



**BOMBAY
MY
BOMBAY**

The Love Story of the City

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas

This work, presented in the form of a literary piece reveals Bombay in all its varied colours. It is an insightful study of all the conceivable aspects of the great city Bombay. As one goes through it, one feels as if one is in a cinema hall, enjoying a very interesting movie. The episode as to how the matinee idol, Amitabh Bachchan was introduced by Mr. Abbas finds mention in this novel. Besides, other film personalities also appear much to the delight of the readers.

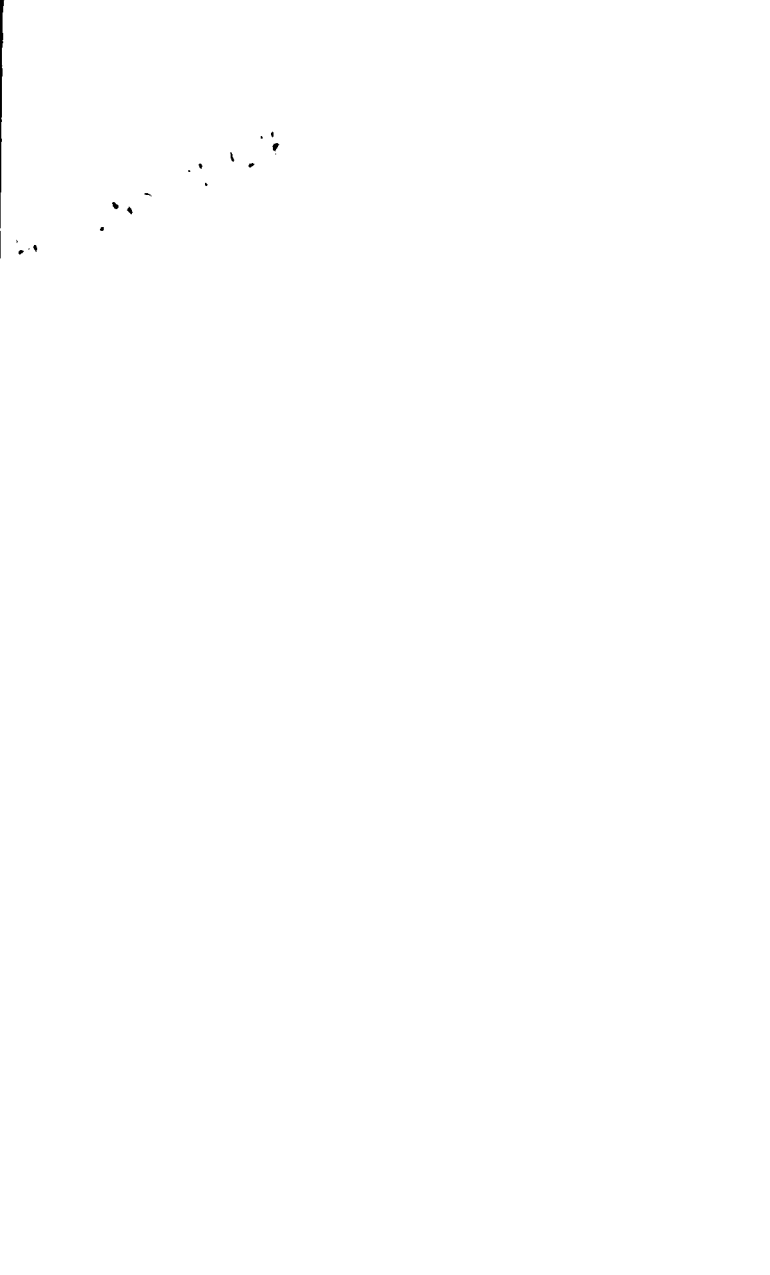
This interesting work has the potential to keep the reader on the edge of the chair throughout.

A late lamented film critic once wrote of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas that he had a love-hate relationship with the city of Bombay. This was said in the context of the films which he made about Bombay—and about Bombay characters!—especially "Shehar Aur Sapna" (THE CITY AND THE DREAM) which may be regarded as a poem in celluloid, both a dirge and a poem of praise!

Abbas has spent 50 years of his life in Bombay. He has slept on pavements and eaten lunches of two annas per *thali*. Since Abbas and inflation both have marched, he has also slept in 5-star hotels and dined off film stars' birthday-dinners which cost Rs. 100 per head (minus drinks which are a saving when Mr. Abbas is invited to dinner).

