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On Other Pages

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

COMMENT	2
<i>View from Delhi</i>	
RE-ENTER UNCLE SAM FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT	4
ASSAM: BEHIND THE TROUBLE	
AFTAB	5
NELL-DARPAN: A LIBERAL'S VIEW OF A PEASANT REVOLT—II	
RANAJIT GUHA	7
<i>Book Review</i>	
THE WASTE LAND	
ASOK MITRA	11
TWO PLAYS	
HITEN GHOSE	13
MUSIC OF THE MASSES	
BY A MUSIC CRITIC	14
A STATEMENT	15
LETTERS	16

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ON Saturday afternoon the West Bengal Cabinet descended on Chowringhee, the Chief Minister clambered on to the top of a police van, waited for half-an-hour for a hand-mike and then addressed a large crowd of Congress students. Mr Subrata Mukherjee, the great guy of the Chhatra Parishad and Minister in the Department of Home, swore stern action against the police and went on to blame Mr Jyoti Basu, the former Home Minister in the second United Front Government, for installing his men in the police force—men who were now trying to create a split between the government and the public. (Couldn't it be that some Congress faction opposed to Mr Mookherjee is up to some trick?)

The policeman involved has been suspended, but the Chhatra Parishad called a strike in schools and colleges—the second in six days—on Monday.

The occasion for all this was: As the Chhatra Parishad was going on some sort of a deputation to Raj Bhaban, some of them discovered a CPM man—or an anti-social—suspected of being involved in murder cases (according to one report, the police later said there were no charges against him) in the rear, pounced on him and, according to one version, did not allow a police van to pick him up, while according to another, a traffic policeman was asked to arrest him. When he refused to do so because it was not his business he was surrounded by a crowd. Going into a huff or being scared, he began to shoot—haven't we marvellous people to keep law and order? Five people were injured, one of them seriously. This naturally led to a great commotion, necessitating the presence of the Cabinet. Did Mr Ray, atop the police van, think of Lenin and Finland Station?

The fact that some people were wounded, and that one of them might die, is, of course, tragic. But the concern of the Cabinet has an element of melodrama if one remembers that members of the Ministry, as Congressmen, and the forces they control in the administration and outside have many killings to their credit. Their concern is always selective. They rush to places when their men are involved while they are noted for their brutal action or indifference when others are concerned. A government that arrests 175 people assembling for a public meeting, whose forces maim and kill prisoners, whose 'political' wing holds entire areas in terror, not allowing political opponents to return to their homes,

can live by lies and melodrama. And ever since the Ministry came to power after a strange election we have been fed on lies and melodrama. But since Bengal was once famous for 'Jatra', her people still seem to have an infinite capacity to be taken in by melodrama, particularly the puja-addict middle and lower middle classes. One such melodrama is the sight of ministers collecting 'people's donations' for the coming Congress session in the Salt Lake. It is rubbing salt in festering wounds. The Government and industrialists

should bear all the expenses. The clause barring company contributions to political parties is overcome by the practice of taking Rs 10,000 or more by way of advertising by companies in Congress souvenirs. The Rules and Instructions for the Protection of the Prime Minister when on tour and in travel were amended back in 1969 to include the costs incurred even at her election meetings. Why should the public be induced or forced to pay for Congress sessions? Enough is enough.

ed as a CPM supporter. They beat him, the usual thing, and allegedly wanted the police to arrest him, another usual thing, without any prima facie case. Unfortunately the policeman happened to be a traffic policeman, who did not know how to arrest. That was a mortal offence.

Every non-Congressman, now in West Bengal, knows what it is not to listen to the orders of the Congress minions. The orders of the Congressites, let us not make a fine issue on the distinction between Chhatra Parishad and Congress, reign supreme—in schools, cinemas, bazaars, roads. Perhaps a slight mistake by a policeman—fortunately there are not many of this sort—made the thing a little blown up and dramatic. It called for a little weeping, a little blood, a little offer to resign from the minister's post, a little denial to accept the offer, a little reprimand for the erring police—not much in the city which has seen killings at the hands of the police not by dozens but by hundreds, not only in open daylight but also in darkness, when bodies disappeared, when young boys were lined up against the wall and shot. There is one difference: the newsmen expatiated on this one—looking the other way when gory things were done to this city earlier and are done even now.

On The Same Theme

A correspondent writes:

Thank God, it was a man from the CPM and not CIA who tried single-handed and unarmed to sabotage the large procession of Congress students in Calcutta on Saturday last. Were it an agent from the CIA, which a Kuwait daily quoting reliable Indian sources tells us, attempted four times to kill Mrs Gandhi in two years, it would have been more difficult for Mr S. S. Ray to assuage the wrath of the processionists. In that case he would have been hard put to lay the blame on the CIA straightaway—without compromising Indo-American relations and jeopardising American assistance! The Americans, let us recall, returned last week to India a cheque of 29 million dollars by way of debt relief, even without informing either the India Government or the Aid-India Consortium. It was a silent gesture from the silent majority in the U.S., after the coronation of Mr Nixon.

Mr Ray had however to tackle the lone CPM crusader among the crowd in Esplanade East. He must have sensed that the CPM dies hard. It was not enough to drive the CPM men out from poll booths, from their homes and localities, chase them out of trade unions and college unions. It seems that the CPM has not had it enough, some more hell has to be served.

However, let Mr Ray not forget that he was a barrister before he became a Chief Minister and it is highly unlikely that he will continue to be the Chief Minister for the rest of his life. For one thing he is too young and for another all is not wholly well among the Congress ranks in West Bengal nor among the leaders. In case he has to go back to his old profession, he should not throw his senses overboard and lose track of the loose ends of his story he made up last Saturday.

Why should, let Mr Ray ponder, a CPM man try to infiltrate the Congress procession? What could he have done in that procession?

Why should a traffic policeman, even if he is a CPM policeman (!), try to fire on Congress students? Did he have the slightest hope that he would not be lynched by the crowd if he fired on a Congressman?

How was it that two of the five injured were general secretary and president of student unions? Are we to believe that every two of the five, in that procession, were high officials of student unions? Statistically it is impossible that two of them should become victims of firing, assuming that the traffic policeman blindly shot at the crowd.

What happened is not very unclear. The processionists found a young man on the road whom they suspect-

Only Thunder

It is not always clear who actually advises whom at those august advisory council meetings, one or the other of which seems to be held in New Delhi all the time. When they are not just a plain "nimbo pani" affair, as most of them are, they tend to become a free for all, providing an opportunity for participants to steam off. From this point of view, the recent meeting of the Central Advisory Council of Industries has been eminently successful. There was a lot of thunder but little light. And neither the Government nor industry—not to speak of the public—

can now claim that its idea about industrial policy or the state of the economy is any clearer than before. There was more accusing than advising, with industry and Government blaming each other for the sorry plight of the country's economy. The Industrial Development Minister, Mr Subramaniam, who not so long ago had been all for changing the 1956 commandment, appears to be a much sobered man since his unsuccessful encounter with the party's left at the Ahmedabad congress. But the intensity of feelings exhibited by some private sector wallahs at the meeting might actually give him the ace he has been looking for to clinch the deal. Whether he would dare do so is not known, particularly in view of the risk involved, but that a rethinking of the policy frame is overdue cannot be seriously doubted any more.

Mr Subramaniam had to concede that the economic outlook is not entirely hopeful, though rather meekly he tried to suggest that the current year has been better than the last, and that the coming one will be better still. Industrial production during the first half of 1972 has run 7.5 per cent higher than last year. The problems of power, transport and raw materials are being attended to, and the decks, he tried to give the impression, are being cleared for accelerated industrial growth. But the industrial scene still does not present an inspiring picture. While only a few industries, notably textile, have been doing well, most others are still just carrying on with little visible enthusiasm for growth. The slow-down in investment has become the single most important factor for the lacklustre state of affairs. And

with prices showing no inclination to come down, the situation becomes still more disturbing. If the trend continues, a further cutback in investment is bound to follow. To this rather dismal picture, a new element has now been added. Import of foodgrains as proposed by New Delhi is bound to deplete further the limit-

ed foreign exchange reserves now at the disposal of the Government. This is bound to lead to a further tightening of imports of essential raw materials which cannot but retard industrial activity. The only way out seems to be to seek larger foreign assistance which, willy-nilly will require a shift in foreign relations.

A Russian Obsession

European security has been a Russian obsession since Molotov floated the idea of a security pact covering the Continent in 1954. In recent years the Kremlin bosses have been seen scurrying the European capitals to sell the idea of a conference on security and co-operation. They are so particular about such an assembly that they waived their initial resistance to the participation of countries which do not belong to the region. It has never been in doubt that the Soviet Union's keenness to sanctify the status quo in Europe and thereby lessen military vigilance in an area where in any case the dangers of war are very much reduced is to further intensify the pressure on China. The fear of Russia, it is claimed in many circles, has been pushing China to normalise relations with the European countries. M. Maurice Schumann, Herr Walter Scheel and Sir Alec Douglas-Home have all returned happy from their visits to China, obviously to the discomfort of Russia. In all cases, visits by Western Foreign Ministers have opened many new possibilities of trade; but it has not yet been possible to estimate what China has to offer and what she is to buy from others. The range of industrial and consumer products that China is already supplying the world has, however, impressed many and unnerved some. To return to the palaver in Helsinki, the Rumanian proposal that all the participants, irrespective of their belonging to different military pacts, should be treated as equal and independent sovereign nations

has created a crisis. This was, however, not unexpected. For Bucharest has left nobody in doubt that the Russians are breathing too heavily down its neck. Perhaps it feels that it will be able to secure some help by creating a flutter at the Helsinki conference. The Warsaw Pact member countries will be happy if there is a restatement of guarantees on territorial integrity and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries; the restatement may be unavoidable because the two Germans are not yet seated in the United Nations. But what such a restatement is worth is anybody's guess. Strategic arms talks as well as the issue of lowering the level of troops in central Europe will remain beyond the scope of the security conference. The two issues will be the exclusive concern of the USA and the Soviet Union. The *raison d'être* of the conference is whether Europe can be insulated from war threats because of conflicts in other areas. We will have to watch out in Asia.

