

frontier

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DEATH OF A PRESIDENT

GRIEF at Dr Zakir Husain's death has not been merely a part of State ritual; it certainly should not be. State mourning has been, and is still being observed with due solemnity; but there is also sorrow, sincerely felt and very widely shared, at the passing away of a man of much distinction and dignity. Yet neither the distinction nor the dignity was in any way daunting. Dr Husain had never played any obstructive role; he was, above all, a gentleman. It was not any immediately impressive achievement, political or other, that elevated him to the highest office in the land; in fact, the qualities which marked him out were not such as one would readily expect in high political office. For many years he had worked, quietly and with single-minded devotion, in a somewhat unfashionable field of education; his intellectual accomplishments were not dazzling, but they were eminently dependable. He had always been an ardent nationalist, but the ardour was tempered by the moderation of the intellectually and emotionally mature. He led a busy life, and yet he succeeded in living gracefully. He did not shun politics, but remained above sectarian differences.

Dr Husain's election as President showed the measure of the respect that he enjoyed. That he was a Congress party nominee was not altogether an advantage, particularly when the Opposition parties had combined in sponsoring another candidate. Yet his personal qualities earned him some Opposition votes as well. Above all, many saw in his election at least a symbolic vindication of the country's secular professions. Even many of those who opposed him on grounds of party policy were rather pleased when he was elected.

But what happens now? The situation is vastly different, not merely because of the changed political composition of the Central and State legislative bodies which make up the electoral college, not even because of difficulty in finding a comparable candidate, but also, indeed more, because of a change in the political mood. The Congress may be still sure of getting its candidate elected—though the certainty is not quite as indisputable as it was in 1967. But what kind of a candidate can the Congress agree upon? What would be the Opposition strategy? Can it agree on a single candidate? Or can there be an all-party consensus candidate? And, above all, what kind of role will the

President of India play after the 1972 General Election?

The last question will assume crucial importance if the Congress loses its majority at the Centre in 1972, a possibility—indeed a probability—which is no longer of academic interest to either the Congress or the Opposition parties. There is no question of the latter parties combining to replace the Congress in Central authority. In the likely event of the Congress losing its parliamentary majority, the Opposition would be more sharply split into right and left—with a good deal of the Congress probably breaking away to merge with either. Still there might not be a viable majority group, in which case the President would have to do a lot of things over a dealocked Parliament. The point to remember is that the Constitution gives the President much greater and more decisive powers than any of the Presidents has had occasion to exercise. If Governor Dharma Vira can dismiss a State Government, President X, too, can dismiss a Central Government and dissolve Parliament—and perhaps even start thinking of his responsibilities as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Mrs Gandhi and her “liberal” friends may find such thoughts horrifying, but neither the tough men in her party nor their friends across the party’s right fringe can have forgotten to ponder these possibilities. The latter may have also been working out a strategy.

In these circumstances, the chances of an all-party consensus are extremely remote. Mr Jayaprakash Narayan’s name has been suggested, but rightist support for him would be half-hearted—and tactical, as a stop-gap arrangement; many others may have no reason to want a man who might easily yield to rightist pressure in the name of democratic liberalism. It would, therefore, be more to the point to consider other possible candidatures. Mrs Gandhi and her group would probably wish to delay a sharp division by putting up a relatively uncontroversial candidate. Mr Giri might have been one if he had not been so

old or his performances for many years past had not been so uninspiring, or if his elevation did not tend to perpetuate the practice of a Vice-President’s promotion to the Presidency. Mrs Gandhi could think of other possibilities; for example, another member of a minority community (not necessarily Muslim) or a relatively inconspicuous and hence uncontroversial individual.

But the question is whether she will be given the chance. Both the Congress right and the parties to the right of the Congress may think that there must be no more shilly-shallying, that the communist menace is already too great to make it safe to maintain even the residual proprieties of parliamentary democracy, that the challenge can be met only by a rightist coup at the Centre—perhaps even before the 1972 General Election. And if these duties to the nation and to the free and democratic world outside have to be performed, it would be useful to have a no-nonsense President—say, someone like Mr Sanjiva Reddy. He has the right political ideas; and isn’t he also from the south? Nobody would be able to complain about north Indian domination. Or why not Mr Jagjivan Ram; again a man of right ideas and with a capacity for the necessary ruthlessness. And wouldn’t he also be a representative of India’s dispossessed? There are also other men to choose from. The strong men of the Congress, the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh may already have had a close look at the various possibilities. The leftists, by contrast, may find it more difficult to work out their own strategy. For one thing, the so-called left is half not so united as the right. The SSP has its own wayward ideas about political priorities; the PSP might as well merge with the Swatantra; even the communists are divided on policies to be pursued at the Centre. But, whatever they do, the communists must reckon with the prospects and implications of a rightist takeover in Delhi; this Presidential election is going to be of much greater political significance than any in the past.

High-Level Collusion

The concern expressed by some members in Parliament over the Pakistan High Commissioner’s talks with the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister of West Bengal is not an isolated occurrence. A few weeks before, there was a similar storm over Mr Harekrishna Konar’s suggestion that a non-official delegation should be sent to East Pakistan as a token of goodwill that one Bengal bears to the other. It seems the American and Soviet campaigns, started immediately after the uprising against the dictatorial regime in Pakistan, especially in its eastern wing, have caught on, and some people in New Delhi are having nightmares of an independent united Bengal. Others who are less credulous have not hesitated to join the chorus because it enables them to have a go at the UF Government. There is deliberate scare-mongering in the suggestion that the move has the blessing of China, as Maulana Bhasani in the eastern wing and the UF Government in West Bengal are both under Chinese influence. The attitude of the UF parties to China is not unknown; some of them will perhaps regard such statements as libellous. Even if any section of the UF harbours ideas of an ultimate reunion of the two Bengals, it will have second thoughts on the matter if China is known to favour such a course.

The published reports of the talks do not bear out the kind of apprehensions expressed. It is customary for foreign envoys to call on the Chief Minister when they visit Calcutta. There was an additional reason for the Pakistan High Commissioner to make a courtesy call, as he was on his first visit to the city after the mid-term poll. A few weeks ago, the then US Ambassador, Mr Chester Bowles, did it; so have some other foreign envoys and dignitaries. No questions were raised then; no special report was sought by the Government of India on what they had talked about. It is the business of a diplomatist to probe the interviewee’s

mind; if that is wrong, all diplomats are guilty of it, the Americans not excepted. Obviously, the Pakistan High Commissioner could not talk all the time of weather or even of the Indian Airlines plane crash over which the East Pakistan authorities offered exemplary co-operation. It was natural that the talks should veer round the relations between two Bengals and views be expressed on how to improve them. Whether they were meant seriously or not is a different matter; but no one can take exception if the question of resumption of trade between the two Bengals was raised. That seems to be the policy of the Government of India also, which removed the ban on trade with Pakistan exactly three years ago. It is said that resumption has not been possible because of non-reciprocation by Pakistan. If the Calcutta talks indicate the possibility of a change in Pakistan's attitude, New Delhi should be happy. It should be happier still that the UF leaders, true to the new spirit of non-confrontation, made it clear that however much they might like normalisation of relations, any decision on this matter rested with the Government of India.

