. Unhappy families are each unhappy in their own way." While this may sound like a generalisation there is truth in what he said.

While one's personal happiness depends a great deal on one's understanding of a situation the human being, like a plant, needs an atmosphere of warmth and sunshine in which to grow. It is essential for a child to be brought up with love and acceptance if it is to become a worthy adult. When we look around we see few such adults. The quality of human relationships seems to be deteriorating. Parents often do not understand their children. In many homes grown up children neglect aged parents. Brothers and sisters do not keep in close touch with one another. In a crisis one finds one has few real friends.

An average person brings into his work and social life those values he or she has learned as a child. An emotionally stunted child rarely becomes a successful manager or a supportive parent. A western school of psychology tells us that we never outgrow the child in us. The Vedantic precepts make it clear that we are the results of our thoughts and actions in the past. Unless there is peace and harmony in the family there cannot be peace in the nation. Unhappy individuals are likely to express their feelings of hatred and fear on society. A casual look at any newspaper tells us that such feelings are indeed being expressed through violence on the streets, vandalism, and rude exchanges of words even in the highest forums like the Parliament.

Few of us can do anything

about the state of the nation. All of us can do something with ourselves and in our own homes. We have more power than we think; and can influence those around us, support them when they suffer pain and give them courage to go ahead with their ambitions. This we can do in the manner in which we communicate with them. Ideally home is where one shares one's hopes and disappointments and looks to other members of the family for support. Unfortunately, many homes are centres of suffering from which the members would like to escape. Every family has to face joys and sorrows. In a happy family these are shared. In an unhappy family each member feels alone and isolated. Each is unhappy in his own way. Harmony does not happen by accident. It is brought about by some person or persons in the family who care enough to bring about family closeness. This is done through some sacrifice of one's time and through interest. Mere goodwill is not enough. One needs to possess active skills in communications. They were handed down, in a subtle form, by elders. I was fortunate to have grandparents, uncles and aunts whose words of wisdom have saved me from many a difficult situation. They gave us a sense of bonding which is rare today.

With the coming of the nuclear family people are left to face life on their own. Parents lack skills with which to bring up children. Children do not have models on which to base their lives.

Fortunately, these skills can be learnt. Most of the principles of effective communications are based on common-sense. When practised they can bring about far reaching changes. There are three basic styles of communications. These styles can be understood by observing our own families and those with whom we come into contact.

Let us take a look at some of the remarks commonly heard in families. "Wait till I tell your father." "No matter what happens you must be home before dark." "Children should be seen and not heard." "Children should always obey their parents." "Don't answer back." "Do what your are told." "Don't ask questions." "If you don't finish your homework I won't let you visit your friend." "What a mess you have made; clean it up at once." "I'm going to give you a good beating." "I'll break every bone in your body."

These words sound as if they come from a horror story. Far from it. There is not a single remark I have not heard somewhere or the other and one or two which I am ashamed of having made myself. Put together a lifetime of this authoritarian style of communication from a child's point of view. The child will become afraid, and suppressed. It will be almost impossible for him or her to grow into a strong decision-making adult.

We are not saying that a child should never be corrected or be told what to do. This is a necessary part of parental duties. It is not the only part, and there is a manner in which to do it. However, when a parent thinks his sole purpose is to correct and improve the child, he not only uses power on the child but tries to build up authority through threats and playing on the child's sense of guilt. Such a child often grows up to be either a flatterer or a tyrant. True, a person *could* break free from this net of repression, but that will be a rare case. Many of the stories of Charles Dickens reflect the results of this authoritarian type of communication on a young child, and the grotesque view of life he comes to have as its victim.

Authoritarian behaviour may appear to have great merit for a time. The children in such a set-up are well behaved and apparently successful. A subordinate could be obedient and outwardly disciplined. This pleasant state of affairs is only on the surface, and short-lived in its effects. A young man in our neighbourhood was in a good job, the only child of his well to do parents. He was outwardly cheerful and active in community affairs. Yet one day he was found hanging from the fan in his room. There was no hint of a love affair or any trouble. Only those who knew the family well whispered that his spirit was broken: that he had committed suicide because of his father's continuous authoritarian behaviour.

Often the authoritarian style of communication is masked. Here a person may say something like, "Please get me that job. You're the only person I have in the world." "I'd like to go on a foreign trip but I don't have any money." "I don't mind your inviting guests but I don't feel well." Such remarks are made with an appearance of helplessness. One communicates what will happen if one's wishes are not fulfilled through posture, gestures and a sad voice. Such a person gets his or her own way by playing on the other person's sense of responsibility or by inspiring a sense of guilt in him and can be much more dangerous than the simple authoritarian. Such a person exerts power through manipulation—the mother who becomes ill every time her son shows signs of leaving her parental influence; the spouse who pleads helplessness and leaves the partner to take on most of the burdens, the child who is absent whenever there is hard work to be done. We see each incident as an isolated case and seldom realise that it is a predictable pattern of behaviour

The authoritarian style of communication, no matter how it is used, isolates the person who uses it. He or she is constantly on the lookout to see how one can make use of others. Inwardly, he or she is miserable, making others around equally miserable.

Today there is a greater emphasis on individual freedom and the authoritarian style of communication is less common than before. However, in many households it has been replaced by a permissive style of communication, which can have equally unfortunate results. In a family

where there is a permissive style of communication parents fail to use authority even where it is necessary.

One may hear some of the following remarks. 'Do what you like'. 'Ask your father.' 'Nobody ever listens to me.' 'If you fail you will suffer. Don't say I didn't warn you.' 'Everything is fate.' 'Clean your room when you find time.' A child exposed to this sort of communication feels insecure and confused. No guidelines are laid down. The child does not know what to do. He or she tends to drift through life. Such a person will lack self-discipline, avoid hard work and possibly take to drugs or alcohol.

A beautiful young lady of my acquaintance, once smart enough to be elected head girl of her school, is now over thirty, jobless, unmarried, spending her time in clubs and restaurants. She comes from a well known and respectable family. They gave her everything, including love and encouragement. In fact everything except a direction in life.

Where then does the balance lie? How does one communicate with one's children, neither suppressing them nor allowing them to make one mistake after another? The answer is in Effective Communication.

Effective communications is an ongoing process. To develop an effective style of communication one must be on the alert. The parent must truly care about the child; must be willing to respect the opinions of the child, at the same time be strong enough to express his or her own views. Let us see how this can be done.

A young man I have known from his childhood once came to visit us after being enlisted as an officer in the army. I remarked that his father, an army officer himself, must have been pleased. "No," replied the boy. "When I told him of my decision he was disturbed."

"I'm sorry that he is disappointed at your choice of career."

"Not at all. Now everything is sorted out."

"How is that?"

The boy told me that as soon as he finished school he wanted to join the army. The father was not happy with the idea and wanted the son to take a degree in engineering as he himself had taken. The son pointed out that the father had lost seniority by going in for such a degree!

The father said; (I am quoting the boy's words) "Son! The army is a fine service. If you want to join it do so with the best training available. A good degree in hand will not only help you to serve the army better, but give you better job opportunities when you retire." He suggested that the son go to engineering college first. Should he still want to join the army, the father would not object. The son did take a degree in civil engineering. At the time he met us he was doing some technical work in the army which he enjoyed. His father was very proud of him.

This story illustrates the principles of Effective Communications. The father was not authoritarian and did not lay down what the son should do. Neither did he allow him to make what he felt would be a mistake in not taking a technical degree.

The first thing the father did was to sit down and discuss the matter with his son. In other words he was available and willing to spend time on his child. He listened to his son, and allowed him to express his views. Listening and trying to understand is a key factor in communications. He expressed his need to see that the son was well qualified and in a position to be able to make a good living at any stage in life. He was able to communicate his needs to his son.

Next, the father discussed ways of fulfilling the needs of both father and son. Very often where there is a difference of opinion people get caught in the immediate problem and do not open their minds to greater possibilities.

Once this was done the father made a positive suggestion to the son to work for a degree. This idea took root in the son's mind. A negative remark such as, "If you don't get a degree you may starve one day," would have had an adverse effect.

Though there may have been a compromise, both parties were satisfied at the outcome. **Good communication does not mean getting one's own way. It means creating an environment in which people can grow to their full potential, without harming others.**

The concept of Effective Communications is not new. The Ramayana illustrates some of these principles. Ravana used the authoritarian style of communications. Kaikeyi used power by manipulating Dasaratha into exiling Rama. Lakshmana did not use the authority given to him by Rama to protect Sita. He allowed her to overrule the decision that he stay with her. He left to 'save' Rama, thereby allowing Ravana to abduct her. Rama, on the other hand is a study in Effective Communications. When Vibhishana is seen approaching his army, he listens to the warnings put forth by his 'generals', expresses his views regarding the matter and discusses the possibilities. Finally, the decision to accept Vibhishana is a joint one. Time and again Rama shows his capability to listen, understand, discuss issues and accept adverse situations with grace.

Effective communications is not easy. It requires alertness, emotional control; a willingness to see the other person's point of view—and above all a strong desire to interact with another human being in the most effective manner possible. The process is never complete. There are no instant answers. The results are not seen immediately. Yet it is only through effective communications that one can maintain harmony in human relationships, avoid conflict and gain peace of mind.

(Acknowledgement : Gary and Kathy Miller)

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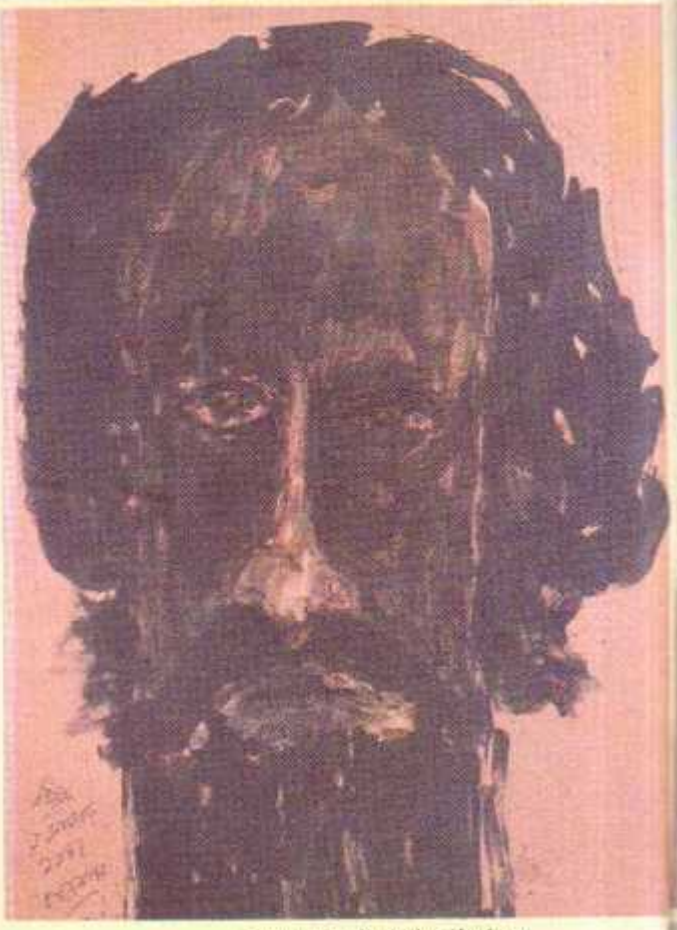


Courtesy Lalit Kala Akademi

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

by Varsha Das

THE poet, the painter, the playwright, the musician, the actor, the thinker, the philosopher, the experimenter... one can go on adding epithets and still they will be apt in the case of Rabindranath Tagore. His contribution to several arts is so original, overpowering and in some cases quite unconnected with the rest, that an effort to find the original trunk of these branches seems unnecessary. Each one is, as if, an independent tree by itself!

Tagore's life was unique. In his seemingly uneventful childhood, (he was born on the 7th of May 1861) he absorbed a plethora of images and emotions in his mind which found outlet through different media as he grew and began to express. Throughout his life Tagore received support from different women, from far and near, who responded to his genius. The foremost of them was his sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi. He was highly influenced by her. She was his friend, philosopher and also a mother!

Women in Tagore's life can be roughly put into three categories: those who came into his life and made a significant contribution; those that are portrayed in his written works; and lastly the female figures in his paintings. The women in his art and those in his literature apparently have no link with each other, but one does find a particular woman in his life reflected in his poems as well as in his paintings. Such poems and paintings are manifestations of his innermost feelings, perhaps having no relationship with his social environment and his views on women in general.

The *Purabi* manuscript is the finest example of the unparallel contribution made by a woman from Argentina. She was Victoria Ocampo. In November, 1924, when Tagore was on a voyage to Peru, he fell ill in the ship. The doctors advised him to disembark at Buenos Aires and take rest. Victoria Ocampo met Tagore and took him to her Villa called Miralrio at San Isidro, outside the city. Tagore stayed there with his friend Mr. Elmhirst for one month and twenty days.

Tagore wrote a number of lyrics during his stay at San Isidro which were published in a collection called *Purabi*. It was this *Purabi* manuscript on which Tagore had started drawing grotes-

Courtesy: National Gallery of Modern Art Veiled Woman

Photographs of paintings : Prabhjit Singh

que and primitive shapes which were almost in conflict with the content of those words and lines. Prior to that his decorative erasures were restricted in their use only to some poems written under stress or very casually. Those were shapeless blots with rounded edges. Some had a suggestion of a leaf or a creeper or an animal. But in *Purabi* there were strange shapes over the criss-cross handwriting, and these were in ink.

Victoria found the figures in the *Purabi* manuscript fascinating. She could see Tagore's hidden genius as a painter. She persuaded him to paint and Tagore took up painting more seriously. Now he began to draw on blank sheets of paper, and soon there was a body of works for display! Victoria arranged his first exhibition in Paris, in May 1930 at the Galerie Pigalle.

Tagore, thus, started painting at the age of sixty-seven and during the remaining thirteen years of his life he produced nearly 2,500 works. He has given a large range of landscapes, birds, self-portraits and heads. He used to draw very fast. The paintings came forth in a great torrent. His birds and animals continued to be a unique fusion of fantasy, fancy and fact! It was a world "reminiscent of Lewis Caroll", says Asok Mitra. He further says about the use of painting material: "Throughout his artistic career he continued to use ink; indeed, the great bulk of work is in that medium. He did not try his hand at oils, certainly not more than twice or thrice, of which he tore off one in sheer impatience. Oil takes a long time to dry and he could not afford to wait, once the urge to paint was upon him. On the contrary, he used to pour spirit into the inks to help them dry quickly. His pictures were all drawn in black indelible ink. These were followed by pictures in two tones of the same colour, deep blue and light blue, then red and black or red and blue. Finally, the entire range of colours, all at once... He never mixed his colours, never used mixed paints. He did not use a palette; the paper was his palette."

Head Study

Courtesy: National Gallery of Modern Art

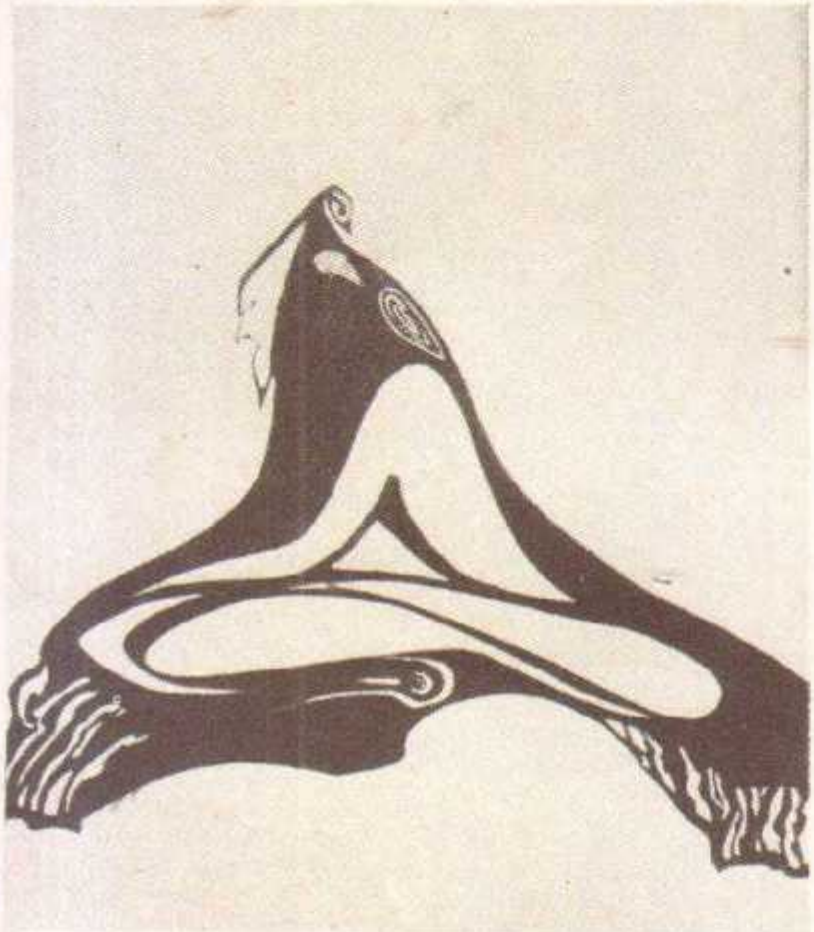
That is why, it is said that it is very difficult to copy Tagore's paintings. His figures and forms, his colours and tones, his light and volume were so unique that they cannot be reproduced by anybody. The kind of rhythm Tagore had in his poems and music, he brought into his paintings. So it was the rhythm which mattered, not the so-called beauty. Tagore himself says:

"In perfect rhythm, the art form becomes like the stars, which, in their seeming stillness, are never still, like a motionless flame that is nothing but movement. A great picture is always speaking, but news from a newspaper, even of some tragic happening, is still-born. Some news may be a mere commonplace in the obscurity of a journal; but give it a proper rhythm and it will never cease to shine. That is art. It has the magic wand which gives undying reality to all things it touches, and relates them to the personal being in us. We stand before its productions and say: I know you as I know myself, you are real."