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Re-Enter Uncle Sam

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

NOW is the time to forget the "green euphoria" and let Mrs From A Political Correspondent Indira Gandhi's face launch a thousand food ships from the coasts of the United States. A warm message of greetings to Mr Nixon was followed by a warmer message from him to the Prime Minister on her birthday and Mr Swaran Singh's pathetic yearning for normal Indo-United States relations and Mr William Rogers responded to it. All that remains is the unrolling of the red carpet for the new United States Ambassador to New Delhi to be named shortly.

Going by official pronouncements in public and briefings in private, the food crisis is on and off. It looks as though the deficit was conjured up on paper by a Central Minister and a top official to provide an alibi for seeking normalisation of relations with the United States. Or it could just be that the official concerned had a more personal motive. By making it look that imports were inevitable he might have eminently qualified for a six-month extension of his tenure because he had proved himself to be the wizard in negotiating food grain imports.

The Chief Ministers know that imports would be arranged and therefore see no need for a tough procurement policy which might alienate the kulaks. The Centre thinks it is extra-smart, being vague about the quantum of imports and the foreign exchange to be earmarked for it.

The ready Washington response to Mr Swaran Singh's gesture suggests a well-worked out time-table for normalisation of relations between India and the United States. How does one explain, for instance, the fact that no Congress member participated in Friday's discussion on

foreign intelligence agencies, in the Rajya Sabha? Was there a party whip against Congressmen attacking the CIA or the KGB? And it is well known that while the CPI members did all the shouting about Mr Piloo Mody's "I am a CIA Agent" badge, the Congress sections were silent because of a diktat from a certain quarter. Even Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, the redoubtable CIA fighter, looks a little sheepish at his evening durbars for the benefit of the Press. The Prime Minister's decision to soft-pedal the anti-CIA campaign is not the result of a sudden realisation that the campaign had lost its credibility. It stood in the way of normalisation of India-United States relations.

* *

The victory in Cuttack and the award Mrs Gandhi handed on the Mukli Rules have not solved the political crisis in Orissa or Andhra Pradesh. Nor is she able to get her team in New Delhi to do some serious work. The CPI lobby is gunning for Mr Mohan Kumaramangalam, Mr C. Subramaniam and Mr D. P. Dhar at the same time. Mr A. N. Haksar is the man to cultivate. His is the name to drop in the cocktail circuit. Inspired stories of Mr Haksar's determination to retire are followed by carefully planted stories of friends persuading him to seek election to the Lok Sabha from Nagpur where he is originally claimed to come from. All Kashmiris cannot be accommodated in the Central Cabinet as Kashmir's representatives. Mr Haksar can well be fobbed off on Maharashtra if this minor detail is worrying Mrs Gandhi. The entire Dhar lobby of yore has switched allegiance to Mr Haksar after the Simla agreement. Mr Kumaramangalam is supposed to have stopped short of resignation, in his disenchantment with his Ministerial position but he has been relentlessly sputniking Madras tendering gratuitous constitutional advice on toppling the DMK Ministry there. The Prime

Minister might profess a desire for strict constitutional propriety and might have even assured the DMK leadership that she has no intention of intervening in the State. But as a DMK leader has gone on record, some of the Central Ministers seem to have strange ideas and with Talleyrand think non-intervention is just a longer word for intervention.

As Mrs Gandhi waits for stringless food aid from the United States, the economy is getting messier and messier amidst inter-ministerial sniping. One section of the Moscow lobby thinks Mr C. Subramaniam has a weakness for the Tatas while the other thinks he is anti-Tata. Someone is a Tata-man up there and the joint sector is yet to be defined for the edification of the inquisitive common man. Big business is gladly owning up the government and the slick young entrepreneurs who felt a little leftist and left out sponsor seminars on closer Indo-East European co-operation because they know which side the public sector bread is buttered these days. Short of joining the COMECON India will have to fit its plans into the COMECON matrix. Some integration indeed. No Central Minister has had the courage to say this openly and everyone of them has stopped short of proclaiming what they really want. Mrs Gandhi has been invited to Moscow for the 55th anniversary of the founding of the USSR but if she goes it has to be a hurried visit because she has to be back for Mr Siddhartha Sankar Ray's spectacle of a Congress plenary session at the Salt Lake in Calcutta. Overtures to the United States have to be balanced with goodwill visits to Moscow. In 1966, devaluation followed Mrs Gandhi's visit to Washington but then devaluation was followed by her hurried visit to Moscow. United States-Soviet relations are indeed more cordial now than they were in 1966. Nevertheless balancing acts have their own use, given the lobby alignments in her own party.

December 3, 1972

DECEMBER 9, 1972

Assam : Behind The Trouble

AFTAB

“অসমত শিক্ষাৰ মাধ্যম অসমীয়া হ'ব লাগে”

66 IN Assam, Assamese should be the medium of instruction.” This sentence, sounding almost plaintive, has been of late occurring more or less as a refrain in almost all the regional bulletins broadcast over the Gauhati station of AIR, as the news reader briefly reports on the ‘resolutions’ taken in various small towns and villages in the Brahmaputra valley, about the ‘Medium’. One recalls the words spoken by Jawaharlal in 1960 when he visited Assam in the wake of the ‘language riots’ then. In a public speech at Gauhati, he rhetorically asked: “Where else but in Assam can Assamese be the official language?” And after a pause, as he continued derisively, “In Bombay?”, there was thunderous applause. A dozen years later, the issue is once again with us. But with a difference, though, which is only apparent. In 1960, the issue was the recognition of Assamese as the official language of the State; the battle-lines were drawn between the Bengalis and the Assamese (with the Khasis on the sidelines cheering the Bengalis) and the result was at best a draw. Now, the issue is the ‘medium of instruction’, and going by the decision of the Supreme Court, it seems to have been decided in favour of Assamese. Yet, even after the Supreme Court decision, after the Chief Minister’s conceding the major demands of the students, and after the ‘suspension’ of the movement by the students themselves, tension still lingers; the recent flare-up of trouble in Dhubri and Dibrugarh only symbolises vividly the fact that things have not entirely cooled in the whole of the Brahmaputra valley; that the ‘medium’ issue is, as it were, only the tip of the iceberg, the symptom of a problem that has deeper roots. These ‘deeper roots’ of course do not

refer to the well-known historic antagonisms that exist between the Assamese and the Bengalis in Assam; rather, these refer to the sustained efforts at obstructing the assertion of a clear-cut, homogeneous, cultural and national identity on the part of the various small and weak nationalities of this region, by the ruling elite in Delhi.

Much horror has been expressed outside as well as within Assam about the events of the past few weeks. Even according to Government’s own admission (in Parliament on November 14, 1972), thirty-one people were killed during this period, including three who died as a result of police firing, though the highlighting of these casualties in the newspapers has been ‘selective’. One cannot help noticing an element of hypocrisy in the highly selective horror and condemnation that has followed the events of the past few weeks. Deploable as these events have been, they have to be seen in the context of a general predilection towards meaningless, non-political violence that has been a characteristic feature of the Indian situation; and in comparison with the very high standards set by communal fanatics, the linguistic violence in Assam, arson and murder included, falls far short of the optimum reached periodically in the heartland of Bharat. But let that pass.

There have been two issues in the present agitation, though for all appearances, the less important issue—that of the choice of the medium of instruction—was more visible. A little bit of reflection should make it clear as to how unreal the medium issue is, how it has been essentially a ‘bogus’ issue. Not that a very large number of common people were not passionately and even violently involved in the issue. But the very fact that the question of choice of the

regional languages as medium of instruction has been made to appear as the most important issue before the people is an indication of the extraordinary political sophistication of the ruling classes. Evoke regional nationalism at every level, set one group of people against the other, make them engage in fratricidal conflict, erect walls between them; and all these are done, using the most progressive and even revolutionary slogans! Whoever can question the necessity to develop and enrich the various languages of India? But the method chosen to ‘enrich and develop’ the regional languages has been one of extreme cynicism. The ‘elite’ in every region (the ‘intellectuals’, the college and university teachers, editors and men of letters etc.) is made an active party to the programme, is actively involved in the production of text-books, the financial rewards for the ‘writing’ of which are far beyond the dreams of avarice. Thus, this ‘elite’ is made to develop real financial stakes in this problem, and then it can be trusted to keep the issue alive. Clearly, the politicians who have formally legislated the switch-over to the regional languages as the medium of instruction, the intellectuals who are actively producing the textbooks needed, the leaders of other political parties all of whom support such a switch-over, the educationists and Chairmen of Important Committees, in other words, the whole political, intellectual, financial and bureaucratic elite of the country, who despite different party affiliations and seemingly contradictory class commitments, are all united on one thing: that instruction for the coming generation of students must be in the regional language. There might be (and there have been) differences in the method of implementation, in the working out of details; there have been even conflicts between contending regional nationalisms, as the recent one between Bengali and Assamese; but be they Bengalis or Marathis or Hindusthanis or Kannadigas, they are

all agreed that instruction should be in the regional language.

The Indian Elite

But the new rules are for Other People. The Indian elite which is actively engaged in implementing the new system is itself a product of 'English education'; but it is not really anglicised, not even in a bogus way like the old ICS crowd. The kind of anglicisation and sophistication of the present elite can be gauged by a browsing of the newspapers and periodicals which form the reading material of this group, from *Femina* and *Junior Statesman* to *Blitz* and *Current*. But the despicable cultural standards of this elite are more than compensated by its cunning. The encouragement of regional nationalism is only one of the many ways in which this elite hopes to perpetuate its dominant position in the Indian situation. The English medium schools are there, dotted all over the country, schools to which only the most privileged can send their children; and for the sake of those students passing out of these schools, there have to be colleges as well, with English as the medium of instruction. (Already, there has been a proposal by the UGC to start Central colleges in English medium in every State). It will be students from these schools and colleges, admission to which will be automatically closed to the vast majority of our people who will study through the medium of the mother tongue (who themselves form a very small part of the vast masses of our people) that will continue to rule the country. The Sons will inherit from the Fathers; this dynastic principle of course is even now present, but there is just the outside chance of an 'outsider' breaking into the narrow circle. But this possibility will from now onwards disappear.

