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ELECTIONS, BANGLADESH

THE interest in the March 7 elections in Bangladesh is rather worked up. It is part of the routine job of newspapers to try to cover such events from exciting angles, even though the contestants know the outcome. As one observer in Dacca told a foreign correspondent with pride, even in the fairest possible election the Awami League would win 80% of the seats, and in an unfair one, over 90%. Why for a mere ten per cent, pressure, intimidation and terror should be used remains a mystery. The arrogance of power, perhaps.

Mujib the Magician is in great form, and exhorting people at the top of his voice. He has horse sense, and unlike his counterparts in India, is not promising the people all sorts of things. After the devastation Bangladesh has suffered, one thing is disappearing after another. The moment he arranges for cloth, mustard oil becomes scarce; if mustard oil is procured, salt goes. He has been begging every country for aid. In the circumstances, people should not expect an overnight miracle. Why has his party set up a corrupt man as a candidate in a particular area, a man who is behind the rampant blackmarketing? Never mind, they are being asked to vote for Mujib, not for a particular man. This sort of thing is going down well with the masses. Nothing succeeds like success, even if the success was largely due to foreign intervention.

The tide might have turned a little after the January 1 incident in which two students were killed by the police in front of the USIS building, but for the outright denigration of Mujib by NAP (Muzaffar group) students. This premature, downright attack on the Sheikh helped the Awami League to counter-attack the NAP (M) and some other groups, forcing them on the defensive; and also, in a devious way, showed that Mujib was independent of India and the Soviet Union—the two countries the NAP (M) is enamoured of and against whom there is a good deal of suspicion and resentment. The hilsa hooked and cooked by the two powers is now tasting delicious to the Americans.

The other groups, to the left and extreme left, know that they have little chance. Some are said to be having second thoughts about the policy of fighting the elections. They are divided. The NAP (Bhashani group) and its leftist front, the party set up under the name of National

Socialist Party etc—are all setting up candidates all over Bangladesh. Even a child knows what the outcome will be of such divisions. And

most Indians should know what would have happened even if a United Front should have won. The road is long and hard.

French pilot and the Cairo airport control tower, which was played by an Egyptian official before a packed Press conference in Cairo, showed that the Israelis had given no warning before hitting the Boeing. It was because of navigational error that the Libyan airliner had strayed into the occupied Sinai, but the pilot had no idea of it till his plane was hit by an Israeli fighter. It is not difficult to understand why the Israelis have not produced the black box from the cockpit of the plane to substantiate their claim. The Israelis have chosen this particular time for action in order to foil Arab efforts to persuade America to bring pressure on them for a settlement of the West Asian crisis. The Arab leaders would do well to rethink their strategy.

Murder In The Air

L'amour between Nixon and Brezhnev has grown so strong that America's client State in the Middle East can do any wrong to the Arabs with impunity. A few days ago the Zionists, without any provocation, carried out two most outrageous acts against the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanese camps and a Libyan Boeing 727 airliner. Shocked and enraged, the Arabs are crying for action. The funeral for the victims of the Libyan airliner turned into a political demonstration in Cairo, with mourners calling for revenge against Israel. But their leaders, particularly Colonel Gaddafi, seem to have no answer to the Israeli acts of aggression. The reactions of countries known to be sympathetic to the Arab cause have been in most cases less than sincere. Routine protests have been lodged with the United Nations—the world body which never really took off. What is expected of the Libyan leader is that his retaliation for the Israeli action should be in the same proportion, as his declared enthusiasm for battle. Gaddafi has never in the past missed an opportunity to remind the Arabs of the great battle ahead but till now there are no signs that he would emerge from the present crisis with his prestige enhanced. This is the first time that any direct action against Libya has been reported. As *An Nahar* observes, the Israeli crime puts Gaddafi's revolutionary courage and spirit to test.

Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities have been saying everything they can think of in defence of their action; but in the process they have so often changed their position that even a staunch supporter of the Zionists would find it difficult to accept the

Israeli version. The first reports from Tel-Aviv said that the airliner was shot down after efforts lasting 15 minutes to make contact with the pilot, who incidentally was a French national, for landing failed. The pilot was also reported to have ignored warning shots fired by Israeli fighters. But on February 24, General Dayan admitted that there was some error of judgment in shooting down the plane. The taperecording of the conversation between the

A Survey Of Despair

The cat, one can say, is now out of the bag. The Indian economy has reached a point where no amount of window-dressing can conceal the basic crisis. And since confession is the better part of valour, official agencies also have now learnt better not to put a coat of optimism when things are far from reassuring. The Economic Survey, which down the years has provided a fine forum for projecting the Government's image, has lately been sounding a more matter-of-fact note. But this year's seems to have gone a step farther. The Survey seems determined to prick the many bubbles of optimism and exuberant self-confidence the powers that be are floating with an unceasing zeal. It delves deep into the varied forces at work and comes out with the disturbing conclusion that between the present state and a full-fledged crisis, there stand only the whims of the weather. The situation is already bad and is certain to be worse unless the rabi crop retrieves it to some extent. Late winter rains are reported to have improved the rabi prospects but how

much of the grains would come to the market is not known. It is certain that vested interests would reach some sort of accord with the bureaucracy to safeguard their interests when the Government finally goes for wholesale trading in wheat from the rabi season, but still some dislocation in the supply line is very much on the cards. And the weak-kneed Government has so far shown little capacity to handle a situation like this.

The Survey has put the point straight that agriculture still remains the most vulnerable point of the economy, and, as it is said, the strength of a chain lies in its weakest link. Most of the problems facing the economy today—of them price rise is one of the most important—owe their origin to the upset on the farm front. Other factors have confounded the inflationary forces and have made them more intractable. The large dose of deficit financing has also been responsible, as much as the utter failure of the government machinery to take any worthwhile measure to check the all too appa-

rent rigging of prices. The drought could not have wrecked such a damage if there were not so much black money in so many hands. The Survey seeks to suggest some measures, like check on ostentatious spending, to curb further accretion of black money, but discreetly leaves unanswered the question of how

the existing hoard can be tackled. Perhaps its authors too have realised that the scourge will be with us so long as the illicit liaison between the moneybags and the politicians remains intact. But then this is the price we have to pay just to enjoy the privileges we now have.

official paraphernalia which takes two to three years. And all Government grants come at irregular intervals and in dribbles. No wonder most teachers look for and probably find swifter means of recompense. And thus almost everybody concerned with our education, except the students, may be doing well for himself in the prevailing disorder.

Laissez-Faire In Education

A correspondent writes:

A few years ago when violence on the campus threatened to disrupt normal academic life, the guardians of our society were losing their sleep in their anxiety to save education. Today in West Bengal such violence is no more to be spoken of, and yet, the oldest and biggest university is running down under the weight of its own growth and expansion; others cannot hold examinations according to prescribed norms, or have to withhold results for reported violation of them. Some have been putting off their examinations indefinitely, so that when they are held at last nobody knows which year any of them relates to. Calcutta University M.A. and M.Sc. examinations are already several years behind schedule. Reports of corruption in every sphere of the academic life abound.

Apart from these chronic afflictions of the university administration, reports of several private colleges facing a financial crisis have been coming in. Certain big colleges in Calcutta and outside are unable to pay their teachers' salaries for lack of funds. Several small colleges may have to be closed for the same reason. If the colleges cannot pay

their teachers even according to their own modest scales, it must be because of either a sharp rise in the expenses with no corresponding rise in student fees, or an equally sharp fall in the number of students in the current session, or both. Non-realisation of a part of student dues or large-scale remission under political pressure is also a contributory factor in some cases. Government grants to private colleges never embrace recurring expenses and only part of the building and equipment costs. The rest of its subsidies relate mainly to the making up of the difference between the college and UGC scales of teachers' salaries. For the most part, private colleges have to find their ways and means as best they can.

A large number of college teachers are outside the purview of the UGC scale. Most of the non-UGC teachers are in the big colleges, where the number of students exceed the UGC limit of 1500. Teachers appointed in respect of students beyond this limit are not entitled to the UGC benefits. Quite obviously morbid overgrowth has been going on in spite of such a deterrent. For the college authorities the going must have been quite good so far with an indefinite increase in student numbers, over the past years. And the teachers who get no UGC benefits are not so disconsolate either, with many opportunities for supplementary earnings which a big college indirectly provides. Even those teachers who are entitled to the UGC scale are not immediately admitted to it but must await the completion of

official paraphernalia which takes two to three years. And all Government grants come at irregular intervals and in dribbles. No wonder most teachers look for and probably find swifter means of recompense. And thus almost everybody concerned with our education, except the students, may be doing well for himself in the prevailing disorder.

It is much the same story with the primary and secondary education. Standard of teaching in most schools and colleges is deplorable. Academic life is nowhere what it should be except in a few institutions maintaining themselves as special preserves of the privileged classes. The Government has been giving much thought to changing the present 11-year school system to the 10-year one and other epoch-making discoveries in the field of education. It seems to have little time for such a mundane task as providing good schools and colleges for the common people. This it leaves to the private enterprise and resources of the people themselves. Even primary education has not been made free, universal and compulsory. The Government has taken over both primary and secondary education in the State and yet good education, even at these levels, remains the privilege of those born rich. Vocational training institutions, which are run by the Government, cannot attract students because of high percentage of unemployment among those holding vocational qualifications. Centres of higher education receive the main bulk of unemployed school-leavers, but the kind of education available in them remains useless and unsuited to the majority. Only a few who pass through the better institutions derive its benefits in terms of opportunities for better employment.