The reason for New Delhi's nervousness is different. It is scared of the people's movement in East Pakistan which compelled a dictator to step down and is keeping another on tenterhooks. For its own safety and possibly for that of some others also it has to stamp out any move for a rapport between the people of the two Bengals. Its allegiance to the Tashkent Agreement is now confined to stabilising the military regime in East Pakistan where General Yahya Khan is faring rough weather. That is why the Union Ministries of External Affairs and Defence are maintaining "discreet silence", though they have "irrefutable evidence" that troops in plain clothes are being flown across Indian territory on scheduled PIA flights operating non-stop between West and East Pakistan. The earlier official denial that Pakistani troops are not being flown across India is only a half-truth, for it refers

to troops in uniform and not civvies. New Delhi's collusion in the massing of troops in East Pakistan is a gesture against the people of that province. It was not really necessary because apart from military transport planes which can fly non-stop around the Indian peninsula, the military regime in Pakistan has chartered about a dozen ships to move troops and equipment, including tanks and guns, to East Pakistan. Three infantry divisions are said to be already there—an unprecedented concentration, for even in 1965 hardly more than one division was stationed in the province. Both Maulana Bhasani and Sheikh Mujibar Rahman are reported to be quite critical of India's apathy to the misuse of their civilian air services by the Pakistan authorities for flying troops across the sub-continent. India can stop such overflights under international civil aviation regulations, but it is making no such move even after a massive transport of troops has been accomplished. It is in good company in trying to buttress the military regime in Pakistan, for neither the USA nor the Soviet Union has any sympathy for the aspirations of the people of East Bengal. The Soviet attitude is clear from an article in *Pravda* (reproduced in this issue) by its Karachi correspondent, who has sought to make out that the whole agitation was whipped up by anti-national, pro-Peking and pro-imperialist elements. Both Moscow and Washington have laid down the guidelines for India, each in its own way. In following them India can claim to be implementing in earnest the Tashkent Agreement, which is underwritten by the Soviet Union.

May Day

What a May Day it was! In Moscow, despite the victory of the Russian border guards on the Ussuri, the military parade was dropped and there was no chance to see the weapons used and captured in the Damansky clash. It was a farewell to arms. The arms, however, lurked

in Czechoslovakia and, uncertain of how the populace would react, the authorities did not go in for a big show. With Mr Husak no nonsense. Will the Czechoslovaks observe May 9, their national day, as a day of mourning? Or will some announcement be made to improve the image of the fraternal octopus?

In Paris, both the Government and the Communists apprehended revolutionary combat on the streets when the militant students announced their decision to join the workers in their traditional parade. The communists, for the first time, called off the parade and the Government banned all demonstrations. No risks could be taken—the Grand Old Man had just committed political suicide.

Calcutta saw some revolutionary combat in the Chowringhee area between rival processions of the CPI (M) and the Naxalites. For the latter it was to be an important day—they had decided to announce, through Kanu Sanyal, the formation of the third communist party—and they should have practised moderation for a few hours. But being prone to violence by nature and upbringing, they ran berserk, as the Home Minister said. In the clashes, the police used a new tactic: extensive use of tear-gas shells, including many rounds on the venue of the Maidan meeting before it was held, when not many were about in that area, but there were no lathi-charges, no arrests. In a fluid situation where it is difficult to tell who is who, whether it was the right or the wrong volunteer, it was a wise tactic.

Those who gave currency to reports of the irresponsible, one-sided, appalling behaviour of the Naxalites and advised the listeners at the Brigade Parade Ground to go home in groups to avoid further murderous assaults, should remember that they are encouraging even friendly outsiders to believe that there is no knowing Calcutta: in a city where some political elements with an ideology of their own can be such reckless and ruthless hooligans even in the presence of a police force ready to give all-out protection to the ruling parties,

what can ruthless, non-political rowdies not do, suppose at a place called Rabindra Sarobar, when it was dark, the police were ineffective and the victims helpless?

A Myth Well Nourished

It is entirely right that there is a committee to study the performance of our public sector projects. The vital role that this sector plays in the country's economy can be gauged by the fact that, while in 1951 its share in the total productive capital employed was only 3 per cent, in 1967 it rose to over 40 per cent. But the periodic survey of its faulty management, it seems, is doing more harm than good. The factors that have been retarding its development are by now well known but not at all checked. Consequently an impression has been allowed to grow that there is some inherent defect in the very idea of a public sector and that it is unfit to be in operation in India. This impression is being assiduously fostered not only by people who have an interest in the growth of private capital, for latest example, the present Congress President, but also by people who are understandably irritated by instances of mismanagement constantly cited by the Committee on Public Undertakings.

It needs therefore be stated that of the 44 running public sector enterprises, 26 have earned a net profit of Rs. 31 crores. The other 18 have incurred losses. There is of course no reason to sing paeans for the profit-making 26, for among them 14 gave a return of just ten per cent on the capital. But the fact of their earning profits should have been brought to public notice equally forcefully to prevent a public sector phobia.

There are people who exploit the committee's criticisms by carefully omitting to mention the better side of the public sector. They are trying to make out a totally unwarranted case for the private sector by building up a mystic association of firm

and prompt action with private sector managers. Whether the efficiency of the private sector is a myth carefully constructed or a reality is yet to be established. There is no doubt that many of these enterprises are making fantastic profits but how much of it is due to the efficiency of the management? It may well be that they make profits because they have chosen to produce materials which have an immense capacity to yield profits, because they have a market not fully explored yet, because they are allowed to fleece people freely and because the gap between their costs and selling prices is so very large that they can well afford an indifferent management. How they operate is not publicly known, there is no parliamentary committee to examine private sector operations.

The Deputy Prime Minister said at a recent meeting in New Delhi that the management of the private sector is as bad as that of the public sector. But it seems that his championing the cause of the public sector was more a personal rejoinder to the deprecations of the Congress President than a rational defence. If he or the Government he represents were really concerned with the growth of the public sector, the committee would not have to repeat the same criticisms year after year. What are the recurrent charges? Surplus labour, bureaucratic approach, lack of autonomy and flexibility, lack of incentive for managers and faulty planning. None of these are inherent defects of the public sector. But they are spoiling the management because the Government continues to employ civil servants to run these enterprises. These managers do not have any idea of management of industrial relations, they have no experience in running a business and when the enterprises crumble they demand and get other sinecure posts. And the Government explains the failures in a metaphysical way, saying that the public sector is concerned with the welfare of the people and not with profit!

View from Delhi

The Next President

FROM A POLITICAL
CORRESPONDENT

THERE is something singularly morbid and vulgar about all politicking in New Delhi, right or left. There is no let up in its dizzy pace, even to pay homage to the dead. Dr Zakir Husain's body still lay in state when the bookies and slick operators got cracking down to business. In the semi-bazaar atmosphere of Parliament's Central Hall, the probing started in right earnest about managing the choice of the next President. This is nothing to be shocked about, at least for the hardened cynic who knows his New Delhi beat, because back in January, 1966, even before the body of the late Lal Bahadur Shastri was brought from Tashkent, the political stampede started at the Palam airport as everyone was waiting for the delayed plane.

In the 1967 Presidential election, the Opposition saw chances of a mid-term coup against the Congress through defections at the poll. It was the painless, easy way of achieving the democratic revolution, because changing the balance of political forces is much harder than organising defections from the Congress. In the process, the office of the President was devalued. It was partly the Congress folly, making it a party issue when its own base had shrunk so miserably. Now again, the bosses in the Congress think they could force a new factional alignment over the election of the next President while some of the leftist groups think they have yet another chance of toppling the Government at the Centre. In the aggregate every Opposition group is going to play the game of one Congress faction or the other.

The Presidential election finds the Congress overtaken by a serious political and organisational crisis. If the election leaves the Congress badly

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mauled nobody except Moscow would feel sorry for it.

Last time, Mrs Gandhi made the election of Dr Husain an issue of her personal prestige. Now she would like a President who would dissolve the Lok Sabha and order mid-term elections whenever it suits her. This is what the bosses seem to be out to forestall and the next few weeks will witness a new phase of politicking.

Last week there was intense speculation about the purport of Mr Morarji Desai's enigmatic announcement that he would tell a lot of things to the Press after the Parliament session. Does he mean announcing his resignation after implicating others? But then he also said he was not going to resign to oblige the Opposition. One does not have to wait for Mr Desai to disclose who provided "information" about him to whom. It was somebody's game, played by willing communist correspondents so that the Prime Minister could stabilise her factional position. But in the wake of the Faridabad Congress, when the Young Turks wanted to ambush Mr Nijalingappa for his notorious speech, they could muster a bare 42 signatures requisitioning a special AICC session to discuss the speech and many of them withdrew their signatures on second thoughts. In the end, the move was quietly dropped. The fiasco is a measure of the "leftist" strength and the Prime Minister's own strength in the Congress.