Clearly, the 'medium issue', the rousing of linguistic nationalism in every State of the Union, is a most sophisticated device of the ruling classes to ensure the perpetuation of

an elitist principle of education, to completely formalise, in the name of modernity and progressivism, the principles of heredity and caste. The sophistication lies in the linking of the issue of the medium of instruction with the question of the cultural and linguistic identity of the various nationalities of this country. The device worked exceedingly well in Assam, because of some historical factors peculiar to this region. But the crooked techniques of the ruling classes do not in any way weaken the genuineness of the second of the problems that was highlighted during the recent agitation—the problem of the national identity of the Assamese-speaking people. At this point, it is almost obligatory to cite Lenin and Stalin; but even without beginning with the First Principles, one can see that the 'Assamese', just like any other nationality of the country, do constitute a broadly recognizable linguistic, cultural, national group; they are recognizably different from their neighbours, and any extended stay in rural Assam will for once and for all give lie to the belief, still popularly held though seldom publicly expressed, that the people of this region, and their language and culture are only a 'degenerate' expression of the Bengali ethos. The fact is that for a long time, the core of Assam was artificially enlarged by the addition of various territories to it on its peripheries, these various territories themselves being acquired to further the 'imperial destiny' of the Empire. The British had their own security and defence problems in mind when they 'enlarged' the territory of Assam, and kept the other, even smaller and weaker nationalities of the region, forcibly within a Greater Assam. Our present rulers have of course not merely inherited the burden of British India, but also the generally paternalistic and suspicious attitude of the old masters towards the less-developed nationalities of the border regions. Thus, while they enthusiastically set about 'reorganizing' the rest of the country on a linguistic

basis, such a reorganization was not merely not undertaken in the North Eastern region, but the SRC even recommended a single political and administrative set-up for the whole region. And it was only the emerging national consciousness of the various weaker nationalities of the region that forced the issue in the 1960's. The aspirations of the people of this region cannot be thwarted merely on considerations of 'security and defence', considerations which are any way part of the imperialist legacy; the voice of the Nagas, the Khasis, the Mizos, the Assamese etc cannot be suppressed merely to allow Mrs Gandhi to sleep in peace.

Is Assam 'unilingual', or 'multilingual'? The answer to the question should have been simple. The situation in Assam cannot, in any way be considered 'unique'; rather, the only uniqueness that Assam has is that it is a 'border' State, a kind of 'distinction' that can hardly be allowed to be used to suppress the cultural aspirations of a people. Over the years, much political writing has been done emphasising this 'uniqueness', or in more fanciful instances, the 'quaintness' or the 'picturesqueness' of this region and its people. (The stereotypes of Assam in the rest of India are paralleled by the stereotypes of the other weaker nationalities of this region that exist in the popular imagination of the Assamese.) Thus, Assam, we are told, is a *miniature India*; it is a *melting pot*; it is a *patchwork quilt* of a variety of cultures, civilizations, manners, speech etc.; it is *the Eastern Sentinel*, a land of undulating Hills and Valleys, with the Mighty Brahmaputra the waters of which do not *flow*, but *ROLL*. The clichés, too, roll, but the reality is far more prosaic. Assam, historically, has always been a narrow strip of land on either side of the Brahmaputra, as it flows from Sadiya in the Northeast to Dhubri in the West. Of course, the Assamese ruling classes too have had a vested interest in clinging to the territories that had

been joined to Assam by the British, and one still comes across expressions of wistful regret, barely concealing the rapacity beneath, at the 'loss' Assam has suffered over the years due to the machinations of New Delhi, Tribal leaders, Verrier Elwin &c. The Assamese elite too viewed

their situation with the eyes of the ruling classes in Delhi. One can only hope that the coming generations in this region will turn their eyes more inward, and derive the inspiration for future developments not from the corrupt and tottering

elite of Delhi, but from the regions of revolutionary fervour lying to the north and the east of the region. Only that way can the full potentialities of the people of the region be realized, instead of being wasted in fratricidal conflicts.

Neel-Darpan : A Liberal's View Of A Peasant Revolt—II

RANAJIT GUHA

IN a foreword (left out of Madhusudan's translation) Dina-bandhu defines what he wants his play to achieve. This is to influence the indigo planters to turn away from 'self-interest' to 'philanthropy' so that Britain's face may be saved, for their cruel ways 'have given the British a bad name'. He condemns their greed, rapacity and hypocrisy, but notes hopefully 'the signs of a new dawn of ryots' happiness'. These are described as follows:

'The great Queen Victoria, compassionate mother of the *prajas*, considers it improper that her children should be suckled by her wet-nurses. So she has taken them up in her arms and is feeding them at her own breast. The even-tempered, wise, courageous and liberal Mr Canning has become the Governor-General. The high-minded and just Mr Grant who punishes the wicked, protects the innocent, and shares with the ryots their weal and woe, has been appointed Lieutenant-Governor. And, truthful, astute, non-partisan officials like Eden, Herschel and others are gradually coming to blossom as lotuses in the lake of the civil service. It must, therefore, be clearly evident from all this that we have an indication now of the great souls mentioned above taking up soon the *Sudarsan* disc of justice in order to end the unbearable misery of the ryots who have fallen into the clutches of the wicked indigo planters' (8: 1).

This declaration of faith in the

ultimate triumph of British justice is based on the illusion that the law is fair in absolute terms and all one needs is the fairy godfather of an impartial bureaucracy to make it available for all. It is a measure of this illusion that the Basu brothers in *Neel-darpan* remain unshaken in their faith in the Lieutenant-Governor and the Commissioner despite the altogether unwarranted imprisonment of their ageing father. When someone suggests that the magistrate who sent old Golok Basu to jail is no more wicked than the Commissioner, Bindumadhab flares up. 'Sir,' he says, 'you know not the Commissioner; and therefore, you spoke thus of him. The Commissioner is very impartial, and is always desirous of the improvement of the natives'. He and his brother both believe that the Governor is just on the point of quashing the sentence so that their father can be set free (Act IV, Sc. 2). The curtain goes up on the next scene to reveal Golok Basu's corpse hanging in his cell.

Illusions

In real life, too, we find some of the most radical of the contemporary liberals falling prey to the same sort of illusion. Even Harish Mukherjee appears to have been enthusiastic about the civil servants as late as February 1860 when the stage was already set for the first round of jacqueries (7: 149). Sisirkumar Ghose's despatches to the *Hindoo Patriot* document this illusion in detail. In mid-August, 1860, he

writes bitterly about the 'partiality' of M.G. Taylor, a magistrate recently posted in Magura. In another despatch next week he talks about Mr Taylor having 'considerably changed' for the better. His letter of 19 December 1860 is a long catalogue of Taylor's misdeeds and it concludes with the hope that 'the Lieutenant-Governor, highly spoken of here', might be less unheeding to the cries... of the indigo districts' than his local subordinates (1: 30, 36, 42 ff.).

Thus, the liberal looking for perfect justice climbs, toehold by toehold, the edifice of colonial authority from its sub-divisional level to its gubernatorial summit. His faith in the morality of colonial rule survives all the evidence he has of collusion between planters and civilians and of the resulting perversion of the processes of the law. These latter are sought to be explained away by him as mere aberrations of an otherwise faultless system. Or, as Dina-bandhu Mitra suggests more than once in his play, there are good sahebs and bad sahebs: the good ones run the Government and the bad ones run the indigo factories. Savitri, the Kayastha matron in *Neel-darpan*, spelt this out in terms of her own understanding of social distinctions when she described the planters as the white men's *chandals* (Act I, Sc. 4). And in this she came very close to the distinctions that the more sophisticated *Tattvabodhini Patrika* made a decade ago between 'badra Englishmen of good character' who never took up the indigo trade and

'the cruel, *abhadra* men' among them who did (4: 129). Collaboration between the *bhadra* Bengalis and the *bhadra* Englishmen was, clearly, the need of the hour. In emphasizing this *Neel-darpan* was simply upholding an ideological tradition already well established among our liberals by the middle of the last century.

'Loyalty Lotus'

The urge for collaboration runs through the entire range of Dinabandhu's literary works. The theme of the British conquest of India which for so many of our patriotic writers served as a cue for strident anti-British declarations, occurs in his *Suradhuni Kavya* as a vehicle of loyalty. The sad maiden haunting the grove at Plassey was for him not a symbol of the loss of Bengal's independence but the fall of the hateful Mughals (8: 363 f). The careers of Sirajuddowla and Mir Kasim provided Girishchandra Ghose with material for editious plays about the collusion between foreign invaders and native traitors against Bengali monarchs. Dinabandhu describes Sirajuddowla as a monster who richly deserved his cruel end (8: 362 f). And he invests his account of the defeat of Mir Kasim's troops and the rescue of the Nawab's enemy, Krishnachandra Ray, by the British with the aura of a miracle comparable to the rescue of Bharatchandra's Sundar by the goddess Kali and of Mukundaram's Srimanta by the goddess Chandi (8: 360). Still another idol of a later-day nationalism—Nana Sahib—was denounced by him as a 'brute and a coward, while he was no different from any other Bengali baboo of his time in representing the rebellion of 1857 as a senseless orgy of violence' (8: 345). For the permanence of the raj and the removal of all threat to it were 'for him highly desirable ends' (8: 443). And if these attitudes are about the same as those held by other stalwarts of the Bengal Renaissance, Dinabandhu perhaps excelled many of them in the obsequiousness with which he could put these into words. Any-

one who wants this confirmed may do so by turning to his poem, 'Loyalty Lotus or Rajbhakti Satadal' (8: 437 f).

That such a loyalist writer with a play which so emphatically upholds the raj, should come to be regarded as patriotic, throws a curious light on the character of Indian nationalism. It indicates that our nationalism has in it an ideological element with a fairly low anti-imperialist content. This element represents the contribution of that section of our bourgeoisie who are interested in opposing imperialism but cannot do so firmly and consistently owing to the historical condition of their development. So their antagonism is compromised by vacillation and expresses itself spasmodically. Middle-class Bengalis in search of a radical tradition during one such spasm that culminated in the swadeshi movement, settled on *Neel-darpan* as a patriotic text (9: 274). We thus got what we deserved: a loyalist play glorified as a manifesto of petty-bourgeois radicalism.