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Trouble In Orissa

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

THERE is an unmistakable feeling of barely suppressed satisfaction here in Assam over the recent 'happenings' in West Bengal and Orissa. For a change, the heat is off Assam, and assurances of mutual regard by the Chief Ministers of the two States, and goodwill visits by MLAs and other bigwigs to the capitals of the two States not merely ring an echo in our minds here; they also warm us because we recognize our brothers, even in arson and murder.

Though there have been brief reports in the newspapers about the trouble in Kharagpur, Cuttack, Calcutta and Khurda Road, it was only today that I was able to locate the editorial (in the *Hindusthan Standard* of 4th February '73) which allegedly started off the whole trouble. At the first reading, I could not quite see what had caused such great offence; it seemed the usual kind of 'Third Leader', made more amusing (those this amusement was not perhaps intended by the wit who wrote it) by the ponderousness of its "humour". It was only on reading it again that I saw the offending passage, a rather condescending generalisation, full of genial contempt even it is couched in seemingly complimentary terms. And yet, should such a remark cause riots? My disbelief is not evidently shared by others I have talked to, for almost to a man, people here believe that the observation is not merely 'highly insulting', but the people who go about making such remarks have had it coming to them, and a good thing too that they are being taught a lesson. You can't always blame only the Assamese people for finding the Bengalis insufferable.

But words don't break bones. This simple, elementary point seems to be entirely forgotten by our people. We Indians (assuming that one can still use the term 'Indian' in any meaningful sense) are of course no-

toriously lacking in any capacity for objective self-criticism, not to speak of a real sense of humour. Most of the 'humour' in the Indian context is unintended to be funny, like the suggestion that we should send people abroad to get advanced degrees in humour, or it is pompous and boorish and painfully contrived, as in the offending editorial. But even the most solemn and highly sensitive people can't start a riot just because a newspaper published hundreds of miles away makes some snide remarks. It is clear that all the disturbances in the recent past have been mainly, or even solely, shows put by the ruling Congress party. In Assam there is hardly any other political party which can rival the ruling Congress in organizational resources, money power etc. The leadership in Cachar as well as in the Brahmaputra valley was entirely in the hands of the Congress; and even the mini-agitation that is at present going on in Cachar is being led by the Congress, the Bengalis being led by the local District Congress Committees, and the 'indigenous people of Cachar' who, the Gauhati newspapers inform, 'all want Assamese in Cachar, being encouraged not even very covertly by the State Government. And both are quite loyal to Indira Gandhi. In Andhra and Telengana, of course, the avowals of loyalty are quite loud and frequent, and we even have a Telengana Congress Forum for Socialist Action, than which you can't have a more convincing proof of loyalty to the Great Leader.

Clearly, it is in the interest of the Congress party to foment these troubles all over the country. Whatever were the forces that led to the reorganization of the Indian States on linguistic basis, and however halfheartedly the reorganization was carried out, none can deny that within the context of the prevailing

situation in India, the reorganization was a progressive step. Most of the linguistic nationalities were able to come together for the first time, and even if they continued to suffer under the political and administrative rule of the bourgeoisie, their coming together led to a measure of cultural and literary enrichment and could have, in course of time, led to real mass awakening. The Congress of course, would be most naturally interested in thwarting this mass awakening. But the tactics adopted by the rulers to thwart this mass awakening have been very refined. In certain areas, specially in the so-called 'border' areas, every effort is made to artificially yoke together different weaker nationalities, in considerations of 'national security'; the north-eastern region is a classic case in point, and though the rulers have been forced of late to recognize the claims of the different nationalities of this region, they are still trying to impose a 'unity' here, through a bureaucratic measure that goes under the guise of the 'North-Eastern Council'. But in areas which by no stretch of imagination can be considered 'border' regions, more sophisticated attempts are made to weaken and destroy the national linguistic awareness, and the goings on in Andhra have to be seen as part of this larger design. It is not accidental that the leaders of the separatists in Andhra and Telengana both swear by Indira Gandhi, indeed repeatedly affirm their loyalty to her leadership. In Orissa on the other hand, precisely the same end is achieved, this time by inciting the people against the 'aliens'. The trouble in Orissa began significantly enough just before the new budget proposals, and all the new back-breaking burdens that are certainly going to be imposed are going to be conveniently overlooked by the masses, and before they recover from induced wrath, further exploitation would have become still another fact of life, against which it is no use fighting.

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Sophisticated

The Indian bourgeoisie is nothing if not intelligent and sophisticated, a formidable combination of native cunning and acquired sophistication. Repeatedly it has been returned to power, in one political guise or the other, in all the States of the Union and in the Centre. And yet, it is precisely this class that has been continuously engaged in leading the so-called 'mass' movements, which have invariably led to the weakening of the masses, led to increased misery and hardship for them, and have at the same time made the position of the bourgeoisie themselves more secure. Assam, Andhra, Orissa

—each situation has demanded a different tactical approach to confront the masses and confuse them—and the national and State leaderships in each case have succeeded in employing brilliant diversionary tactics. Of course, in continuously dividing and spreading confusion among the masses, the Congress is only being loyal and faithful to its historical role; but what is one to make of the 'left' parties who are supposed to be engaged in exposing the role of the bourgeoisie? The people of Orissa occupy practically the rockbottom in the scale of degrading poverty that is a concomitant of the over-

whelming mass of our people; the Oriya people certainly need to be politically mobilised. But the joint statement of the 'left' parties of West Bengal seems to be a curious way to mobilise mass anger by encouraging over-sensitive pride. A hundred clever-by-half editorials cannot do so much harm to a people as the visible effects of Congress and Swatantra rule over twenty-five years. Political education is necessary, even for the most depressed and exploited people; one may say, it is especially necessary for them.

20th February, 1973.

Doesn't Anybody Care Any More?

PANCHAJANYA

THE incident at India House in London and the Israeli shooting down of a Libyan civilian aircraft have more in common than merely being sensational headlines on two successive days of the same week. Superficial rationales have been offered to justify the acts; a little reflection will show that things aren't what they appear to be at the first sight. What is more important, the two incidents demonstrate how much contempt we seem to have for human life. It has been argued that the modern age has reduced a human being to a statistic; now our moral depravity is such that even numbers, when they concern human lives, don't seem to matter.

Take first the Israeli act. An unarmed civilian plane on a scheduled flight strayed into the airspace of the Israel-occupied Sinai. According to the Israeli version, the pilot did not respond to various radio messages and visual signals from the intercepting Phantoms, tried to take "evasive" action, and finally they had no option but to fire on the plane. As a consequence, 106 lives have been lost. Other reports from Egypt contradict this version, with

a dramatic tape recording of the last conversation of the pilot with the Cairo Airport tower. It is claimed that the pilot strayed into the Sinai airspace, thinking he was southwest of Cairo. He heard no warnings, and he mistook the Phantoms for MIGs. The shooting seems to have taken the pilot completely by surprise, according to the Cairo story. The other nation involved, Libya, has so far maintained an ominous silence.

Neither versions are entirely consistent. The Israelis changed the details of their account a number of times. The Egyptians claimed earlier that the plane had difficulties with its transmitter-receiver, then played the recording of the conversation. Only one thing seems certain: we may never know the true chronology of events leading up to the crash. Journalistic speculation is already rife.

Whatever be the facts leading up to the downing of the Libyan Boeing, it is the costliest and the ugliest incident so far of the spiral involving civilians as gun-fodder. No desparado acts of Black September, or of the hired Japanese guns, can quite

match either the toll of human lives or the ruthlessness of the Israeli action. On the face of it, there is plenty of rationale for the Israelis to behave as they did; in the words of the *Times of India*, it has been "the target of so many Arab terrorist attacks."

This writer has been, and is of, the belief that many of the Palestinian acts of protest have actually been counter-productive as far as their ends are concerned. The community has always reacted with varying degrees of hostility to their activities. This is not to belittle the utter frustration felt by them in the face of continued world apathy towards their grievances or the human weakness that causes them to react to such frustrations by further escalation of actions, guaranteed to generate screaming headlines. A truly disciplined revolutionary movement tries precisely to avoid such failures, which weaken the potential support for it. Witness the case of the Vietnamese. To torture the American prisoners of war because of the various terrorist acts of their country, and, because the world fiddled while Vietnam burned, would

have been human enough on the part of the Vietnamese. Their very humane treatment of the same individuals who had caused so much death and destruction to rain upon all of Indochina, however, leaves nobody in any doubt about their noble aspirations. Palestinian actions, on the other hand, have managed to create a reservoir of sympathy for the Israelis, much as the Naxalite strategy ended up portraying the Bengali kulaks as so many innocent victims of senseless violence!

The Israelis are perhaps going to depend upon this hidden reservoir of sympathy—and in the Western world, guilt—to avoid the consequences of their heinous crime. Their apologists can defend their shooting down of the plane as justified reaction in self-defence of a people engulfed by hostile groups, or at worst, as nervous and jittery reaction to be mildly censured, to be sure, but no more. Moreover, the Israeli Prime Minister's office has expressed its "deepest regret for the incident." The propaganda mills are already churning out their stuff. Newspaper pictures show Israeli soldiers carrying the stretchers of the victims. So the world conscience need not be awakened from its deep slumber.