Yet Mrs Gandhi might try to secure the election of one of her nominees as President, using the two communist parties as her main anchor and the possible extra-party support for her candidate as the lever to secure Congress approval. No doubt the Presidential election will be a cross-party affair, and a dress rehearsal for a coalition manoeuvre—to hell with the Faridabad resolution rejecting coalitions.

West Bengal

There are conflicting assessments of the Centre's thinking on West Bengal and this at best could reflect

the lack of a unified Central approach to the State. Mr Chavan has to retrieve the lost "strong Centre" image and he is eminently suited for the role. It is said that all the loose talk by the United Front leaders at the Calcutta end (and how domesticated they are in their behaviour here!) would help the Centre's political preparation for the Ministry's dismissal at a future date. But the Centre is for a soft line for the present despite heavy big business pressure for some kind of intervention. The Centre's detente with Kerala suggests the possibility of a similar detente with West Bengal, but then certain busybodies in the Congress have other plans. The lobby talk in Faridabad was that Mr Atulya Ghosh is perhaps the only Congress leader in West Bengal who would not like the Centre to intervene. Others are getting desperate. There is the talk of a certain Congress leader defecting to the Bangla Congress and to be inducted straightaway as a Minister of the United Front. The situation in the West Bengal Congress has to be watched in the next three months.

The United Front might count it a big victory when the Centre drops the Cossipore judicial inquiry plan. But the reason for this is something else. The person appointed for the inquiry backed out and it was embarrassing for the Centre to change the person after his name had been announced. So it was made to appear in the Rajya Sabha that Mr Swaran Singh would take the decision on the inquiry after he has had the West Bengal Government's communication.

China Scare

The newspaper scare about a coming India-China border war looked like a joke of the "silly season" if one knew how it all began. The "microphone warning" business is a very commonplace occurrence on the 2000-mile border. But the news of this particular incident reached the U.S. Consulate-General in Calcutta and a certain Indian employee of the outfit thought he was smart and tipped off an American wire agency which cook-

ed up the scare story with a Gangtok dateline to make it look credible. An Indian agency lapped it up and gave it a special slant, that General Kumaramangalam had gone to the eastern sector following the incident. The General's visit, as everyone who ought to know knew, was a farewell visit to the sector on the eve of his retirement.

Significantly this time, Members of Parliament were not worked up over the incident at Nathu La. Nobody even cared to ask for a statement in Parliament because such scare stories of vague "stirrings on the eastern border" have lost their credibility edge. The Defence Ministry in fact was having a big laugh at the news agency that goofed because the story could have been better timed for April 1, when incidentally the Fourth Five Year Plan came into effect.

The offer of talks on the border with India made by Mr Chou En-lai in his talk with a visiting Japanese delegation got very little mention in the Indian Press. But this came a bare two days before Mr Dinesh Singh went over the brink to pledge implied Indian support to the Soviet Union in its border dispute with China. That is New Delhi's way of stalling any formula towards a dialogue with China.

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"The Truth" About Pakistan

A. FILIPOV

HOWEVER capricious the weather,—and this year March has been savagely hot—what troubles Pakistanis today is certainly not that. As will be remembered, on March 25 Marshal Ayub Khan divested himself of presidential powers and transferred full authority to the Army in the person of its commander-in-chief, General Yahya Khan, who henceforth will be acting President until a new national constitution is drafted. This important event was preceded by a protracted, tense political wrangle that disclosed the full complex picture of the political situation inside the country.

Pakistanis demonstrated in many cities as far back as last November. At first only students and intellectuals were involved. Later on office em-

ployees and representatives of the petty bourgeoisie joined in. Though these demonstrations were not against the government, this did not deter the opposition from capitalizing upon them. As a result one saw slogans directed against Ayub Khan, with frankly pro-Peking elements displaying particular zeal in this respect.

Common demands were repeal of the state of emergency introduced during the 1965 armed Indo-Pakistani conflict, reversion to the federal system and parliamentary rule and restoration of democratic liberties. Several opposition leaders pressed for the President's resignation and the formation of a coalition government. In Eastern Pakistan the emphasis was that it was necessary to make this province autonomous. In Western Pakis-

tan the demand was to abolish the province as an administrative unit in favour of autonomous areas based on language.

Early January saw the establishment of a bloc of opposition parties incorporating among others the National People's Party, the Muslim League Council, the Nizame-Islam and both wings of the Awami League Party. The leadership of this bloc sketched a programme of joint action.

Workers began to ask for higher pay and better working conditions. In very many cases this had nothing at all to do with the provocative doings of the opposition. In several areas peasants called for a revision of land-renting terms and the taxing procedure—which did not at all come within the plane of the opposition right wing, whose representatives are for the most part large landed proprietors, merchants and bankers.

In the opinion of the local press February will go down in national history as a time of large-scale actions

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unprecedented in Pakistan over the past 15 years. During the demonstrations there was more than one clash with the police and arms were used. In Karachi, Dacca, Lahore and Rawalpindi the authorities called out the army.

President Ayub Khan asked the opposition leaders to discuss a number of urgent issues in order to resolve the protracted political crisis. The opposition agreed. After that the President ordered a nation-wide repeal of the state of emergency. At the same time political prisoners were freed. On the evening of February 21 President Ayub Khan broadcast a brief statement in which he said that in the prevailing conditions he had decided not to run for head of state at the coming elections.

Another round of talks between the government and the opposition bloc leaders began in Rawalpindi a few days later. But the very first meetings revealed the lack of co-ordination and of concerted opinion among representatives of the opposition parties. The dialogue had to be put off for almost a fortnight. On March 10, the delegations resumed negotiations. This time, the opposition advanced a preconcerted proposal to the effect that a parliamentary form of government should be introduced in the country, and suffrage be granted to all the people. On the fourth day of the negotiations, the people were informed that the government had accepted the proposal. The opposition bloc leadership declared that this organization had fulfilled its duties and that the existence of the bloc was no longer necessary. So it was dissolved with the consent of the leaders of the parties in the bloc.

Meanwhile, overtly extremist groups became active in the country, which did not disdain any means that could lead to the aggravation of the situation—force, provocations or arson—and which combined extreme leftist demagoguery with religious fanaticism. It is only natural that many opposition leaders condemned these tactics of pro-Peking and pro-American elements who were trying to imitate the "Red Guards" and unprincipled politicians'

practices and were doing a great damage to the country's national interests, obstructing any positive action. The situation in the country was growing worse, finally resulting in bloodshed. When things had gone so far, President Ayub Khan resigned, and the new leadership was forced to halt the operation of the constitution.

Lately, I have been meeting many Pakistanis, people of different age, profession and views. Naturally, their points of view on the events were different. But practically all agreed that at the root of these events was complex economic and social problems which had to be resolved urgently. Most of the people I had talked to pointed out that much had been done in the independence years for overcoming the country's age-old backwardness. But life puts forth newer and newer demands, calls for active effort to speed up agricultural and industrial development, strengthen economic independence, wipe away unemployment and illiteracy and democratize social and state life.

The necessity of national and social reforms in the interest of the people is evident to the Pakistanis. At the same time, there are groups in Pakistan which have been trying to use the present situation for gaining selfish political aims of their own, aims which have nothing to do with the people's requirements and are even hostile to them. The anti-national, pro-Peking elements do not calm down. The pro-imperialist forces have also reared their head, still hoping to turn the Pakistani development into the neo-colonialist channel.

But in their majority the Pakistani people rightly suppose that the country can and must solve its own problems with its own forces. The patriotic and democratic forces realize the importance of the development of equal and mutually advantageous relations between Pakistan and other States. In this connection, many point out the importance of co-operation with the Soviet Union, which already exists and is developing. The Pakistani authorities realize this well.

Life is becoming normal gradually in Pakistan. Studies have been resumed at colleges and universities. But problems, and quite acute, still remain. The new Pakistani authorities are getting down to them.

The people of that country hope that their vital interests will be taken into account and defended.

*From Pravda ("Truth"),
April 1, 1969.*

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Poetry Across The Border

IN his poem "To Rabindranath", Samsur Rahaman, one of the finest East Pakistani poets, wrote :

People say there's famine in Bengali poetry today,
That your death forced it to lose its beauty,
That there's roughness instead, resulting
In widespread waste land.
Sudhindra and Jibananda are dead,
Buddhadev looks for shelter in translations.
And Subhas-Samar are no more
Than the sound of footsteps of the past.