He has walked in the rain-spattered pavements, and driven in air-conditioned limousines, unmindful of the rain outside. He knows what

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BOMBAY, MY BOMBAY !

THE LOVE STORY OF THE CITY

KHWAJA AHMAD ABBAS

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LOVE-HATE

A noted film critic, now also dead, the late KOBITA SARKAR, said about the four films I have made with Bombay (Mumbai) as background (MUNNA, BAMBAY RAAT KI BAHON MEIN, SHEHAR AUR SAPNA, and the Bombay chapter of the documentary, A TALE OF FOUR CITIES) appeared to have a love-hate relationship with the city of Bombay

That is, literally, true. Any sensible and sensitive man cannot but *love* (or have loved) Bombay for its natural beauty and the beauty of its old buildings, and at the same time he cannot but *hate* it, for all its evils—corruption and pollution in excelsis, the F. S. I. scandals, the extreme poverty and degradation of its sub-human slums and *jhongad-patties*, and what it does to its population—the moral and cultural degradation, the high incidence of crime, the glaring contrasts of 5-star opulence and extreme poverty—which, at some places, are to be found cheek-by-jowl—e.g. the huts around and below a sky-scraper. You don't have to take a taxi to have a glimpse of slum-life of Bombay. You can have a bird's-eye-view of it right under a sky-scraper or hotel window.

Could one help both loving and hating this city at the same time—loving what it was once, hating what it has become today, but loving again what it can become in the future?

LIVING ON 50 RUPEES A MONTH!

It is the Golden Jubilee Year of my first arrival in Bombay.

I came to Bombay better-equipped than any journalists who were reputed to have come with nothing more than their *dhoties* and their *lutyas*, and yet, within a few years, they rose to be Chief Reporters, Assistant Editors and, in one case, as an Editor of a Bombay daily paper !

I came better equipped with two steel trunks—one of them contained all my books, except text-books, which I had bought, borrowed or even stolen from the University Library. There were books on History, Political Science and Economics, besides small collections of Plays from Shakespeare to Ibsen and Shaw, collections of Short Stories from Somerset Maugham to O'Henry, and the latest novels of Ethil Mannin and Beverley, Nichols, very important at that stage of my adolescence.

The other trunk contained all my clothes including the Black Turkish coat (buttoned-up) and white trousers that was the Aligarh University uniform. Apart from that I had one warm suit with a half-dozen ties and a silken scarf. There were two cotton-padded coverlets for these trunks which converted them into settees, and which, at night, served as a mattress if there was no proper bed to sleep on.

For three months, I had a room partner — ANSAR HARVANI who, though two years junior to me, was already reputed to be a fire-brand orator in Urdu, which meant invitations to him from many mosques on Friday after prayers. He linked the religion of Islam with his anti-imperialist and socialist themes very well. He had the gift of the gab, and he took the maximum advantage of it. Next to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who was a prodigy at the age of fifteen and six-

teen. Ansar, at the age of eighteen, was the youngest Muslim orator in mosques and, likewise, never forgot to bring in all the cruelties and sacrileges perpetrated on Muslim nations by British (and French) imperialisms.

It was this gift of the young man that made him one of the youngest M.P.'s from Uttar Pradesh and a favourite of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who appreciated the young man's fire and courage in holding to ransom the Muslim communalists on their own religious grounds in mosques and in mausoleums, wherever political and social issues were discussed from the Muslim view-point.

I knew that Ansar was not a staunch religious practitioner. He was a hedonist and, like his elder brother, *Majaz*, the young poet who died of alcoholism at an early age, liked his bottle of whisky (or, later, of rum). He, however, could not be away from anti-teetotalerism.

But he was a good friend and ideal companion to have as a room-partner. He was also an unpaid apprentice in the *Bombay Chronicle* for the three months of the summer vacation; unlike me, he had to return to University, so he went to all-night *mujras* and would entrust the single latch key of the room to me to lock before setting out on his frequent night adventures for I liked to sleep early. But one night, by mistake, I presume, he took the key with him and, about ten p.m. when I returned home after finishing my sub-editing work at the office, I found myself locked out.

After wandering about for an hour and having several *singal chas* in the neighbourhood Irani tea-shop, when still he did not return home with the key, I decided to sleep on the pavement—"the bed of stones" which became my theme in three or four stories and one novel, which was to be turned in a President's Award-winning motion picture, *Shehar Aur Sapna* (The City And The Dream) which all grew out of that single night I slept on the "bed of stones".