The Hindus & Palestinians

Many in this country, particularly the upper middle class Hindu readers of the English language press, have made dear unto themselves the Israeli cause. They have nothing but contempt for the Palestinians, which to no small degree stems out of the fact that Palestinians are Muslims. These same people were aghast when the Black September men struck at Munich. Column upon column of precious newsprint was taken up either by condemning editorials or letters. Yet, when close to a hundred people perished because of Israeli air piracy and scores of others died in an almost simultaneous raid into Lebanon, the *Times of India* thought it fit only

to devote a Current Topics space to these international crimes!

The 'deafening' silence from the Western capitals is to be expected. Israel is as much a creation of their guilt as of the Jewish quest for a homeland. What many in the Third World in general, and in India in particular, do not realise is the enormous price the Palestinians have been made to pay for absolutely no crime of their own. How would, for example, the Rhinelanders react to a part of their valley being made into the Jewish homeland and their being evicted from there? We even feel sorry for Uganda Asians being rightly kicked out, but we do not realise what Palestine has gone through in being obliterated from the map, just so that the ghost of Lord Balfour, and the average Western Christian who would still look askance at his sister or daughter marrying a Jew, can rest comfortably. We talk of the partition of British India and the attendant evils, but we seem to be utterly blind to another partition, at roughly the same time, when a group of outsiders evicted a people from their homeland, in the name of claiming their historical homeland! The moral violence of the creation of Israel far outweighs any consequent physical violence on part of the Palestinians. Now, of course, the Israelis have demonstrated that they are one-up in the game of taking the lives of civilians. We seem to be concerned about neither kind of violence.

India House Incident

Except when it hits us, as in the case of the India House incident. Here, too, we have the familiar exaggeration on the part of the press. We read of the reports of "Chicago-style gun battles" between the intruders and the London police, only to find at the end of the story that there were three youthful intruders, armed with toy guns, daggers and one sword. Two of the three are dead and the third, a fifteen-year-old Pakistani student, is described now as being of less than average intel-

ligence and like his dead accomplices, of showing little awareness of political matters. They were apparently protesting the continued detention of the Pakistani prisoners of war in India. An organization calling itself Black December took credit for the action. It is instructive to reproduce the statement of their spokesman:

We are sorry for the way things turned out today, and for the inconvenience caused. We were not intending to take any hostages, do any damage, or harm anybody. We would have just walked out after a while. But in future we will be armed. From now on we shall organise ourselves on a different scale.

Evidence, if any were needed, for the assumption made above regarding the mounting frustration of groups like Black September.

The Pakistani Government has already accused the London police of excessive violence. All available evidence points to the accusation containing a degree of truth. While not underplaying the value of the two lost lives, it is not our concern, for the moment, whether the Bobbies did indeed overreact.

But what about us? Have we played no part in this tragic incident? To be sure, we are busy at the moment building up sympathies as victims of yet another senseless act of violence. The only victims, however, are the three Pakistanis and those injured in the melee. As a nation, sad to say, we invited the incident. What is surprising is that given the current ways of protests, this did not occur earlier.

We have held around a hundred thousand Pakistani prisoners of war, captured on the eastern front for fifteen months. While the conditions under which they live may actually be better than those for Sam Manekshaw's men, it is obvious that the prisoners are not very eager to stay in their camps. Attempted escapes seem to be frequent, although perhaps no more so than from POW camps in any other country or

at any other time. More importantly, what right do we have to hold them so long after the cessation of the hostilities and the withdrawal of troops from the western front? We keep saying that Sheikh Mujib wants to try them and that they surrendered to the joint command of India and Bangladesh and therefore, unilateral release of the POWs on the part of the Indians would not be right. While the former could be true, the latter is sheer sophistry.

There is considerable doubt as to whether the Sheikh *really* wants to try the Pakistani soldiers or is using the threat, obviously, for bargaining with Pakistan, and not so obviously, for keeping up the tensions between India and Pakistan. If the POWs are indeed so many pawns in the chess of negotiations between Islamabad and Dacca, it beats all reason why New Delhi must continue to do the dirty work. Having played the midwife for the birth of Bangladesh and having agreed to share some of our minute plenty with them to help them stand on their own, we have no cause to be buying international abuse on account of the POWs. And certainly, it is not in our interest to let the Sheikh dictate whether there should be peace between us and Pakistan, just as we cannot have a say in, for example, Sino-U.S. detente.

But there is a more delicate, and, moral dimension to the problem of the POWs. What right do we have to play with the destinies of so many human beings? (We must not forget that they have families and dependents, too) Are we not appalled at our own lack of concern for human misery? All through 1971 we castigated the world about not paying attention to what was being done in the then East Pakistan; now have we lost perception of what we are causing by detaining the POWs or using them as ploys in the games of *realpolitik*? Or does human suffering get defined only when *millions* are involved? It would be just as criminal on our part not to recognise the frustrations of the Black Decem-

ber group as would be to ignore those of Black September. We cannot condemn Israel for its barbarism without some recognition of our own potential for that.

One is appalled in the West about their utter disregard for human life in the Coloured portions of the world. Fratricidal wars, natural calamities, human blunders, all costing enormous numbers of human lives in the East have been accepted as a matter of routine by the Westerner. The part of their sensitivity dealing with Oriental life seems to have been brutalised by the hideous war in Vietnam. But what about us? Because war, famine, pestilence have been with us from time immemorial, do we become immune to

their consequences? Do we ignore the POWs, the victims of American imperialism (now by proxy) in Indochina, the victims of Israeli ambition in the Middle East (or closer home, the famine victims, (There is an obscene advertisement on the commercial AIR, in which a mother-in-law urges her son-in-law to eat more goodies and then take a digestive aid. One wonders how the Government allows this to be broadcast from the principal city of a famine-affected State, Ahmedabad. But then, Ministers themselves flout guest control orders...), on the specious grounds that they have always been with us? What has happened to us that has made a concern with values and human lives so very old-fashioned?

On Vietnam

BHAGWATI KUMARMANGALAM

Around his tomb let art and genius weep, / But hear his death, ye block-heads, hear and sleep.

THE USA first sent military advisers to South Vietnam in 1954 just before the Geneva Agreement. The measure was taken under the presidency of General Eisenhower, and we danced in the streets of Europe to welcome "Ike". The first US combat troops were sent to South Vietnam during the rule of President Kennedy. Later we deeply mourned the death of that "man of peace". Only barbarian China did not bow her head in condolence in the World Peace Council. The World Peace Council session in Helsinki would not even countenance the phrase "American aggression against Vietnam" to entitle a resolution sponsored by China and a few others. It put forward instead "The Vietnam Question" as the title of the resolution. Maintaining peace is the supreme task! A small local war can turn into world conflagration, and who would live to enjoy

socialism if mankind died? The Gulf of Tonkin affair pointed not to American but to Chinese provocation, and we must wash our hands clean—threatened the great creative Leninist Comrade Khrushchev. Meanwhile President Johnson, successor to the great philanthropist Kennedy, increased the U.S. troops in South Vietnam to 550,000, plus navy and air force contingents. And as Comrade Khrushchev said, "Johnson is a sensible statesman". What else could he do in the face of provocation? But Russia is Russia.

A *New York Times* article dated September 29, 1969 placed the total of Soviet aid to the DRV at one billion dollars a year. Other estimates quote lower figures. Philip Dion, for example, (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1971, No. 12) stated that Soviet aid for the past five years had fluctuated between 250 million and 1 billion dollars. In sheer magnitude China, whose aid has been estimated at 200 million dollars a year, cannot rival the USSR. True, foreign observers are

unanimous in saying that the amount of China's aid to North Vietnam and the Vietcong cannot be estimated with any accuracy and that her aid "should not be measured in dollars alone". (*The Communist States in Disarray 1965-71* by Bromke and Rakowska-Harmstone, Minnesota). In the early years of the war the picture was rather different. According to Peter Lyon (*War and Peace in Southeast Asia*, OUP) President Ho Chi Minh was said to have told a delegation of the Japanese Communists in September, 1966 that China was supplying 70 per cent of all the military aid, against which Hanoi was receiving 20 per cent from Russia and 10 per cent from Eastern Europe.

Much has happened since. To say that the Soviet Union has been embarrassed by China into increasing its aid to the DRV is to make only one point, a minor point at that. More aid means more acquisition of pressure points and not merely that. With their global interests in view, the Soviet Union can hardly afford to abdicate its role in Vietnam and South-east Asia which it once threatened to do in order to stop the flames of the liberation war spreading.