This had a rather sinister consequence for the historiography of the indigo rebellion. Adopted by many generations of baboos as a theme for their literary and artistic self-expression, this peasant revolt came to acquire the respectability of a patriotic enterprise led by benevolent landowners like Navinmadhab with peasants like Torap following them with all the loyalty, strength and intelligence of a herd of cattle. (Torap is in fact likened to a buffalo in Act V, Sc. 2). The emphasis has thus been laid on the unity of interest between the peasant and his native exploiter against a common, foreign enemy. This has helped to mask the truth, first, about the fierce contest between the landed magnates and the common peasantry for the initiative of the struggle against the planters, and secondly, about the defeatism and the general lack of a fighting spirit which characterised the upper classes, particularly those 'of intermediate means', in this struggle.

The Hero As A Junior Landlord

This defeatism, leading, in fact, to defeat, is well illustrated in *Neel-darpan*. It is the story of a minor landlord family, the Basus of Swarupur. It has as its hero the elder son of the family, Navinmadhab. Under normal conditions his annual income would amount to seven hundred rupees in rents alone and his other assets to fifteen warehouses for corn, sixteen bighas of garden land, twenty ploughs and fifty day labourers. He could afford to celebrate the Pujas in great style, throwing large banquets, distributing gifts, entertaining his guests with music and *jatra* (Act III, Sc. 2). They grow enough food to feed the family for the whole year and still have a good deal left over (Act I, Sc. 1). They make a bit of money by selling mustard and tobacco which they grow themselves, and all this income from land is supplemented by usury (Act III, Sc. 2).² It is an index both of Navinmadhab's culture and his resources that he can afford to have a siesta in the middle of the working day (Act I, Sc. 4).

His affluence impresses by contrast. Sadhucharan, described as a *matabbar*, i.e. principal ryot of the village, has only one and a half ploughs and twenty bighas of land (Act I, Sc. 3) of which about half has been rendered unproductive by salt water (Act I, Sc. 2). He cannot afford to have his house protected by a fence, so that his wife and daughter are quite defenceless once the men have left for the fields (Act I, Sc. 4). Old Golok Basu can boast of growing enough mustard to meet his family's annual requirement of oil and still have sixty to seventy rupees worth of seed to spare (Act I, Sc. 1). The *matabbar's* wife must beg for a little oil from the kolus (oil-men) before she can light up for the evening (Act I, Sc. 4). And to complete the picture of the relative affluence of the Basus, we have in the play the description of an agricultural labourer, a Tikiri by caste, who representing 'as he does the very lowest depth of the village society, comes from a family that never possessed a single plough and

he has no land, no cattle, no cowshed (Act IV, Sc. 1).

Neel-darpan is a play about this Basu family. But it is not a play that invites us to witness the authentic aspects of the economic and social operations of these not inconsiderable exploiters in a village of impoverished peasantry where even a matabar ryot is no better off than a middle peasant of the poorer sort. The author appears to be primarily concerned to emphasize the paternalistic element in the given agrarian relationship. Navinmadhab is so utterly dedicated to the welfare of the ryots that the planter's dewan is tempted to jibe, 'That braggart is become like a Christian Missionary' (Act I, Sc. 3). Even in the midst of his worst trials our hero sticks to his principle that 'to do good unto others is the highest virtue' (Act II, Sc. 3). And the ryots, persecuted by the planters turn to him as their provider. An innocent peasant dragged away from the fields by the guardians of the law accompanied by the planter's hirelings, cries out to Barobaboo (as Navinmadhab is called by the villagers), 'Preserve my two children; there is no one else to feed them' (Act II, Sc. 3), and sure enough, in the next scene, we have the dewan complaining to the planter how Barobaboo was indeed providing food for the families of four of the arrested ryots and having their lands cultivated at his own expense with his own ploughs, cattle and hired labour (Act III, Sc. 1).

In Praise of Usury

Far from exposing the less benevolent side of the Barobaboo's transactions as a landlord, the play goes so far as to make a virtue of an even more sinister aspect of his role in the village economy—that of a moneylender. We gather from Act III, Scene 2, that usury is, for the Basus, a subsidiary, though not meagre, source of income. We gather, too, that even the matabar's family—not to mention others poorer still—have to share their hard-earned income with the *mahajans* every year (Act I,

Sc. 2). Yet in a play supposed to be sympathetic to the peasantry, moneylending, that scourge of the rural poor, appears as the theme for a panegyric (Act V, Sc. 1). 'The moneylender is a well-wisher of his debtors', we are told (Madhusudan Datta misses out on this key sentence in his translation). Or, again, 'The Mahajans never bring an action against their debtors'. The two speeches where these nuggets occur are quite explicit in upholding *mahajani* not merely for its alleged superiority to *dadni* as favoured by the planters, but in absolute terms for the advantages it holds for the ryots. In defending *mahajani* in the words of the dewan who with all his wickedness is still represented as sympathetic to the ryots and is therefore regarded as unreliable by the planters, Dinabandhu Mitra set himself up not only as a defender of the contemporary landlord-usurer represented by Navinmadhab, his hero. A 'progressive' writer, he was at the same time striking a blow for an emergent class who, as Kling points out, benefited most from the rebellion: 'Ultimately they snatched the fruits of victory from the peasants and the indigo disturbances mark the transfer of power from planter to moneylender in Lower Bengal' (7: 75).

We have already noticed how so many of the political beliefs and social attitudes of the Basu family were almost identical with those cherished by Dinabandhu Mitra himself. This is of course quite appropriate in view of the author's affinity to his protagonists in class terms. It adds greatly to the authenticity of the Basu family's ideological portrait as presented in the play. What, however, comes through as less than authentic is the ideological portraiture of the peasantry. A close look at Dinabandhu's characterization of Torap should make this clear.

The Characterization of Torap

Torap is largely responsible for Dinabandhu's fame as a 'progressive' writer. For each successive generation of middle-class Bengali radicals

throughout the twentieth century—and this includes even such a perceptive historian as Suprakash Ray (10: 400)—Torap has been the symbol of peasant insurgency. That this has been so reveals a good deal about the baboo's mental image of peasants and rebels. For, the author of *Neel-darpan* has endowed this agricultural labourer with so much of his own virtues of liberalism and loyalism that he has, in fact, turned him into a perfect petty bourgeois. Sivnath Shastri records how on the publication of the play Torap immediately endeared himself to the readers. One is not surprised. What can be more endearing to the Calcutta intelligentsia of 1860 than to read about someone who thinks like themselves and is helped by his fictional existence to perform such brave and noble deeds as beating up a wicked white planter and saving a pregnant peasant woman from his lust?

Act II, Scene 1, provides us with some details of Torap's ideology. He is seen as a prisoner here in the warehouse of Begunberay indigo factory. Four other ryots are his fellow captives. Of these at least one is an agricultural labourer, the Tikiri whom we have already met. The rest, too are either labourers or poor peasants. Torap dominates the conversation as one who obviously is a leader of the village poor and deals with the doubts and questions of the others with a certain amount of knowledgeability and authority. One of the ryots seems to have little faith in the *sahebs*. He was twice made the victim of false criminal charges, the second time by the white planter of the Bhabnapore factory whom some people consider to be a nice fellow. Torap defends the *saheb* against the ryot. The ryot must have done something wrong to merit his punishment, he says, for 'the *Saheb* of Bhabnapore never raises a false disturbance... Had all *Sahebs* been of the same character with him then none would have spoken ill of the *Sahebs*'. The ryot retorts by pointing out that this nice *saheb* has in fact been found to have illegally detained seven persons

including a small child and that he still continues to rob the peasants of their cattle. Torap changes the subject, but not the theme. 'As soon as they get a Saheb who is a good man,' he says, 'they want to destroy him'. Which raises the interesting question of the distinction between good and bad sahebs, a distinction the other ryot is unable to grasp. Torap explains this in terms similar to those used by the matron of the Basu family: the magistrates are the scions of respectable families (*baronoker chhawal*) while the planters are the low-caste people of England (*belater chhotonok*). 'Then,' quips in another peasant, 'how did the late Governor Saheb go about all the Indigo Factories being feasted like a bridegroom just before the celebration of the marriage?' The much-harassed ryot who is still not able to shake off his mistrust for the white man, suggests that the late Governor Saheb, that is Halliday, judging by the cordiality of his relations with the planters, must have owned 'some share in the Indigo Company'. Torap dismisses this as absurd, but unable to say much in favour of Halliday, passes quickly on to his successor who provides him with another foothold for his undaunted loyalty to the raj: 'If God preserves our present Governor, then we shall be able to procure something for our sustenance; and the spectre of Indigo shall no more hang on our shoulders'.

The Peasant As a Baboo

This Torap has nothing in common with a peasant up in arms against his oppressor. He, like the baboo who created him, is full of a sweet reasonableness which is ready to exonerate the colonial regime for all its crimes against the peasantry. For every bad planter, bad magistrate, bad Governor named by the harassed embittered ryots, our so-called rebel peasant has a good planter, a good magistrate and a good Governor to name. While by the autumn of 1860 masses of armed, angry peasants were fighting to end the cultivation of

indigo once for all—the struggle had by then nearly gone beyond the bounds of the immediate economic issues involved—the rebel peasant, thought up by a luminary of Bengal Renaissance, is busy trying to reform the planters: he still seems to be hoping that they would give up their predatory ways and take up indigo cultivation as a regular agricultural pursuit in which, Torap assures them, they can depend on the cooperation of the peasantry (Act II, Sc. 1)! And he carries on with this theme—backed by a nodding assent from Podi Moirani, the white man's procuress (Act II, Sc. 3)—right up to the rescue scene when after he has beaten up Mr Rogue, he still finds it useful to try and persuade him to 'carry on your business by mutual consent' (Act III, Sc. 4). This is not an angry, insurgent peasant's voice addressing an enemy, it is a baboo's voice supplicating the saheb to come to terms with the turbulent *chashas* before they get out of hand.

Which brings us to the question of violence. The widespread use of violence by the ryots against the combined forces of planters, police and troops is a fact about the indigo rebellion recorded in all contemporary evidence. A few words from a local observer, such as those of Sisirkumar Ghose from Jessore in August 1860, can even at this distance in time sum up for us a quickening situation: 'The planters are collecting revolvers, ammunition and lathials... while the villagers are gathering clubs and spears...' (1: 26). *Neel-darpan*, published only a few weeks later, has nothing in it even remotely approaching the coiled tension of these lines. This is so because the author is simply not responsive to the music of a clash of arms between the peasant and his oppressors.