Tagore also says that "art is a solitary pedestrian, who walks alone among the multitude, continually assimilating various experiences, unclassifiable and uncatalogued."

Tagore did not draw pretty faces and beautiful landscapes. Ugly subjects and grotesque figures were his favourite subject matters. Thus he was very different in his approach from his contemporaries like his near ones Abanindranath and Gaganendranath. He did learn a lot about painting from his elder brother Jyotirindranath and nephew Abanindranath, but he walked on a path of his own, different from theirs.

Jyotirindranath's wife Kadambari Devi and Tagore's wife Mrinalini Devi played a major role in Tagore's life as a painter. The colours of soulful female heads depict a certain sadness which was so true of both these ladies.



Though it has not been confessed by Tagore in any of his writings, most of his female heads are those of Kadambari Devi. The heads done by him during and immediately after his European travels have a tinge of western touch. One of them almost looks like an art by Modigliani! It is said about Tagore's paintings of this period that they are akin to German expressionism.

Many scholars point out that Tagore remained essentially a poet. When he took to painting at the age of sixty-seven he did not stop writing poetry or composing music. Painting came as yet another channel of expression, from deep within.

That is why he urged the "artists to realise the greatness of their vocation: it is to take a creative part in the festival of life, the festival which is to give expression to the infinite in man. In our everyday world we live in poverty; our resources have to be husbanded with care; our strength becomes exhausted and we come to our God as beggars. On festival days, we display our wealth and say to Him that we are even as He is; and we are not afraid to spend. This is the day when we come to Him with our offerings and not our wants, and such offerings need Art for its vehicle."

Rabindranath as a painter will always remain an issue open to debate. He took no formal training in painting, he could not draw realistic 'still-life', he did not join the group of his nephew which professed Indianness in art. He did what gave him boundless joy, he poured out a portion of himself which he could not express through words and sounds. He needed another medium. And so he executed so many paintings—those precious treasures of Indian art.

Courtesy Lalit Kala Akademi

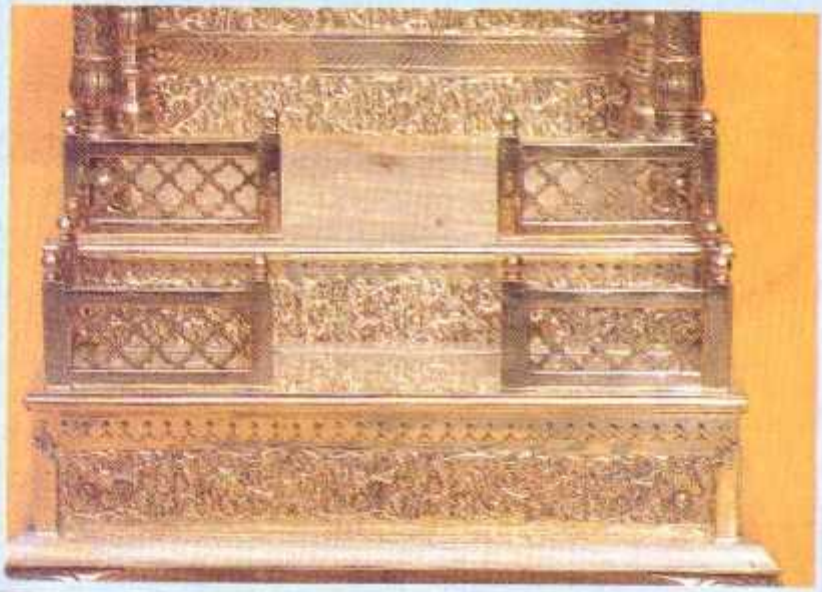
MAN AND HIS CREATION

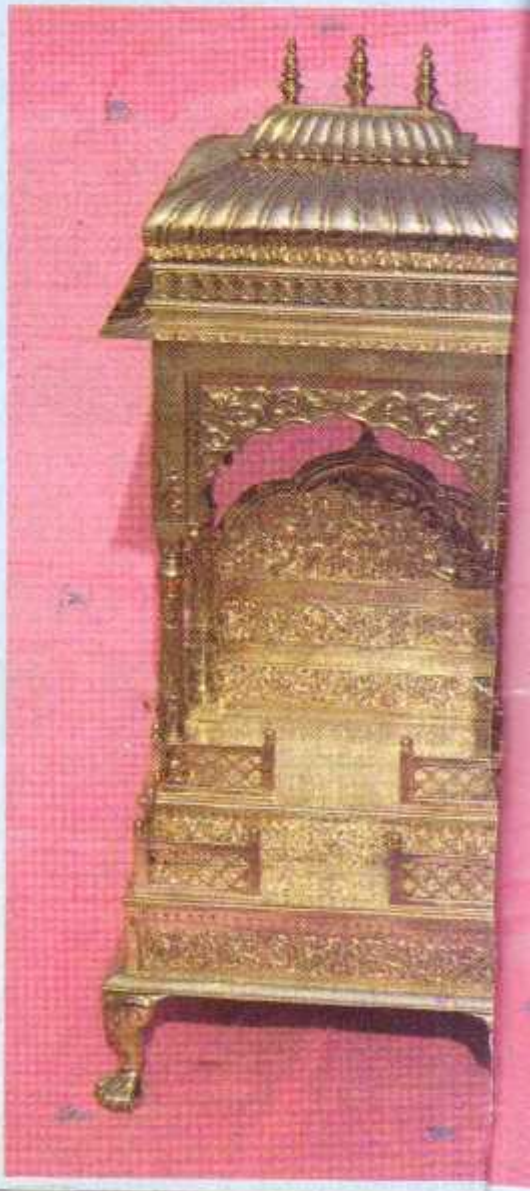
The French artist, Pierre Auguste Renoir, suffered a great deal from an old malady, rheumatism. It was extremely painful for him to continue painting, which he nevertheless did, seated in a chair.

A friend, who was visiting him, noted Renoir's obvious pain. "You have done enough already, Renoir," he commented. "Why do you continue to torture yourself?"

The famous artist looked at him for a moment and replied, "The pain passes, but the beauty remains."

SEATS FOR THE





DEITIES

by K. B. Swaroop

Photographs by Liaquat Ali Bhatti

TEMPLES occupy perhaps the most prominent place in Indian architecture. And the throne for the deity is one of the indispensable items in treasures of most of the temples.

The thrones are crafted in gold, silver and brass depending on the material prosperity of the respective temples. Even the crowns of the temple were made in gold in earlier ages and they were examples of delicate craftsmanship. Nowadays, of course, they are made of brass.

In a modest lane in the *Puravi Basti* of the pink city of Jaipur resides Shankar Lal Jarwal, the man adept in the unique art of throne craftsmanship.

It is at the tender age of ten that Shankar Lal started learning this art from his father, Bhuramal, who during his time had achieved a high degree of competence in carving brass figures. It was Shankar Lal's great dedication to the craft that has earned him this distinction in the field today.

The process seems simple, but the work requires a great deal of artistic skill and imagination. Brass sheets are cut according to the size of the throne to be crafted. Then various components like the *matangi* and *Kalash* are proportionately moulded. The seat of the throne is hammered well and heated as per requirements; finally with the help of small instruments embossing work of intricate patterns and designs is done by hand.

Thrones are generally made in one foot to two feet dimensions but various other sizes could also be designed. A two-feet plain throne of brass would cost around Rs.4000/- whereas with intricate workmanship the price of the same throne can increase by five times.

The making of the *Kalash* demands a great deal of labour and precaution. It is made by repeated hammering of the copper or gold sheets. Then the two components are crafted and are finally put together.

Shankar Lal Jarwal is the only craftsman today who has mastered the art of crafting thrones, *Kalash* and cenotaphs of temples in brass and his talent has received the recognition it deserves.

It is strongly felt that the Government and the appropriate bodies like All India Handicraft Board should provide adequate patronage to revive this unique art.

The secret of the man who is universally interesting is that he is universally interested.
—William Dean Howells

A SYMPOSIUM IN THE FOREST

by Vindusar

IT was a bright fullmoon night, though the tall and bushy trees around did not let much moonlight to fall on the small area between two hills, in the small forest.

And the rabbits and deer and some other small animals who had gathered there were not looking for moonlight. They were scared of a tiger who was lately haunting that part of the forest. They had gathered to discuss some strategy for their own safety from the menace.

Suddenly they saw a strange creature peeping through two rocks.

The deer and the rabbits were about to flee, but somehow the elder ones among them realised that the stranger was not a harmful beast.

"Who are you, sir? Why don't you come in?" the eldest deer said, extending his welcome to the stranger.

The monkey, who had escaped from his wandering master, emerged from the opening between the rocks.

The gathering surveyed him with amazement. The monkey understood that they had never seen anything like him before. Probably troops of monkeys never frequented that forest.

But before the monkey had said anything, a friendly crow signalled to them about the tiger's approach.

The deer and the rabbits instantly dispersed and hid in bushes, holes and caves. The monkey scampered up a tree.

The crow signalled once again to say that the tiger had taken to a different route. The creatures came together again and looked with surprise at the tree. The monkey jumped onto another tree and then to yet another and then slowly descended.

"Sir, we must confess that we are puzzled. What are you—a beast or a bird? You look like a beast, yet the way you went from one tree to another was nothing short of flying!" observed the old deer.

That put an idea into the monkey's brain. He laughed and asked, "Well, what do you suppose I am?"

The creatures kept quiet. Then the senior deer said again, "In fact, you resemble a human being which is neither a beast nor a bird, but I'm sure, you are not one."

"I am not, you're right. I must inform you that my forefathers were human beings. But we evolved and this is the result," said the monkey pointing at himself. "And I'm known as the monkey."

"That is something of a news to us," said the deer enthusiastically. "How do the human beings look upon you?" asked a leading rabbit.

"They worship me, naturally. Don't you see?" he showed the garland around his neck, given to him by his master who made him dance and show other feats for a living.

The creatures examined the garland and were impressed.

Since human beings worshipped the monkey, they also worshipped him. They entertained him to fruits and vegetables and listened to his lectures on men and mice for long.

Towards dawn they fell asleep.

The monkey's master, who was looking for his lost pet, suddenly spied upon the scene. He took hold of the monkey. The monkey chattered for a second, but fell silent.

All the creatures woke up with a start and saw the monkey being carried away—but on the shoulder of the man.

"It seems the creature, the monkey, is not superior to man, after all, for the man caught him!" said a deer.

"You're not quite correct in your observation. The man took the monkey away, true, but the monkey rode on the man. The monkey is the one who is superior," said another deer.

Since then, every moonlit night, the small creatures gather there and debate the issue—who is greater, the man or the monkey.

BIG BILL

by Satyajit Ray

BY Tulsi Babu's desk in his office on the ninth floor of a building in Old Court House Street there is a window which opens onto a vast expanse of the western sky. Tulsi Babu's neighbour Jaganmoy Dutt had just gone to spit betel juice out of the window one morning in the rainy season when he noticed a double rainbow in the sky. He uttered an exclamation of surprise and turned to Tulsi Babu. 'Come here, sir. You won't see the like of it every day.'

Tulsi Babu left his desk, went to the window, and looked out.

'What are you referring to?' he asked.

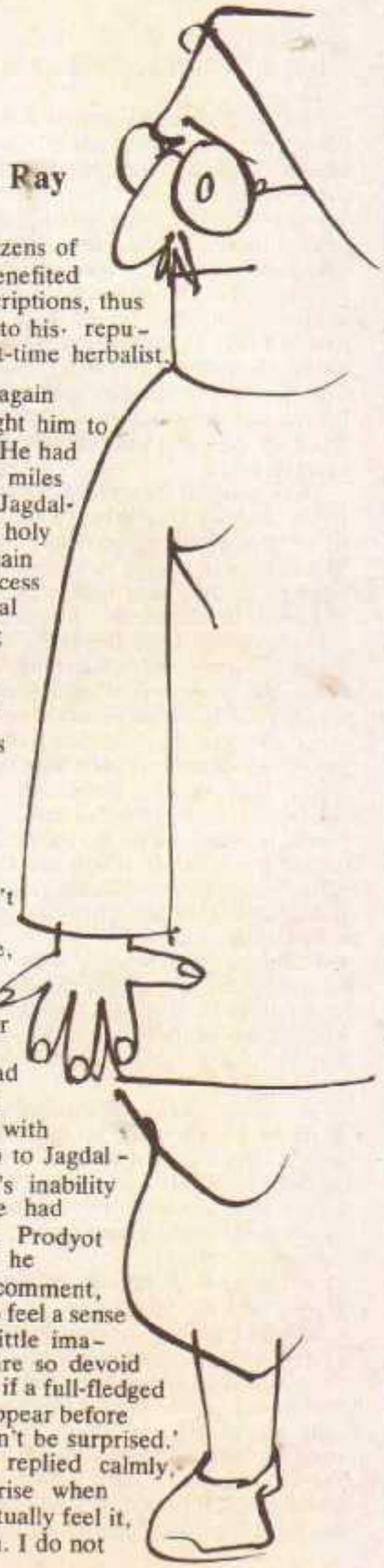
'Why, the double rainbow!' said Jaganmoy Dutt. 'Are you colour-blind?'

Tulsi Babu went back to his desk. 'I can't see what is so special about a double rainbow. Even if there were twenty rainbows in the sky, there would be nothing surprising about that. Why, one can just as well go and stare at the double-spired church in Lower Circular Road!'

Not everyone is endowed with the same sense of wonder, but there is good reason to doubt whether Tulsi Babu possesses any at all. There is only one thing that never ceases to surprise him, and that is the excellence of the mutton *kebab* at Mansur's. The only person who is aware of this is Tulsi Babu's friend and colleague, Prodyot Chanda.

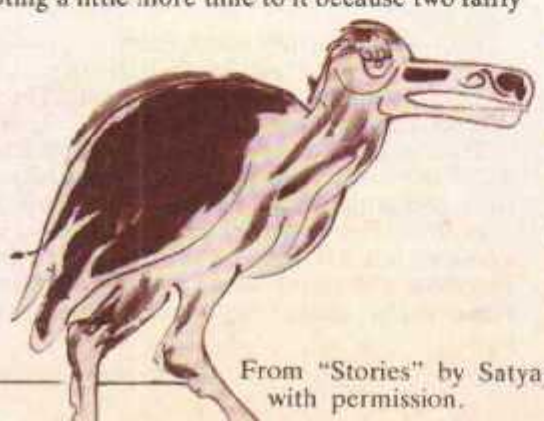
Being of such a sceptical temperament, Tulsi Babu was not particularly surprised to find an unusually large egg while looking for medicinal plants in the forests of Dandakaranya.

Tulsi Babu had been dabbling in herbal medicine for the last fifteen years; his father was a well-known herbalist. Tulsi Babu's main source of income is as an upper division clerk in Arbuthnot & Co. but he has not been able to discard the family profession altogether. Of late he has been devoting a little more time to it because two fairly distinguished citizens of Calcutta have benefited from his prescriptions, thus giving a boost to his reputation as a part-time herbalist.



It was herbs again which had brought him to Dandakaranya. He had heard that thirty miles to the north of Jagdalpur there lived a holy man in a mountain cave who had access to some medicinal plants including one for high blood pressure which was even more efficacious then *rawolfia serpentina*. Tulsi Babu suffered from hypertension; *serpentina* hadn't worked too well in his case, and he had no faith in homoeopathy or allopathy.