In that night there were many lessons I learnt. I had to pay a couple of annas (to be exact, a quarter rupee) to the local *Dada* who commanded that pavement for "floor space" on which I had to lie minus a bed.

That night I was made aware of the class (or caste) system

among pavement-sleepers! At the top came those who slept on clean sheets and embroidered pillows—they had their lodgings in one of the adjacent chawls, they were permanent sleepers-by-choice—they were driven out by the intolerable heat of their musty and small cubicles, in which they left their women-folk and children to lock themselves in the heat and the squalor, while they enjoyed the cool sea-breeze which was occasionally available to them on their "beds of stones" on the pavement.

Then, after them, and a little away from them, came the humbler *chatai*-sleepers who belonged generally to the mill-worker class. Then came the class of those who slept on gunny sacks—the porters and the coolies and the *thela* (or handcart) pullers, who spread their sacks on the pavement. Then there was the lowest class—those who had nothing to spread on the "bed of stones"—I was one of them for one night, though it was only by "accident" because only a few yards away I was half-tenant of a room with two beds and a writing table, not to mention the small dressing table with a mirror which we used for shaving ourselves by turns.

We never had a formal breakfast—one day I would take out wheat *sattoos* from my pillow-case which I had brought from Panipat, next day Ansar would take out rice *sattoos* which he had brought from his rice-producing and rice-eating district in Eastern U.P. Sugar (which was very cheap at that time) was already mixed with both kinds of *sattoos* and what we had to do was to pour water from *surahi* which was cool enough. We had never used cold water from the *fridge*, upto that time, iced water was an unheard of luxury!

I continued my apprenticeship in the "CHRONICLE" for three months. After that the time limit set by my father to finance me at the rate of Rs. 50/- per month, for 3 months, after which I must give up the craze for journalism and come to legal practice in Lucknow or Allahabad in which case he would spend Rs. 250/- per month to settle me in "practice" where I had to make a name by "doing" cases *free*, without charging any fees. "That is the only way to make a name for yourself as a lawyer!" he had said.

So I went to my editor (Syed Abdullah Brelvi), an idealist

and a brilliant editor. I told him I am going back to Delhi, because the time given by my father to try "journalism" was over. I have not yet got any money from journalism, so I cannot afford to live in Bombay.

"How much do you want to live in Bombay?", he asked me.

I replied, like a fool that I was, "Fifty rupees a month". That's what my father was sending me every month."

He wrote a chit, folded it, and handed it over to me. "Give it to my Secretary, and forget about going back."

I handed the chit to the Secretary which he read out to me. It was only a few words. "Put Abbas as a reporter-cum-sub-editor, on our staff. Salary : Rs. 50/- (Fifty) per month!"

So I was hired, but at the lowest rung of the ladder. If I had asked for a hundred rupees a month, it would have been given to me and my financial status would have been at least twice as good. I knew that, even at that time, and in a Nationalist newspaper, salaries were much lower than now, or in Anglo-Indian press, but I, through my own modesty or foolishness, had placed myself very low on the scale. But I had none else to blame except myself. "That is what I had asked for. That is on what I started my career!

But, apart from the low salary, I was given a first-class training in journalism. I was encouraged to not only report but sub-edit. I was also allowed to try my hand at writing editorial notes, once even a First Editorial, moreover I was assigned for training to M.A. Basit, a nephew of Dr. ANSARI and he taught me to write a humorous column, which had always been a political slant. It was composed of about sixteen brief items—and out of that if I could have three or four paragraphs of mine accepted out of a dozen that I submitted every day, I was very happy and felt that I had earned my three or four cups of tea which Mr. Basit gave me, and, when he liked anything particularly, he would add a couple of biscuits to the tea.

AUTHOR ! AUTHOR !!

In course of time I became a regular *chela* of Basit Saheb and Chidambaram who was supposed to teach me sub-editing. One day a building under-construction collapsed on the labourers working in it. And Chidambaram gave the news-item a seven column heading, "SONS OF TOIL BURIED UNDER TONS OF SOIL"—which, I thought at that time, was rather *good* though our Editor took Chidambaram to task for using a facetious alliterative phrase to describe so grim a tragedy! So I learnt that smart and laughter-raising headlines were not to be used for a grim tragedy. But the same Chidambaram had given the Congress-League Pact, some years earlier, the heading of "LUCK NOW IN LUCKNOW"—which was much appreciated in journalistic circles and became the talk of the town.