At home we also did perform our great international duty. We sang "Vietnam amar nam tomar nam" in Parliament and we passed resolutions and donated blood. Some of us did more. We passed stronger resolutions and organised demonstrations (though far less in scale and militancy than what took place in reactionary feudal Pakistan, East and West). What is more, we have criticised severely both the Soviet Union and China for not uniting and doing what they could. Let the Red Army and the PLA unite and liberate the North and liberate the South and liberate the world. For ourselves we go on speechifying: Why adventurism and unnecessary deaths? And action is a most dangerous thing. Yes, but the Vietnamese had as far back as 1939 started procuring arms and forming secret armed cells. (See

Vietnamese Studies, No 12) For us the mere mention of armed struggle is sheer provocation. Ours have been a different case and will remain ever so. The Lenin saying—There is one, and only one kind of internationalism in deed: working wholeheartedly for the development of revolutionary movement and revolutionary struggle *in one's own country* and supporting (by propaganda, sympathy and material aid) such, and only such a struggle and such a line *in every country without exception. Everything else is deception.* (Lenin's italics)—is no longer valid. Nor the slogan, "Create two or three more Vietnams". To sell Che Guevara is no doubt profitable, but to do what he wants us to do is altogether a different matter. Now creative Leninism demands rallying not against but behind the respective bourgeois governments to defend the country—be it against China or Pakistan, Kashmir or Nagaland. Everybody talks of imperialism. But imperialism, as Lenin said, is nothing but monopoly capitalism. And capitalism is India has acquired its monopoly character; therefore India is imperialist. But who cares? Words, words, words. Indeed only the lazy do not swear by internationalism these days.

Most men carry things so even
Between this world and Hell and
Heaven

Without the least offence to either
They freely deal in all together.

Well, does not China look a little tarnished? She takes tea with Richard the Butcher! But so did the DRV long before China did while the savage war had been going on, at the Paris Conference table. And did not the DRV send a telegram the other day to Indira Gandhi, that "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide"? Everyone else can commit the act and lead a Christian life, can even be a great saint, but not China. Either China will have to eke out a place on the moon to keep herself free from contamination, or else she will have to have herself crucified to redeem the world!

History has witnessed many a

metamorphosis and we now see one more before our eyes; the peaceful transformation of the Lion into Gautama the Buddha. The super-subtle Briton (there are quite a few noble exceptions) now lectures in America, now in Russia; but about China it is a single chorus, a single orchestra, as it was against Lenin's and Stalin's Russia a decade ago. It is true that all these orchestras are not conducted by one centre following a definite score. One moment China is the root of all evils; the next moment China is not revolutionary enough—and they never bother that they are ridiculously contradicting themselves. The difference between America and Britain is that the American has more money and the Briton tries to hide his melancholy and jealousy under his pontifications. Almost all the gruesome atrocities that one has witnessed in the Mekong Delta can be traced back to the Malayan jungles. The *International Times* published several years ago a couple of tape-recorded interviews with soldiers: a quite young Glaswegian who had killed communists in Malaya and an American college boy on his way to killing communists. The Scot had enjoyed the killing without introspection or ethical consideration. The American was more cerebral. In any case, so far so good. Let them spite each other. Our colonial intellectual, as in every other thing, follows what the master does at home with the difference that he is cruder, which is typical of the slave. He too criticises now America, now Russia, reserving his whole hatred, however, for China and the Sinophile. The colonial left intellectual is cleverer: he contraposes North Vietnam to China. Without detracting a whit from the great importance of Vietnam's struggles it can be said: if Vietnam faced the most ferocious enemy, it also received the largest ever help. Neither Mao nor the Algerians received help on such a scale.

It is a pity that some honest intellectuals fall a prey to the anti-China chorus, confusing cause and effect, forgetting that there should be one tactic when there is international

revolutionary solidarity and revolution is on the rise, and another when there is no solidarity and revolution is at a low ebb. However, much as one sympathises with the doubts or dislikes felt by these intellectuals, one wishes that they would direct their shafts of frustrated anger towards some worthy objects other than Red China, a country that with all her faults is one of the best and not one of the worst the revolution has created. One wishes this not only for China's sake but for the sake of their

own revolution. They should not undermine the base from where world revolution operates today. America Vietnamised the war; China Vietnamised world politics. China, single-handed, frustrated all attempts right from the beginning to let down the Vietnamese struggle. Now the Vietnam struggle has scored important victories. Richard the Butcher has become Richard the Kind-hearted! It is cold comfort. One would have hardly thought that progress (towards peace) such as ours would have made us smell like bloody hothouse flowers!

culture' in provenance there are not revolutionary society and radical culture, will have been fuzzed by the time the unwary reader finishes the book. His formulations, predicated on this book, are bound to be fanatical and foolish, in consequence. This pseudo-intellectual brainwashing will have achieved its aim.

It is fair to admit that Revel has very painstakingly built up his case. His denunciation of national paranoia, bilateral accords, omnipotence of oligarchs thriving on the ignorance of people, collective suicide, and curbs on freedom sound genuine. But his conclusion that America "offers the only possible escape", being too kitschy, is not even a good joke. America offers Escapade all right (or does it?). Revel himself says as much by admitting the American 'Revolution' to be more "a centrifugal gyration than a clash between opposing camps". It should be so in the "huge pantheistic feast" America is in his configuration. But 'gyration' can be, at the most, a diversion; it is not a synonym for revolution.

Revolution As Revel

ISH

IN a longish review of the thesis that America is Revolution and that Revolution must be all Revel and no Red Rigour, Mr H. Ghosh bears down on the April 1972 supplement of *The American Review*, "Without Marx or Jesus: The New American Revolution" by Jean-Francois Revel, also issued in book form, and widely distributed, free, all over the country. This is Revel on Revolution as Revelation or whatever variation you like with the help of three R's.

Just as Mary McCarthy came to Mr Ghosh's rescue in her sly, slick demolition, McCrea Hazlett comes to mine by informing, editorially, 'Revel has combined philosophy and journalism in his career'. Nothing could illustrate the resultant disaster better than this book. And, even though the USIS sponsored this publication in India, Hazlett lets the cat out of the bag by saying, 'you will probably find Revel's judgement surprising'. Probably, indeed!

And why only judgment? His method and material are no less. Hence the book is not a utopia a la Wendell Wilkie, but a take-off on it. It succeeds signally in 'selling' the American way of life far more seditiously and seductively than any

other book up to date authored by even an American and so deserves further study. And M. Revel is a Frenchman.

The book is intended to be the New Testament of the homo democraticus (Tocqueville) and homo novus (Revel). Hence the massive scale and missionary purpose of its wide dissemination. As everything else big about America, on Revel's evidence, there are five revolutions going on there, whereas we had thought even one is too many in a long while for any country. So the underdeveloped Asia and Africa will discover, to their amazement, that America is not only the paradise of dionysiac revels as shown in the glossies, but also a woodland of revolutions. Dope could not have been dressed better.

That the book is a farrago of contradictions and obiter dicta is more dangerous than if it had been pure propaganda and all lies. It abounds in pithy quotes and colourful phrases. It has a sprinkling of humour too. And it marshals some statistical information 'to impress'. All these militate against its summary dismissal as a trifle. That "things" happening in America are not revolution but "things" only that 'counter-society' and 'counter-

Third World

The Third World is a massive despair because, 'one of the consequences of living in an underdeveloped society is that one's revolutions are also underdeveloped'. Naturally. Then it lacks 'political and administrative knowledge' of conjuring a revolution out of nowhere. Supposing it stumbles against one, Revel rues, 'it is neutralized by nationalism or folklore', or it relapses into 'recidivism'. He ignores the new folklore emerging as a spin-off from the dissolution that America is today. This contempt of his liberalist soul for the Third World folly of looking up to the Russian, Chinese or Cuban models is reason and vindication enough for the USIS decision to shower the gift of this book on us all.

As to Europe it is, 'barbarous, bloody, narrow, fanatic and repressive'. Why? Because it does not

yet have sex acts on the stage as in the USA (we qualify for commendation for having had the semblance of it on January 26 last year in New Delhi, performed by a famous group of Calcutta), because it had a guy called Lenin who frowned on sex-obsession as unhealthy, because it has a 'cultural stockpile' while no such dead albatross chokes the American throat. America is forward-looking, shaping the future for the whole world—and, should not be disturbed. Europe is weighed down by a guilty conscience and a junky past. Its 'wounded leftist chauvinism' would not let it concede the plain fact of America spear-heading the 20th century revolution, or, to be precise, leading a Revolution Quintet. Christ suffered for the whole of humanity for ages to come. America is carrying the Quintuple Cross for the benefit of five continents on this planet. A global undertaking. Gospel according to Revel—Take heart, oh you faithful, and rejoice, for that is about all for your portion, and your privilege.

Even after Joan Robinson and Joseph Needham to call the Cultural Revolution in China 'essentially a purge' and an 'explosion of collective sadism' is more than mere falsehood. This mayhem is carried farther in asserting that the 'austerity' in communist nations is not 'an investment in the future', and that they are victims of 'anarchic poverty' etc. For a definition of the function of a revolutionary Revel goes to Hitler. After extolling 'constitutional benevolence', 'legal means', 'existing legal framework', 'constitutional margin' and the 'classic liberal system', he has the cheek to say, 'American revolutionaries do not want merely to cut the cake into equal pieces; they want a whole new cake'. And then, certainly, 'one cannot be both a legitimist and a revolutionary at the same time'. First, 'Elections have nothing to do with what one thinks, experiences, says and sees every day'. (p. 36). Next, 'Elections are precisely what

we allow them to be'. (p. 125). 'Revolution is not imitation'. True. But dissent and dulcet delinquency within the assimilative framework of the Establishment are not revolution either even if from Dollar land and written with a capital D. 'Cultural originality does not consist in warming over the past'. Nor does it in orgiastic dissipation and tribal primitiveness manifest in the Priapean and hirsute cults burgeoning all over America. 'There is no "news management" in the U.S.', is a brazen lie. Slant, selection, suppression and subversion are the four most organized techniques of news-editing and purveying, religiously practised in the U.S.