Tulsi Babu had taken his friend Prodyot Babu with him on this trip to Jagdalpur. Tulsi Babu's inability to feel surprise had often bothered Prodyot Babu. One day he was forced to comment, All one needs to feel a sense of wonder is a little imagination. You are so devoid of it that even if a full-fledged ghost were to appear before you, you wouldn't be surprised.' Tulsi Babu had replied calmly, 'To feign surprise when one doesn't actually feel it, is an affectation. I do not



From "Stories" by Satyajit Ray Seagull Books, 26, Circus Avenue, Calcutta-17. with permission.

approve of it.'

But this didn't get in the way of their friendship.

The two checked into a hotel in Jagdalpur during the Autumn vacation. On the way, in the Madras Mail, two foreign youngsters had got into their compartment. They turned out to be Swedes. One of them was so tall that his head nearly touched the ceiling. Prodyot Babu had asked him how tall he was and the young man had replied, 'Two metres and seven centimetres.' Which is nearly seven feet. Prodyot Babu couldn't take his eyes away from this young giant during the rest of the journey; and yet Tulsi Babu was not surprised. He said such extraordinary height was simply the result of the diet of the Swedish people, and therefore nothing to be surprised at.

They reached the cave of the holy man Dhumai Baba after walking through the forest for a mile or so then climbing up about five hundred feet. The cave was a large one, but since no sun ever reached it, they only had to take ten steps to be engulfed in darkness, thickened by the ever-present smoke from the Baba's brazier. Prodyot Babu was absorbed in watching, by the light of his torch, the profusion of stalactites and stalagmites while Tulsi Babu enquired after his herbal medicine. The tree that Dhumai Baba referred to was known as *chakraparna*, which is the Sanskrit for 'round leaves'. Tulsi Babu had never heard of it, nor was it mentioned in any of the half-dozen books he had read on herbal medicine. It was not a tree, but a shrub. It was found only in one part of the forest of Dandakaranya, and nowhere else. Baba gave adequate directions which Tulsi Babu noted down carefully.

Coming out of the cave, Tulsi Babu lost no time in setting off in quest of the herb. Prodyot Babu was happy to keep his friend company; he had hunted big game at one time—conservation had put an end to that, but the lure of the jungle persisted.

The holy man's directions proved accurate. Half an hour's walk brought them to a ravine which they crossed and in three minutes they found the shrub seven steps to the south of a *neem* tree scorched by lightning—a waist-high shrub with round green leaves, each with a pink dot in the centre.

'What kind of a place is this?' asked Prodyot Babu, looking around.

'Why, what's wrong with it?'

'But for the *neem*, there isn't a single tree here that I know. And see how damp it is. Quite unlike the places we've passed through.'

It *was* moist underfoot, but Tulsi Babu saw nothing strange in that. Why, in Calcutta itself, the temperature varied between one neighbourhood and another. Tollygunge in the south was much cooler than Shambazar in the north. What was so strange about one part of a forest being different from another? It was nothing but a quirk of nature.

Tulsi Babu had just put the bag down on the ground and stooped towards the shrub when a sharp query from Prodyot Babu interrupted him.

'What on earth is that?'

Tulsi Babu had seen the thing too, but was not bothered by it. 'Must be some sort of egg,' he said.

Prodyot Babu had thought it was a piece of egg-shaped rock, but on getting closer he realised that it was a genuine egg, yellow, with brown stripes flecked with blue. What could such a large egg belong to? A python?

Meanwhile, Tulsi Babu had already plucked some leafy branches off the shrub and put them in his bag. He wanted to take some more but something happened then which made him stop.

The egg chose this very moment to hatch. Prodyot Babu had jumped back at the sound of the cracking shell, but now he took courage to take a few steps towards it.

The head was already out of the shell. Not a snake, nor a croc or a turtle, but a bird.

Soon the whole creature was out. It stood on its spindly legs and looked around. It was quite large, about the size of a hen. Prodyot Babu was very fond of birds and kept a mynah and a bulbul as pets; but he had never seen a chick as large as this, with such a large beak and long legs. Its purple plumes were unique, as was its alert behaviour so soon after birth.

Tulsi Babu, however, was not in the least interested in the chick. He had been intent on stuffing his bag with as much of the herb as would go into it.

Prodyot Babu looked around and commented, 'Very surprising; there seems to be no sign of its parents, at least not in the vicinity.'

'I think that's enough surprise for a day,' said Tulsi Babu, hoisting his bag on his shoulder. 'It's almost four. We must be out of the forest before it gets dark.'

Somewhat against his wish, Prodyot Babu turned away from the chick and started walking with Tulsi Babu. It would take at least half an hour to reach the waiting taxi.

A patter of feet made Prodyot Babu stop and turn round.

The chick was following them.

'I say—' called out Prodyot Babu.

Tulsi Babu now stopped and turned. The chick was looking straight at him.

Then it padded across and stopped in front of Tulsi Babu where it opened its unusually large beak and gripped the edge of Tulsi Babu's *dhoti*.

Prodyot Babu was so surprised that he didn't know what to say, until he saw Tulsi Babu pick up the chick and shove it into his bag. 'What d'you think you're doing? he cried in consternation.

'You put that nameless chick in your bag?'

'I've always wanted to keep a pet,' said Tulsi Babu, resuming his walk. 'Even mongrels are kept as pets. What's wrong with a nameless chick?'

Prodyot Babu saw the chick sticking its neck out of the swinging bag and glancing around with wide-open eyes.

Tulsi Babu lived in a flat on the second floor of a building in Masjidbari Street. Besides Tulsi Babu, who was a bachelor, there was his servant Natobar and his cook Joykesto. There was another flat on the same floor, and this was occupied by Tarit Sanyal, the proprietor of the Nabarun Press. Mr. Sanyal was a short-tempered man made even more so by repeated power failures in the city which seriously affected the working of his press.

Two months had passed since Tulsi Babu's return from Dandakaranya. He had put the chick in a cage which he had specially ordered immediately upon his return. The cage was kept in a corner of the inner verandah. He had found a Sanskrit name for the chick: *Brihat-Chanchu*, or Big Bill; soon the Big was dropped and now it was just Bill.

The very first day he had acquired the chick in Jagdalpur, Tulsi Babu had tried to feed it grain. The chick had refused. Tulsi Babu had guessed, and rightly, that it was probably a meat eater; ever since he has been feeding it insects. Of late the bird's appetite seems to have grown, and Tulsi Babu has been obliged to feed it meat; Natobar buys meat from the market regularly, which may explain the bird's rapid growth in size.

Tulsi Babu had been far-sighted enough to buy a cage which was several sizes too large for the bird. His instinct had told him that the bird belonged to a large species. The roof of the cage was two and a half feet from the ground, but only yesterday Tulsi Babu had noticed that when Bill stood straight its head nearly touched the roof; even though the bird was only two months old, it would soon need a larger cage.

Nothing has so far been said about the cry of the bird, which made Mr Sanyal choke on his tea one morning while he stood on the verandah. Normally the two neighbours hardly spoke to each other; today, after he had got over his fit of coughing, Mr Sanyal demanded to know what kind of an animal Tulsi Babu kept in his cage that yelled like that. It was true that the cry was more beast-like than bird-like.

Tulsi Babu was getting dressed to go to work. He appeared at the bedroom door and said, 'Not an animal, but a bird. And whatever its cry, it certainly doesn't keep one awake at night the way your cat does.'

Tulsi Babu's retort put an end to the argument, but Mr Sanyal kept grumbling. It was a good thing the cage couldn't be seen from his flat; a sight of the bird might have given rise to even more serious consequences.

Although its looks didn't bother Tulsi Babu, they certainly worried Prodyot Babu. The two met rarely outside office hours, except once a week for a meal of *kebab* and *paratha* at Mansur's. Prodyot Babu had a large family and many responsibilities. But since the visit to Dandakaranya, Tulsi Babu's pet was often on his mind. As a result he had started to drop in at Tulsi Babu's from time to time in the evenings. The bird's astonishing rate of growth and the change in its appearance were a constant source of surprise to Prodyot Babu. He was at a loss to see why Tulsi Babu should show no concern about it. Prodyot Babu had never imagined that the look in a bird's eye could be so malevolent. The black pupils in the amber irises would fix Prodyot Babu with such an unwavering look that he would feel most uneasy. The bird's beak naturally grew as well as its body; shiny black in colour, it resembled an eagle's beak but was much larger in relation to the rest of the body. It was clear, from its rudimentary wings and its long sturdy legs and sharp talons, that the bird couldn't fly. Prodyot Babu had described the bird to many acquaintances, but no one had been able to identify it.

One Sunday Prodyot Babu came to Tulsi Babu with a camera borrowed from a nephew. There wasn't enough light in the cage, so he had come armed with a flash gun. Photography had been a hobby with him once, and he was able to summon up enough courage to point the camera at the bird in the cage and press the shutter. The scream of protest from the bird as the flash went off sent Prodyot Babu reeling back a full yard, and it struck him that the bird's cry should be recorded; showing the photograph and playing back the cry might help in the identification of the species. Something rankled in Prodyot Babu's mind; he hadn't yet mentioned it to Tulsi Babu but somewhere in a book or a magazine he had seen a picture of a bird which greatly resembled this pet of Tulsi Babu's. If he came across the picture again, he would compare it with the photograph.

When the two friends were having tea, Tulsi Babu came out with a new piece of information. Ever since Bill had arrived, crows and sparrows had stopped coming to the flat. This was a blessing because the sparrows would build nests in the most unlikely places, while the crows would make off with food from the kitchen. All that had stopped.

'Is that so?' asked Prodyot Babu, surprised as usual.

'Well, you've been here all this time; have you seen any other birds?'

Prodyot Babu realised that he hadn't. 'But what about your two servants? Have they got

used to Bill?'

'The cook never goes near the cage, but Natobar feeds it meat with pincers. Even if he does have any objection, he hasn't come out with it. And when the bird turns nasty, one sight of me calms it down. By the way, what was the idea behind taking the photograph?'

Prodyot Babu didn't mention the real reason. He said, 'When it's no more, it'll remind you of it.'

Prodyot Babu had the photograph developed and printed the following day. He also had two enlargements made. One he gave to Tulsi Babu and the other he took to the ornithologist Ranajoy Shome. Only the other day an article by Mr Shome on the birds of Sikkim had appeared in the weekly magazine *Desh*.

But Mr Shome failed to identify the bird from the photograph. He asked where the bird could be seen, and Prodyot Babu answered with a bare-faced lie. 'A friend of mine has sent this photograph from Osaka. He wanted me to identify the bird for him.'

Tulsi Babu noted the date in his diary: February the fourteenth, 1980. Big Bill, who had been transferred from a three and a half foot cage to a four and a half foot one only last month, had been guilty of a misdeed last night.

Tulsi Babu had been awakened by a suspicious sound in the middle of the night. A series of hard, metallic twangs. But the sound had soon stopped and had been followed by total silence.

Still, the suspicion that something was up lingered in Tulsi Babu's mind. He came out of the mosquito net. Moonlight fell on the floor through the grilled window. Tulsi Babu put on his slippers, took the electric torch from the table, and came out onto the verandah.

In the beam of the torch he saw that the meshing on the cage had been ripped apart and a hole large enough for the bird to escape from had been made. The cage was now empty.

Tulsi Babu's torch revealed nothing on this side of the verandah. At the opposite end, the verandah turned right towards Mr Sanyal's flat.

Tulsi Babu reached the corner in a flash and swung his torch to the right.

It was just as he had feared.

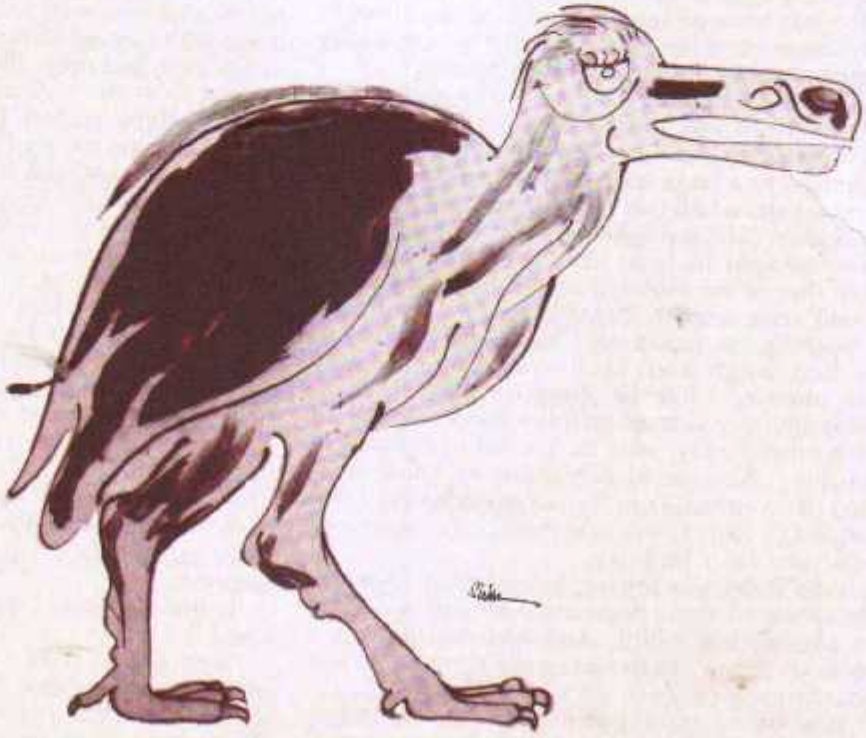
Mr Sanyal's cat was now a helpless captive in Bill's beak. The shiny spots on the floor were obviously drops of blood. But the cat was still alive and thrashing its legs about.

Tulsi Babu now cried out 'Bill' and the bird promptly dropped the cat from its beak.

Then it advanced with long strides, turned the corner, and went quickly back to its cage.

Even in this moment of crisis, Tulsi Babu couldn't help heaving a sigh of relief.

A padlock hung on the door of Mr Sanyal's room; Mr Sanyal had left three days ago for a



holiday, after the busy months of December and January when school books were printed in his press.

The best thing to do with the cat would be to toss it out of the window on to the street. Stray cats and dogs were run over every day on the streets of Calcutta; this would be just one more of them.

The rest of the night Tulsi Babu couldn't sleep.

The next day Tulsi Babu had to absent himself from work for an hour or so while he went to the railway booking office; he happened to know one of the booking clerks which made his task easier. Prodyot Babu had asked after the bird and Tulsi Babu had replied he was fine. Then he had added after a brief reflection—'I'm thinking of framing the photo you took of it.'

On the twenty-fourth of February, Tulsi Babu arrived in Jagdalpur for the second time. A packing case with Bill in it arrived in the luggage van in the same train. The case was provided with a hole for ventilation.

From Jagdalpur, Tulsi Babu set off in a luggage caravan with two coolies and the case, for the precise spot in the forest where he had found the bird.

At a certain milepost on the main road, Tulsi Babu got off the vehicle and, with the coolies carrying the packing case, set off for the scorched *neem* tree. It took nearly an hour to reach the spot. The coolies put the case down. They had already been generously tipped and told that they would have to open the packing case. This was done, and Tulsi Babu was relieved to see that Bill was in fine fettle. The coolies, of course, bolted screaming at the sight of the bird, but that didn't worry Tulsi Babu. His purpose had been served. Bill was looking at him with a fixed stare. Its head already touched the four and a half foot high roof of the cage.

'Good-bye, Bill.'

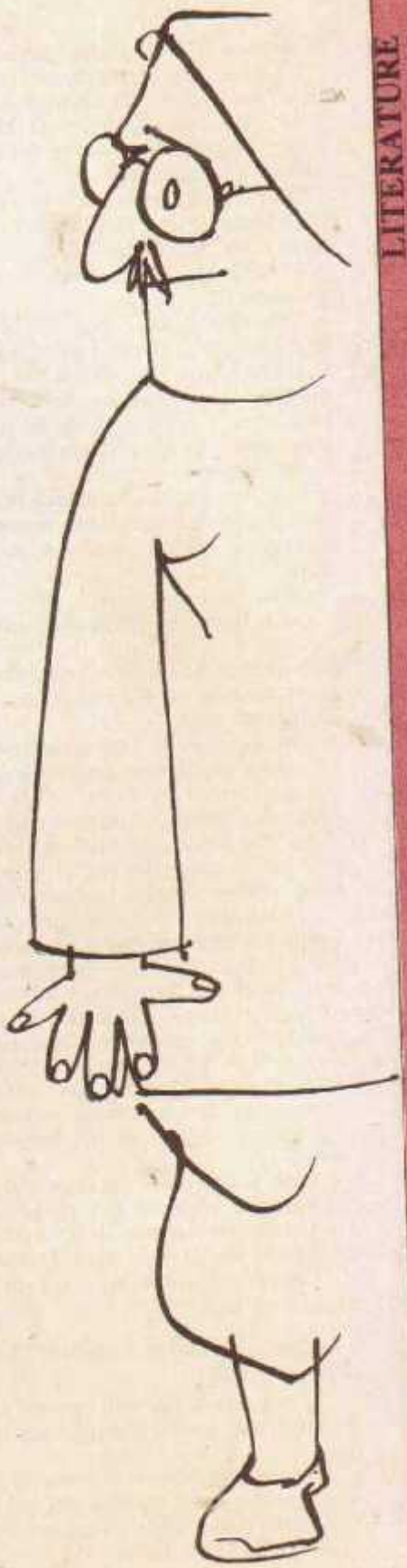
The sooner the parting took place the better.