It is not that there is no violence in the play. There is indeed, a lot of it in the form of the planters' terror backed by the official engines of repression. But the theme of retaliatory violence by the victims is kept firmly under control throughout the text. For whatever the reality of

the struggle raging in the indigo districts, the author does not allow his realism for which he is so highly rated by the literary critics, to get the better of his philosophy. When Torap at last succeeds in laying his hands on the wicked junior planter, Navinmadhab, our hero, tries to reason with him: 'What is the use of beating him? We ought not to be cruel, because they are so' (Act III, Sc. 3). And it is a measure of Navinmadhab's sense of values that he allows himself to get into a fight with a planter who insults his dead father's memory but not with the other planter who tries to rape a pregnant peasant girl. In any case, his advice is not lost on Torap who, after he has bitten off Mr Wood's nose in the affray involving Barobaboo, says that he would have inflicted further physical punishment on the planter if he had a chance, 'but I would not have killed him, he is a creature of God' (Act V, Sc. 2).

Torap, Pseudo-Rebel

This highly sanctimonious tone, this neatly drawn distinction between chastisement and annihilation can come only from one who can afford not to have his hatred spilling over, not to indulge in 'excesses' when the planters are looting, burning, raping all around. This cannot be the attitude of an indigo peasant of 1860 involved, by all accounts, in a most sanguinary battle for survival. Torap is a pseudo-peasant and a pseudo-rebel.

Note how, in the first place, he displays none of the initiative with which all contemporary observers credit the peasant rebels. In fact, he hardly ever confronts the planters on his own. On each of the two

সন্ধিৰূপ

(রাজনীতি-অর্থনীতি-সমাজনীতি সংক্রান্ত
পান্থিক)

১১শ সংখ্যা প্রকাশিত হয়েছে

স্টলে খোঁজ করুন দাম ৩০ পয়সা

occasions when he actually gives a fight, he does so as the Barobaboo's strong-arm man. The author endows him with only as much militancy as would be needed to highlight the over-riding quality of all—that is, his loyalty to Navinmadhab. And it is precisely because of this—and here is a second important thing to note about him—his militancy has little in common with that of the rebels of 1860. All contemporary accounts agree on the highly organised and steady combativeness of the insurgent peasantry, particularly when they succeeded in seizing the initiative of the struggle from the big landlords and the lesser gentry, as for instance in that minor epic of a peasant war fought against the Aurangabad Concern (7: 91 ff). By contrast, Torap's combativeness appears to be spasmodic. It is not disciplined because it is not informed by the consciousness of the rural proletariat. Gifted by his liberal maker with a petty-bourgeois consciousness his militancy explodes in brief discontinuous outbursts. What goes well with this is the politics of the bomb and of middle-class terrorism, and not the politics of a revolutionary peasant war. Finally, it should be noted that he is not even all that brave: he confesses to being mightily scared at the sight of Navinmadhab being hit on his head by the planter, and in his very last speech he says: 'Let me now hide myself inside the barn; I shall fly off in the night'. (Act V, Sc. 2). This does not strike one as exactly the sentiments of a peasant hero, a fish in water, at the height of a popular rebellion sweeping the countryside.

The defeatism of Torap's parting words represents the spirit of the play as a whole. Forced into a confrontation with the power of the planters, he wants to run away as soon as possible. He is not the only one to do so. At one point Sadhucharan, too, thought of leaving the village with his entire family in order to take refuge in a neighbouring zamindar's estate (Act I, Sc. 2). And although in the opening scene Golok Basu rejects all advice in favour of deser-

tion, the idea occurs to his son soon afterwards when he finds the old man threatened with imprisonment under the new law (Act II, Sc. 3). This temptation to run away is only equalled by all the principal protagonists' efforts to placate the planters, reason with them and arrive at a compromise—and failing all this, to try and defend themselves by litigation. The only character to take a stand of total defiance is a poor ryot who, even as he is forcibly led away from the fields, asserts that he 'would rather have my body rot in the jail than any more prepare the Indigo of that white man' (Act II, Sc. 3). But this one firm voice of a genuinely rebellious peasant is drowned in the chorus of petty-bourgeois wailing of the rest of the cast. In the end there is nothing in all their faith in the law, the civil service, the Lieutenant-Governor and the Queen that can save the Basus of Swaropur from being utterly ruined. *Neel-darpan*, written by a liberal in the midst of a peasant revolt, shows where the liberal stands at the time of a peasant revolt: he stands close to the power of the State seeking cover behind the law and the bureaucracy. It also shows what happens to him if he does so: he is destroyed.

(Concluded)

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Book Review

SO KRISHNA, AS WHEN HE
ADMONISHED ARJUNA

The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound.

Edited by Valerie Eliot.

Faber & Faber. £5.00.

TO one long in the Planning Commission pent and on whom some of its patois inevitably gets rubbed off, this book is a marvellous instance of investment support, technical know-how and collaboration, making one of the most spectacular breakthroughs ever known in literary history.

Few would have ever imagined, had this book been never published, that the author of the two books of poems, *Prufrock* (1917) and *Poems* (1920),—which had brought about a revolution in English diction and versification as unique as ever witnessed in any previous period of English poetry, and the author of which had already produced some of the most impeccable verse that could be thought of in that glorious tradition, and which nobody would ever dream of editing, by way of even a comma—so immaculate and final they seemed, so daring and true their thought—would ever need a Virgil and a Cavalcanti, rolled in one in the figure of Ezra Pound, *il miglior fabbro*, to guide him through successive drafts of the poem of the century, *The Waste Land*, to a point where Eliot himself arrived, miraculously transported to a new plane of excellence altogether, never to commit the kind of mistakes and, worse still, lapses of taste that lie strewn across this book.

The introduction written by Eliot's wife, Valerie, tells us gently yet vividly how without the small amounts of money that Quinn and Pound were so hard put to find excuses for helping Eliot with throughout 1916-23, without the slightest suggestion or trace of patronage, but rather in a

state of thankfulness, Eliot's writing might have irreparably wilted and even dried up completely. But this kind of story of nursing and sustaining a genius through oppressive penury is not without its parallels in history. What is perhaps unique is that a major poet should have so persistently edited, goaded and admonished another major and rival poet to a point where the pupil was enabled to outreach the master in creative performance through lessons learned and instruments acquired as generous and gratuitous gifts from the master himself who, far from charging a price, did not even demand gratitude. This surely is an example of selflessness unsurpassed in the history of creative writing and Valerie Eliot has earned everybody's gratitude by redeeming Pound from his post-World War II limbo and putting him on a pedestal uniquely carved by himself in history.

Eliot's original drafts, the corrections and annotations made word by word, line by line by Ezra Pound with a fine tooth comb, and the final version of the First Edition as printed in 1922 are a unique example of how a major poet, who eventually proved like Cavalcanti to Dante in history a lesser poet, purged another major poet of major lapses of taste and judgment, compelled him to transform his diction, and finally gave him a true and irreversible feel of

"...every phrase

And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,

Taking its place to support the others,

The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,

An easy commerce of the old and the new,

The common word exact without vulgarity,

The formal word precise but not pedantic,

The complete consort dancing together)

Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning".

The proof comes right on the first page of the original draft of *The*

Waste Land which makes one marvel how Eliot should have ever passed it, so smart, even cheap and inconsequential it now seems, in print, which Ezra Pound just scored out from top to bottom with one stroke of the pencil, after having attempted minor improvements in phrasing and ridiculed jingles with his own jingles like 'Meet me in the shadow of the watermelon Vine Eva Iva Uva Emaline' or 'Tease, squeeze, lovin' & wooin' Say Kid What're y' doin'?', and came straight to what is now one of the best-known openings of the century's verse in *I. The Burial of the Dead*: 'April is the cruellest month, breeding...'

A similar cruel excision, so it must have seemed to Eliot at the time who must have taken pride in writing it, but which again unerringly proved the maturer judgment and the better taste of the editor, was the entire opening page of *III. The Fire Sermon*, which Ezra Pound scratched out again with the comment: 'Pope has done this so well that you cannot do it better; and if you mean this as a burlesque, you had better suppress it, for you cannot parody Pope unless you can write better verse than Pope—and you can't.' Here, too, Pound once again led Eliot to the overwhelming opening sentence: 'The river's tent is broken, the last fingers of leaf...'

But what one suspects spelt the sudden and irreversible breakthrough for Eliot were the far shorter passages, the specific phrases and even the single words, and the devastating lunges that Pound made in the margins to drive his point home and which obviously had such profound lessons for Eliot that he never turned back and which put him over the hump once and for all.

These corrections and lunges will remain enshrined in literary history but it is difficult even in this brief review to resist some of the most delectable ones:

Here is one on lapse of taste in the original draft

'Bestows one final, patronising kiss

And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit;
And at the corner where the stable is
Delays only to urinate and spit.'

Pound scored out the last two lines and wrote 'probably over the mark'.

This one urges clarity and precision. Eliot had written:

'Across her brain one half-formed thought may pass:

"Well now that's done, and I am glad it's over."

Pound put a circle around 'may' and scratched it out with the comment: 'make up yr. mind you Tiresias if you know, know damn well or else you don't.'

Here is one on propriety of observation. Eliot had written:

'A touch of art is given by the false

Japanese print, purchased in Oxford Street.'

Pound scored out the second half of the second sentence, with the remark 'not in that lodging house?'

Devastating on imprecision, he scored 'perhaps' off the sentence 'Perhaps his inclinations touch the stage' with the comment 'Perhaps be damned'.

Throughout his life Eliot must have been greatly moved by the stupendous Ulysses canto (XXVI) of Dante's *Inferno*. In his original draft of *Death by Water* Eliot had put in a very long passage imitative of the passage on Ulysses' shipwreck in Dante, which Pound once again scored out entirely and put a final, short "OK from here on *I think*" at 'After the torchlight red on sweaty faces' which now forms the opening line of *V. What The Thunder Said*.

For the uncertain

'When Lil's husband was coming back out of the Transport Corps,'

the finality of Pound's exact word

'When Lil's husband was demobbed'.