Revolution, Revel says, is not a monopoly to admit of a 'Hollywood star system', i.e., Lenin, Mao, Guevara, Debray. Nor is it a game of patience or charade where alone the Revels have the chance to monopolise all plays and all pleasure. That the working class is 'the only revolutionary avant garde' is not a dogma, but a fact of life. The Yankees were in a funk to see the Australian and Danish workers boycotting American ships and other enterprises, and organizing a world-wide squeeze. This too sobered Nixon into a retreat from Vietnam.

A 'new religion of the future' is not being born in the 'American underground'. It is deadly decadence spreading through imitation which, on his own admission, is not revolution. If he could see, the new religion is already born in China, Vietnam, and Guinea-Bissau in Africa. These are not commodity-cluttered societies but ones with a new conscience and a new courage, a revolutionary elan, with total transformation of praxis. Revel is Kipling with less art. But in Kipling's time the peoples in Asia and Africa were 'silent' and 'sullen', i.e., ignorant and unsuspecting. No more now.

Impressionistic judgments are admissible within the realm of our subjective freedoms and individual eccentricities. But if they are dished out as value judgments they become

debatable. For example, a reviewer calling Revel a paid agent of the CIA must be dismissed as biased and wrong. So must be Revel calling Mao 'no theoretician' and 'the little Red writer'. Even physically Mao is massive, and is no less in his writings and formulations. Or, when he calls Lenin "narrow-minded" for not allowing 'sexual excesses' as part of his revolution!

Not Grown Up

America has not suffered and therefore not grown up. Or it would not have taken to war as a major industry which atrophied its conscience. The trail of violence goes back to pioneering picaroons. So, 'violence and heroism have been made synonymous except when it comes to blacks'.¹ Lionel Trilling, the noted literary critic, called America an 'insane society' in a recent lecture in Washington. Marcuse, in a Thames Television debate in England, June 1972, said: 'if there is any society which is solving its problems by violence it is at present the American society'. Cadavers as containers for opium and heroin is America's contribution to the 'canning industry, exceedingly original.

As to why non-violence is recommended to the Negroes—'white men do not want their lives, their self-image, or their property threatened,² So they are adopting 'tricknology to prevent the black men from hearing the truth'.³ Revel thinks there is progress in the Negroes' situation. No, the concessions whites give and the compromises they make to stay at the top, are out of fear and not from any moral impulse. It is to delay the day of reckoning. The American Constitution once defined the Negro as 'three-fifths'⁴ of a man, who today can 'precipitate chaos and bring down the curtain on the American dream'.⁵ For the Negro is 'the key figure in his country, and the American future is precisely as bright or as dark as his'.⁶ A 'historical vengeance, a cosmic vengeance'⁷ is looming. No cerebral opiate as that dished out by the Revels can

curb its fury or mangle its inevitability.

It has not occurred to Revel that liberalism is an obsolete concept, a dead curio piece from the past, which he so much abominates. And it belonged to Europe, his *bête noire*. Double suspect on his own scale of values.

Deprecating the European students of the Left and praising their American counterparts, he quotes

Chomsky. "The most stupid men learn how to talk, while even the most brilliant monkeys never learn." Obviously, the European students are the 'stupid men' and the Americans 'brilliant monkeys' here. No objection. But it is not given to monkeys, however brilliant, to launch revolutions.

In conclusion, to borrow a phrase from Revel, "such nonsense is not without a purpose". It cannot be.

Nor much percipience is needed to see what the purpose is.

Tailpiece: When the police raided recently a friend's rooms it pounced upon this book as a big catch to prove him a Naxalite! Revel will be outraged with this compliment. So will the Naxalites. Regrettable, Revel.

1 to 7: *The Fire Next Time* (James Baldwin). Penguin, 1964; Dial Press, U.S., 1963.

Calcutta : The City Of Renaissance—I

BENOY GHOSE

CALCUTTA was sixty-seven years old when the battle of Plassey was fought in 1757. In 1690, Job Charnock, the founder of Calcutta, issued a proclamation inviting all kinds of nationalities to come and settle in the Company's Zamindari, which then comprised the three villages of Sutanati (North Calcutta), Kalikata (Central Calcutta, from which the name 'Calcutta' has been derived and Govindapur (Fort William and a part of the Maidan). Charnock, the first Governor of the English settlement, "reigned more absolutely than a Raja" for a couple of years only and died in 1692. He was buried beside the grave of his Indian wife. His son-in-law, Charles Eyre, erected a mausoleum over the tomb, which is still there in St John's Churchyard. This is the Churchyard "where lies the dust of Job Charnock, of Surgeon William Hamilton, and of Admiral Watson, the founder, the extender and the saviour of the British dominion in Bengal" (Curzon).

Calcutta's population, in the beginning of the 18th century (1710), was about 12,000. By the middle of the century (1752) it was about 400,000 (Holwell's estimate). By the end of the century (1800) it was about 500,000 (Police Commissioner's estimate). During the 'Zamindari' of the British, in the pre-Plassey

days, Calcutta grew into a city, with a 400,000 population, from the agglomeration of three villages. How could it be possible? What was the 'pull' factor which was so irresistible that several lakhs of people migrated from the neighbouring villages, to the 'Zamindari' of the English? Certainly it was not in quest of any spiritual solace that people came to the city, but in search of the 'yellow gold', the 'money' with a new velocity of circulation.

The following satirical sketch in *Hickey's Gazette* (India's first newspaper) in 1780, gives a picture of Calcutta society of those days:

Q. What is Commerce?

A. Gambling.

Q. What is the most cardinal virtue?

A. Riches.

Q. What is beauty?

A. Paint.

Q. What is punctuality?

A. An observation of the appointments of duelling and intriguing.

Q. What is gentility?

A. Extravagance.

Q. Who are the people?

A. Nobody.

This satirical sketch of 1780 may be reproduced in any newspaper today, to represent the true picture of the mentality of Calcuttans. Men have come to and men have gone

from this great city, but Calcutta's 'cultural ganga' flows on for ever.

Life in Calcutta in those days, for the English 'Nabobs' and the new 'native' affluents, was gay, gaudy and gastronomical. The first phase of Indo-English culture-contact in Bengal was marked more by 'Indianization' of English manners and customs, beliefs and attitudes. It was the feudal culture of the Nawabs of Murshidabad and Dacca, which flowed to Calcutta and flourished under the patronage of the new city-aristocrats, the Bengali Raja-Maharajas, Dewans, Banians and Mutsuddis, and the glamour of this culture cast its spell on the boorish type of the English rulers. It made them Nawabs and when they returned to England they were called 'Nabobs'. These retired Englishmen carried with them a kind of 'caste' mentality also, and the Scottish capital's large number of pensioners from India provided the inspiration for writing a book about the castes of Edinburgh in 1859. Even the word 'Brahmin' came into use in English to mean a superior person, someone boasting pedigree and blue blood.

The early English settlers in Calcutta were early risers and getting on horseback in the morning and evening was a pleasure, just galloping for several hours "like automations without any purpose". Work

began early, the hours at Public Offices being from 9 o'clock to 1 in the morning and from 7 o'clock till 9 in the evening. Dinner was a huge sumptuous affair and much wine was drunk. A wag suggests the following "guides to Health" in the *Calcutta Gazette* of October 9, 1788: "The gentlemen are particularly entreated not to eat above four pounds of solid at a meal, or drink above six bottles of claret. Dancing will be extremely fatal to the ladies, if taken more than three times a week, and they are positively forbid to wear full dresses of either satin or velvet, until the 1st November."

By the sixties of the 18th century, after Plassey, the fashion of 'hookah smoking' had become firmly established in Anglo-Indian society. In 1769 Stavorus says that at a dinner given to a Dutch Director in Bengal hookahs were placed before each of the Company. Granpré describes the culture of the hookah thus: "The rage of smoking extends even to the ladies; the highest compliment they can pay a man is to give him preference by smoking his hookah. In this case it is a point of politeness to take off a mouthpiece he is using and substitute a fresh one, which he presents to the lady with his hookah, who soon returns it." The decline of the 'hookah-culture' became perceptible after 1800, when it was gradually replaced by the cheroot or cigar-culture. The fashion of cigarette smoking began to make headway after 1900.

As there was hardly any metalled road in Calcutta in the 18th century, the *palkee* or palanquin was the most convenient means of conveyance. From house to office, on all journeys of business or pleasure, the *palkee* was the regular mode of conveyance. With the growth of metalled roads, horse-drawn carriages of various sorts were used, but the palanquin remained the essential means of transport in Calcutta till the Mutiny in the middle of the 19th century. Boating in long handsome boats of various shapes and designs was greatly in vogue, particularly in

the evening, with bands of music. Racing was also then popular in Calcutta as now. There were two race courses, one near Garden Reach and the other on the Maidan. There was so much enthusiasm about it that at the close of the races the stewards did not grudge to give a ball to the gentlemen and ladies of the settlement (Calcutta). The wealthy 'baboo's of Calcutta also maintained their own private race courses, and there was at least one such race course in north Calcutta.