Tulsi Babu started on his journey back to the Tempo.

Tulsi Babu hadn't told anybody in the office about his trip, not even Prodyot Babu, who naturally asked where he had been when he appeared at his desk on Monday. Tulsi Babu replied briefly that he had been to a niece's wedding in Naihati.

About a fortnight later, on a visit to Tulsi Babu's place, Prodyot Babu was surprised to see the cage empty. He asked about the bird. 'It's gone,' said Tulsi Babu.

Prodyot Babu naturally assumed that the bird was dead. He felt a twinge of remorse. He hadn't meant it seriously when he had said that the photo would remind Tulsi Babu of his pet when it was no more; he had no idea the bird would die so soon. The photograph he had taken had been framed and was hanging on the wall of the



bedroom. Tulsi Babu seemed out of sorts; altogether the atmosphere was gloomy. To relieve the gloom, Prodyot Babu made a suggestion. 'We haven't been to Mansur's in a long while. What about going tonight for a meal of *kebab* and *paratha*?'

'I'm afraid I have quite lost my taste for them.'

Prodyot Babu couldn't believe his ears. 'Lost your taste for *kebabs*? What's the matter? Aren't you well? Have you tried the herb the holy man prescribed?'

Tulsi Babu said that his blood pressure had come down to normal since he tried the juice of the *chakraparna*. What he didn't bother to mention was that he had forgotten all about herbal medicines as long as Bill had been with him, and that he had gone back to them only a week ago.

'By the way,' remarked Prodyot Babu, 'the mention of the herb reminds me—did you read in the papers today about the forest of Dandakaranya?'

'What did the papers say?'

Tulsi Babu bought a daily newspaper all right, but rarely got beyond the first page. The paper was near at hand. Prodyot Babu pointed out the news to him. The headline said 'The Terror of Dandakaranya'.

The news described a sudden and unexpected threat to the domestic animals and poultry in the village around the forest of Dandakaranya. Some unknown species of animal had started to devour them. No tigers are known to exist in that area, and proof has been found that something other than a feline species has been causing the havoc. Tigers usually drag their prey to their lairs; this particular beast doesn't. The shikaris engaged by the Madhya Pradesh government had searched for a week but failed to locate any beasts capable of such carnage. As a result, panic has spread amongst the villagers. One particular villager claims that he had seen a two-legged creature running away from his cowshed. He had gone to investigate, and found his buffalo lying dead with a sizeable portion of his lower abdomen eaten away.

Tulsi Babu read the news, folded the paper, and put it back on the table.

'Don't tell me you don't find anything exceptional in the story?' said Prodyot Babu.

Tulsi Babu shook his head. In other words, he didn't.

Three days later a strange thing happened to Prodyot Babu.

At breakfast, his wife opened a tin of Digestive biscuits and served them to her husband with his tea.

The next moment Prodyot Babu had left the dining-table and rushed out of the house.

By the time he reached his friend Animesh's flat in Ekdalia Road, he was trembling with excitement.

He snatched the newspaper away from his friend's hands, threw it aside and said panting: 'Where d'you keep your copies of *Readers' Digest*? Quick—it's most important!'

Animesh shared with millions of others a taste for *Readers' Digest*. He was greatly surprised by his friend's behaviour but scarcely had the opportunity to show it. He went to a book-case and dragged out some dozen issues of the magazine from the bottom shelf.

'Which number are you looking for?'

Prodyot Babu took the whole bunch, flipped through the pages of issue after issue, and finally found what he was looking for.

'Yes—this is the bird. No doubt about it.'

His fingers rested on a picture of a conjectural model of a bird kept in the Chicago Museum of Natural History. It showed an attendant cleaning the model with a brush.

'*Andalgalornis*', said Prodyot Babu, reading out the name. The name meant terror-bird. A huge prehistoric species, carnivorous, faster than a horse, and extremely ferocious.

The doubt which had crept into Prodyot Babu's mind was proved right when in the office next morning Tulsi Babu came to him and said that he had to go to Dandakaranya once again, and that he would be delighted if Prodyot Babu would join him and bring his gun with him. There was too little time to obtain sleeping accommodation in the train, but that couldn't be helped as the matter was very urgent.

Prodyot Babu agreed at once.

In the excitement of the pursuit, the two friends didn't mind the discomfort of the journey. Prodyot Babu said nothing about the bird in the *Readers' Digest*. He could do so later, there was plenty of time for that. Tulsi Babu had in the meantime told everything to Prodyot Babu. He had also mentioned that he didn't really believe the gun would be needed; he had suggested taking it only as a precaution. Prodyot Babu, on the other hand, couldn't share his friend's optimism. He believed the gun was essential, and he was fully prepared for any eventuality. Today's paper had mentioned that the Madhya Pradesh government had announced a reward of 5,000 rupees to anyone who succeeded in killing or capturing the creature, which had been declared a man-eater ever since a woodcutter's son had fallen victim to it.

In Jagdalpur, permission to shoot the creature was obtained from the conservator of forests, Mr Tirumalai. But he warned that Tulsi Babu and Prodyot Babu would have to go on their own as nobody could be persuaded to go into the forest any more.

Prodyot Babu asked if any information had been received from the shikaris who had preceded them. Tirumalai turned grave. 'So far four shikaris have attempted to kill the beast. Three of

them had no success. The fourth never returned.'

'Never returned?'

'No. Ever since then shikaris have been refusing to go. So you had better think twice before undertaking the trip.'

Prodyot Babu was shaken, but his friend's nonchalance brought back his courage. 'I think we will go,' he said.

This time they had to walk a little further because the taxi refused to take the dirt road which went part of the way into the forest. Tulsi Babu was confident that the job would be over in two hours, and the taxi agreed to wait that long upon being given a tip of fifty rupees. The two friends set off on their quest.

It being springtime now, the forest wore a different look from the previous trips. Nature was following its course, and yet there was an unnatural silence. There were no bird calls; not even the cries of cuckoos.

As usual, Tulsi Babu was carrying his shoulder bag. Prodyot Babu knew there was a packet in it, but he didn't know what it contained. Prodyot Babu himself was carrying his rifle and bullets.

As the undergrowth was thinner they could see farther into the forest. That is why the two friends were able to see from a distance the body of a man lying spread-eagled on the ground behind a jackfruit tree. Tulsi Babu hadn't noticed it, and stopped only when Prodyot Babu pointed it out to him. Prodyot Babu took a firm grip on the gun and walked towards the body. Tulsi Babu seemed only vaguely interested in the matter.

Prodyot Babu went half-way, and then turned back.

'You look as if you've seen a ghost,' said Tulsi Babu when his friend rejoined him. 'Isn't that the missing shikari?'

'It must be,' said Prodyot Babu hoarsely. 'But it won't be easy to identify the corpse. The head's missing.'

The rest of the way they didn't speak at all.

It took one hour to reach the *neem* tree, which meant they must have walked at least three miles. Prodyot Babu noticed that the medicinal shrub had grown fresh leaves and was back to its old shape.

'Bill! Billie!'

There was something faintly comic about the call, and Prodyot Babu couldn't help smiling. But the next moment he realised that for Tulsi Babu the call was quite natural. That he had succeeded in taming the monster bird, Prodyot Babu had seen with his own eyes.

Tulsi Babu's call resounded in the forest.

'Bill! Bill! Billie!'

Now Prodyot Babu saw something stirring in the depths of the forest. It was coming towards them, and at such a speed that it seemed to grow bigger and bigger every second.

It was the monster bird.

The gun in Prodyot Babu's hand suddenly felt very heavy. He wondered if he would be able to use it at all.

The bird slowed down and approached them stealthily through the vegetation.

Andalgalornis. Prodyot Babu would never forget the name. A bird as tall as a man. Ostriches were tall too; but that was largely because of their neck. This bird's back itself was as high as an average man. In other words, the bird had grown a foot and a half in just about a month. The colour of its plumes had changed too. There were blotches of black on the purple. And the malevolent look in its amber eyes which Prodyot Babu found he could confront when the bird was in captivity, was now for him unbearably terrifying. The look was directed at its ex-master.

There was no knowing what the bird would do. Thinking its stillness to be a prelude to an attack, Prodyot Babu had made an attempt to raise the gun with his shaking hands. But the moment he did so, the bird turned its gaze at him, its feathers puffing out to give it an even more terrifying appearance.

'Lower the gun,' hissed Tulsi Babu in a tone of admonition.

Prodyot Babu obeyed. Now the bird lowered its feathers too and transferred its gaze to its master.

'I don't know if you are still hungry,' said Tulsi Babu, 'but I hope you will eat this because I am giving it to you.'

Tulsi Babu had already brought out the packet from the bag. He now unwrapped it and tossed the contents towards the bird. It was a large chunk of meat.

'You've been the cause of my shame. I hope you will behave yourself from now on.'

Prodyot Babu saw that the bird picked up the chunk with its huge beak, and proceeded to masticate it.

'This time it really is good-bye.'

Tulsi Babu turned. Prodyot Babu was afraid to turn his back on the bird, and for a while walked backwards with his eyes on the bird. When he found that the bird was making no attempt to follow him or attack him, he too turned round and joined his friend.

A week later the news came out in the papers of the end of the terror in Dandakaranya. Prodyot Babu had not mentioned anything to Tulsi Babu about *Andalgalornis*, and the fact that the bird had been extinct for three million years. But the news in the papers today obliged him to come to his friend. 'I'm at a loss to know how it happened,' he said. 'Perhaps you may throw some light on it.'

'There's no mystery at all,' said Tulsi Babu. 'I only mixed some of my medicine with the meat I gave him.'

'Medicine?'

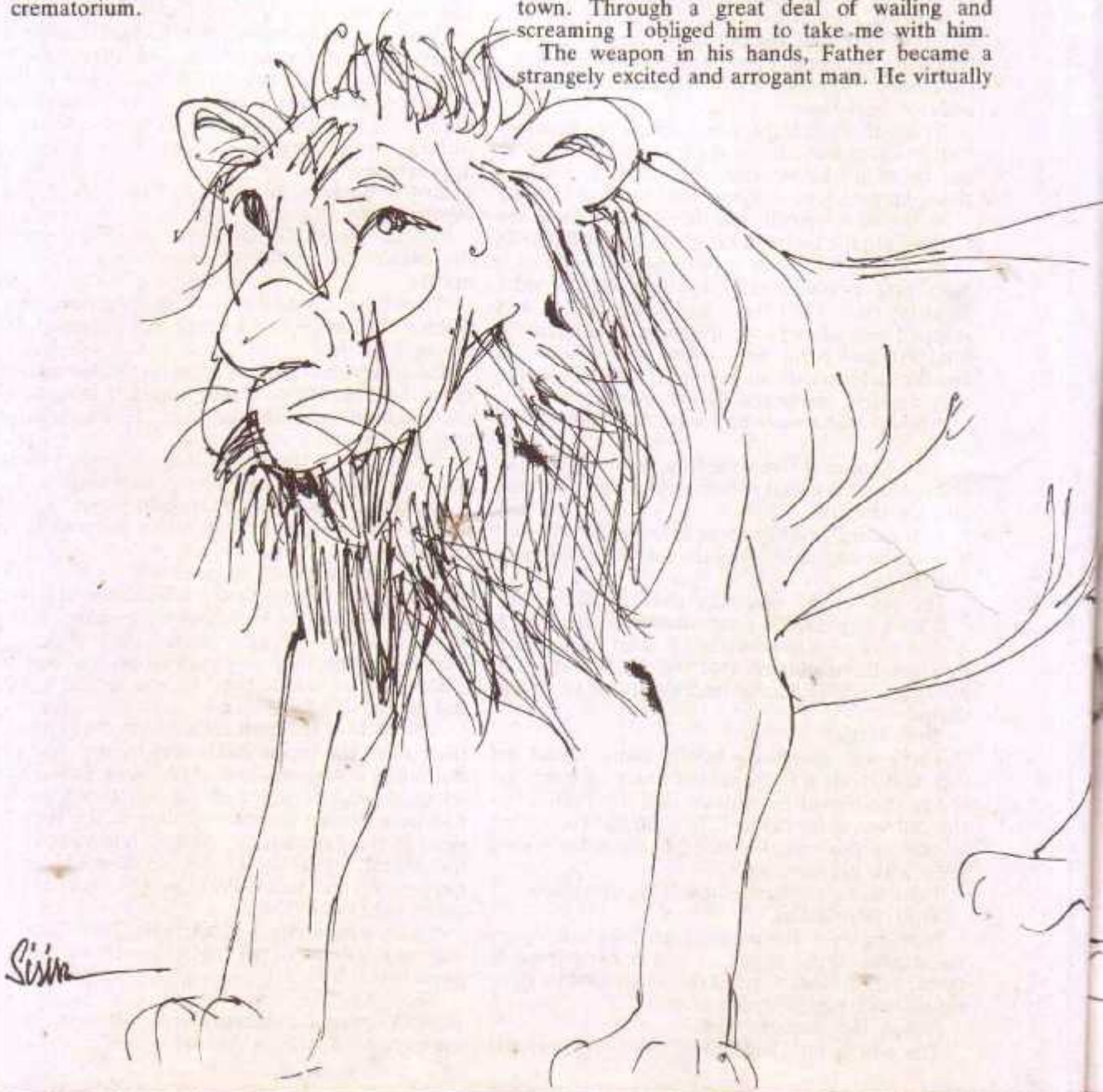
'An extract of *chakraparna*. It turns one into a vegetarian. Just as it has done me.'

THE town, besides other tourist attractions, has a very old and unique zoo. I had seen it when I was a student of the village primary school.

At that time our village was a compact cluster of mud-houses surrounded by a dense forest. The forest was the habitat of all sorts of animals. It was also said that persistent threat and persuasion had failed to cleanse the forest of half a dozen notorious and stubborn ghosts. However, the forest and the sky belonged to our village which responded to the bleatings of the sheep and calves and the sound of the conch shells. They seemed to come closer to our village with the beating of the drums in a marriage procession and when the last flame of the pyre died down in the village crematorium.

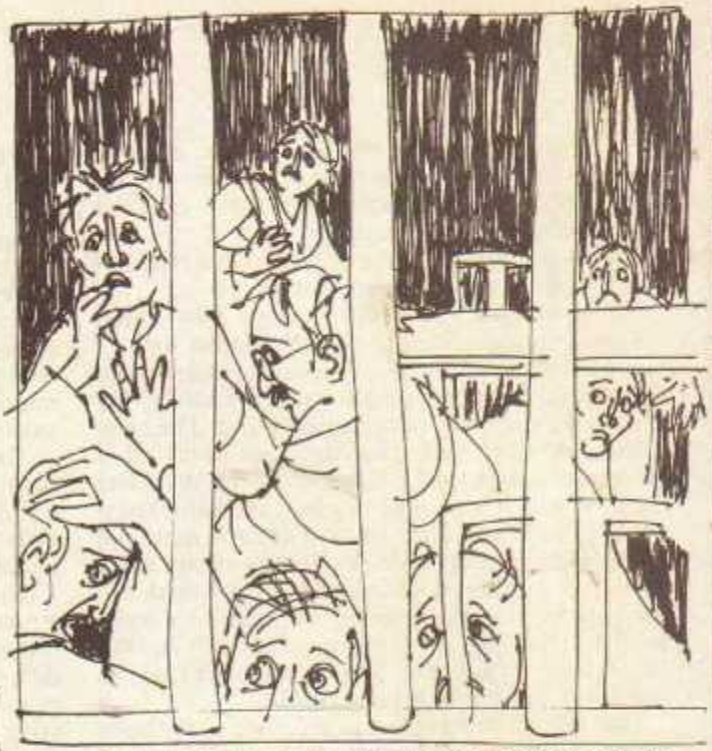
My father was a well-to-do man in the locality whose time was stuffed with sitting in judgement on village quarrels, reading popular detective novels and looking after the teachers of the primary school of which he was the president. A sense of contentment and self-confidence seemed to radiate from his face. He had no complaint against life and the world. This quiescent and eventless life of Father underwent a total change when he could no longer withstand the pleadings and pressure of the villagers to buy a gun. To be frank, particularly the bears had turned out to be a perennial nuisance for the villagers. They would go on frequent rampages in the choicest sugarcane fields. Several villagers were wounded by them, some quite seriously. Father set out for the town. Through a great deal of wailing and screaming I obliged him to take me with him.