Lord Willingdon, the 'agricultural Viceroy' was now the head of the Government and his *penchant* for agriculture and, specially, dairy-farming, was often the butt of jokes in Basit Saheb's "TETE A' TETE" column. So I thought of writing an imaginery "Interview With The Viceroy's Bull"—which became the hilarious talking-point from Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's suite in the Taj Mahal Hotel to the next-door Irani restaurant, where people would gather to read the daily paper, *free*, with their morning cup of tea.

That piece was so much talked about that I got a peculiar but most welcome award. Basit Saheb invited me (as a non-paying guest) to live with him in his Byculla flat where I had a separate room of myself. I wrote weekly on some such journalistic fantasy which became my first book to be published which I called "NOT ALL LIES". The day that book came out I can never forget! I kept the "SIX copies" that were conventionally given to the author (Imagine my excitement when at the age of 22, I could call myself an author!)

under my arm and gave them free to all my Seniors and colleagues—to the Editor, Basit Saheb, the other Assistant Editor, Chidambaram, the NEWS EDITOR, to N.G. JOG, who was much senior to me in age (he was a Lecturer of English in a college before joining *The Bombay Chronicle* on the same salary as myself—Rs. 100 p.m.).

So, within two or three years, I was earning twice my original salary. I was also contributing free-lance stuff to all kinds of papers on all kinds of subjects—from Politics to Society Gossip which I shamelessly cribbed from the *Bombay Man's Diary* of the *Evening News of India*. My income thus became supplemented with the small payments which I received—from Rs. 3/- per thousand-word column to Rs. 15/- which I got every month for supplying *Bombay Calling* social gossip to INDIA, or India Magazine, from Calcutta.

I kept the freelance work going by making a solemn promise to myself that I could not have anything to eat unless I had written and posted an article to some paper or magazine.

So, in less than three years, I was the proud possessor of a typewriter (bought on instalments) and had three thousand rupees in my Bank account! So, with seventeen hundred rupees, I bought a Round-the-World Economy Class Steamer ticket, and prepared to leave for my first adventure in the world. But the Bank in which I had deposited my money was Travancore and Quilon Bank, which failed after a week of cashing my 1700 rupee cheque issued to American Express with office at Flora Fountain.

I lost Rs. 1300/- in the Bank failure and, with that, my dreams of foreign travel dimmed. At the same time I read in a despatch from our Allahabad correspondent that Jawaharlal Nehru was also packing his bags to go abroad. The next week he was in Bombay, and imagine my surprise, when Brelvi Saheb invited me to accompany Basit Saheb to have breakfast at his homestead with *Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*. That piece of good news gave me an idea.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was going alone, but he would need a Secretary during his travels and meetings with important people. Here was the kind of break I wanted and needed.

I was already imagining myself as Secretary to Jawaharlal Nehru and I confined my dream to Basit Saheb and asked him to broach the subject with Panditji.

At the breakfast table while I was sitting opposite Panditji, Basit Saheb began by asking him what countries he was going to visit this time.

"England and France, of course! Then I think Spain will be worth visiting. They are fighting the Nazi-Fascists of the world, they are bravely engaged in the Dress Rehearsal of the next world war."

I was thrilled to hear the name of Spain. I had already read a lot about it.

"*No Pasaran!*", I exclaimed, "*No Pasaran!*" I quoted the slogan of the anti-Fascist forces. *They Shall Not Pass!*

"Abbas is also going to Europe this Summer!", said Basit Saheb.

"I am planning to go round the world," I proudly informed him.

"That will be very good for a young journalist!" He commended my idea of going round the world.

After breakfast, we went over to the Drawing Room, and I took the liberty of sitting on the same sofa as Panditji.

As expected by me, he asked me, "What do you plan? What is the itinerary of your world tour?"

I explained to him that, as at present, tentatively arranged, I would begin with the Far East, then Japan, then cross the Pacific to the West Coast of U.S.A., take a train from Los Angeles to New York, then across the Atlantic to Europe and catch a steamer from England or France back to India."

"That seems to be a very ambitious tour—you will hardly spend only a few days in each country!"