One wishes it were possible to

know what triggers off what chain reactions in the deep recesses of a poet's mind but the final version of the first edition as it came out in 1922 bore evidence of a sudden quantum leap in precision and taste and almost an unaccountable improvement in what Eliot mentioned with reference to Dante and so applicable to his own case: "We have to consider the type of mind which by nature and *practice* tended to express itself in allegory: and, for a competent poet, allegory means *clear visual images*."

The final passage in *The Waste Land* based on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 5.1—'*Datta dayadhram, damyata*' (Give, sympathize, control) came all by itself rounded and immaculate like a pearl, of which Pound suggested not one change of word or comma. Eliot had arrived and Pound's task was done.

Valerie Eliot has handsomely and fully acknowledged this by calling Ezra Pound "a wondrous necessary man" to my husband".

ASOK MITRA

Two Plays

HITEN GHOSH

THE Pavlov Institute Natya Samstha's *Kalinagari* is a political allegory. In what is meant to be a clinical investigation of murderous hate and dissensions amongst "progressive" forces, a few theatrical roles are made up and acted out in improvised situations. A confusion, however, creeps into the method of presentation. When the play-acting begins, we have no idea of what the performers are in real life, that is in the external play. If they are meant to be the research team of the Pavlov Institute itself, trying to understand a political situation by playing it out in a conscious make-believe, this is left vague and doubtful. In any case, they cannot have been an ordinary theatrical troupe. And then, even after the role-playing

begins, the leader of the group, who plays the doctor now, continues his survey and commentary, not only as the original play-maker but in his newly assumed role as well. Everytime he intervenes, it is uncertain whether he does so as leader of the survey-team or chief of the nursing-home. His function in the outer frame and the inner play is identical, though he has apparently two different roles to play. The roles are never kept separate allowing him to pass from one to the other; they are simply confused. This shows an inadequate mastery of Brechtian technique and the resulting muddle makes the performance a fumbling and amateurish affair. The acting hardly matches the daring technical venture.

But the most serious defect is in the conception of the play itself or, to be more precise, in the very moral of this moral allegory. *Kalinagari* is a feudal society lately ruled by an alien power but now abandoned to the greed and corruption of its native rulers. There are certain characters who represent aspirations for a free and equal society, with mutually exclusive recipes for its attainment. They are all at loggerheads, each trying to undo the other in his own way, never trusting, never agreeing to compose their differences by reasoned argument. But for their implacable hate and suspicion of one another, *Kalinagari* might have been transformed by now into *Samyapuri*, the Land of Equality. All these characters are easily identified with the principal political parties once sharing power in the two United Front Governments in West Bengal—plus the so-called extremist factions. One wonders who the benevolent doctor may be—so eager to restore their unity and believing such unity to be the key to utopia. The euphoria which the Bengali left intelligentsia had evinced in the late sixties is hardly dead yet.

But let that be. To return to the story, the Demon-King *Hiranyakashipu*, taking advantage of the mutual bickering and liquidation

among the partisans for *Samyapuri*, succeeds in liquidating the liquidators with the help of "peace-keeping citizens" until his demon hordes occupy *Kalinagari*, sending all the aforementioned characters to their death. But soon after, the people rise in revolt, with a new leader (*Nrsingha* or *Man-Lion*) formed out of the mutilated bodies of the characters who fought among themselves to their own ruin. One does not know for sure, but *Prahlad*, who rouses the people, may be the doctor himself.

All this may seem no more than a simple-minded but honest and well-intentioned day-dreaming. But no, there is a more serious disorder in the playwright's imagination. In a moralizing vein, the observations of *Thucydides* on corruption and disorder in Athens during the Peloponnesian war (which *Nirad Chaudhuri* also quoted in his fulminations against leftist "anarchy" in West Bengal), of *Baishampayan* to *Janmejy* about how unnatural vices and depravity led the *Jadavas* to destroy themselves in mutual warfare (*Mahabharat*, *Maushal Parva*), of a Buddhist Brahmin (sic) deploring the in-fighting among the Buddha's followers leading to the decay of Buddhism in the land of the Buddha's birth—all these voices of wisdom of the East and West are intoned from backstage to draw a lesson from the happenings in *Kalinagari*.

But the lesson which is not drawn is that the civilizations of the past all went under from their inherent and inescapable contradictions. To their great credit, *Thucydides* and the Greek tragic poets saw the doom of their civilization as something inevitable, a part of its inexorable fate working through *hubris*. To draw a parallel between the fall of ancient civilizations and the catastrophe threatening *Kalinagari* makes sense only if we push it to its logical conclusion. The crisis in *Kalinagari* is a result of the same contradiction which has, so far, caused the decay of all civilizations. The partisans for *Samyapuri* are involved in this con-

tradition and form part of the decaying process no less than the Demon King who attempts to stem the rot by tyranny. While the great poets of the past could face the truth about the fate of their civilization, with its inhuman basis, breathing a moving despair and a struggling hope, the author of *Kalinagari* can only hide behind comfortable lies and produce a fake and facile solution. Marx, on the other hand, had foreseen the doom as part of the history of class societies, and looked to it, in our day, to destroy, once for all, the very basis of disaster in man's social history and usher in the era of human brotherhood, freedom and equality. He had the true vision of a tragic poet.

Khamosh Adalat Jari Hai

Adakar's *Khamosh Adalat Jari Hai* is a Hindi version of Vijay Tendulkar's Marathi play, a Bengali translation of which was staged in Calcutta by a troupe known for its modernist pretensions. Adakar's choice may have been determined by the sophisticated stage-history of the play, for the group sets store by cultural sophistication and modernity. Articles in the souvenir throw emphasis on the high attainments of modern Bengali theatre, which Adakar tries respectfully to emulate. But going through the titles of plays in its repertory, which includes Agatha Christie's thriller, one can hardly resist a smile. Indeed, as regards modernism in theatre, the group has got the wrong end of the stick, like most of the professional and semi-professional companies in Calcutta. There is little perception that a great deal of modern Bengali theatre is either vile or pretentious. Its technical virtuosity is a shallow imitation and no more progressive than the new sartorial barbarism and male coiffure.

But Vijay Tendulkar's play is remarkable in the way it sums up our cultural bankruptcy. That a pioneer Bengali troupe has included it in its repertory, shows that the degeneration has affected the very source of

Indian upper-class culture. The story is about the undoing of a young woman by a married professor. The victim is no immature school-girl seduced in innocence but a school teacher aged 30, willingly getting off with her would-be ravisher until she finds herself with child. By way of self-defence, she reveals with withering scorn that everybody has lusted after her lovely flesh since she burst into youth. But why should she have succumbed to the adulterous desire of a man unless her own flesh was weak, though the spirit not too willing perhaps? Indeed it is difficult to believe her air of injured innocence.

But this jejune theme is woven into an elaborate design of play within play, which is labouriously unravelled in the course of a rehearsal. Much ingenuity is expended on this unravelling game. It is here that ill-digested ideas from modern European theatre are used as a device to give a modish air to the hackneyed story. A theatrical company is rehearsing a play dealing with court proceedings which bring to trial an unmarried mother for attempting suicide. The actress, who is to play the accused woman, is the very school-teacher whom the villainous professor has got with child. Her actual identification with the role she plays emerges in the course of rehearsal of the mock proceedings, once a 'witness' gives the cue by improvising his part from a popular novel. Then the others add their real evidence by way of improvising their lines. The play takes shape—an 'imaginary' one strangely resembling what has actually happened to the heroine. The identification is complete: she cannot play the part; she can only live it.

All this cleverness in the construction of the play, its preoccupation with the novelties of modern theatre in its externals, are a perfect illustration of decadence. A decadent art is marked by divorce from life, lack of genuine inspiration, imitativeness and needless elaboration of form. In Calcutta's theatrical pro-

ductions, this decadence manifests itself either in vulgarity presented with sophistication or sophistication presented with vulgarity.

Music Of The Masses

BY A MUSIC CRITIC

LAST week Rabindra Sadan became the focal point of cultures from different countries—a Moldavian folk music ensemble, a folk troupe from the German Democratic Republic and a cultural group from Bangladesh. The emphasis was on the folk ingredients of the cultural tradition of each country, although the Bangladesh programme included some other varieties also. Minor lapses apart, the whole show (a two-day session for each country), was a refreshing experience.

The Moldavian group, Fluorash, was named after the traditional folk musical instrument of the country, the fluier, a kind of pipe mainly played by the shepherds. Founded in 1949, this group includes many musicians who are the direct descendants of the ancient Moldavian folk-singers and instrument-players, and this explains the spontaneity and spirit of gay abandon among the troupe, a part of the living heritage of their folk culture. The songs were highly evocative, specially the lilting charm of the folk song "Green Leaf" and the touch of romantic comedy in the song "I would marry the girl, if only she were like you". Equally remarkable was the wine-festival song performed by Tamara Tchegan with full-blooded gaiety. The folk-orchestra was of a high order and the musicians played not only with their instruments but also with all their body and mind. The folk-melody "Lullaby" brought out the soft tenderness of a mother's heart and the "Morning Scenes" and the melody of the spring unfold the beauties of nature in a series of vivid musical images. The dance numbers were beautifully choreographed and marked

by an unerring sense of rhythm. The piece entitled "On the Way to Kishinev", shone out for its beautiful exposition of folk characters with a touch of uninhibited, numbestious, rural wit. A pleasant surprise of the programme was a boatman's song in Bengali presented by the troupe which created an immediate rapport between the performers and the supporters.

The folk troupe of the German Democratic Republic was composed of the musicians from the community of the Sorbs of Slavonic origin, inhabiting the territory between the Elbe and the Oder. Since its inception in 1952, this group has been working hard for disseminating their folk culture in different countries. Unlike the Moldavian group, the troupe's performances were marked by formalised dance movements replete with abstract imageries, a complex musical structure and an overall rigidity of discipline (maybe a touch of the usual Teutonic rigour), veering more to classical moulds than to improvisation-based folk patterns. However, the programme was highly enjoyable and the technical virtuosity of the musicians, singers and the dancers was breathtaking. The opening ballet number "Bread and Salt", a kind of ode on human liberation, was full of heroic overtones; "St John's Night" was a humorous evocation of a spooky midsummer night when the young ones are out for fun; and "Story of Stone Workers" was a bravura piece of symbolic ballet where stone was shown as the personification of human endeavour. The group also presented a song in Indian language, but it was a pity that the song chosen was a cheap one, from a Raj Kapoor film, and not a real folk-piece as rendered by the Moldavians.