Hotels, Taverns

One important culture-trait of Johnson's England invaded Calcutta triumphantly in the 18th century, which manifested itself in the prolific growth of hotels, taverns, coffee houses and punch houses. There were at least eight hotels in Calcutta in the 18th century—the London, the famous Harmonic which occupied the Police Court building, the Union, Wright's new Tavern near St John's Church, the Calcutta Exchange, the Crown and Anchor, Beard's (Hotel and Moor's Tavern. 'Monsieur de la Gallais Tavern' was famous for public breakfasts and banquets. Besides these there were about eleven punch-houses and quite a lot of coffee, eating and lodging houses in different parts of the town. Gastrology and astrology both are dominant traits in the traditional culture-complex of India, particularly of Mughal India, but the first phase of British acculturation in Calcutta was more gastrologically oriented. The gourmands and gourmets, the cultural participants in the field, were mainly composed of Englishmen, while the 'native' rich, mostly orthodox Hindus, kept away from them and preferred to transplant a part of this 'tavern-culture' in their family festivals and entertainments.

The famous Durga Puja festival, described by Holwell as "the grand feast of the gentoo's", may be cited as a case in point. The *Calcutta Chronicle* reports in September 1792: "The grand festival of the Doorgah Poojah commences on Sunday next.

The following are the principal houses, where the customary annual ceremonies will take place: Raja Nobkissen's, Prawnkissen Sing's, Kestuo Chand Mitra's, Narrain Masery's, Ram Hurry Takoor's, Banarassy Ghoshe's, Durponarain Takoor's. The scarcity of amusements in Calcutta and the fineness of the nights will no doubt, cause this spectacle to attract, as usual, numbers of Europeans".

"Of the nautches at the different great houses, those of Sookmoy Roy's afforded by much the most satisfaction, not only on account of the superior number of Singers and Dancers, but of the coolness of the place; no low crowds being admitted, and two large swing punkhas being kept constantly in motion. The only novelty that rendered the entertainment different from those of last year, was the introduction, or rather the attempt to introduce some English tunes in the Hindoostanee music."

This kind of celebration continued in the 19th century, till the Mutiny and the end of the Company Bahadour's rule. Fanny Parkes gives an account of a festivals in 1823:

"September 13, 1823: We went to a nach at the house of a wealthy Baboo during the festival of the Doorga Pooja. In the room on one side a handsome supper was laid out, in the European style, supplied by Messrs Gunter and Hooper where ices and French wines were in plenty for the European guests. In the rooms on the other sides of the square, and in the area, were groups of nach women dancing and singing, and crowds of European and native gentlemen sitting on sofas or on chairs listening to Hindostanee airs."

The process of acculturation was considerably accelerated in the first half of the 19th century. Cigars were replacing hookahs, carriages were dislodging palkees, European tunes were blended with Hindustani music, the guests of goddess Durga were served with English food and French wine, and fireworks were

more frequently displayed on festive occasions with brilliant banners wishing the prosperity of the British rulers. It was in this social-cultural milieu, which did not change much during the days of Rammohan, the young Derozians and Vidyasagar, that our reformers launched their campaigns against some of the socio-religious prejudices and customs of orthodox Hinduism.

Calcutta was looking up in the 19th century. Although the boundaries of the 'White town' and the 'Black town' were clearly demarcated within the city, still the city was getting a kind of baroque look, thanks to the effort of the Lottery Committee and others, with its new pucca roads fit for buggies, rickshaws, phaetons and a lot of other kinds of carriages, its palaces, garden-houses, barracks, administrative buildings, mercantile offices, shops and bazaars, schools and colleges, newly excavated tanks and squares, and of course the sprawling slums and decaying hovels around innumerable stagnant pools.

From the 'Notes of a late sojourn in the city of palaces' by a Griffin in the middle of the 19th century, the following picture of Calcutta comes into view. If one looks around from the top of the monument on the Maidan, he will find "a countless number of flat-roofed houses with and without balustrades, so close do these roofs appear to be one another, that he who inclines, may apparently walk and jump over them from one end of the native town to the other". If one slips into a palkee (which could be hired for the whole day, that is for 14 hours, at four annas and for four bearers, four annas) and traverses the town, he will find that "the greatest number by far of the dwellings in this proud metropolis are of a very humble description" and they are so small that "the home comforts of a family of four or five persons are sometimes confined in a mud hut, seven feet long, five feet broad, and five feet high". But in the 'black town' particularly on the Chitpore Road, there are many 'na-

tive mansions' which are "so very large that they seem more like public than private edifices", and "truly a display of wealth and oriental taste bursts on the sight of the visitor" when he steps into these mansions.

Our 'Griffin' mentions in his 'notes' that "there are thirty-six bazaars in Calcutta and its vicinity, but few of them are so much frequented, perhaps not one so often mentioned as Old China Bazaar". In this bazaar there are money-changers with "small lots of gold mohurs and rupees, and heaps of pice"; "dealers in idols" with images of "the five-faced Shiva the destroyer, of the blood-thirsty goddess Kali and of 'Doorgah'; the makers of hubble-bubbles; the confectioners or "dealers in sugary preparations" with "heaps of saccharine obelisks, pyramids and balls" (Bengali sweets of different shapes and sizes); the Bengali and European

cabinet-makers, the Bengalis with a small stock of chairs, couches and almirahs, and the Europeans employing 600 to 1000 carpenters in their workshops. The description of a small punch-house in the bazaar of a Sree Krishna Dutt, "a miserable and almost unfurnished place", is interesting. The customer "Jack is altogether ignorant of Bengalee, and the native spirit-dealer is ignorant of English, but the former wants liquor and the latter wants money, and therefore the language of signs is very expressive". Besides the punch-house "the shop of Callachund Tagore is a more interesting place to ladies than sahibs, for this native is a haberdasher, he has a varied and fanciful stock of goods and is moreover a most obliging pleasant person".

The description of 'bookshops' in Old China Bazaar is perhaps the

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By Anna Louise Strong Rs. 5/-

History of that old story—how with the power of cash Washington moved into Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam with "military aid" to the new governments to break their pledges of neutrality and bent them into a military base against China and North Vietnam.

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most interesting in Griffin's 'notes'. "Bookshops have attractions all their own, even in the China Bazaar. The stock of books in some of these native shops is heavy, and the authors are commonly of the first rank in literature and popular science; Shakespeare, Addison, Burns, Chalmers, Scott, Maryatt, indeed almost every author of note with general readers has a place on the shelves of the bazaar booksellers. If the visitor wishes to have a non-scientific work recently published in London and already popular, he is certain of obtaining it in the New or Old China Bazaar. American authors, few though they be, fill many a shelf in these bazaars; Janathan calculates that Cooper's and Washington Irving's works, and cheap reprints of popular British authors, will sell rapidly hereabouts, and therefore he sends large quantities of them; these books are purchased by the native booksellers at the auctions, and by other natives who sell them on the streets".

Age of Reason

The English-educated Bengalis visited then the bookshops in Old and New China Bazaar in search of new books from Europe and America. It was in these shops, perhaps, that Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* was abundantly supplied by some American publisher—the book which became the 'Bible' of the young Derozians of Calcutta. The Christian missionary, Alexander Duff, says: "It was some wretched bookseller in the United States of America, who—basely taking advantage of the reported infidel leanings of a new race of men in the East (the author means the Hindu College students, particularly the young Derozians), and apparently regarding no God but his silver dollars—despatched to Calcutta a cargo of that most malignant and pestiferous of all anti-Christian publications. From one ship a thousand copies were landed, and at first sold at the cheap rate of one rupee per copy; but such was the demand, that the price soon rose and after a few

months, it was actually quintupled. Besides the separate copies of the *Age of Reason*, there was also a cheap American edition, in one thick Vol. 8 vo., of all Paine's works, including the *Rights of Man*, and other minor pieces, political and theological".

This socio-cultural life-pattern of Calcutta continued without any major break or change till the end of the 19th century, and beyond that till about the thirties of the 20th century. During the whole 19th century the population of Calcutta increased from roughly 600,000 (1802) to about 800,000 (1901), and the annual growth rate was negligible. In the next thirty years it increased by 300,000, from 800,000 to 1,100,000 (1931). The annual growth rate of population in the forties was smaller than that in the thirties, but the partition of Bengal into two halves led to a steady influx of East Bengal refugees, mainly to the city, and this added a new dimension to the economic, social and cultural life of Calcutta. The situation became worse and more complicated with the heavy influx of immigrants from other provinces to the city, and the consequent cut-throat competition in the limited sector of distributive and petty trades, which are and have always been the major source of employment in the city (and not industries), and from where the Bengalis, young and old, are being steadily ousted. As the Bengalis are being punched and pushed from all fields and corners of employment, and as the bulk of the Bengali lower-middle class is expanding enormously, a huge underworld (which is no longer 'under') of criminals and anti-socials is growing in the city and its suburbs. These anti-socials of a large variety are known as mastans. The history of Calcutta, since the days of the Great Calcutta Killing, 1946), is yet to be written by social historians. And the origin of the 'mastan culture' which dominates Calcutta's social and cultural life today dates back to that period. The 'mastans' have been steadily ascending the social scale of respectability, by being popular heroes and martyrs,

since the days of Calcutta Killing, and since the late sixties, their anti-social role has been politically sanctified by both the Rightist and Leftist parties, for the furtherance of their selfish ends.