"No, I plan to stay a month in New York, a month in Paris, and a month in London. Of the other countries and cities I will have a passing glimpse—but at last I would have gone round the world! When will you be in England?"

"May be in August or September—it all depends on how the events shape themselves."

"Panditji," at last I blurted out, "can I be your Secretary?"

"What? You mean Private Secretary? But I will have no

Exchange there to pay you anything!"

"I am not expecting anything—I will do it without any pay!"

"What will you do?"

"I will look after you. I will buy tickets for you—in train, or buses or theatres. I will make appointments for you. Remind you about these appointments. In short, do everything that a Private Secretary is supposed to do!"

"Why? Why will you do it *free*?" I was asked suddenly.

"You will meet important people—like the Prime Minister and leader of Opposition. Bertrand Russell and so on. It will be good for a journalist to be present when you meet those people!"

"But it is my principle that no one should be made to work free."

"Then you can pay me something," I lamely suggested.

"But if I take work for me, I should pay you well—in keeping with your dignity—and mine!"

"In that case you need not pay me anything." I repeated.

"But I told you it is against my principles to take work from some one and not pay him anything. I don't believe in honorary work even in politics."

I took the hint and closed my trap. After that, I moved away from that sofa, making room for Mrs. Brelvi, who was a charming woman, much younger than the Editor. I knew that Panditji liked the company of such women.

Two days later, a strange thing happened. An invitation came to cover the dance recital of the late Madam MENAKA, wife of the late General Sokhey, who were both known to me, as a journalist. The show was either at the CAPITOL or the EXELSIOR theatre which are both in the Bori Bunder area! My seat, according to the Complimentary Pass, was right in front, but General Sokhey who was receiving the guests told me that my seat had been given to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's party which would include about four or five persons, so they had kept half a dozen of the front-row seats reserved for them. Would I mind taking a seat in the second row? I said I would not mind at all, yielding my seat to my political hero. Indeed I would welcome the

opportunity to sit directly behind Panditji, which was the right place for a *shishya* or *chela*!

The show's second bell was ringing when Panditji's party arrived to take their empty places. I *namaskared* Panditji, and did I find a slight embarrassment in the way he responded? He sat down directly in front of me. To his right was his younger sisters, Mrs. Hutheesing. To his left was sitting a thin, slim and tall young lady, taller than Panditji. She could not be called beautiful in the classical sense but she was glamorous, no doubt! Next to her sat Mr. Hutheesing, who was also known to me as a Congress Socialist, with the airs of an Oxford intellectual.

Who was the young lady sitting to Panditji's left? That evening I did not concentrate on Madam Menaka's dancing. I was all the time looking at the young lady on Panditji's left. In the Interval, Panditji and his party went in the lobby for a smoke or a cup of tea, and I button-holed General Sokhey: "Who is the young lady sitting on Panditji's left? I straight-away asked him, and he said, "I don't know her very well. She is a barrister in London. I think her name is Miss Bee Batliwala."

For the second half I concentrated on Madam Menaka's performance. She was a fascinating dancer, then in the prime of her life and career. There was a tumultuous applause at the end, even Panditji clapped with the rest of the audience. But I had to rush away because of work in the office—I had to submit the report of the recital before 10 p.m.! Panditji's presence was NEWS and I had to mention it, "Among the dance art lovers there were several distinguished personages like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru." I did not mention Miss Bee Batliwala's name—was I sub-consciously jealous of her? Why should I be jealous of her?

I knew the reason when, after half-circumnavigating the globe and meeting Panditji at Geneva, I saw in the *National Herald*, a photograph of Panditji and Krishna Menon in Barcelona in which the glamorous Miss Bee Batliwala "a London Barrister who is acting as Panditji's Private Secretary during his European tour". How Private? That question came back with me to India when I resumed my job at the *Bombay Chronicle*.

WAR COMES TO BOMBAY!

The population of Bombay had grown to more than a million and a half. Still the bus and tram and train fares had not gone up, and there were empty flats to let. It was the eve of the war, there was a lot happening in the international field. Jawaharlal Nehru sums up the International Situation in his *AUTOBIOGRAPHY*:—

"I was affected more than others by the developments of events in Europe and the Far East. Munich was a shock hard to bear, and the tragedy of Spain became a personal sorrow for me. . . . the sense of impending catastrophe overwhelmed me, and my faith in a bright future for the world became dim. . . ."