The weapon in his hands, Father became a strangely excited and arrogant man. He virtually



The Cage

by Ramachandra Behera



started plundering the forest with the help of the few enthusiastic villagers. The animals were bewildered and disturbed because of the unprecedented boomings of the double-barrel gun. He was not satisfied with just driving the bears out of their hideouts; he tried to reduce every conceivable creature to the common fodder of his gun. Even birds fell prey to his untiring weapon. The villagers, on account of Father's unerring marksmanship, felt jubilant and proud. Only the thunder used to be able to shake the stillness and the repose of the majestic hills and the forest. But now Father's relentless gun inflicted stabs in them in quick succession. Many wondered what dreadful havoc a tiny and unassuming thing like a gun can play with life and its surroundings.

While Father was thus seized with a frenzied obsession to convert the forest into a completely harmless area, I was busy projecting myself as a hero of almost supernatural strength in the eyes of my pals. They were all my classmates in the primary school admirably adept at climbing trees, swimming in the village tank and stealing things occasionally.

I still remember to have repeated before them : "You have not yet seen a zoo, have you? If you ever go there you will come across such tigers and lions whom you can ride and move about inside the zoo. The ticket costs only fifty paise."

"Ride tigers and lions?" There was always a murmur of wonder and disbelief. They looked at each other in search of a suitable applause to my claim.

"I made a brief excursion around the zoo sitting on a lion's back holding fast to his silken mane. There was, in my right hand, a delicious ice-cream," I used to say nonchalantly.

"Ice-cream! Is that the urban name for a cub?" some of my friends queried anxiously.

"I pestered Father to buy me a tiger. He said no. He has assured me to get one provided I secure at least the fifth position in the class." I revealed with a deep sigh.

"Alas let alone a tiger, our fathers are afraid of mere bears!" they almost whimpered.

This was almost three decades ago. Now, what was once a magnificently beautiful forest with its endless foliage and varied creatures, resembles a massive ulcerous wound and, with its sandy, dry soil, looks at the sky with endless thirst. The hills, pitiably naked, look like the grey teeth of a faceless monster trying to eat away the sky. And the sky, which was once so close and intimate is now a distant and alien thing. Father is quite old now. With his grip over the village affairs sadly loosened, he feels neglected and abandoned. He sits in the verandah alone for hours on end, thinking nothing and seeing nothing. To the current of village life that flows unabated he considers himself a total stranger.

Our gun is now rotting in a corner of Father's bedroom. It waits, probably vainly, for a moment of animation; a moment in which it can discharge its fury in one terrific explosion. But the call for such a moment has irrevocably vanished from the geography and time of our village.

I became conscious of the newspaper in my hands which the hotel bell-boy had brought to the room together with the morning tea. An irresistible force of nostalgia had completely washed it out from my vision. This force had superseded the present by superimposing my past over it. The past had come back to me with all its liveliness and details enabling me to relive it. I lighted a cigarette and gave up all pretensions of reading the agonies of the world enumerated in endless reiteration in the paper.

It was about nine. Outside, the big town looked anaemic and lazy in the December morning. I looked into the mirror which assured me that my dress and hair-style were neat and trim. There is no knowing when Sarat will come out of the bathroom. He is still humming a fragment of a Hindi film song with the accompaniment of splashing water.

We have been staying in this hotel for the last four days. Our jointly owned factory is producing children's toys in prodigious quantities. We have come here to explore the market for our products. Having achieved some success, we have been enjoying our time since the last evening. Today we shall go back to our place by the night train. With the whole day at our disposal, we have planned to spend a few hours in the zoo and then go wherever our whims would lead us to.

I will revisit this zoo after nearly three decades. I experienced an uncanny quiver which, like waves, washed the shores of my entire being again and again. I had never felt anything like this before.

I know that I cannot go back from the zoo as the triumphant rider on a lion. I have, since long, lost the world which was so enchanting only because of Grandma's fantastic stories. These stories gave meaning and substance to the world. Everything was believable then and the laws of the world were subservient to wild imagination. How could have I known, as a primary school student, that the world, and the things in it are imprisoned within the inviolable truth and logic of existence?

The handsome, pragmatic and unsentimental Sarat was chalking out the day's programme and trying to ascertain my opinion. I was replying in monosyllables without enthusiasm. I was getting impatient to reach the zoo.

The taxi took fifteen minutes to reach it. What struck me instantly was that the place had remained almost unchanged. What I saw was no different from what I had seen thirty years ago. It is an utterly limited place like the world. It has a lake, an artificial stream, trees, flower-beds. The rest of it, for which the zoo is worth visiting, intensified its resemblance with the world.

It is a place of inexorable cages, like our houses. Each cage radiates a smell which is elemental. It is a smell which suggests the strength of life; and life which, in its state of inescapable circumscription dissipates itself and decays within the bounds of the cage. I wonder if the formidable railings and the roof are different from the horizon and the sky! The roar of the lion, the frolics of the monkey, the beating of the wings of the matchless bird—every creature in the zoo—are contained by the cages as our houses resound in their limitedness our smiles and agonies, our victories and defeats. All the cages are the same here : houses of imprisonment and denial of freedom.

After about an hour I was thoroughly distraught and wanted to run away from that terrible place. I felt dazed and sick.

"Let us have tea," I suggested.

'Where?" Sarat's enthusiasm was distracted for a moment.

"In the restaurant, of course." Without waiting for his answer I proceeded towards it. He looked at me for a moment or two and was convinced that there was something wrong with me. He followed me without protest and in order to cheer me up started talking about the strange manners of an animal.

It was while we were sipping tea on the wide porch, that a fantastic event took place.

The restaurant boy who had just served us tea attended a ringing telephone. Suddenly his eyes became too big for the sockets. With his face miserably contorted, he flung the receiver and while running towards the room shouted : "Come into the room! Quick! God knows how a lion has

managed to escape from the cage. It is moving about in the zoo!"

Before I was rendered physically and mentally paralysed, I dashed towards the closing door of the room—our ultimate shelter—and in the process overturned a table and a few chairs. The room was crammed with well-dressed, intelligent men looking pale and defenceless like kids lost in a strange and malignant crowd. Before I had time to see if Sarat had entered the room, came the blare on the loudspeaker: "It is for your own safety, ladies and gentlemen that we advise you to take care of yourselves. Enter into a well-defended house or jump into the lake or climb a tree, if you can climb. We assure you that the zoo authorities are trying to lure the beast back into the cage. Meanwhile we will continue to apprise you of its movement and the direction it takes."

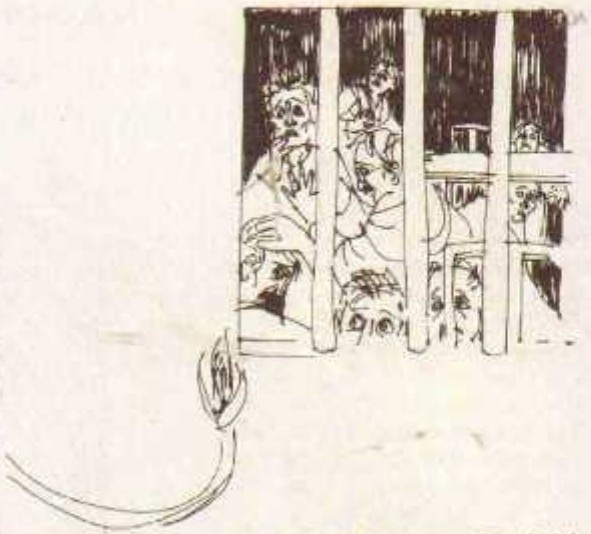
It was only a matter of seconds. The busy, crowded zoo became deserted and abandoned. It was just a terror-struck world looking helplessly guilty and waiting for the fatal blast only to be annihilated. With no hope of divine intervention I looked at this God-forsaken world again and again like a dying man trying to cling to his home and family.

Inside, the oppressive smell of sweat was terrible. We felt like criminals huddled together for execution. Our faces were bloodless and desperately anxious. As the last laugh, the restaurant boy standing by my side was humming the tune of a film song. The pragmatic, handsome Sarat sneered at the whole world and grumbled : "Don't tell me that these chaps do not have a gun. Instead of shooting the beast they just make a running commentary about its movement. Playing with our lives, the scoundrels."

Hardly had he finished this when came the announcement : "The lion is now moving in the direction of the restaurant. Take care!"

And within a few seconds there appeared before us a skinny, rickety thing moving like a somnambulist. The king of the animals, now a pitiable ruin, stopped only a few metres away from the restaurant, just a bag of bones. In spite of the railings and glass-panes we tried to move away from the window. The lion looked around and in its eyes there was the unmistakable stamp of disillusionment about life and the world. I can never believe that eyes can contain so much detachment, can speak so eloquently that everything is a deceptive lie.

The lion looked at the window and opened its mouth apparently to roar and challenge us. Picture the situation : the lion outside and we terrorised human beings inside the room resembling a cage. The world seemed to have turned topsy turvy : the lion sitting in judgement on our destiny. It made a second attempt to roar, its belly contracting like a punctured balloon. There was no sound at all. I don't know how long the



lion seemed to have held us hostages. But I felt that we had been like that for ages and would continue to be so for eternity.

We felt greatly relieved when the lion started moving again in the opposite direction. The restaurant boy was giving an account of the beast : "This is Sultan. He was born in the cage like his parents. He has, with Rosy, produced half a dozen cubs. All have died, the Devil knows why. Only a few months ago Rosy died. Sultan is now a lonely creature and is keeping indifferent health."

Very soon the boom of a gun reverberated from a corner of the zoo. Three shots were fired which were followed by the announcement that the beast had been done to death and that the zoo was absolutely danger-free. There was a riot of ecstasy, such was our sense of relief. We emerged from our captivity feeling that we had been reborn. Everything appeared to be fresh and attractive.

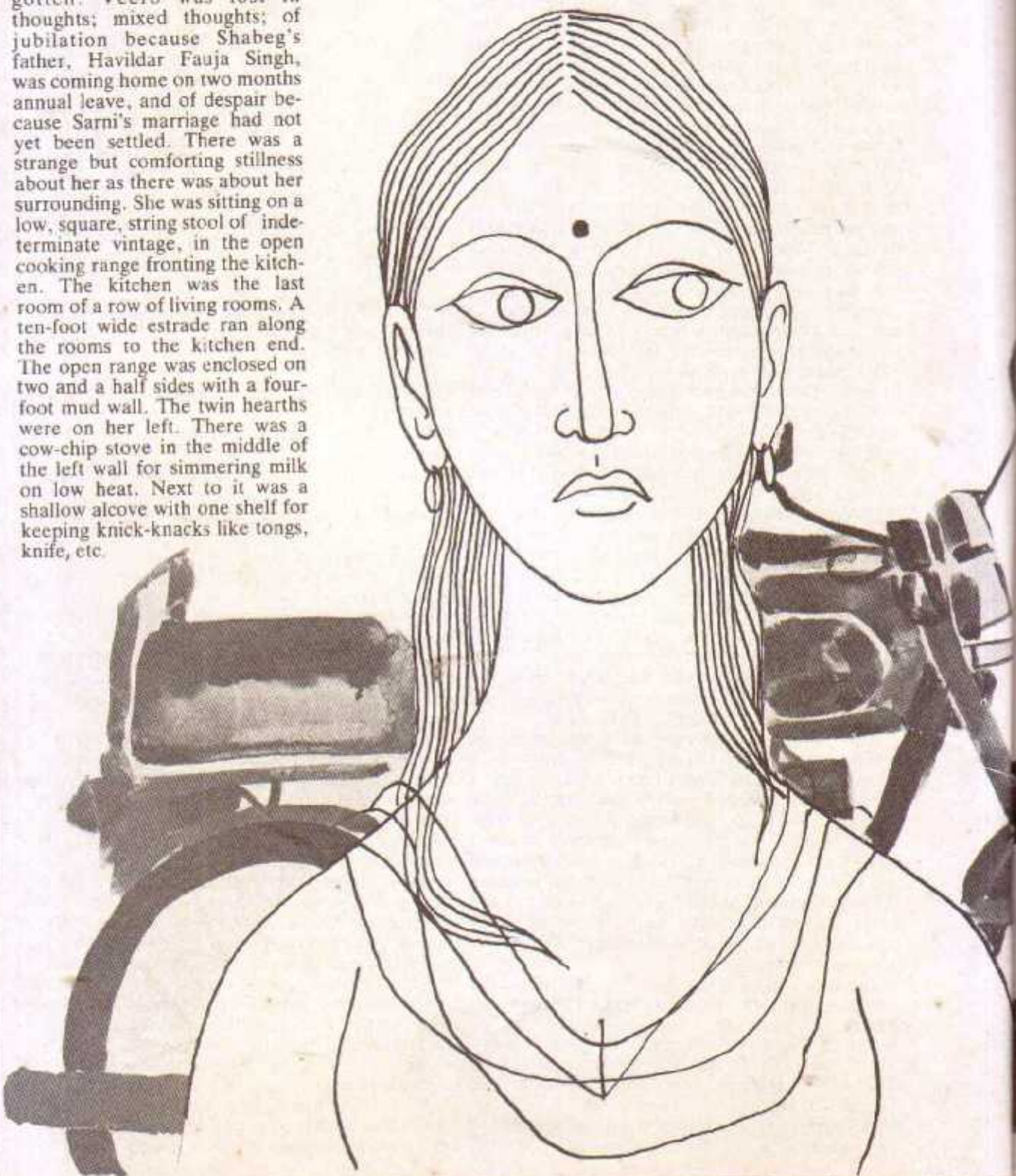
I was restless lying on my berth in the train. Some uncanny force had gripped my throat, as it were. There was, in the depth of my being, an undefinable anguish, which, having failed to find expression, was tormenting me. I was not able to understand why Sultan was going back to his cage. For, his bullet-sprinkled body was lying in front of the cage in which he had grown old and decrepit. Nor was I able to find out a convincing explanation as to why Sultan, looking like a rusted gun, pounced upon the officer who was goading him into his captivity. Was it a gesture of his final protest against everything? Why did he oblige the reluctant officer to shoot him down? The stunned officer, while surveying his wounds, had mumbled that the beast would remain an enigma for him, his long acquaintance with it notwithstanding.

Back at the home, I was running my fingers on the rusted barrels of our gun. Should I ride a lion or shoot him down in order to be a hero? ⑮

The scene of this story is the Punjab of today!

THE

THE nickel-plated brass dish, heaped with black gram, held atop her drawn up knees was forgotten. Veero was lost in thoughts; mixed thoughts; of jubilation because Shabeg's father, Havildar Fauja Singh, was coming home on two months annual leave, and of despair because Sarni's marriage had not yet been settled. There was a strange but comforting stillness about her as there was about her surrounding. She was sitting on a low, square, string stool of indeterminate vintage, in the open cooking range fronting the kitchen. The kitchen was the last room of a row of living rooms. A ten-foot wide estrade ran along the rooms to the kitchen end. The open range was enclosed on two and a half sides with a four-foot mud wall. The twin hearths were on her left. There was a cow-chip stove in the middle of the left wall for simmering milk on low heat. Next to it was a shallow alcove with one shelf for keeping knick-knacks like tongs, knife, etc.



RED BIKE

by Raj Gill

Her partial mood of jubilation slowly gave away to a pall of sadness. She was sad because her son, Shabeg, was not serious about Sarni's marriage. It had to be him to settle it with his father being in service and home only for two months in a year. He did not realise that evil times had come. Events like the Blue Star Operation could take place only in Kalyug. Shabeg himself had grown strange; kept strange company, came and went at all odd hours with strange companions, and talked to them in whispers and half sentences. She dared not ask him about his doings though she had an ominous feeling about them. But today she must take it up with him, she decided.

Just then there was a harsh peal of a bicycle bell outside the main door. There was a thud against the door. The two leaves of the door swung in and Shabeg rode in bumping over the sill. He stopped near a cot lying in the courtyard and pushed the cycle on against the courtyard wall. It gouged another furrow in the mud plaster. The wall was already looking furrowed and ugly. She must plaster it one of these days.