This, in short, is a fair assessment of present-day Bengali poetry. We are aware of the fact that Bengali poets, since Rabindranath, have not succeeded in achieving much. That, however, does not indicate lack of capability on their part. Bengali poetry, since Rabindranath, has been in an experimental stage. There is a tremendous urge to introduce new techniques and forms. Foreigners, mainly the French and English, have contributed largely to these poetic adventures. Americans, Russians and Chinese have also influenced the poets to a great extent. Symbolism, not quite unknown in the days of Rabindranath, has become a matter of serious experiment. So has Marxism. No doubt, a reader is bewildered by the massive diversity in poetry. All this, however, cannot be said of Bengali poetry in East Pakistan. The poets there are remarkably free from "isms"—poetic or political—that very often mar

My heart is heavenly, yet where have I come?
Why have I lost my beauty in this darkness
Of hairy animals?
Skulls are rolling on the dust on all sides
Like unimportant pawns in the game of chess
Helpless, futureless.
This knowledge has made him sarcastic.
There's nothing like being a drunkard,
There's no greater demand than that of the body,
This unruly mind refuses to reconcile
With the hypocrisy of this poor world.

Or, If I have to open my mouth at all
Should I say that I'm completely drenched
On this hot April day?
Should I say that your blouse-piece is excellent,

RATHINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAY

On the other hand, some more names
Sit high on safe thrones by saving
Their skins from storms and torrents,
Some others are like boats striking hard
Against vast sandy shores and
Getting punctured and lost forever.
Flower-lovers pray for spring
Sitting light on rotten withered flowers.

poetry. The poets there are more akin to Rabindranath than their counterparts on this side of the border. This may appear a rash statement as we do not have enough books to reach such a conclusion. But from the few books that are available in Bangla Kavitar Granthagar (Rabindra Sarobar Stadium) and from individual sources, it can be said that poetry in East Pakistan is far less influenced by foreign poetry (I hope that Tagore and Nazrool are not treated as foreigners in East Pakistan) than that of West Bengal. Of course, one occasionally comes across references to Marx, Eliot, Freud and Huxley. One can even trace lines which are direct imitations of Eliot. But the general trend is to write pure poetry—to express the feelings that are more associated with the birds, trees, rivers, herbs and beasts of East Pakistan and less with Mary, Freud and Eliot. The theory of association—of which we speak so

much in our country—is somewhat simplified. The overall impression, therefore, is this: Bengali poetry in East Pakistan is easily readable and, thus, thoroughly enjoyable. We do not have to stumble on every line and find meaning out of meaningless lines. As plain reading is possible, our enjoyment is also boundless.

Samsur Rahaman, who has dedicated his recent book *Niralokey Dibyarath* to Bishnu Dey, has been characterized by Ashim Ray (*The Statesman*, December 29-30) as a "pessimistic". From my study of Rahaman's "Roudra Karotite" (1370 B.S.) and "Prothom Gan, Dwitiya Mriyur Aage" (1366 B.S.), it appears that "pessimistic" is the word to characterize his poetry. His pessimism is the result of the knowledge that while the Almighty has bestowed so many blessings on mankind, the latter has always been forced to stoop low.

That it's a perfect match with a brown sari?
Should I say that Hanif has again scored a century
That there are lots of events in Dalai Lama's
autobiography?
Should I say—let's go and have coffee
Have you gone through all the recent books?
If you haven't, you're like the frog
That jumps into the rotten pond or shallow well.
Should I point out the man who (alas) even today
Doesn't know how to fasten his tie-knot?
Should I say that three straight lines
Make one triangle
Should I fulfil my heart's desire
And sing mongoose's carol
By sitting tight in my room?
Should I say ?

This attitude to have no compromise with the modern world is terribly acute in Samsur Rahaman. Almost always he waits for the days that are long gone by and compares them

You have given me language
Which like a flame in the open candlestick called life
Blazes eternally

While Samsur Rahaman respectfully keeps his mother tongue free of all adulterations, *Talim Hossain* pays least respect to his Bengali. Hossain

Cultivate peace in your own self,
Send the products to the world,
Learn the way to cultivate from Muhammad,

This sort of poetry, even when written by famous poets, cannot produce that poetic effect on the reader which a pure poem does. It should be remembered that although Eliot's *The Rock* was hailed as great by the Catholics all over the world, it is not even treated as good by the critics. Poetry can never be the medium of religion. If the poet be one of average calibre he, no doubt, fails to achieve either of his aims—his poetry suffers and his religion remains static and does not progress further. Hos-

Where's golden mother—Bengal
Where's paddy-full store
Her throat is no more full of
The song of Princess Champabati.

Thus there is the shattering of a dream—the dream of making life

I'm all right, all right in going
Round the eternal ten-to-five mill,
I'm all right with thoughts of patients and clients,
I'm all right in participating in political strifes
And in the buying and the selling of ideology,
I'am all right in this world full of magic.

It is quite apparent that everything is not all right with the poet. He is disillusioned and his only consola-

with the bitter present. What, however, pleases one most is Rahaman's amazingly lucid and conversational language. Moreover, he is one of the few East Pakistani poets who have

is full of Urdu words. Let us go through some of the titles of his poems in *Sahina* (July, 1952)—“Intijar”, “Gorosthane”, “Sahide Millat”, “Sur-

sain's experiment with the sonnet, however, is laudable. The seven sonnets that are included in his *Sahina* are deep in thought and remarkably free from all references to religion. It appears that Hossain is a victim of the unjust anti-Indian propaganda. He can be a good poet if he discards crazy ideas about the suitability of Urdu words in Bengali poetry. It is very difficult to understand him when he writes :

Tai e dwanda—sangharser
ghana julmat

worth living. Now, what really, is his life? The poet is not reticent

tion is in getting himself lost in the wilderness. Because he is generally gloomy and sombre, his satire be-

not deliberately insulted the Bengali language by incorporating unwanted Urdu words. In “Suryabarta”—a tribute to Rabindranath—he wrote:

In my heartbeat and
Soliloquies
You are not limited to one 25th Baisakh.

Saki” etc. From a careful study of his poems one can easily understand that he uses poetic forms for the spread of Islam.

Whose name is “Al amin”,
Whose characteristics are “Islam”
Whose contributions are “Salamat”—
Peace .

Iblis-rocha karagare kore insaniat
e ahajari.
This is not Bengali poetry.

After Rahaman, he is the most promising young poet who follows Samsur Rahaman in his search for knowledge. He is more sombre than Samsur and his pangs are more poignantly felt. From a study of his *Dui Writu* (1363 B.S.) and *Akdin Protidin* (1371 B.S.), it appears that his pessimism is the direct result of frustrating experiences.

Bones are all baked in the furnace of hunger.
There's a flood in the eyes of the moon
And yet Aunty remains as firm as ever
In her mercilessness.

I'm all right inside restaurant, club and theatre,
In the scandal about neighbour, in self-appreciation
I'm all right, all right in the den of flash-players
And in the market-place.
I'am all right in discussing lust and sex,
In singing scandalous songs about women.

comes all the more poignant :

"No value can be attached to poetry or to light fancy,"
 Thus spoke our laughing friend with the air of a pedant,
 "It's better to deal with pulses, rice and salt.
 If the trick is known, being a broker is a better profession.
 Look at that man—becoming fat day by day,
 He possesses lots of cars and houses,
 He does very brisk business,
 Only a few years ago his room was roofless
 Now he is having all the prestige of the world.

That, however, does not make him a snob because he takes a lot of care to remain one of the common people. His language is superbly lucid and his Bengali is free from all encroachments. I have not been able to trace more than five Urdu words and even those that are used are easily understandable. Moreover, he still believes that the two Bengals are not culturally separated. His "Hili"—the first poem in *Dui Writu* is a superb testimony to the great belief.