When I read it, I forgot the disappointment of the talk in Mr. Brelvi's house. It disappeared. A man who felt, as he did, about the world, could take any Secretary he chose to accompany him if he (or she) helped him to feel and write about Spain and Europe the way Nehru did!

But our subject was Bombay, and its exploding population. I had been aware of the rate of Bombay's growth of population, from first-hand experience of those who were forced by circumstances to sleep on the "beds of stones"!

But the growth of population took a "breather" when the war started and there was danger of attacks from the sea by lurking German submarines. The coastal area buildings suddenly were advertising their flats "TO LET", and through a friend who was living in a building on the sea-front at Shivaji Park, I was able to shift to Shivaji Park, which was then regarded as a posh area next to Marine Drive (also called the Queen's Necklace), the poshest area in the city.

I was already on the fringes of the Cinema business (generally and wrongly called the Film Industry), being part-

time publicity writer for the Bombay Talkies Studios at Malad. I spent half a day there and by three p.m. I was back in the *Bombay Chronicle* office where I was being asked to write film reviews, among my other activities. But I took it more seriously than others, which involved editing "MOTORING AND AVIATION" and "AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY" pages which were mostly scissors and paste assignments but which brought me a wind-fall when the "AVIATION" editor received an invitation for the inauguration of Delhi-Bombay postal flights, as the solitary passenger of the 4-seater plane which no less a pilot than Mr. J.R.D. Tata, himself, was piloting. I did not know him when we took off from Juhu airport in the darkness of the pre-dawn hour. So I committed a *faux pas* by asking my pilot what salary he got, when he reluctantly replied, "Three thousand per month."

"You pilots earn a lot," I said, relative to the time before war, "Your company looks after you very well."

J.R.D. brought me a shattering climax when he answered, "I am not exactly a pilot!"

I looked down at the fields under us, 5000 or 6000 feet, and asked nervously, "You are not exactly a pilot? You are not an amateur pilot, I hope?"

He studied my nervousness and said, "Don't worry, Mr. Abbas, I am not an amateur. I have all the necessary licences. But I am not exactly a pilot. I am the Chairman of the Company." Then I knew that the youthful-looking pilot was the great J.R.D. Tata himself.

But to come back to Bombay, at the beginning of the war, the *Sethias* were going back to Ahmedabad, Surat and Baroda, and large number of war-time job-seekers were coming to Bombay. These included the later famous Anand brothers—Chetan Anand who was an intellectual, a school teacher of English who stayed, to become a film director, and Dev Anand who was working in the war-time Censor office as a Sorting Clerk, before People's Theatre cast him in my play called "ZUBAIDA" - and Prabhat of Poona took him over as a film hero. After that he never looked back—only looked ahead. It is difficult to imagine him in today's "HUM NAUJAWAN"!

The population of Bombay was about 2 millions during the war !

Many nationalities were represented amongst the Allied soldiers who were seen in Bombay during those days. One could meet them, mainly in the Fort of Bombay—British and (later) Americans, of course, but Canadian Americans, even French, Dutch, and Swedes and bedraggled Italian Prisoners-of-war who passed through Bombay on the way to their P.O.W. camps in Maharashtrian countryside.

This influx brought with it, a whole lot of magazines and papers of all languages which were sold at Lamington Road second-hand book-shops of which I was an avid customer—they ranged from Pornography to more serious magazines like New Yorker and New York Times magazine.

Seeing this (mostly) English-speaking potential clientele, local publishers started publishing a lot of cheap paperbacks—at a price of Rs. 1/8—mostly reprints of D.F. Karaka's books and novels, books on Yogas and Indian Spiritualism, even a little book of mine, INDIAN LOOKS AT AMERICA, got published and sold well among American troops who wanted to know how an Indian writer looked at their country. There was a chapter about Negroes called "The Darker Brothers" which brought quite a few appreciative letters from the coloured G.I.'s and even from Liberal-minded White troops—and a few abusive letters from soldiers from Southern States who had the same mentality like our Brahmins and Thakur landlords who think nothing of burning Harijan villages !

QUIT INDIA

Came 1942, and Bombay witnessed the August *Kranti*—the fiery presidential oration of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad created a great impression on the American Special Correspondents who could not understand a word of the high-flown Urdu—but they felt here was an orator of skill and conviction. I had made friends with several of them and translated the whole speech to them, as it was being delivered.