"Ma," Shabeg said aloud for her to hear him in the open range. "Done. I have done it, at last."

Veero put down the dish and hurried to him.

"Tell me Shabeg, son, what's it that you have done."

"Fixed it to send the witch to her in-laws. She won't be eating into your bin anymore."

"Why do you worry, brother," Sarni said sharply coming up to the two. She held a bucket in which a little water sloshed. She was on her way to milk the cow. "I eat my parent's food. You worry when you'll have to feed me." Shabeg ignored Sarni. He continued, "B.A. pass he is, Ma." Sarni blushed and ran away. "Has more land than us. Teaches in a school. Is tall and handsome And plays the mouth-organ like he's learnt it in London! Plays it all the time. People are pleading with him to play all the time. If you listen to him you will forget your *Kirtan*. You couldn't wish for more, Ma," he finished and sat up facing his mother.

"Did you do the ceremony to make it formal, son?"

"Yes, Ma. A packet of sweets and hundred and one rupees. They took only one rupee. Fixed the engagement and marriage for next month too. They agreed. Thought Pa is coming home. So it would be right."

"God bless you, son," Veero said in a choked voice and returned to her chores, happy and impatient for the event she had dreamed about all these years.

The wedding went off well. Havildar Fauja Singh stood to his reputation, making it a lavish affair. Sarni went over to her 'true' home, her husband's. She came visiting, her parents only once and then six months had passed. There was no visit from Sarni and her husband. There had not been a letter even. Veero had been nagging Shabeg to go calling on his sister and even to bring her home for a while. But he was too busy in his own clandestine activities which were worrying Veero even more than no news from her daughter. She herself wanted to pay a visit to her. But the propriety demanded that she should go either with Sarni's father or with Shabeg. Fauja Singh was back with his regiment. And Shabeg was too occupied to have time for her to take her to Sarni. Veero felt distraught. But she could not help it. There could not be a greater misfortune than being illiterate and a woman at that. Veero felt it and wept. That was all she could do.

"Ma, look who's here," Shabeg shouted as he came down the ladder from his first floor room. She ran out to the courtyard. Sarni and Joginder were entering the house. Sarni ran to her mother and embraced her and cried on her shoulder. Shabeg and Joginder hugged and thumped each other's back lustily before the latter could go and greet his mother-in-law by touching her feet.

"Come, brother, let me make you comfortable," Shabeg said, spreading a double thick white cover on a cot.

"Not today brother, not today. I'm in a hurry."

"You've just come!"

"True. But I've a meeting at the District Education Officer's office. I'll be late if I don't hurry."

"Son, you certainly can wait for a glass of tea. I've the water on the boil."

"Well, if you insist, Ma."

"How come you took so long visiting us, Joginder?"

"You know, brother, what's it travelling these days. There's no safety. But worst is the bus service. Always so overcrowded that only the rowdy and the muscled can manage to travel. Then all the checking on the way. One feels so humiliated bearing the pawing of those

clowns in uniform. It's better not to travel than to be humiliated. Even today she was sandwiched inside while I travelled atop the bus. If I'd my own conveyance, say a scooter or motorcycle, we'd have come here a number of times by now. Anyway, I've applied for a loan. If it's sanctioned, then I'd buy a motorcycle and say goodbye to buses." Joginder finished his tea and departed.

"Ma, did you hear? The son-in-law is bitter that we didn't give him a motorcycle. As if we haven't given him enough!"

"Brother, why do you say wrong things?" Sarni intervened.

"He was just talking to you of his plans and not asking you for a gift of a motorcycle. He's applied for a loan. That's nothing off your skin."

"Look lass, he taunted us. If he doesn't want us to buy him a motorcycle, couldn't he buy it first and then tell us about it?"

"You always read wrong." Sarni said almost in tears.

"Wrong or right, he'll get his motorcycle. He can't taunt us and get away with it. I'll tell the boys to look for the best." Sarni ran into the house crying. Before Veero could remonstrate with Shabeg, he had left.

Two months passed. Joginder did not come for Sarni. Nor did he write a letter. Shabeg too was adamant that unless he had a motorcycle for Joginder he would not get in touch with him.

"If you're so hell-bent on buying him a motorcycle, why this delay?" Sarni said in a bitter tone one day.

"Don't be impatient. I'm looking for one."

"You don't have to look beyond Amritsar. Go, buy one."

"I'm not that foolish. You'll get your motorcycle, I promise." Sarni could only cry into her mother's bosom. She wanted to go back to her in-laws alone. But Shabeg was adamant. It could not be. It would be a shame on the family. Veero did not wholly agree with it, though she did not oppose it strongly.

"Ma I'm taking the first bus tomorrow morning for Amritsar and from there I go on to Sarli." Sarni served the ultimatum on her mother. They were sitting in the open cooking range. Veero was sifting rice.

"Why tell me, child? Tell it to your brother."

"Aren't you my mother?"

"I am, daughter. Mother only for bearing you and rearing you. Who'm I after that!" Sarni kept quiet. She knew that her mother was nobody in the house. Women were just there to cook, to clean, to serve.

The peal of the cycle bell announced Shabeg's arrival. He sounded jubilant as he came in. As usual he sent the cycle crashing against the wall gouging the first furrow in the newly plastered area.

"Sarni, you can now write him to come and get his motorcycle," he said jauntily. Sarni looked at him with anger and tears. She was younger. She could not retort as she would have liked to. Just then the sound of the motorcycle became audible. And then a red, brand new Suzuki roared into the courtyard. The driver put the bike on the side stand and stretched lustily.

"There you are, sister dear," said Shabeg as he escorted the driver to the upstair room of his.

Sarni and her mother kept standing by the open cooking range. The red bike looked brighter in the last rays of the setting sun. After a while Sarni walked up to the bike. She felt a strange fear in touching it. It looked wet, as if freshly painted, or smeared with blood, a thought ran through her mind. She shivered. She closed her eyes and silently recited a prayer. Then she opened her eyes again. Her mother too had crept close to her.

Sarni, at last, dared to touch the chrome-plated handle bars of the bike. Her fingers slid on to the petrol tank and then the satiny touch of the twin seats. There was a saddle-bag too. She took quite a while before she ventured to look into it. She opened the lid with trembling fingers. She could not understand why she was afraid to do so. There were clothes inside. Red brocade clothes. A bridal dress — something a young husband often carries when going to bring his wife back home. She gingerly took it out. There was something familiar about it. Something intimate. As if it were her own bridal dress. She opened the folds. Something slipped out of it. Just then Shabeg's voice interrupted her.

"Like it sister?" He was coming down the ladder with his friend, both carrying shoulder bags with odd shaped articles inside. Sarni gave him an indifferent look and returned her gaze to the article that fell out of the folds of the dress. It was there on the ground. Silver plated mouth-organ with 'J' etched in the middle. Sarni could not believe it. The bridal dress slipped slowly from her fingers and folded up beside the organ.

Shabeg and his friend had come up behind Sarni. When the dress fell, Shabeg looked at the ground. He saw the mouth-organ and the initial on it.

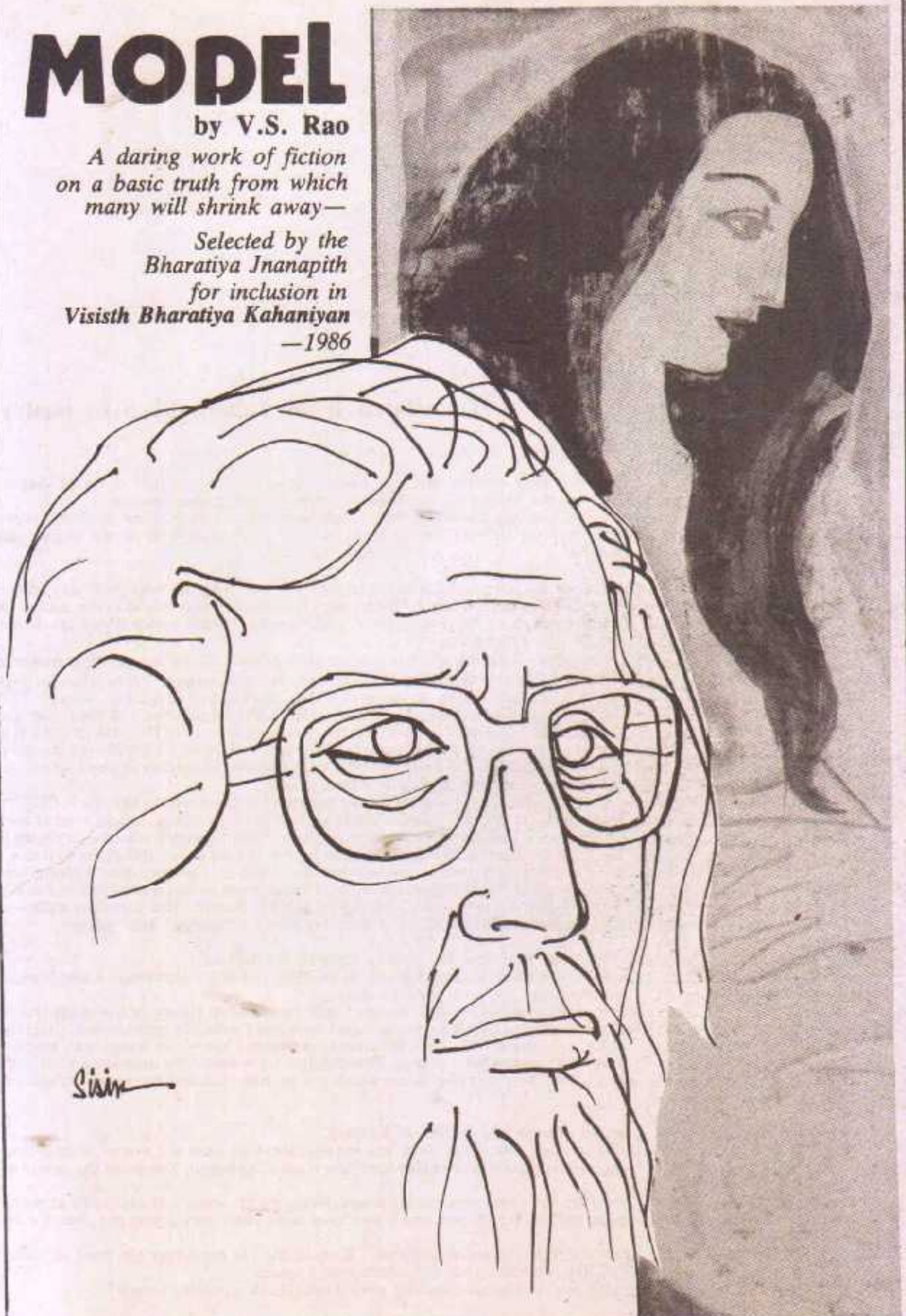
"Oh my God," he exclaimed as his shoulder bag slipped and fell on the ground. The muzzle of a carbine slipped out and aimed at the mouth-organ. Sarni was not aware of his presence; of anyone's presence. She was only aware of the wetness of the red colour on the motorcycle and the growing redness of the rays of the setting sun.

MODEL

by V.S. Rao

A daring work of fiction on a basic truth from which many will shrink away—

Selected by the Bharatiya Jnanapith for inclusion in ***Visisth Bharatiya Kahaniyan*** *—1986*



MODEL

by V.S. Rao

Translated from Telugu by S.L. Sastry

What a lovely sunset!

Crimson skies of the western hills were interspersed with multicoloured cloud-formations of varied shapes, suggestive of the colour-blend on the palette of the Cosmic Artist for his master-creation.

In the foreground stood two tall coconut trees with their heads bent towards each other, as if they were whispering to each other the secrets of Nature. Behind them the sun was setting with all the colour and splendour of an autumn evening.

What a glorious sunset!!

Atma Ram sighed lightly. The setting sun started arousing thoughts in him. The sun rises every day and of course, is bound to set everyday. So is the human being. Having been born, everyone is bound to die, sooner or later. The sun constantly demonstrates this every evening with every sunset. People notice it and yet do not notice. They understand, yet do not understand.

Engrossed in his thoughts, Atma Ram turned back. His eyes caught a glimpse of the two paintings hanging on the wall on either side of the door One was captioned 'Sunrise' and the other 'Sunset'. These were the two paintings which had raised his fame as an artist, to the pinnacles. The art-critics of those days wrote: "The paintings of 'Sunrise' and 'Sunset' are two brilliant mirrors reflecting the heights of perfection of the painter in Atma Ram." In one, a smiling infant in a colourful napkin with the morning glow on his face was painted in a garden in bloom with a yellow-tinged rosy sky for background. 'Sunset' depicted, against a purple-red sky over black mountains, the body of an old man in eternal sleep, his face reflecting the tranquillity of celestial peace. The meanings of sunrise and sunset were thus gracefully demonstrated.

Atma Ram stood gazing at the two paintings. The infant in one had grown old and died in the other. Did the dead person in the painting resemble him? But critics had commented that in his paintings, he had even at that early stage disentangled himself from the touch of the subjective feelings which invariably colour every artist's work. Then—whence this resemblance? Was his vision changing as he was getting closer and closer to death?

A person sentenced to death is granted a last wish before he is executed. Will his Destiny which is giving him the death penalty, grant him his last wish? But how could death be a punishment to him when birth and death are both, in fact, irrevocably inter-related boons; both blessings of Mother Nature! This universal truth—a unique reality—was indeed profoundly reflected in his artistic creation of 'Sunrise' and 'Sunset'.

"Good-evening, Sir."

Interrupted in his thoughts, Atma Ram saw his student Kamesh before him.

"Come in, Kamesh, come in!" he said and, leading Kamesh to his study, sat in his easy-chair. Kamesh's face reflected the agony of disappointment. He took another chair.

"Sorry, Sir. No one agrees to modelling in that state though I have promised to pay twice the usual rate."

Atma Ram remained silent. The model of which he was in urgent need was practically impossible to find. He had been frantically searching for that 'Model' ever since the artist took shape in him—like a sage searching for the Almighty, like a desert traveller running after a mirage. The ambition lay dormant for decades, a fond wish getting old and aged like him. A deep-long standing desire which was perhaps destined to remain unfulfilled forever.

"Sir ..."

Atma Ram returned from his reverie and turned to Kamesh.

"One or two of your old 'models' are now in the stage you require. But they have put a stop to modelling after their marriage. Moreover, to give a nude pose in that condition is out of question. You know the nature of women Sir, *you* know it!"

"Yes, my boy, I know. One often develops some strong desire during his life-span, and cannot be at peace until it is fulfilled. It has been my life's ambition and I too have been constantly trying my best for its fulfilment."

"Let me try again, Sir. If we are lucky, it may materialise." Kamesh tried to encourage the tired old man. Atma Ram merely looked at him with sad eyes and attempted a smile.

"But, Kamesh, do you think life will remain waiting until Dame Luck presents herself?"

Sisir

"Don't lose hope, Sir. You are quite healthy and not too old."

"But there is no relation between age and longevity. I absolutely must finish the painting within a month."

Kamesh did not understand. He looked at Atma Ram with surprise.

"Let me tell you something, Kamesh. Can you keep it a secret? Will you hide it in the heart of your hearts? Will you?"

"I will Sir, I assure you I will."

"I am suffering from terminal cancer. Doctors have given me six months. Five of which are already over..."

"Sir! ... Sir!" Kamesh was choking. He took Atma Ram's hands into his own shaking hands. His trembling fingers and wet eyes, expressing the agony his speech seemed to refuse to formulate. Yet he attempted it. "Sir!,—I feel lost—you—" His voice struggled and ceased. It was impossible to speak any more.

In silence they looked at each other—striving with strong emotions. Atma Ram began gently caressing his student's hands. At last he spoke, consoling Kamesh with philosophy.

"My dear boy, the line of demarcation between life and death is very thin. Man imagines it is a thick iron curtain, but that is not true, it is a mistaken idea."

"Sir, your words are only increasing my fears and anxiety, Sir, kindly ...."

Atma Ram looked at him with eyes full of sympathy. "Tell me Kamesh ... imagine yourself in my position ... and let me know what you feel."

Kamesh instinctively lifted his face and looked at him. The wet film in his eyes seemed a thin curtain drawn by Destiny. He wiped his eyes and looked again, carefully. Thin grey long locks of hair. A broad forehead marked with sprangled lines. Grey, thick eyebrows; deep, wide eyes with a penetrating look. A long pointed nose. Atma Ram, his mentor, in his robes, looked like an intellectual colossus.