Syed Ali Ahsan, unlike the poets discussed so far, exposes the indeb-

Rain here rain there rain everywhere
 Rain all over the world
 Rain at Chicago, New York, Paris
 Somewhere it touches the lights
 Somewhere else the window-glass,
 At times it touches posh cars,
 Or waterproofs or umbrellas,
 Rain in my world touches the soil
 And then there's the maddening smell,

Healthy optimism distinguishes the otherwise mediocre poet Ashan Habib Rahaman. In almost all his poems

Even now
 Flowers bloom
 And birds sing

I started my discussion with the suggestion that the poets in East Pakistan have systematically followed Rabindranath. The present belief on this side of the border is that the poets on the other side of the border are

tedness to the European poets to the full in his *Akok Sandhyay Basanta* (1369 B.S.). Ahsan's individuality and sensitive outlook are well known. What, however, amazes one most is Ahsan's thorough knowledge of technique. From this point of view, his poems entitled *Ak Mutho* (7 in all) are unique. These are short poems comprising 8 lines each—the last one, however, runs into 12 lines. In each of the first six poems, 24 words have been used. However, the poet has not succeeded in having proper rhymes although this drawback does not in

This much? Listen more, he is now a big leader,
 A member of the Union Board, he says he'll
 Compete in the coming election and win
 There's the possibility of his becoming a minister
 That, of course, shouldn't surprise anybody.
 (Let me tell you confidentially, he's deeply religious,
 He does his Namaji-Roja—takes care of his beard.)
 What logic! Even Euclid is defeated
 And so, to be a broker is my dream from today.

any way affect the rhythm. This is a poetic technique which can very well be cultivated by the poets on this side of the border. Ahsan's love for East Bengal (he hates to call it East Pakistan) is quite prominent in his "Amar Purva Bangla" poems. This series contains three wonderful poems on East Bengal and reminds one of the famous song "Amar Sonar Bangla, Ami tomal bhalabashi". "My East Bengal", says Ahsan, "is like the sound of the rainfall on the leaves of trees at the dead of night".

Paddy-fields are all washed away,
 Branches of mangoe-trees crumble down,
 At times cows moo loudly and
 The drench'd birds flap their wings
 And then there's the symphony
 In ponds and rivers.
 My East Bengal's like the sound
 Of the rainfall on the leaves of trees
 Late at night.

And
 Gold falls from the morning sunbeam
 As it has fallen on this earth
 For thousands of years.

more akin to Jibanananda and Bishnu Dey than Rabindranath and Nazrool. From the above quotations, it is clear that it is Rabindranath (and, therefore, Jibanananda) who has influenced them to a very considerable extent.

Whatever be the extent of the influence, one thing is quite clear—the rural atmosphere reigns supreme in the hearts of East Pakistani poets and will perhaps continue to do so for many years to come.

Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

WHOEVER thought first of a businessmen's Development Corporation for Calcutta hit on a good thing for its sponsors. If accepted they could carve out the great city in such a way that it might turn out to be their best business venture so far with the added attraction that they could pose as so many virtuous men who had done their duty by the city which made their operations, not always this side of the law, possible. On the other hand if it is not accepted they can put on an air of injured innocence and plead that their offers of help are refused; so, what after all should they do?

The plan of course was conceived during the halcyon days of Governor's Raj when some people thought that things might last like that for ever and they started having delusions of grandeur. The Minister of Planning and Development, Mr Somnath Lahiri, is reported to have turned down the proposal to give the businessmen the major share in the proposed Development Corporation, and wanted 51% share for the Government, which in effect means that if the report is true there is no objection to the proposal as such. It is highly doubtful if the businessmen would agree to this. But major share or not, the whole project smacks of unreality. When the State and the Central Government are unable to solve the many problems of the city, what will any such Development Corporation do? Its limited resources at the best and still limited powers would be a guarantee that hardly anything would come out of it.

There is only one thing that the Development Corporation can do and do it well. It would help sell the image of businessmen as honest citizens willing to do their part for the betterment of the city from which they earn their millions. The United Front has no duty to the businessmen to build up their image. If it has not already been done, the UF

Government would do well to throw out the proposal lock, stock and barrel. To meet the businessmen when necessary is one thing, to embark upon joint ventures quite another. Fraternization between opposing sides never did any good to either.

It is one thing to smell a rat when there is one and quite another to go about in fear of ghosts. Mr Lahiri is reported some time back to have said that the businessmen wanted dispersal of the city of Calcutta because of its glorious tradition of struggles. No doubt the industrial tycoons would love a Calcutta without its spirit of protest but they must know that it is easier said than done. But how can a great city be dispersed? Short of bombing it out it is not likes and then again the chances are that it would rebuild itself on the same spot. Dispersal then is out of the question, but expansion is possible and is what has been happening. The only question is whether it should be planned or unplanned. We know what has actually been achieved by the CMPO.

The problems of Calcutta are many. Housing, transport, sanitation, to name the most important. All three are inextricably linked up so that piecemeal solution is not possible. It is a question of all or none. It is not fashionable to say so, but the incompetence and worse of those in authority in doing anything about these problems is equalled only by the citizens themselves.

Shortage of funds, of course, is supposed to be the main drawback in doing anything; but shortage of ideas seems equally there. When money is short a little has to be made to go a long way. But the way money is spent sometimes does justice to the ideas prevalent in Western countries at one time of all Indians being wealthy princes. The plain fact is that the worst parts of Calcutta are crowded beyond limit and nothing that any Government or other agency can do will improve matters short of removing the citizens and bulldozing the buildings down. But they want to eat their cake and have it too. Take Burra-

bazar for instance. It must have the greatest concentration of human beings per square metre anywhere, coupled with a great capacity to produce filth in the course of trading. Which city authority in the world can boast of having tackled successfully such a problem? The inhabitants of this area moreover have never shown, like their fellows all over the city, the least inclination to produce a little less garbage to clear.

Many of those who live in crowded and unhygienic houses would perhaps move out to better places. But then transport is the bugbear. Satellite townships of course are the answer. But Kalyani, the brain child of the late Dr B. C. Roy, was the right idea executed quite wrongly. Even by electric train it is over an hour's journey from Kalyani station to Sealdah. To that must be added the time from the township to the station and again from Sealdah to one's place of work. No wonder the scheme languishes. What prevented the Government from acquiring land nearer Calcutta, say 20 to 30 minutes journey from either of the two rail stations serving Calcutta? Nobody knows.

Much of the misery of poorer sections of Calcutta's citizens comes from living in slums called bustees and pucca buildings little better than these. Succeeding Congress mayors, of course, have declared their resolve to abolish bustees, though where the unfortunate dwellers are to go has never been said very clearly. There is nothing wrong in bustees as such. The point is to insist on reasonable standards of sanitation and sufficient water and see that the landlords who thrive on such business are made to follow the regulations. But that is exactly what has never happened, with too many councillors having close ties with bustee-owners, if they are not owners themselves. The results are plain to the eye. Clogging up of sewage drains and providing of water at public expense when all

this should have been done at the expense of those who reap the profits.

To the affluent all these are academic problems. To vast numbers of the bottom class, they might as well not exist, so used are they to their miserable lot. Only to those who come in between it is a constant nightmare which time does nothing to make it bearable. The true city

dweller, whether a son of the soil, or coming from outside, knows no alternative. Having never had any connection with the good earth, it is not for him to move out into the green belt outside the hard city limits and at least enjoy some sort of life within his modest means. For him better the stink he knows than the fresh air to which he is a stranger.

improved by denunciations of the leadership and the exhibition of personal differences. Nevertheless there was brave talk of not adopting a defeatist attitude by reference to a deadlocked Parliament in 1972 or the need for the Congress to seek an understanding with other like-minded parties. Serious thinking on such issues and the programme planning that must inevitably go with it should be done now. There is not much time.