The next early morning, all the leaders of the Working Committee were arrested and it was a South Indian reporter who, posing to be a country bumpkin, stumbled on the platform where the Special Train carrying Gandhiji and the other leaders like Nehru, Patel, and Azad were being carried to some unspecified destination, brought back the NEWS of their departure. We knew from top secret sources that Gandhiji was dropped *enroute* to Poona, while the other leaders were taken to Ahmednagar Fort which was turned for them into a special jail, but we were not allowed to reveal the destination, while the American correspondents scooped the news by flying to Colombo and filing their despatches from there.

Next day Kasturba Gandhi was to address the meeting at Shivaji Park, in my neighbourhood. So I was there, along with a hundred thousand others, and received two-three whacks of a policeman's lathi on my back and a quantity of tear-gas which momentarily blinded me and I had to take refuge in the stair-case of an orthodox Maharashtrian old lady's house who, seeing I was a victim of Police's brutality, rendered me first aid and gave me a glass of milk to drink, while the portraits of gods and goddesses looked on from the walls of her room, at this demonstration of unorthodoxy, for I had told her frankly that I was a Muslim.

That reminds me of the first (not the last) time R.S. Padbidri, the Gandhian older Assistant Editor, took me for dinner to his house, where his wife remarked as a compliment to me, "This Abbas does not look like a Muslim at all!" I did not have to protest, for Mr. Padbidri took his wife to task for the unconsciously implied insult to all Muslims! He was a true Gandhian and referred to many Muslim associates of Gandhiji.

So she was the Maharashtrian Mother India who became one of the "Five Faces of MOTHER INDIA" in the series of sketches I later wrote.

That year was memorable, for at the age of 28, I got married to my distant cousin, Mujtabai Khatoon—I invited my Maharashtrian Brahmin friend, V.P. Sathe, to attend my marriage in distant Panipat. He—or his kind father—returned the compliment by inviting me, along with my wife, to attend the orthodox nuptials of his son, when some years later he was married at Poona, defying his orthodox close relations who were opposed to a Muslim family taking part in the holy rituals including the lunch where I was seated next to the bride-groom! Thus, by our mutual presence at each other's marriage, was orthodoxy crushed both in Panipat and in Poona (or Pune)!

A PROGRESSIVE WRITERS AND PEOPLE'S THREAT

My wife lived in Shivaji Park with me all through the worst communal riots that plagued Bombay—and the rest of the country.

For the last six or seven years I was a member of the Progressive Writers' Association which was founded in 1935, with the blessings of Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore and Munshi Premchand, by some young writers including the world-famous novelist MULK RAJ ANAND who was not a Communist but a "fellow-traveller" as I was. I felt no embarrassment in working with my Communist comrades. Mulk who had earned international fame with his novels starting from THE UNTOUCHABLE, ACROSS THE BLACK WATERS and several others was originally London-based where he had settled after doing his Ph. D., but the war and the Quit India movement drove him back to India. He was a Punjabi originally, but he chose Bombay to settle down, eventually with a country-house in Khandala in the Ghats artistically fashioned out of an old and long-disused Church, where he spends half of his week, working on his books. But he is never at the same place—today he is in Delhi where he is the President of the Lalit Kala Akademi, tomorrow he may be in Madras releasing some book, and the day after he may be in Calcutta, delivering a lecture on Art in the Bengal tradition. Besides his flat in Bombay, he has two houses—one in Khandala and the other in Delhi near Hauz Khas, both full of books and *objects d'art*—at eighty he is like a free-wheeling monument, active, versatile, mobile and volatile.

So I was in the P.W.A. the same way as Mulk Raj was—a non-Party Communist and non-Party Socialist. But, while I joined the Progressive Writers' movement after it was stated

I collaborated with Anie de Silva, a left-oriented young lady from Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known), and several others, to start the Indian People's Theatre Association. In the beginning it was dominated by leftist-sounding Society ladies, but we wanted to create an impression on the Marathi-speaking people, and so we chose a play of a Marathi writer (who happened to be a Communist) and he gave us a Labour-oriented play. We collected some actors in consultation with the Author, and staged it in a hall in Parel. The play was a big success and repeated shows were staged. Then we needed a Hindustani play, with special appeal for Muslim handloom workers from U.P.