"Sir, I did not know the situation was so serious. Yet, I really tried very hard. I shall try again," he said with intense resolve and a touch of anxiety. Atma Ram smiled. "Take it easy my boy," he patted his beloved disciple.

"I shall come again tomorrow Sir," said Kamesh before leaving.

II

"Forgive me Sir. I am defeated ... I am defeated."

Atma Ram looked at him sympathetically and sighed.

"My wife is now running eighth month. She would have made an excellent model. I made all efforts to convince her. Ratna has not agreed ... There even was a heated argument between us. I hope, Sir you ..."

"I understand, my boy, I know. You must not misunderstand that poor girl. Not only your own wife, nobody's wife can possibly agree. My own wife who knew the artist in me, and loved me as an artist and married me ... if *she* had agreed then, my ambition would have been fulfilled long long ago."

"One of the wonders of creation is a pregnant woman. The pregnant female is a perfection of beauty. Not only in humans, but also in animals and birds. Every creature which conceives and carries its own miniature in its womb presents a sublime fullness, a completeness, a perfection. It is inestimable. It just cannot be expressed through our brush." Atma Ram became emotional. There was a glow in his eyes that reflected his ideal of perfection, the object of his worship.

Kamesh was about to say something, when they heard the door opening. Vinaya was coming in with cups of tea on a tray. She caught Kamesh's eye and greeted him with a smile. She placed the tray on the teapoy and gave a cup to Atma Ram. "Your tea, Papaji."

He took it and smiled at his daughter-in-law. Vinaya gave another cup to Kamesh and turned back to Atma Ram.

"He has written a letter, Papaji. He may have to stay in Delhi for another fortnight. It may even become three weeks before he returns. He wants me to write about your health."

"His job is like that; one camp after another. He finds it difficult to stay at home even for one full month in the year. But, Vinaya, my dear, do ask him to come early this time," Atma Ram calmly replied.

Vinaya nodded and left.

Atma Ram looked at Kamesh. "Forget it Kamesh. It is the old story: man proposes and God disposes. We can only try. The result is not in our hands. Please do not think about it any more. Leave it at that."

Looking sadly at Atma Ram, Kamesh left reluctantly.

III

Vinaya put the morning coffee on the teapoy. Atma Ram took it with a smile. Vinaya remained standing. Atma Ram finished his coffee and gave the cup back to her. She kept the empty cup on the teapoy, but remained standing. Puzzled Atma Ram lifted his head and looked up at her. Her eyes were fixed on him. Her radiant wide eyes with a note of serious silence showed that she wanted to convey something to him.

"Do you want to say something, Vinaya?"

"I am running ninth month, Papaji."

Atma Ram looked at her with affection. "I know, dear," he mumbled.

"So, having known this, you ignored me?"

Vinaya's question shook him up a little.

"Oh,——what? What do you mean?"

"You were hiding two things from me," she said with a smile.

"Vinaya!"

"First you didn't tell me the truth about your ill-health. You pretended that the pain you were getting off and on for your terminal cancer was merely the common stomach-ache."

Atma Ram's face wore a troubled expression. "Vinaya ... how ... how did you know about it?" His voice quivered.

Vinaya's laugh was hollow, mirthless.

"Papaji, I also have ears, and not Kamesh alone."

Admitting defeat, a deep sigh escaped Atma Ram.

"What was the use of telling you, Vinaya? I would only be causing sorrow for you and Murari. Moreover, in

your present state you ought to be happy and cheerful. I felt I should not frighten you and so kept the truth to myself. For the disease has passed beyond the stage of responding to any treatment. I knew very well what would have happened if I told Murari. You know he is an adamant fellow. He would have gone on worrying himself and the doctors to attempt every treatment when it is no longer of any use. The fact, the doctor told me and rightly too, is that when the body gets cancer, an unconditional surrender to the disease rather than medical treatments might probably do more to relieve one from the intensity of pain. If we go on fighting, taking one or another treatment, the suffering may perhaps climb greater heights and life become a virtual hell."

Tears glistened in Vinaya's eyes.

"Papaji, you have filled the place of my father since I lost him at a young age. After the death of my mother you discharged her duties too. Now if you leave, Papaji, I will be losing both my father and my mother again!"

Vinaya's voice faltered. Tears flowed in vertical streams down her cheeks. She wiped them with her left palm. Atma Ram looked at her with pride and satisfaction. Did he fulfil his part as both father and mother to her with such affection! No father-in-law would easily be the recipient of such praise.

But Vinaya had collected herself. She had not finished yet. She looked at him quietly before she exploded a bombshell.

"Now, about the second point. There is a pregnant woman in the house and yet you have been unable to take cognizance of it."

"Vinaya!"

Acute dismay filled Atma Ram's face and showed up as if intensified through a magnifying lens.

"Your ... your last ... and long-cherished wish. To fulfil which you have been searching all over. It's like searching for ghee, when butter is available abundantly at home."

"Vinaya ... !"

"Don't get so disturbed, Papaji. Don't I have in your view the place other pregnant women have?"

"Vinaya ... my dear ... !"

"Can't you paint my picture?"

"Vinaya ... my child ..."

"Please take me as the model you require. Let your long cherished desire be fulfilled. Papaji, it is your satisfaction that is our satisfaction. If you die without fulfilling your desire, you can imagine how wretched we would feel for the rest of our life for failing to help you achieve your ambition even when I am in a position to do it?"

Atma Ram was suffocating. He was feeling like a drowning person struggling for his life.

"My little girl ... I can't bear it ... my mind is stupefied." He paused, out of breath.

"You are my daughter-in-law—my son's wife. You—you—my—" He stared at her: Was this the Vinaya he knew and loved for so long? Standing before him now was not that mere five-foot girl. Here was an embodiment of divinity. An omnipotent, all-pervading form of the Almighty. Her voice was reverberating in his heart as though a primeval sound from Eternity.

"If your artist eyes can see someone else's daughter-in-law or someone else's wife as a model, then Papaji, surely they can certainly see your own daughter-in-law, your own son's wife as a model?"

Atma Ram felt that as a whip-lash. He was unable to stay in his easy chair any more. He rose abruptly and looked at his daughter-in-law from behind the thin moist layers that covered his eyes. She seemed like a spectacular panorama in Nature seen through a veil of mist. He closed his eyes, as if to rend that veiling mist, and opened them again. The curtain before his eyes at last had melted. Vinaya was still there, looking at him silently, patiently. Words failed Atma Ram.

Vinaya had had an oil-bath, perhaps, that day. Her thick black hair cascaded like a waterfall. Her wide eyes beamed. Her smoothened cheeks were like mirrors reflecting the beauty which pregnancy brings to women. Vinaya looked like a jasmine bud, a white lotus about to open and blossom or like the maize pod covered with thin delicate membranes. Her lustrous green tinted garments enhanced her natural beauty. Oh, that's Vinaya, his own daughter-in-law, ... expectant mother ... an acme of beauty!

"Why don't you speak, Papaji?"

Vinaya's question roused him from his musings. He went up to her, patted her on her shoulder and looked into her eyes with great reverence.

"You are dragging me into some turbulent stream. Carried by it, I am plunging headlong along a great waterfall. At the same time,I do not know how, I feel I am flying into the clouds! It is taking my breath away... Atma Ram remained shaking his head helplessly.

Vinaya looked seriously into his eyes. "I will ask you one more question—please answer me honestly. Had Ratna, Kamesh's wife, agreed, wouldn't you have used her as your model?"

Atma Ram could not answer. Forlorn and exhausted he glanced at her. Her forceful gaze had imprisoned him. His conscience was bidding him to speak truthfully. Atma Ram rotated the tip of his tongue on his dried lips.

"... I would have ..."

A bright smile danced on her face.

"Then, Papaji, what is lacking in me which she has or, what is it that I have more in me which she doesn't, that makes you waver?"

Vinaya's question pierced into his heart like an arrow.

"Vinaya ... !"

She continued smiling. "Has the status of daughter-in-law elevated my position and reduced my qualifications?"

"Dear Vinaya ..."

"Papaji! Before you ask the wife or daughter-in-law of another person for accomplishing your mission, don't you think you are morally bound to ask your own in the first instance?"

"Please ... please. Dear ..."

"You will not look at me with the eyes of a father-in-law or of any other person. The artist in you shall look at me with the eye of the artist—that is all. Is it not so?"

Atma Ram had become dumb. Vinaya's questions and arguments were melting his heart like the rays of the sun melting the mists. Tears of joy flowed like a river down his cheeks. He wanted to express a thousand thoughts but they all stuffed and choked his throat instead and made him breathless. Atma Ram remained looking into her eyes meekly and helplessly.

Vinaya's searching regard held him.

"Please take up your brush. Let your sublime art bubble into life again in making my portrait ..."

Atma Ram's chest swelled with a belaboured breathing. He surveyed her with the sensitivity of an artist. His eyes were reverent. He was like the devotee who beholds the deity of his worship manifest in full form before his eyes. And his glowing eyes were offering the flame of worship to that deity.

"Papaji! Please do look at me as you would have looked at any other model. Please do not make any distinction, bestowing any superiority to me. This is all that I wish. Please do use me as a tool in the fulfilment of your aim."

"Vinaya, dear ..."

IV

"Vinayaah!"

Sensing a strange change in her husband's tone, Vinaya looked back stunned. Murari's face was red and swollen. The arteries were pushing to the surface. His eyes were bloodshot. His chest was heaving as though he had just come in from a marathon race.

"What's this nonsense?" he yelled.

His whole body was shivering with anger. Vinaya immediately understood what he was referring to. Yet, she kept a calm exterior.

"Yes?"

"Father-in-law and daughter-in-law, you have behaved like profligates and thrown my prestige to the streets! Have you both lost your damned heads?"

Vinaya had anticipated this confrontation.

"Please don't talk so loudly, Papaji will hear you," she said in a low voice.

"Having seen all, having done all this, what if he hears? I thought persons of culture and decency lived in this house. Damn it ... what nonsense ... Damn it ... " The volume of Murari's voice went on increasing. The veins in his throat bulged and appeared like well-woven nylon ropes.

Vinaya walked over to him and held his hand. Murari violently snatched his hand away. She looked at him entreatingly. "Please, please, listen patiently. I will tell you everything. After hearing everything ..."

"I have seen everything with my own eyes. There is nothing more to know. No woman in the state in which you are will dare behave like this—Not even a creature of the street."

Murari's eyes were flashing sparks at her. "Why, you, ... now you can remove off your clothes, bare your body and pose even for others—you could stand their stares happily. Can't you stand my words? ... You ... "

"But Papaji is not an outsider."

"What! A father-in-law is not an outsider? For a woman everyone is an outsider except her husband. The husband bonded by wedlock. But yes, *you* are not like other women. Isn't it? The stage of nude painting is over. What remains is getting your nude poses photographed and having them published in newspapers and magazines." Murari was full of anger and scorn.

Now Vinaya felt anger rising in her. "You are not talking sense."

"Yes! There is sense when a girl from a respectable family, daughter-in-law of an honoured house, in such an advanced stage of pregnancy,—yes, there is sense when such a woman stands as a model and gets an oil painting made of her nude body. There is no sense in my words uttered under the force of anxiety that my wife and I are becoming a laughing stock and will be looked down upon by society." Murari looked pointedly at her for a while, his eyes overflowing with contempt.

"Vinaya, I could never imagine that you could stoop so low. Daughters-in-law do not dare go before their fathers-in-law without covering themselves fully. They would die of shame."

"Papaji's looks are not like that ..." Vinaya interrupted him.

Murari laughed derisively.

"Ha! there is no doubt about it. Your Papaji's looks are special. Even the pin-head-sized mole on the inner part of your right thigh could not escape his scrutiny. Damn it. My own father and my own wife have betrayed me—ruined me. You—you—you people ..."

Vinaya looked coolly into his eyes. "You would not speak like this if only you knew the circumstances under which this had to happen."

Murari impatiently raised a hand. "Stop it," he roared. "Not even the most terrible circumstances can justify this. Never can such circumstances arise on earth where a housewife, a pregnant lady, should stand nude for days together before her father-in-law and encourage him for making an oil painting of her. To console oneself that such circumstances have arisen is only to indulge in self-deception. Both of you have committed an unpardonable sin. He—has become insane because of old age and ill-health. How about you? Why did you choose to hurt me like this? What wrong have I done to you? Why this punishment to me? Why?"

Murari clenched his fists as he shouted.

Tears trickled from Vinaya's eyes.

"Please! Give me an opportunity to explain. Papaji's life's ambition to paint a pregnant lady would have remained an unfulfilled desire—unfulfilled in this birth. That was his last wish ..."

Murari laughed sarcastically. "Thank God! I hope that gentleman's last wish was only that?"

Vinaya looked at him in astonishment. It was a cruel blow. Her face went red with anger and disgust.

"Please do not degrade yourself to such a level. One should have some sense of shame before talking like that. In your anger you are not able to see what is right, what is true..."

But this merely incensed Murari still more. "I saw, yes, I saw the truth. I saw the truth that is going to deliver a child in a day or two—a naked five feet tall truth—the full naked truth in a pose and posture which is concealed even from her husband, even in their bedroom. Shedding shame, morality, self-respect and honour like discarding dirty linen. Yes, I saw the full form of the naked truth with my own eyes. What remains is only

showing it to the world at large. Go—you and your Papaji, go round the world holding exhibitions. Show the live naked beauty of the daughter-in-law and the life-size oil-painting created by the father-in-law to match it—go, show it to all—go—go away—"

Murari's screams shook the walls of the house. Closing the door behind him with a bang, he stormed out of the house burning with intense fury. Vinaya stood for a while looking at the door. Then dragging her feet heavily, she struggled slowly to the dining table, and dropped into a chair, resting her head on the table. She was utterly exhausted. Warm tears flowed out of her eyes drawing lines of collyrium on her cheeks.

V

Vinaya slowly climbed upstairs, quietly entered Atma Ram's room and stopped short. Her eyes widened with surprise and anxiety. Atma Ram was standing before the painting. His hand held a wide brush and was mixing a thick black paint. It was trembling as if out of control.

"Stop it! Please—", shouted Vinaya instinctively. Atma Ram turned round with a sudden shock. His pale face glistened with sweat. The short silvery beard was shining. His red eyes were fluttering as though he was a boy caught doing something wrong.

Vinaya kept the tray on the teapoy and quickly walked over to him. She examined the painting anxiously. Even the large mirror in the bathroom never showed her beauty so acutely and so vividly. How lucky! She had come at the right time.

Vinaya turned towards Atma Ram. Her lips were tremulous.

"Vinaya! My creation of art has created deep cleavage of misunderstanding between you and your husband. It has raised high walls of anger and hatred. It has separated you from your husband for the last two weeks. It has proved a curse to your otherwise harmonious wedded life. I want to wipe it out ..."

"Papaji!"

"Yes, Vinaya! An artist's creation should do good to others. Universal good is the aim and motto of the artist. My brush has turned into an axe swooping down to cut away the indispensable ties between two living beings. That is unpardonable. This painting stands like a fence of thorns, like an iron-wall between my son and my daughter-in-law, my only children. I must wipe it out with these very hands which created it. It can't be helped. Please forgive me."

Vinaya looked at him pathetically.

"Papaji! Did you read Oscar Wilde's novel 'A Picture of Dorian Gray'?"

Atma Ram nodded mechanically. Vinaya continued calmly.

"In that novel, Dorian Gray stood before his own portrait which was blatantly revealing his old age and cruelty. He tore it into pieces with a big knife. The next morning he was found dead before that very painting with stabbings of knife. Did you get the author's perception, so wonderfully portrayed in that incident?"

Atma Ram nodded mechanically as though he was mesmerised.

Drops of black paint were oozing out of the brush in his hand. Vinaya looked at him with emotion.

"When you were drawing this picture I stood before you without any cloth on my body like a baby called by its parent for a bath. I dedicated my mind, my heart, my soul—every bit of myself to your worship of Art. I forsook my shyness, shame, fear, qualities which are considered forming a second layer under a woman's skin. I demolished the stone walls built by society in the name of civilisation. I eschewed all bogus traditions and inhibitions as a snake discards its skin—and I stood before you, Papaji, pure and free, as if I was newly born."

Vinaya's voice was getting uneven with sobs. Two drops of tears trickled down to her cheeks. Atma Ram was trembling.

"Vinaya ..."

"Papaji, if you wipe out this painting I fear I may also get wiped out like Dorian Gray," Vinaya looked at him with tearful eyes.

The brush in the hand of Atma Ram suddenly dropped to the ground. "Please don't talk like that," mumbled Atma Ram with a choked voice. He was unable to contain himself.