About the Jana Sangh session the paper says that an alliance with the Swatantra party and the BKD, which the Jana Sangh is willing to explore, might constitute a fairly strong right-wing group especially if the Congress itself encourage a polarisation of forces. But such a coalition might not materialise and will certainly not offer a constructive alternative unless the Jana Sangh is prepared to shed its sectarian bias and social conservatism. The party's definition of "nationalism" is a narrow and exclusive one which provides little reassurance to the minorities for whom secularism is the only guarantee of equal citizenship. There appears to be a small liberal wing in the Jana Sangh which recognises this and seems willing to adopt a more moderate and modern posture. But RSS influence is obviously still strong within the party, and as long as this lasts the Jana Sangh will remain a poor choice for many Indians.

Commending the Faridabad decision to keep the Congress and the Union Government to the middle-of-the-road. *The Indian Express* says that the present parlous state of India is due not a little to the esoteric policies of the Congress at home and abroad. Over the past four years Mrs Gandhi has had too many cabin boys on the bridge to steer an independent, steadfast course. But if the Faridabad session is any index the Prime Minister at last seems to be shaken into a sense of realism and resolution. If brave words on the need for nationalisation could salvage the country they would have done so long ago. The fact that India continues to flounder in a sea of slogans away from the safe solid banks of practical effort and achievement reveals, how very far off

The Press

Parties In Distress

COMMENTATOR

OPINION will differ on how different the Congress is from the Jana Sangh. At the annual session of the two parties at Faridabad and Bombay there was no end of efforts to stress how unlike the two parties were. Even without challenging those statements it may be said they have one thing in common—both are on the way out. The Congress was worsted in the general election and the mid-term poll. The Jana Sangh's brief hour of glory which began with the general election has ended with the mid-term poll. That the annual sessions of the two parties reverberated with talks of coalition or merger with like-minded parties to retrieve their lost position, betrays a defeatism on the part of both which their leaders would not acknowledge publicly. Newspapers have done their bit to bolster up their sagging morale. All big papers had arranged for special coverage of the sessions and neither was ignored in the editorial columns. No one will be able to accuse the papers of being unfair to to either of the parties for they have maintained strict parity in doling out praise and blame. The Congress has been congratulated on its decision to stick to the middle of the road while the Jana Sangh has been praised for its desire to coalesce with the Swatantra and the BKD. They have disapproved of the Congress craze for

the public sector and criticised the Jana Sangh for its association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. It would seem the papers would stop worrying about the future of the country if the two parties could by some undefined process of adjustments join hands to run the administration.

The Hindustan Times thinks that the dust kicked up at the Faridabad session of the Congress has possibly obscured the direction that the party must take if it is to serve itself and India. There was little or no reference to plan implementation or sufficient performance and not a whisper about the party's role in the fulfilment of these tasks. The Congress President made the perfectly valid point that the public sector must create wealth if it is to inspire confidence. Likewise, he spoke in support of productive enterprise, even if in the private sector. These pragmatic statements were however assailed as a betrayal of socialism. The most constructive thing to emerge from Faridabad was the restatement of intent that the Congress should remain a middle-of-the-road party wedded to democratic socialism and avoiding the pitfalls of polarisation by moving further left or right. Yet a good part of the proceedings was taken up by ideological wrangles that could only confuse and divide the rank and file. The image of the party was not further

course the Congress leaders, victims to their own illusions and delusions, have taken the country. The Prime Minister's bold stand at Faridabad is an act of considerable and characteristic courage. India will judge her by what she does in the coming crucial three years before the next general elections. Mrs Gandhi should not allow herself to be cowed by thunder from the left or to be browbeaten by the tame adolescents left of left. Having plumped for the middle-of-the road, she must refuse to be deflected by the rhetorics of paper tigers. Centrism spells sanity. It means added strength to the Congress and the country.

Jana Sangh Session

Commenting on the Bombay session of the Jana Sangh the paper says that in seeking to avoid both the Congress and the Communists the Jana Sangh appears to be working for a third force of Mr Charan Singh's conception. A pertinent question is whether such an alliance can adequately fill the gap caused by the ouster of the Congress. A Swatantra-BKD-Jana Sangh coalition is not likely to provide the alternative to the Congress in the near future. The only hope for ending the instability seems to be in these parties opening a dialogue with the Congress in the national interest. Between nationalist parties wedded to democracy, it should be possible to hammer out a common minimum programme for the transition period even without seeking a share in power. The Jana Sangh was at pains in Bombay to present itself as a modern and forward-looking party. The familiar obsession with Pakistan and Muslims was missing, and the emphasis on Hindi was toned down. But the support for the party is still mainly confined to the Hindi-speaking belt and it is pathetically dependent on the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh which is an organisation of militant Hinduism. In seeking changes in the Constitution to make it unitary not merely in content but in structure as well the party has really over-reached itself. It is hardly possible to undo the pattern that

has evolved during the 22 years since independence. The present Centre-State conflicts have to be resolved through the growth of healthy federalism. The process need not necessarily be anti-national or undemocratic.

The Hindu congratulates the Congress President on his courage to tell a few home truths about this business of nationalisation as a cure for the nation's ills. He has had to hasten later to clarify his stand as not one disowning the party's basic commitment of expansion of the public sector. But his criticism of the incompetent functioning of the public sector enterprises is valid and has been admitted by other Congress leaders also. If there is to be an extension of such public enterprise, it has to prove that it is fit for the job. Otherwise, the people will see in this zeal for more and more nationalisation only an eagerness on the part of the party bosses to have more room for the dispensation of patronage in the form of jobs, contracts and so on. One reason for counsels of despair and suggestions of drastic remedies is the fear of the party losing majority even at the Centre in the 1972 elections. Some Congressmen's clamour for extremist policies is their idea of improving the image of the party and so of the election prospects. But since some remedies may in the end kill rather than cure the disease, great care has to be taken before the deciding to apply them. Those who set their faces sternly against electoral alliances have failed to learn the lesson of the 1967 poll, as also of the recent mid-term elections. If the party remembers that in the past it has been winning a majority of seats on a minority of the total votes because the Opposition was divided, it will realise that it may not be able to do the trick again without strengthening itself with electoral allies.

The paper commends the Jana Sangh suggestion for an expert commission to review the Constitution and whittle down the autonomy of the linguistic States that now exist. It says that politics is the art of the possible and drastic constitutional changes of

this kind are not on the cards. But the fact that such a proposal is made at all is significant, since the Jana Sangh had been regarded as a bigoted champion of Hindi and has its main membership in the Hindi-speaking States. Obviously, the attempt to fight and win election in non-Hindi States has led the Jana Sangh not to set too much store by linguistic considerations. The party has set up a six-man committee to explore the possibilities of working hand in hand with the Swatantra party and the Bharatiya Kranti Dal, both of which are both anti-Congress and anti-Communist. The Rajmata of Gwalior has already met Mr Rajagopalachari, and Mr Charan Singh, who leads the BKD in Uttar Pradesh, has shown interest in the proposal. If agreement emerges by the end of the year, there will be a united front of the right-wing parties which would carry considerable weight in certain parts of the country. Mr Vajpayee pointed out that the best way to meet the Communist danger was to remove the conditions which are exploited by the Communists. The conference passed a resolution on labour unrest, which called for a better deal for the workers and jobs for the unemployed. Mr Vajpayee said the party should launch a campaign to fight the evil of untouchability and help the scheduled castes and tribes. All this shows that a new wave of liberalism is at work in the Jana Sangh which augurs well for the future progress of the party.

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Satyajit's Latest

KIRAN RAHA

THOSE who found in the films that came after *Charulata* uneasy evidence of their foreboding about Satyajit Ray's waning powers should start thinking again. It can quite simply be said about his latest that there has been nothing like it before in Indian films. Which, in a way, is not saying much, considering the dismal record of children's films in India. Viewed as one, *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne* is as much an illuminating expositor as *Pather Panchali* was for Indian cinema in general.

But is *Goopi Gyne* to be viewed as a children's film in the sense that it is to be judged by the yardstick of nourishment to children and their enjoyment of it? That children are going to enjoy it immensely and it is wholesome nourishment for them, there can be no doubt. Nor is it surprising that Ray should have succeeded incomparably well in attaining these, not unimportant, objectives. For a great film-maker belonging to a family which for three generations have enriched the imaginative lives of children in Bengal, the surprise, perhaps, is that he should have waited so long before transforming a delightful long short story by his grandfather into a magnificent film.