It is no wonder therefore that the rule of the mastans, their daggers, bombs and pipeguns, is absolute today in the city and its suburbs, and in every field—social, political, educational and cultural. This is 'Calcutta 1973'.

Meanwhile the Bengalis are fast losing their historical and cultural identity in their own city of Calcutta, in spite of their desperate efforts to save it by holding seminars, melas and fairs on Bengali culture, folk culture and poetry, and by resurrecting the memories and monuments of 'Giant Bengalis' of bygone days.

(This feature will appear occasionally.)

Inquilab

HITEN GHOSH

ASIF Currimbhoys' *Inquilab* (directed and produced in Bengali by Tarun Roy) sets out to interpret revolutionary violence in terms of a young man's impetuous involvement in such violence and ultimate revulsion against it through personal loss and disillusionment. The theme and background of the play are provided by the Naxalite movement in West Bengal. The Bombay-born English playwright, however, evinces little insight into the social and psychological causes of the phenomenon. This general shortcoming coupled with his specific ignorance about the Bengali youth, peasantry and the upper class, who were caught in the maelstrom, makes his play a superficial study in political violence and its personal motivation and consequences. It remains, for the most part, a chaotic medley of sensational horrors capped by a melodramatic moral at the end

The play has a loose episodic structure of sorts with no moving situation or emotional tension to give it any kind of unity or meaningfulness. Characters move in and around the scenes with predetermined postures and a certain ghost-like insubstantiality hanging about them. They remain rigid and flat with the situation in which they are involved, never revealing any truth about life. Neither does the playwright succeed in working up an atmosphere charged with violence, anger, repression, hope and despair. The whole thing looks like a mechanical contrivance purporting to bring out the tragic futility of violence. But even this final theme does not develop out of the action and the characters' individual or historical destiny. The tragic course of the violence is not presented from inside, with any real understanding of the personalities involved. Neither the revolutionaries nor their targets, or victims if you prefer, appear as living human beings waging a real struggle for supremacy. They remain abstract generalisations—an embodiment of newspaper editorials and commentaries, and their situation scarcely takes on any concreteness and particularity. Their inner conflicts, if any, also follow a banal formula. The two caricatures representing the central authority and the Congress (old?) are so extravagant as to give a wrong focus on the actual conflict between the ruling class and the rebels. They obscure the real nature of the confrontation. The dramatist's claim to objectivity does not hold much water when judged by the devising of his plot and characters.

The dialogue is turgid and spoken in a ranting style. The dramatist has some pretension to make his play a human document but the human aspects can hardly appear through the false notes of a melodrama. The mystery of life, its pregnant incalculability, its dread, anguish, joy and suffering—all these philosophical frills the dramatist fails to weave into the pattern of his action. He flourishes these metaphy-

sical conceits but they hang loose upon his story like a giant's robe upon a dwarf. The representation of the hero's mother as the symbol of fertility and the recurrent motif of seed-planting and allusion to the cycle of death and resurrection in nature remain all a mystical abracadabra superadded to the penny-thriller theme. They never enrich the meaning of the play.

The conception of the hero's character is a pretty good muddle. His doubts and conflicts are never made convincing. He is divided between his loyalty to the cause of revolution and his love for a girl. His mouth-ing of revolutionary phrases seems all there is to his ardent faith in the cause. The romping love scenes are copied from Hindi films when the hero makes his high-falutin proclamations of love for the heroine and dedication to the cause of revolution. His last gesture of fair-mindedness as between the blood-thirsty peasants and the heroic landlord, with whose daughter he has fallen in love, is an attempt to save the landlord's life. When this attempt fails he begins to doubt the cause of revolution and becomes suspect in the eye of his revolutionary friends who decide to murder him as a traitor. Then follows the wholly inexplicable killing of the professor, his father, by the mysterious leader of the revolution who turns out to be none else but the professor's long-lost son. The professor was opposed to violence and had long deprecated his wife's fixation about this lost son who perhaps fulfils his destiny through parricide. But I do not pretend to know what all these fragments from the Attic tragedy plus Freud plus the cult of Durga as the goddess of fertility plus revolutionary violence add up to.

The portrayal of college revolutionaries and peasant rebels has a kind of surface realism without any attempt at interpretation in depth. The peasant leader is a ribald joke though conceived in all seriousness and intended as a sympathetic character. This is what comes of

making a play out of newspaper clippings. Theatre Centre's performance is all through a feast of ham-acting perhaps in keeping with the gory theme. Tarun Roy seems to excel in a declamatory style of acting which is clearly outdated. Dipanwita Roy makes a better job of her role as the hero's mother with her poise and restrained performance. The only redeeming feature of the production is the sets which were conceived with taste and imagination. They were delightful to look at with three different settings for different scenes, two of them juxtaposed on the lower plane and the other overhanging them from the upper stage. The professor's room is laid on the upper plane, with the two lower sets representing the village and the city scenes. They are alternately illuminated according to the shift of the locale.

Theatre Centre's performance on February 19 was graced by the presence of His Excellency Mr A. L. Dias, the Governor of West Bengal, and the Bengali production has had the blessings of the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi. Among others, Satyajit Ray has also discovered in Asif Currimbhoy's play "a striking capacity for getting below the surface of current events".

Hebbar's Exhibition

SANDIP SARKAR

THE Academy of Fine Arts sponsored an exhibition of Kattingeri Krishna Hebbar's paintings from February 14 to 21. It was his first exhibition in Calcutta. As in Husain's exhibition so in Hebbar's, literally multitudes came.

The Academy of Fine Arts and the Birla Academy of Art and Culture are very competitive; as the latter had organised Husain's exhibition, the former had no choice but to sponsor Hebbar. No doubt both the artists are unaware of this side of

things. One good thing came out from this petty rivalry—the regular exhibition-goers of Calcutta could see for themselves what the artists are doing in other parts of India.

Hebbar is a skilful painter, always moving forward. He is very sincere and melodious but he is not daring enough. The paintings shown here were from 1967-72 and gave us a fair idea of Hebbar the artist. He was born in 1912 in South India and graduated from the J. J. School of Art Bombay in 1938 and in 1949-50 he received further training in the Academy Julian, Paris.

He has tried to be versatile and has been taken in by a variety of contemporary experiments in art. He has not concentrated on one or two particular problems and seen them to the end before moving to the next one. In his paintings one does not see the slow development which is inevitable, but at every step the viewer is jerked into a new problem as there is no time allowed for transition. But, in spite of inconsistency, Hebbar has an artistic integrity which commands respect.

Hebbar uses seven colours as a musician uses seven notes and he likes to build up a serene atmosphere. He wants to transform the viewers to a state of bliss (anandam). One notes that music has inspired some of his paintings. The twin canvas "Music (Western)" (9) and "Music (Eastern)" (10) brought out the very spirit of music in a very delicate and subtle fashion. "Rhythm" (15) compared the sound of music with the gushing, gurgling and roaring of water. Swift brush work communicated the mood of music.

There were some paintings which tried to make the viewers aware of the vastness of the universe. "Blessed Sleep" (5) portray a sleeping village with a number of cots in the open air and a misty white moon. Moonlight descends and engulfs the whole atmosphere. "Space" (21) done in white with some calculated spots generates a sense of awe. "Aspiration" (1), although more of a cover design than painting, done in blue

with sun and moon and a human figure, shows the spirit of man trying to assert himself in infinite space. "Sharad Pornima" (23) almost captures the whiteness of moonlight. "The glow" (22) shows us the setting sun covering not only the sky, but the earth and everything thereof, with its glowing fire. Similarly "Summer" (2) had trees blazing with heat. The sky has both sun and the moon, as if the heat has made the division of time into day and night meaningless. To make us feel the heat the artist made both sun and moon orange. "The dawn" (19) showed how darkness is lifted and everything is given back its colours.

There were two paintings inspired by the events of Bangladesh. "Atrocity" (3) seemed a bit laboured and obvious. It has a body of a naked raped woman and some soldiers. "Nineteen Seventyone" (18) has a mass grave and a lot of dead people huddled together. This one seemed to have a little more inspiration than the former. However both these pictures were timid and showed Hebbar a bit out of breath.

The best exhibit was probably "Search" (17)—a purely non-figurative work which may remind Calcuttans of some similar paintings of Mohim Roodro. The canvas was divided into three parts. The top is done in dark blue, black and dark brown and the bottom with a dark blue circle and small round blue patches in a dark brown background. There was a large space left between the top and the bottom which is done mainly in white. Mild colours peeped through the white like half-forgotten memories. A line bisected the white and goes slightly curving from left to right. It gave the viewer an uncanny feeling of being lost.

One feels, Hebbar is like a beautiful butterfly that hovers from flower to flower, undecided and not quite sure what he wants to do. He is happy and sings like a quail, but somehow he does not seem to be involved with life. In fact he seems tired of it and wants to escape. His paintings suffer much for this.

Reba Hore's Paintings

There are a number of women painters and sculptors in this city—Kamala Raychoudhury, Umla Sidhanta, Tuku Nandy to name just a few. But somehow they are shy to exhibit alone. One must be grateful to Reba Hore for being an exception. From February 6 to 19 she exhibited her recent paintings and drawings in the Chemould gallery. There can be no doubt that she is a professional painter. She not only participates in all national exhibitions, but has solo-shows in Delhi, Santiniketan and Calcutta almost regularly.