"Your son has grown in age, not in maturity. Those men who want their wives to be possessed and kept like flowers in the button-holes of their coats, who want their wives covered with hypocritical culture and tradition but do not hesitate to see other women naked or their pictures in naked poses, they cannot grow up to attain maturity in thought or in culture ..."

"Vinaya!"

"You may wipe out my picture from this canvas. You cannot wipe it out from the mind of your son—the copy of this painting tattooed on his brain—this naked picture, this naked form of mine which you saw and painted—you cannot wipe it out from his mind, Papaji ..."

Atma Ram kept staring at her as though he had lost his speech.

"Please think it over for yourself. Had you painted another woman, your son would have extolled you and your art to the skies. He would have himself undertaken to make an exhibition of that piece of art. Do you doubt it?" Vinaya questioned him with a smile on her lips.

Atma Ram was still staring. He was bewildered.

"What you have to wipe out is not this painting, Papaji. You have to wipe out the uncultured, immature, selfish, jealous and egoistic outlook."

Atma Ram looked at her admiringly. His face glowed. He burst out. "Vinaya! You are not an ordinary woman, you are the presiding deity ... My heart and my thirst for art bow to you ..."

"Kindly promise me, Papaji, that you will not wipe out this painting," entreated Vinaya.

Atma Ram wiped his eyes. He couldn't utter a word. He softly patted her on her shoulders.

VI

It was already 8 A.M. Vinaya had not yet brought the morning cup of coffee. Wondering, Atma Ram

thoughtfully walked to the kitchen. Vinaya was coming slowly, very slowly, with the cup. She stopped, leaning against the door-frame. She was gasping and looked worn out. She was moistening her dried-lips with her tongue, while sweat was spurting out on her face. Her hair was uncombed. Atma Ram rushed to her, took the cup from her and put it down on the nearest table.

"Aren't you well Vinaya?" he asked.

Vinaya's face showed her anguish and fear. Her lips were unsteady. Suddenly a spasm shook her and she had to hold her sides in pain.

"I am feeling very uneasy, Papaji," she muttered weakly.

Atma Ram escorted her slowly to the sofa. He recalled the time when his wife had her first labour pains. He went quickly to the telephone and called the doctor. He looked once again at Vinaya, then rushed to the room of his son. Murari was still in bed, facing the other side.

"Look here, Murari."

Murari turned. He saw his father with an untidy beard and red eyes, and sullenly sat up on his bed.

"Vinaya seems to be having labour pains—" began Atma Ram. But Murari did not speak. Frowning, he went past his father into the hall.

"Mister Murari, it appears the delivery will be difficult. She must be taken immediately to the hospital," said Doctor Sudheshna, who had come a few minutes earlier.

Murari looked as though he did not understand.

"Let us take her in my car. You hold her carefully in the back seat," said the doctor, leading Murari to Vinaya's room. Murari followed her silently.

VII

Vinaya was lying in bed. By her side was the infant wrapped in flannels looking at the sun's rays with wonder, widening his already wide eyes. Vinaya turned her head and found Murari looking at the boy from another cot along the wall.

"Can you please come here ..."

Murari got up slowly and went reluctantly to her bedside.

"Please look at me."

Murari looked at Vinaya. His eyes were not the same as before. Something was wanting in them.

Vinaya smiled, Murari did not smile. He kept on looking at her. Her face was pale. She had thinned and appeared more beautiful in her new form,—the form of motherhood.

"The boy completely resembles you, only the eyes are mine. Isn't it so?"

"Yes," murmured Murari.

Vinaya looked at him sympathetically. He seemed to have lost the faculty of speech.

"I thought you would forget the past after the birth of your son."

Murari kept staring at her. Suddenly his eyes hardened. "Not after the boy's birth ... I cannot forget so long as I am alive."

Vinaya sighed. Of late, if she wanted to hear the voice of her husband, she was forced to bring up the subject of the oil-painting. Otherwise he would not speak at all.

"However much I tried, you did not allow me a chance to explain to you fully. Papaji is suffering from terminal cancer. There is no prospect of his living long. His last wish ..."

Murari cut in roughly, "I fully knew about his cancer. You need not tell me now. The doctor had told me long back. But, but that doesn't justify *your* action. The heinous crime which *both of you* together committed."

"And knowing everything, you ..."

"The person who knows beforehand that he is going to die, gets crazy ideas. Your father-in-law had lost his sanity. But what about you? I am unable to understand your acquiescence. You have deceived me outright," Murari accused.

"I never deceived you!" Vinaya became emotional.

"Vinaya!" Murari thundered.

"I stood naked not before my father-in-law, it was before a worshipper of Art. The eyes that surveyed me were not of some uncouth man. They were the eyes of an artist."

Murari was cynical.

"Worshipper of Art? Ha! He is also a man. He has fulfilled his filthy desires that way. You have not read Freud...

But Vinaya, who had sat up in exasperation throttled his impending diatribe.

"It is not necessary to read books on psychology when the man who talks is right before you. It is enough to read the men and their minds. It is only women who can read the real meaning of the looks of men. When you came with your father to see me before settling our wedding proposal, his eyes were full of adoration, full of respect, for the beauty of his would-be daughter-in-law. But in your eyes, your desire, your thirst for physical pleasure and comfort through me was clearly showing. Though I was physically present before you, your looks were trying to pierce through my dress to see the beauty hidden by the clothes. That day you raped me with your eyes! Every time you came to me, every time you saw me, it was only your selfish sexual desire that was evident in your eyes. Nothing else. In the eyes of your father I could see only parental affection and appreciation. Never anything else," Vinaya exploded.

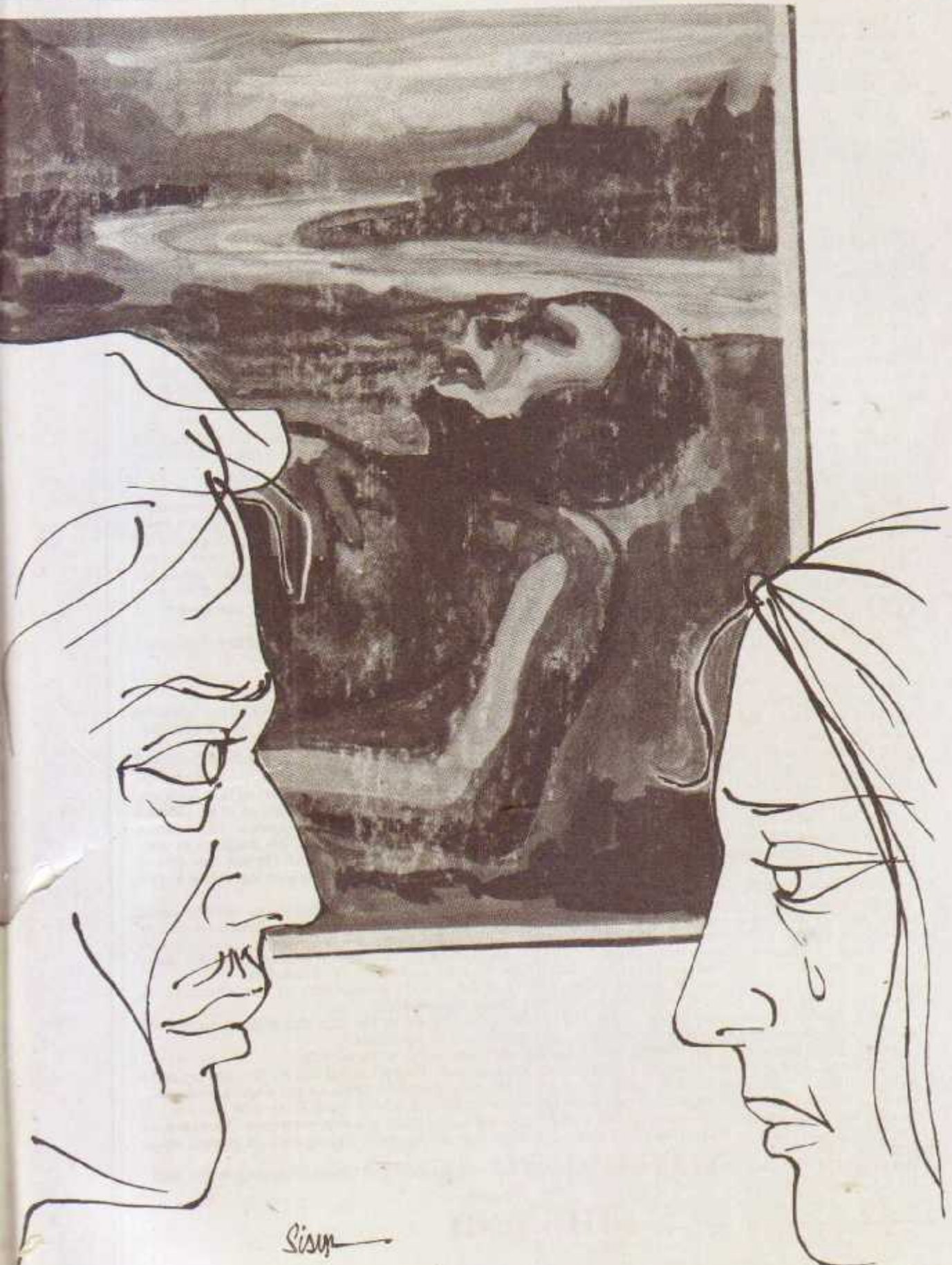
Murari was stunned.

"When the delivery became difficult, some male doctors saw the naked body of your wife for hours together, they examined her whole body, her vital organs," Vinaya went on.

"That is different, those circumstances are different."

Vinaya laughed sarcastically, "Oh! If the circumstances are different, if there is danger to your wife's life—then other men can see your wife's naked body, is it so?"

"You are a patient. They are doctors. Their attention at that time was on—," Murari stopped and gaped at Vinaya.


Sisya

Vinaya smiled. "That's exactly what I am saying. If the view is different, the ideas also are different. Papaji's ambition was to paint a pregnant lady before he died—his last desire, to give a shape to this ambition—for years he was frantically searching for such a pregnant lady who would pose as a model. I came to know about it and encouraged him to use me. I told him it was his duty to ask his own son's wife before asking someone else's wife. He flatly refused. He knows you more than I do ...."

"Vinaya ..."

"Finally he agreed with me and took up his brush. I stood before him without any fear or doubt, as I stand before a mirror without any sort of feeling. The power that gave me the courage to stand so was not my quality of sacrifice; it was his way of seeing; it was just so that I was lying nude before the eyes of four doctors without any feeling, without any shame—like a baby. Every time you gazed at me, I felt bashful, due to the desire that is reflected in your eyes, your selfish desire showing like a fire!"

"Vinaya!" Murari was shocked

"In the 'Candid Photography' books which you have carefully preserved, you see nude pictures in colour! Don't you know that those nude beauties are the wives or daughters or sisters or sisters-in-law of some other men?"

"Vinaya ... please."

"Come, come. Can you deny all this?"

Murari was deflated, shocked into seeing other views than his own, he began to understand his wife.

"Would you have behaved like this with your father if he had painted a pregnant lady who happens to be the wife of someone else?"

Murari sat down suddenly by her side and affectionately put his hand on her shoulder. It was the first time in a month that he sat by her side. The conflict he was experiencing in his mind was profoundly apparent in his face.

Vinaya looked at him with a smile. Her eyes were beaming cheerfully.

"I can change my clothes even when this child in my bed is looking at me. The thought that two eyes are witnessing my nudity never comes to me. I stood before Papaji as a model with the same frame of mind, with the same free heart."

Murari's hand delicately closed her mouth.

"Don't tell me any more, Vinaya! If I still do not understand you and Father, I will be unfit to live amongst you. The first thing that caught my eye the moment I entered the house was that painting and I became mad. Many, many evil thoughts passed through my mind. I became insane. I could not understand the depths of the human mind as Papa could. I could not climb to those heights. I hurt you terribly with words that were red-hot arrows and father with my stony silence. Forgive me, Vinaya! please!" He removed the hand which closed her mouth, pulled her near him as if looking for some consolation. Warm tears from his eyes bathed her face.

Vinaya looked at her husband through tears of joy. She wiped the tears from his eyes, sat up and gave him a cheerful smile. "Please offer your apologies to Papaji—not to me. Come on let us go—"

She stood up, took the child in her arms and led Murari to the staircase, his arm encircling her shoulders.

VIII

"Papa, forgive me Papa. I could not see that line of demarcation between morality and obscenity..." Murari spoke in a low voice. His father was resting on his bed. Atma Ram couldn't believe what was happening. Vinaya and Murari were standing beside him with happy smiles on their faces.

"Did Vinaya show the divine light to you also, my son, as she showed it to me?"he whispered.Brightness had come into his eyes like the flame in an oil-lamp when the wick is pushed up. Vinaya laid the tiny baby on the bed by his side. He caressed the baby's head, and softly kissed its tiny palms. With much effort he slowly sat up. Then, with a cheerful face, but painfully he walked with them, his hands resting on the shoulders of his son and daughter-in-law who supported him on either side. His face was radiant with supreme happiness. His creation of art, his courage, his last wish had not, after all, created any gulf between his son and his daughter-in-law.

Murari removed the screen covering the painting. His eyes widened with astonishment. He was now able to perceive the beauty in the painting which had so long eluded his sight. Vinaya's face was glowing, Atma Ram's filled with infinite satisfaction. He watched Murari with pride.

"Murari, with the purity of her vision, Vinaya has removed the curtain of unnatural behaviour which covered even the artist in me. The greatness about this picture is all hers and hers only ..." said Atma Ram fervently, as he turned to Vinaya with immense gratitude in his eyes. He was trembling, his heart leaping with joy and affection and overflowing like a river after stormy rains. Supporting his father with a hand under his arms. Murari started leading him back towards his bed. There was no movement in Atma Ram.

They carried him carefully to his bed and made him lie down. Vinaya peered into his face anxiously. A perfect peace which she had not seen before adorned Atma Ram's face.

Alarmed, Murari bent over his father's body and put his ears to his chest. He then straightened up and felt his pulse. Vinaya was fondly caressing his hair. Murari looked at her meekly.

"Vinaya, Papa has gone," he blurted and, kneeling over his body, wept silently.

Vinaya touched his back. He stood up and turned to Vinaya, tears obstructing his vision. She was trying to control her tears, by pressing her lips under the teeth —but they streamed down on her cheeks unabated.

They stood side by side and looked now at the newly arrived child and now at Atma Ram, who had just left the world. Both, grandson and grandfather, were sleeping—but one of them was asleep for ever. There would be no waking up for Atma Ram. Calm and peace filled the face of the child. Tranquillity of eternal peace reigned on Atma Ram's face.

The eyes of Murari and Vinaya instinctively fell on the pictures 'Sunrise' and 'Sunset' hanging on the wall.

THE END

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Because

Mrs. Rao was running late that morning. It was almost time for the dabbawala and the rice still had to be cooked.

She placed the cooker by the stove and turned on the burner knob. But the matchbox wasn't in its place. She searched all over for it. Then in exasperation opened a new box.

In her hurry she forgot about the open burner. She didn't smell the gas either. Just lit the match...

Mrs. Rao got away without any major injuries. But you might not be as lucky...

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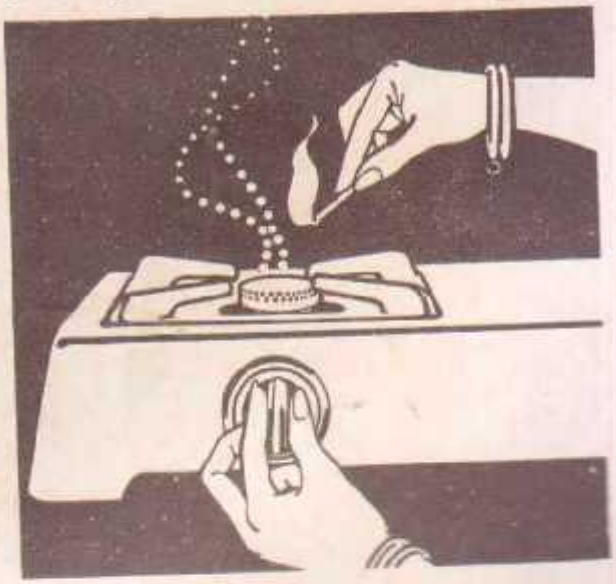

Always light the matchstick and then open burner knobs

And follow Indane's two minute system for LPG safety:

The first minute in the morning—as soon as you enter the kitchen, check if you smell gas. If you do, follow the precautions given below. If you don't, then you can turn on the regulator knob. As you do so, check that the rubber tube is in good condition, without any cracks. And light a matchstick before you open the burner knobs.

The last minute at night—before you switch off the kitchen light, turn off the regulator knob and check that the burner knobs are fully closed.

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