The programme of the Bangladesh cultural troupe was divided into two sections, a recital of songs of different genres and "Bangladesh", a three-act ballet on the people's struggle against the Pakistani mili-

tary regime. Among the patriotic choruses, the song commemorating the language movement of Twenty First February, knocked right into our hearts. For its beautiful melody and elevating content, but the other songs, though well sung, left us cold. Two Tagore songs, "Purano Sei Diner Katha", rendered by Jahedur Rahim and "Swapana Jodi Bhangiley" sung by Fahmida Khatun, stood out for a sensitive understanding of the mood and nuances of Tagore tunes. Sheik Lutfur Rahman sang a kirtan-based song by Nazrul (Ami Jabana Jabana Madhava Bihina Madhabi Kunjey) with enthralling passion. But the most memorable pieces were the folk-numbers, a marriage song from Sylhet, and two Bhowaiya songs by Nina Hamid and Rathindranath Roy, which captured the true spirit of folk tradition. The ballet, of course, was a poor attempt to portray for magnitude of the fire-ordeal in Bangladesh.

A Statement

Some writers, artists, journalists, stage and film directors, actors and actresses and intellectuals of West Bengal in a statement to the press say, in part:

"For more than a year now, thousands in West Bengal have been in prison without trial. The Government is violating all freedom of opinion and basic democratic rights — though posters carrying appeals to eschew violence are issued by it. We cannot but decry the way this violation is going on. In the jails of West Bengal and Madras, prisoners, we learn, are kept in chains in dark insanitary cells, debarred from all contact with their friends and relations. The few who have come out of these places of confinement bear witness, with the horrible state of their mind and body, to the practice of medieval torture carried on inside. Prisoners at Midnapore, Berhampore, Dum Dum and Asansol have been killed by police firing and sometimes even

beaten to death. A report in a local Bengali daily, *Jugantar*, puts the number of those killed in these jails at fifty. But those killed outside at public places in broad daylight are unnumbered.

We demand that these heinous atrocities be stopped immediately. All prisoners should be brought to trial and only those convicted of specific charges punished according to law. The others must be released without delay. On no account should any person be confined indefinitely on suspicion or frame-ups.

We strongly feel that if all who are confined without trial are not released immediately, we must enter on a democratic struggle to secure their release by rousing public conscience not only in West Bengal or India but the outside world as well.

The signatories include: Benoy Ghose, Ashok Mitra, Vivekananda Mukherjee, Mrinal Sen, Hiren Bose, Mriganka Sekhar Ray, Nihar Bindu Chaudhuri, Sudhin Thapyal, Mihir Acharya, Dilip Chakraborty, Tarun Chatterjee, Rana Bose, Robi Sen Gupta, Hiten Ghosh, Biren Chatterjee, Sova Sen, Utpal Dutt, Asha Maitra, Tapas Sen, Kalpataru Sen-gupta, Samar Sen, Jivanlal Banerjee and others.

অনাক

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● 'বাংলাদেশে কি দেখে এলাম?'
(বিশেষ প্রতিবন্ধিক বিপার্ট)

● সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নে পুঁজিবাদ
(শবীর বদুর প্রবন্ধ)

● আজকের বিচারে আণিক বন্দো-
পাধ্যায় (অমল ঘাটের প্রবন্ধ)

● পিকিং এবং সি পি আই (এম এল)

● ভারতের বৃক্ক বসন্তের বজ্রনির্ঘোষ
(পিপলস ডেইলির সম্পাদকীয়)

● চেয়ারম্যান মাও-এর সংগে
লংমার্চে প্রভৃতি।

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Press Freedom

Mr I. K. Shukla, an Associate Professor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, posted at Manipur, wrote in his covering letter to the editor of a Delhi weekly, *Point of View*: "Manipur is rocked with corruption and crime and the ruling party is adopting fascist methods... Let New Delhi awake. The danger is thick and closed. Action can't be stalled for the sake of tin-toy democracy. It will startle, shock, stir New Delhi into action. If we achieve this, journalism has done its duty."

All the apprehensions of Mr Shukla came true. His article ("The Time-Bomb called Manipur", *Point of View*, September 9, 1972) did "startle, shock and stir New Delhi," resulting in his arrest on September 22. One fine morning (October 6) the magazine's office was searched and the copies of the journal and the original manuscript of the article were seized because it contained matter "intended to promote feeling of enmity and hatred and contempt, and excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India, the publication of which is punishable under section 153-A and 124-A of the Penal Code (45 of 1860)."

The journal, in a subsequent issue, gave a summary of the article to prove that the charges were all wrong.

The reaction of national dailies and news agencies, which try to look very worried over the "threat posed by the Government to the freedom of the Press" was very ironical. To the news editor of a news agency the episode had no news value! Editors of two national dailies did not even care to know the facts of the case. The reply of one of them was: "I am busy... doing the make-up of the fifth page... please contact me again." The other editor said that he could do precious little about it and asked the POV man to go to the Press Council. Just a few weeks ago the same editor had fought a much-publicized battle against the Chief Minis-

ter of a State in a case involving its correspondent. A newspaper editors' body politely asked the POV man to take the matter to the Press Council. The reply of the Press Council was that they could not do anything when the Government had already taken action. The Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University said that he held no responsibility as Mr I. K. Shukla was on deputation. Another intellectual, after hearing the story, cynically remarked, "what would you like to have—coffee, beer or what?"

N. K. SINGH
New Delhi

Attack On Prisoners

We severely condemn the incident of lathi-charge (on November 26) on the unarmed political prisoners of Berhampur Special Jail injuring seventy-six of them. According to... newspapers, the prisoners' demand was that they, instead of being confined to the cell throughout the day, be allowed to come out at least once. We think the prisoners' demand was entirely justified. On the other hand, the policy of confining the prisoners in the cell throughout the day, adopted by the jail authority, was inhuman and illegal. It follows that the entire responsibility for this incident squarely lies on the jail authority. We demand an immediate and impartial enquiry into the whole affair and also punishment of the persons responsible for it. In this connection, we want to remind all that this incident is not the first of its kind in the recent past. The situation inside the prisons is so horrible that prisoners are losing their mental balance and on that plea cowardly attacks are being perpetrated upon them one after another. We demand that secure conditions within the jails be brought back and all political prisoners granted recognition and facilities due to them. At the same time, we appeal to people irrespective of their ideological affiliations to come forward to protest against this sort of shameful incidents.

Association for the Protection
of Democratic Rights

Peking And CPI (ML)

I disagreed with the political resolutions, theories and the line of armed actions of the CPI (ML) under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar. But criticism is not enough. One should criticise to cure the sick patient and learn from the past mistakes to determine the correct policy.

You have done a great disservice to the Indian revolution by publishing a downright forged document under the heading "Peking and CP (ML)" in your paper (4-11-72). The "document" has only multiplied the confusion already prevailing among the communist revolutionaries belonging to all groups.

We have verified from the proper source that Peking did never suggest the formulations, lines and understanding as indicated in this so-called document. This abominable forgery is a conspiracy to sabotage the Indian revolution. I do not know who the conspirators are. It may have been hatched up by naive fickle-minded members of the CPI (ML) who have been lately condemning Charu Mazumdar without making any self-criticism, or by the neo-revisionists or even by the police-CIA or police-KGB gang.

I hope that in future you would be careful and verify the authenticity of any document before publication.

Confusion is extreme now; no more confusion please.

JAYANTA BHOWAL
Calcutta

Periyar And Kamaraj

I read with interest the article entitled 'MGR's Party' (4.11.72) by a correspondent from Tamil Nadu. He could not present an objective assessment of the situation there. His subjective approach to the whole problem has made him see many virtues in Mr Kamaraj. But was not Mr Kamaraj himself responsible for all sorts of corruption during the Congress rule? The Nadars under him flourished like anything. Furthermore,

he himself is not above board.

His reference to Mr E. V. Ramaswami Naikar shows his bias against the DK leader, popularly known as Periyar in Tamil Nadu. It is true, he is not a Marxist, nor did he ever claim himself to be. But to deny him the progressive role he played in uplifting the Tamils is a travesty of facts. It is true he is a fanatic anti-Brahmin. But to call his movement religious is again a denial of facts. He had been continuously anti-religious and an iconoclast. His anti-Brahmanism is still his weapon to oppose the influence of religion. Brahmanism happens to be a symbol of religiosity. In fact, Periyar comes in the tradition of the ancient Indian materialists (Charvaka) who showered abuses on the Brahmin priests.

The majority of the DMK leadership is corrupt. Initially, they were inspired by Periyar. Your correspondent could not make a distinction between those who were lumpen proletariat and those who were true proletariat. He has clubbed them all together as "gamblers, butlers, tailors, barbers etc.". If the latter under the inspiration and guidance of their Periyar worked to establish the supremacy of their culture, what was wrong with them? As regards the corrupt among them, people are bound to rise to throw them off. For that purpose, the services of Mr Kamaraj, the leader of equally corrupt men, are not required. Your correspondent is trying to play tricks through these columns to arouse cheap sympathy in the minds of the communists all over the country by publicising the so-called philanthropy of Mr Kamaraj in helping the widow of a communist in distress.

KA KHA GA
New Delhi

Indian Scientists

I have read Dr Narendra Singh's "Indian Scientists" (*Frontier* Vol. 5, No. 20, 1972) with interest, but was surprised not to find any response to

it, especially from the Indian scientific community, in the subsequent issues of the journal. Such lack of response could mean that (a) Indian scientists do not read *Frontier*, a socio-political journal; (b) they are unable to comprehend the points made by Dr Singh; (c) they choose to ignore the article or, (d) they completely agree with the author. Not being able to associate myself with any of these categories, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the following points:

1. I agree with Dr Singh to the extent that a large number of Indian scientists are unconcerned with the problems of the society they belong to; that their aspirations are often individualistic; and that, therefore, they are irrelevant to the wider social context. This assessment is right as far as it goes, but one has to undertake a more incisive analysis of the situation in order to identify the components of the community responsible for its failure and to pinpoint the causes thereof.

2. The scientists of India should be dichotomized into (a) those who hold power—Senior Scientists, and (b) those who do not—Young Scientists.