Her paintings have changed since the Calcutta viewers saw her last. Her approach is mature and sure. Especially her bold way of handling colours shows confidence.

However, one would like to add a piece of advice as the paintings exhibited were a bit monotonous. Mrs Hore would have done the viewers a good turn, had she aimed at a little more variety.

Letters

Cricket Hysteria

The sort of hysteria among the entire urban middle-class people—men, women and children of all ages—during the recent Test matches between England and India was shocking. Acute problems of food, housing, health, education, employment and so on haunt a large section of these people all the time. These problem-ridden people struggling all the time for mere survival and suffering from malnutrition neither have the time nor the means to participate even in games that are far less time consuming and expensive than cricket. So who can afford to pursue it and dream of shining in future? Only those who live on the fruits of labour of other people. The British lords and barons who used to live by plundering the wealth of many countries of the world could have hardly found a better game to kill time. So the wealthy people

(the maharajas, merchants and elites) of their colonies, e.g. India, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa Rhodesia and West Indies started imitating them. British colonialism is gone but the maharajas, merchants and elites continue to master the art of imitating them more intensely. Thus cricket goes on in Britain and her previous colonies with more vigour although it has been altogether rejected by the people of the most prosperous nations of the world, e.g. USA, USSR, France, West Germany, Japan, China and so on. But why this sudden madness, this sudden hysteria among these urban middle-class people who are never known to have any link with cricket in everyday life? Does it help to explore new knowledge or to enrich the soul? Can they ever make it, in reality, their own game? In fact if they had ever any hope of acquiring the status of the maharajas, merchants and elites, there might have been some justification for such madness.

India is one of the poorest nations of the world. The vast majority of her people, living below subsistence level, have never heard of cricket. The so called Indian cricket team never represents India; it represents a handful of people, the maharajas, merchants and elites. Taking the fullest advantage of the totally disorganised and disintegrated state of the people, the entire publicity machinery of the Government and the big business houses—the radio, television and press—went all out to impose the so-called enthusiasm on the urban middle-class people in order to push them into a state of degeneration. It is a matter of shame that our radio, television, and the press could find no other topic than explaining the virtues of cricket to our people at a juncture when the people of Europe, America and Australia were bursting into rage against U.S. bombing of Vietnam. How long will they continue to live like slaves and lose all power of resistance against the rampant social injustices in the country? It is only by pre-

serving their human self that they can wage uncompromising struggle for social justice. The sooner these people realise it, the better for themselves as well as the country. A fraction of the time and energy which they spent for the Test matches, if devoted with the same unity, might have helped to find out ways of solving some of the basic problems of their life. The money which some of them spent on a cricket might have met some of the basic needs of their families.

S. NEOGY

Chandannagar, Hooghly

Student Power

The article 'A New Opposition: Student Power' (January 6), was about students and not about workers and peasants. Mr P. S. Chopra (February 3) should understand it. The misunderstanding of his mind is caused by his intellectual misadventure—to think always about the 'peasant question' (which without any doubt is very important), ignoring all other forms of protest. This is not a Marxist approach to reality. Again, in his hasty thinking he has ignored what I have said and repeated in support of his criticism of my own arguments.

There does exist 'student power', but not a leftist student power. I have nowhere said that the students are challenging 'at present' the 'existing political set-up in India'. Their revolt is still emerging, they are becoming conscious about the inefficiency and uselessness of the 'system', they can challenge the 'system'—only challenge—if they are taught to fight against it and for this purpose made politically conscious.

If today the 'students' are being used in one way or other by the Indian ruling classes to confuse the struggle of the masses' (as Mr Chopra admits), in West Bengal, Andhra, Telengana, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Assam and Punjab, then we should admit that student power is there, which is being misused 'today' by

the reactionary classes. I have emphasised in my article the point that the lack of leftist power is precisely because of the theoretical bankruptcy and general politico-ideological backwardness of the Indian leftist movement. Because of this lack of leftist orientation of the student movement, there is no protest 'against the increasing American and Soviet penetration into India's economy', against 'India's policies regarding neighbouring countries', 'against American butchery in Vietnam'.

My statement that the students alone cannot succeed in creating a New Society (even though radicalized) highlights the importance of the vanguard role of Indian peasants and workers.

BHARTI AZAD
Chandigarh

Delhi University

I thank Mr D. R. Choudhry for his admission (see Letters, January 13), as the spokesman of the CPM group in Delhi University, of the role of his group. He feels that every struggle against the establishment is not the harbinger of revolution. It means, by implication, that during the agitation, the group did not agitate against the authorities, but rather, being active in University politics, opted for being instrumental in crushing the movement.

Mr Choudhry accuses me of distorting facts with regard to the incidents on the 14th/15th November 1972. May I know what is his source of information that he considers to be the absolute truth? Is it not based on reports published in the Delhi dailies and the bulletin issued by the Vice-Chancellor in that respect? Should a revolutionary correspondent report as the bourgeois press does or as it suits the taste of Mr Choudhry and the like? It is true that the call for the University take-over was uncalled for. But the tactics of the movement suggest that one should not start criticizing

everything during the critical stage of the struggle. Besides, the reporter is not a chronicler. He cannot be accused of distortion, if certain insignificant facts are missed by him.

Mr Choudhry says that the revolutionaries ignore "the content of the struggle and as to who leads it". He and the like are of the opinion that the Jana Sangh, a reactionary party, happens to be in the forefront in leading the students. Hence, according to him, a Marxist not only need not join it, but also should see that the movement fizzles out. Why does he not understand even the ABC of Marxism-Leninism that any move against the autocracy of the reactionary ruling party, whether from the left or the right, needs people's active support? In that content, the question of leadership is meaningless. Did Lenin not actively support the earlier revolutions where the leadership was not necessarily that of the Bolsheviks?

Yes, the Jana Sangh is also our enemy. But in the present context, who is our main enemy? What is the principal contradiction? Central Government, Delhi Administration and Delhi University authorities on the one hand (all under Congress leaders) and nearly 100,000 students of the University on the other. Here, even if the President of the Students Union happens to be a Jana Sanghi, the movement needs active support of the Marxists as long as it is militant and serving the democratic cause of the people. Besides, the students affiliated to socialist parties were equally in the forefront. Why does Mr Choudhry distort the facts by ignoring the role of these students? Thus the participation of the revolutionaries, who have become a challenge to the combined strength of the CPI and CPM, was fully called for and which they rightly did. What the CPM and CPI-wallah did was contrary to the teachings of Marxism-Leninism.

SUGAT SINGH
New Delhi

Raiding Courts

The Council of the West Bengal Association of Democratic Lawyers note with grave concern that the anti-socials have now started raiding Court premises and assaulting witnesses, litigants and accused. In Howrah Court on February 13 certain accused in a Sessions Case on bail were chased from inside the Court premises and grievously assaulted with iron rods and sharp cutting weapons by goondas with the police looking on and almost within the sight of the Presiding Officers of the Courts. The same police were unduly active when one of these anti-socials said that one Rajesh Gupta who had come in connection with a case and was sitting in the Sherishta of an Advocate was carrying arms and, even though nothing was found on his person on search before the SDO, Howrah, he was taken into custody on charges of attempt to murder and under the Arms Act.

Threats have been held out to members of the Bar, like Kazi Ahmed Ali and Prahlad Das.

The Association of Democratic Lawyers urges upon the Administration and the Government to prevent such interference with the course of justice and to ensure that litigants, witnesses and accused can attend court and return home safe.

A. P. CHATTERJEE
Joint Secretary
WBADL, Calcutta

Preventive Detention

Thank you for publishing in *Frontier* (17.2.73) an article (Some Light on Preventive Detention) on the working of the laws relating to Preventive Detention in this unhappy State. The orders of the High Court staying hearing of Habeas Corpus applications on the ground that appeals are pending in the Supreme Court against the orders of the High Court in two other different cases in which the State lost, make the common man doubt whe-

ther the Judiciary is really independent (i.e. free from the influence) of the Executive. It beg to draw the attention of the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court to the article referred to above.

R. P. SINHA
Calcutta

Whose English?

I was rather surprised to read Mr Sangh Sen Singh's letter (February 10) written in defence of the university English. Frankly speaking, I can't help saying that he has failed to understand the author's (R.B.S.) English. Mr Singh's attitude is rather adolescent. I don't know why he should cry at the top of his voice to defend bad English in the academic world.

I fail to understand why he should typify *Frontier* by saying, *Frontier* is trying "to focus the attention of the readers on the miseries of the people". What exactly he means by the "miseries of the people"? Does people exist beyond this social structure? Or, is misery something ethereal, sent down by the gods only? People obviously suffer because of unhealthy social circumstances. And it is a fact that *Frontier* often points out the wrongs existing in this present social set-up. Does Mr Singh think that a university is out of this social set-up? And can the great academicians in the universities, in a well-developed country afford to write wrong, incorrect, ungrammatical English? The author of 'English—whose English?' definitely did not express his opinions like the Brahmin (whose story Mr Singh unnecessarily quoted) but only wanted to point out that the university indulges in unchaste English. Pointing out an error is not a danger, I suppose.

A. READER
Calcutta

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I, SAMAR SEN, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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Signature of Publisher SAMAR SEN

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