But *Goopi Gyne* is, in fact, more than a children's film. Satyajit Ray's achievement is that without dissimulation he has indeed made a children's film that holds an adult in thrall. It is an achievement akin to that of, say *La Fontaine* or *Lewis Carroll*. It is not that there is any discernible plan of smuggling in topics that may engage an adult. Nor is there any exhibitionist display of cinematic pyrotechnics designed to draw plaudits from the knowledgeable. Yet the thematic unity achieved in this tale of fantasy, magic and music has in it resonant strands that impart to the finished product the dimension of a fable which is classic in quality. Perennial themes of the human condi-

tion have been unobtrusively interwoven into it that one may or may not find an adjection to the value, or essential to the enjoyment, of the film. Which is, of course, entirely in order. But however beguiling the story, the film, if it has to lay claims to being creative art, has to contain a certain view of life. It is my contention that *Goopi Gyne* does have such a view.

War and Peace

Take for instance, the treatment of such issues as war and peace, or the good man in a bad and contrary society. The resolution of the problems of war and exploitation, or of a ruler held captive by his court, as delineated, is not only in accordance with the terms set by the aesthetic dictates of the film but is also quietly demonstrative of the humanist view of life of its author. Whether or not one agrees with that view is of course a different matter.

In a medium admirably suited for the depiction of the fabulous, reliance to some extent has necessarily to be placed on technical innovations and devices available to the resources of the cinema. In *Goopi Gyne* such innovations are a triumph of inventive imagination. Rarely do they bear the impress of being products of photographic or laboratory gadgetry. This is best illustrated in the command dance of the king of ghosts. The technical devices, scintillating in their effects, are, of course, essential props but they never obtrude or distort the schematic integrity of the dance. The sequence is a feat of wonderful orchestration and is an example of joyous imagination perfectly translated into the language of the chosen medium. Incidentally, the suggestion that we retain all our unlovable traits of character in our ghostly existence after death and go on doing much the same hateful things in the other

world as we have been doing in this, I found quite disturbing.

Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne is a lavish film. Its lavishness is evident in its gaiety, its visuals and above all its music. In no other work Ray had the scope to give his musical imagination as free a play as in this film, cast in the form suggestive of a troubadour's tale. And a wonderful job he has done of it. The songs, the limericks set to tune and the musical compositions are a veritable feast for the ears. At the same time the music direction is a lesson of how tunes, beats and themes drawn from varied sources but given an identity all its own by a process of musical alchemy, can, in a film, preserve its own richness without doing violence to the film as a whole.

Gorgeous Fancy

The excellence of Bansi Chandra Gupta's sets one takes for granted. Even so there has been nothing like this before from him. It is not just gorgeous fancy that he has given solid shape to in the sets. The sets answer so well to the needs of the film that there is, paradoxically, an almost down-to-earth reality about them, the essential reality of the imaginary.

When Rabi Ghosh was cast in one of the two principal roles I was a bit apprehensive lest Tapen Chatterjee in the other might not suffer by comparison. He does nothing of the sort. In fact I am not sure if his is not the better performance. I need not specifically mention the other actors. Except for Jahar Ray who is given to hamming at times all of them turn out finished performances.

Of photography any approving comment would be redundant since the camera, after all, is the basic tool of the cinema. In a film of this quality photography had to be good, and it is.

I am afraid that what I have written may be objected to as uncritical praise and may even be dismissed as a rave review. Well, I really do not care. I enjoyed the film tremendously and I maintain that it is an outstanding film by all standards.

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“All My Sons” In Hindi

BY OUR DRAMA CRITIC

WEEK before last these columns carried a criticism of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* produced by the Amateurs.

The subject which Arthur Miller deals with in *All My Sons* is so similar and the treatment so different that it becomes a tussle in the mind to determine who placed his point of view more effectively.

O'Neill is poetic, subtle and symbolic while Miller is direct, forthright and aggressive. O'Neill warns, Miller accuses, O'Neill evokes our pity, Miller excites our anger. One is emotionally responsible, the other socially moral.

It was a rare treat to see two great plays written by two great playwrights presented in two different languages by two of our best equipped amateur groups.

Although the production values were different and whereas the O'Neill play was experimental in nature the power inherent in both the plays was palpable: one had to be emotionally moved.

The Miller play is based on the wartime scandal of the supply of defective plane engines which were responsible for the loss of many young Americans. Yet, according to Miller, his inspiration came from an actual incident in which a daughter handed over her own father to the police.

It deals with the life of one of those associated with the crime who was caught, but gained his freedom under shady circumstances thereby implicating a colleague. One son is lost in the war. The mother refuses to acknowledge his death. The other son after waiting for three years wants to marry his dead brother's fiancé. The father's involvement in the crime is discovered, the son is disillusioned, and finally the father commits suicide.

The play was most suitable for translation into Hindi, particularly with the Pakistani war in the back-

ground. Since it was adapted to local conditions the reference to planes could easily have been changed to something more appropriate to preserve the play's inherent realism. The reference to planes made the translated play sound somewhat unbelievable. Furthermore, the translation tended to be literal whereas in many places the use of Hindi idioms would have definitely improved the quality of the rendering. The father asks “Kitna Baja?” “Kaye baje” or “Keya baja” would have been nearer normal usage.

Since the translator was trying for maximum understanding an eye on the niceties of the language was not undesirable.

Anamika's production of *Mere Bacche* repeated at the New Empire was straightforward and realistic. This was as it should be because Miller's own words are “I want to make my plays out of evident truths”. A production must, therefore, ring true to be effective. Miller tries to “lay a hand on life” and if Anamika's production failed to get a good grip it was partly due to the translation and partly the supporting cast which looked as if it had been thrown in to make up the number. Lalit could have been a last minute inclusion, so out of tune was he with the rest of the cast. However *Mere Bacche* was well served in the two major roles—the mother and the father. It would have been better if the father gave glimpses of his guilty conscience so that his suicide in the end could be dramatically justified. The mother gave a sustained and dignified performance. Particularly pleasing was

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the manner in which she parried her husband's loud-mouthed recriminations. Pradeep, their living son, carried the character's moral tone well although at times he verged on melodrama. It was a pity that he was not always audible and many of his words were muffled. Ananda's quiet dignity, her homeliness and her sense of reality made her a desirable woman so that Pradeep's staunch feelings for her were understandable.

Indifferent

The other characters were indifferent and seemed as if they were there just to make up the cast. Ananda's brother Kalyan made an effective appearance and could have been a little more vehement, particularly when Lalaji's sickness is suddenly discovered, which actually puts the stamp of guilt on him.

Readers will wonder why no names of the players have been given. This is because the producers chose to keep the cast anonymous and there was no information about the production available at the performance.

The set looked effective but the tendency of the players to sit on the raised platform often made the gestures meaningless. This was particularly unfortunate because the groupings and positioning on the stage were generally well worked out.

Sitting on the same bench, especially on the left side of the stage, resulted in the covering up of one player by the other. Comparatively these were minor faults but they were distracting to an attentive audience.

Rumanian Folk Art

BY AN ART CRITIC

A splendid collection of Rumanian folk art is now on display at the Academy of Fine Arts. The exhibition has been jointly sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the Embassy of the Rumanian Socialist Republic.

The most conspicuous items in the exhibition are carpets, costumes and

textiles. The carpets are from Banat, Oltenia, Moldova and Transylvania and are exquisite in their colour, motif and weaving. There are a variety of costumes for women from various parts of Rumania. Lovely, gay and colourful, they represent Rumanian folk art at its best. In both carpets and costumes as well as towels etc, many of the motifs are Oriental. There is one piece of textile from Wallachia which looks like a Dacai Sari.

Ceramics are another group of interesting exhibits. There are enamelled jugs, bowls and plates whose motifs have remained unchanged from the early feudal times, red and black ceramics going back to Dacian and red ceramics with motifs traceable to the Neolithic age. There are also a number of interesting articles in wood. Pails and water containers, sparingly decorated, for use in the humblest of homes. Scoops and distaffs curiously carved. A dowry chest with geometric and decorative motifs incised all over. The various other exhibits include masks and icons.