3. The Young scientists are not completely unaware of the total social context and of their social responsibility. This is evident from Dr Singh's own writing, "The Problems of Young Scientists" (*Scientific World*, Vol. 15, No. 5, 1971) which summarizes the feelings of a group of young scientists. Also, the fact that a large number of students, including science-students, are recently taking active interest in politics, of whatever colour it may be, indicates the social awareness of the scientists-in-the-making, assuming that at least the majority of these politically-inclined students are not motivated by personal interests.

4. In how many academic institutions, the authorities, who include senior scientists, have incorporated in the syllabi courses on the purpose of scientific research, in general, and the social function of science, in par-

ticular? In how many of them the senior scientists have cared to draw up integrated, broad frames of research programme, with the priorities carefully laid out with reference to the total social context, into which individuals from specific disciplines could fit in, utilizing their specialized interests and training? The lack of a comprehensive planning of scientific research, of a thorough understanding of the wider social context, and consequently, of an urge to impart such understanding to their younger colleagues, are deficiencies of the seniors for which they alone should be blamed.

5. In how many academic institutions, the young scientists are encouraged to pursue original lines of research in an atmosphere of peace and freedom? Talking about encouragement, how many seniors really care to sit with their younger colleagues, discuss their problems and try to provide the guidance that they might need? The seniors seem to be more interested in running around the country, or the world, depending on their academic eminence and/or relative position in academic rackets, delivering stale lectures in sterile seminars, symposia, and what have you, than devoting their time and energy to promoting academics in their own institutions. Further, the seniors seem to be more interested in maintaining their hegemony over these institutions, rather than ensuring maximally efficient performance in a congenial atmosphere by incorporating the views of all scientists concerned in policy-decisions. A striking example of this zamindar-like attitude of the senior scientists is provided by a research-cum-teaching institution of national importance. Recently, while the authority was considering adopting an appropriate organisational structure, all scientific workers of the institution, unanimously recommended a democratic structure, the main feature of which was involvement of the workers, and/or their representatives, at different levels of decision-making. These unanimous recommendations were re-

jected by the highest policy-making body of the institution, which includes many senior scientists, with the active co-operation of some of these seniors.

6. Given the virtual lack of adequate planning and efficient management of scientific research, the available research grants are often largely wasted. This may happen in various ways: (a) most of the funds consolidate at the hands of a limited number of senior scientists, who themselves occupy important positions in various committees of the fund-giving organizations and whose academic commitment and competence might be questionable, and expended on the basis of their subjective decisions; (b) often the emphasis is on spending the grant within the stipulated period, than on genuine academic pursuit, which involves production of a stereotyped report and/or exploitation of the young scientists' labour; and (c) completion of research project and production of a report, of whatever worth it may be, within a stipulated period, and in return of a handsome grant, might reduce science to the level of a commodity and scientists to that of a merchant community, in contradistinction to the much more preferable role of science as an effective tool for promoting social progress.

7. Summing up, Dr Singh's accusations against the Indian scientists are largely valid; but the fault lies more with the senior scientists than with the young ones, who might not have lost all good senses altogether already; and, the inevitable question is, what should one do to put Indian science on the right track—pray to God or raise hell?

A YOUNG SCIENTIFIC WORKER
Calcutta

Bhashani

I am not surprised to see the end of the honeymoon between the so-called Bangladesh and Indian imperialists. Your correspondent (September 9, 1972) under the caption

'Politics and Fanatsy' dismissed Maulana Bhashani's allegations of systematic Indian economic expansion in East Bengal as the work of his feeble mind. This is not a new tactic employed by Indian reactionaries. Twenty-two years ago Hindu imperialists hailed Sheikh Abdullah of Kashmir as a great democrat while he danced to the tune of Nehru and Patel. The same Sheikh Abdullah was thrown into an Indian jail in 1953 when he resisted the banyas from Delhi and Punjab who wanted Kashmir to become their hunting ground. In later years he was branded communalist, traitor and what not. His party and colleagues today stand condemned because they want India to honour her pledge to hold a referendum.

One generation later the same Indian imperialists went into a sovereign state to liberate the people from Pakistani rule. Now history seems to be repeating itself with slight modification. While Sheikh Mujib is anxious to cling on to power regardless of what happens to Bengalis there, the Maulana has shown the courage to point out the new economic exploitation that is going on with the tacit approval of Soviet imperialists. It is a great tribute to the popularity of Maulana Bhashani that he has not been rounded up by Mujib's squads so far. Your correspondent naively suggests that the Maulana should consolidate the progressive forces in East Bengal. He is probably unaware of the massive clean-up of all opposition to Mujib's reactionary clique with active Indian military might under the cover of purging the country of collaborators of former regimes. The suggestion that Maulana Bhashani should accept Indian economic aggression in Bangladesh in return for the refuge he had in India during the Pakistani Army crackdown is ridiculous. India, according to her leaders, went to war with Pakistan to save democracy in Bangladesh. So why should she expect total submission from East Bengal leaders besides Sheikh Mujib, who has shown how good he is at that?

S. M. NASEAR
Montreal, Canada

Calcutta 71

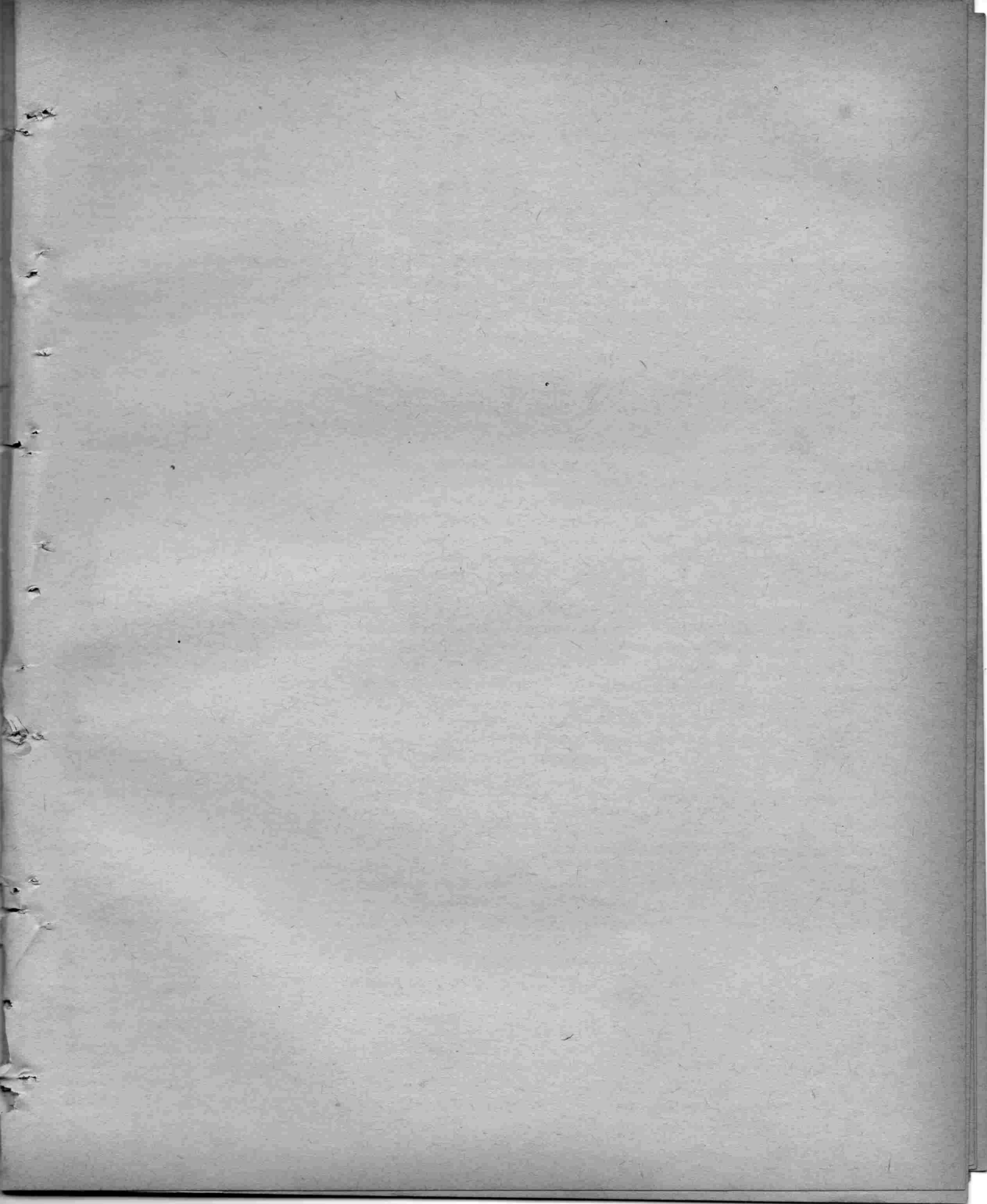
It is said that Mrinal Sen's *Calcutta 71* has the "guts to look reality in the face..." and this reality is "the most real element in the Indian reality—poverty..." (*Frontier*, October 14.). Poverty is a settled fact of human history and as such the most traditional, simple, common place and inoffensive target against which attacks are often directed. Reaction to poverty has, therefore, no meaning because it diverts the focus from exploitation—the real motive force of history—to its effects. Hence the invariable bourgeois technique of mass diversion is the campaign against poverty. Take for example Mrs Gandhi's slogan of "Garibi Hatao". Does it differ very much from Mr Sen's campaign? By his failure Mr Sen has proved that the film medium has not yet reached the stage where it can be an instrument of people's war.

RANAJIT SEN
Calcutta

Interview and *Calcutta 71* have in succession brought against Mrinal Sen the charges from self-styled aesthetes that he is using films as a medium of propaganda. But this is no unnatural phenomenon, no disturbing factor either: in a semi-feudal and semi-bourgeois country the confusion regarding the correct line of demarcation between art and propaganda always persists.

Mrinal Sen must, therefore, go on making films in his own style, no matter whether they acquire "propagandist overtones" or not. The age-old concept that a "film is a film" has to be broken. The basic Indian reality—poverty—has to be focussed in a dispassionate way and in the process mass consciousness will have to be aroused. For how long the poor and exploited Indians will continue to be victims of the silent propaganda of the petit-bourgeois cinema?

DEBABRATA GHOSH
Naihati



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