Endowed with that formal grace that follows from function and embellished with traditional skill and artistry, a typical exhibit like a piece of pottery shows that Rumanian folk art owes its beauty and vitality to its roots in the daily lives of the people, their ceremonies and rituals.

We do not generally have an opportunity of seeing the art of countries in Eastern Europe. And no one should miss the exhibition which will continue till the end of this week.

Paintings and Ceramics

The Indo-American Society organised an exhibition of paintings and ceramics by Robert F. Bussabargar, a young American professor of art, at the Academy from May 2 to 9.

Many of Bussabargar's paintings, done in oil, water colour, pastel etc., and his pencil and charcoal drawings of Indian scenes and life succeeded in conveying local colour and mood. But the artist was seen at his best in ceramics, particularly sculptures. Almost all the pieces showed much

technical competence. But some of them had something more, a mood of mirth and gaiety, for example, the battered taxi with its gesticulating passengers; a decorative two-seater plane of doubtful functional value, and a man in a funny hat. The two figures of the guardian with Banner and Musician' and the piece entitled "Horse and Rider" were excellent. A number of tiles and pottery were also interesting.

Temples in Water Colour

In January, Horilal, a young artist, held an exhibition of his oils and paintings in other media. With admirable dispatch, he was back again at the Academy (April 29 to May 5), this time with a show, less pretentious and better than his previous effort: twelve water colours and four black and white sketches of West Bengal temples and other monuments. Of these, the paintings of the Dakshineswar temple, the Paresnath temple, the Krishna Roy temple of Nadia and the Hansewari temple of Bansberia were beautiful.

Letters

The Other Liebknecht

How to reply to Mr Abheek Das Gupta (April 19)? To the story that the Indian Press has been very much partial to the Naxalite Maoist communist no intelligent reply seems possible, (if the number of times one is mentioned in the news despatches and editorials is to be the index in judging one's popularity, Mao's China must be the most favoured country of the Indian Press), nor to the cheap jibe that it is during the UF regime only that the Naxalites suddenly feel the urgency to raise a cacophony of 'revolutionary' slogans. This particular trick of the trade has been practised far too often by politicians from Nehru and Pattabhi Sitaramma down to Atulya Ghosh and Bijoy Singh Nahar against the communists since 1942 whenever they planned to organise a movement against the Congress regime. To Mr Das Gupta, arrogant

abuse of one's political opponents, the erstwhile comrades, as a band of CIA men or a group of Congress agents is not distasteful, but to express one's strong resentment at such a tone "smacks of bad taste". Taste, of course, like every other thing, has its own fashion, changing according to time and place and person.

I think it necessary to ask Mr Das Gupta to quote correctly before he rushes to print, to be sure of his subject before he speaks. Marx severely criticised his pupil Wilhelm Liebknecht for his 'south German placidity' and for his tendency to conciliate everybody and smooth over contradictions. Marx also corrected him when he lapsed into "Austrophilism and a defence of particularism"—particularism meaning "striving by a part or a region of a State to preserve local customs and autonomous rights". But, then, what has this 'particularism' to do with remaining alone like Liebknecht? I referred to Karl Liebknecht as an example of a lone yet brave fighter, an outstanding representative of the Spartacus Group or the Group of the International in Germany, who openly called upon the workers and soldiers of Germany during World War I to turn their guns against their own government. Lenin held aloft this brilliant example of courage of convictions as a model for the communists to emulate, asking them to remain even alone 'like Liebknecht', if necessary, than to swim with the tide.

I would be happy to take up an argument with anyone in your paper or anywhere else but he must have substantive points. Unfortunately Mr Das Gupta has none. A fruitful argument would lead to a continuous clarification of each position; but abuse displaying animus simply makes a critical ass of the abuser. This does not mean I do not keep in mind the difference between abuse and ruthlessness—the first condition of all criticism.

PROBODH CHANDRA DUTTA
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Telengana

To outsiders, the Telengana agitation may look like a massive upsurge of the people against the bourgeois-landlord Congress Government. But in fact the agitation is nothing but sub-regional chauvinism resulting from the factional war in the State Congress party. Now the working groups inside that party belonging to the Telengana region have openly come out in support of a separate Telengana and have made it clear that nothing short would be acceptable to them.

The agitation has brought the economy of the State to a standstill. The plight of the Andhras is most miserable. Organised attacks on Andhra colonies and Andhra employees are continuing. Shops and grape gardens belonging to Andhras are either looted or burnt. The vast police machinery deployed from other States and the CRP are ineffective. The CPI's campaign for integration backfired and it had to suspend it. The CP (M) is content with giving press statements as it has no hold in the city. Big businessmen like the Marwaris, Sindhis and Gujaratis who have vested interests are adding fuel to the fire by spending huge sums of money. Their ambition is to buy the land and houses owned by the Andhras at runaway prices if they are kicked out of the Telengana region. The millionaire State SSP leader also has come out for a separate Telengana, ignoring the directives of the all-India leadership. The Swatantra Party has been harping on the 'separate Telengana' slogan. Under these circumstances, however reactionary it may be, it is better if Telengana is given separate Statehood before the agitation takes a worse turn.

ELKAY
Hyderabad

Long Day's Journey

I have heard it said that within every drama critic there is a frustrated actor/producer trying to get out. It definitely did seem to be so while I was reading your drama critic's views on the latest Amateur pro-

duction, *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

He got down to business in a pompous way. When he first expressed his "surprise" at the casting of the play, I thought that perhaps he was nursing some secret grudge against individuals and was naturally very relieved to find that what he meant by "casting" actually referred to the interpretation of particular parts.

He then went on to pronounce with awesome majesty that Mary Tyrone was the central character of the play and that the whole production "should have been moulded around her". And polished off that statement with some inconsequential twaddle about social security, Vietnam and American youth! Who is your critic to state that the author's meaning had become "befogged", when the director obviously has his own views on the subject? Besides I feel that the play was more than just the tragedy of a helpless mother, it was more a devastatingly honest account of O'Neill's own family, the effect they had on each other and on him, and how the resulting emotions influenced the formative mind of one of America's greatest playwrights.

Your critic also felt he had missed the "significance" of certain movements on the stage. These, to my mind, were completely realistic movements and did not have to involve any significance to be less real.

After all his adverse comments on the production, unaccompanied by what he felt was right with the playing of the actors, his statement that the production moved without hitch or hindrance and that the Amateurs finally reached "near enough to the destination for which they set out", came as horribly grudging and condescending praise indeed. Surely the efforts of amateurs can be lauded, when merited, without such a lordly nod of the head.

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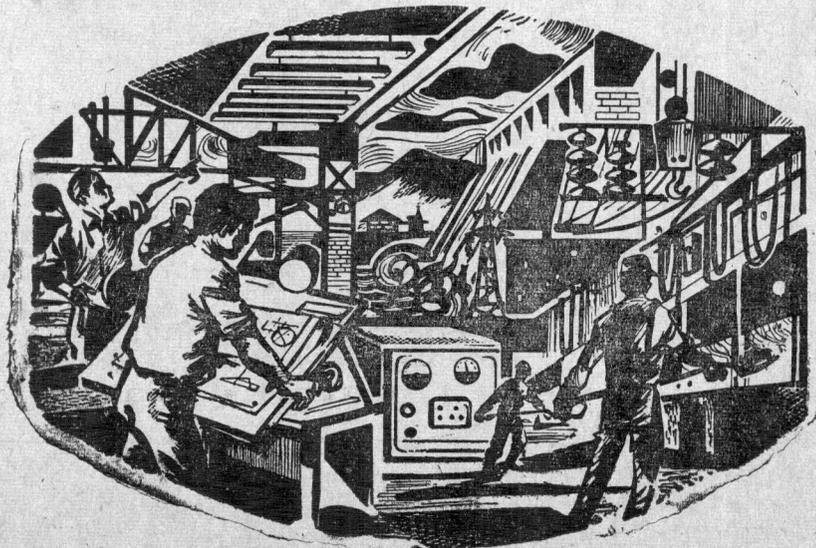


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