So I wrote a play called ZUBAIDAH—concerning a young Muslim woman who died while doing social reform work. The highlights of the play were the scenes which took place outside the main curtain when five representatives of the lower middle class—the Mir Saheb, the Khan Saheb, the Lala Saheb, and the Masterji, the local teacher, and Munshi Bedil, the comedian, who would bring the house down with his readings from the daily paper and his hilarious comments on the current events including what was happening locally in the play. At the end of their improvised *baithak*, each would take away the *mondha* on which he was sitting and then curtain would go up to continue the action in the play.

The arch-conservative, the villain of the piece, was the elderly Mir Saheb, a character no one would like to play, so I offered to do it, with a beard and my father's *sherwani*. When I put on the beard, the gum was so fast-sticking that, for three hours I could not eat or drink anything, nor could I smile. Tahmane, the make-up artist, was afraid that it would spoil my make-up. Everyone said I looked like my father—but the characterization was quite different, it was a composite picture of all the arch-reactionaries I had met in my life in Panipat, Delhi and Aligarh.

When I read the play to our committee, Balraj Sahni, fresh from B.B.C., London, was present. He liked the format of the play and the possibilities of making it a hit, that I asked him to direct the play, not merely praise it, if he liked it so much he had to direct it. So we got a B.B.C.-trained director for

our play. And he created a sensation by the way he directed it.

For the scene of the marriage of the Muslim Hero (played by Chetan Anand), Balraj brought the whole *barrat* through the Central aisle of Cowasji Jahangir Hall, the *Sehra*-clad *dulha* on a white horse, and then the whole *barrat* with a band playing a lively tune. It created a sensation in the packed hall and thus we had difficulty in taking the horse up the specially prepared ramp, because it was afraid of the clapping audience! There was another ramp which took him down from the stage to the corridor and out of the side-gate.

So our People's Theatre was launched with a bang, thanks to my friend Balraj Sahni's brain-wave in bringing a white horse into the hall and preparing a ramp to lead it to the stage.

The applause for the *baraat* scene was so tumultuous that the success of our play was assured. We played for 10 more nights in smaller halls all over the city specially the Parel-Dadar area where the working-class population lived. The heroine of the play who played the title role of Zubaidah, was Uzra Hameed, wife of a friend of mine, who later became known as the heroine of most of Prithvi Theatres' plays.

Meanwhile, it was war-time. So the British Government of India decided to interfere in the affairs of the film business. They made a law restricting the over-all length of a feature film to 11,000 feet. No one could produce a film without prior permission from the Government, which was given to old producers at the rate of 2 films where they had been producing 3 films per year. Thereby they hoped to economize on the total length of raw film imports. Simultaneously, some hidden progressive among the officials sought to encourage new talent, and a new kind of cinema by issuing *three* licences to producers among non-professionals, who had no earlier experience of film producing, to make *their* films in their own way, but who had to belong to some cultural organisation.

This was a God-sent opportunity to intellectuals who were fascinated by the film medium but had no resources to enter

the film business. Now they had a prerogative, if their application was accepted by the Government, financiers would come to them to finance their pictures, without condition of taking any stars or giving any particular songs and dances. So we, of the I.P.T.A. (as the Indian People's Theatre Association was more popularly known) were one of those who applied, and sought the aid of N.M. Joshi, veteran trade unionist who had considerable influence in New Delhi's corridors of power. Three applicants, all interrelated personally and organizationally, were selected on the basis of their experience of providing purposeful entertainment.

The three of us who got the green signal of the Government were UDAY SHANKAR (on behalf of Uday Shankar Culture Centre), to make a dance film which was a different thing from a film with songs and dances, Chetan Anand (with such big names known in the theatre world with a script called "NEECHA NAGAR") and the IPTA (to make a film on the Bengal famine tragedy). Ravi Shankar, the renowned and world-famous maestro was our and Chetan Anand's common music director. (Was he common between US and CHETAN or was he common between us and Uday Shankar?). I was asked to direct and produce the film because I was the only member who had read books by Eisenstein and Pudovkin and seen film-shooting in Bombay Talkies studios. The salary offered to me was 500 p.m. though when top theatrical talents (Balraj Sahni, Shombhu Mitra, actor and director of Bengal IPTA, and Prabhakar Gupte of Maharashtra IPTA) were appointed Associate Directors, I reduced it to 400 P.M. to be on par with them! But this triumvirate created problems—because each of them had an EGO superior to my own EGO. But I was happy to have my old friend and collaborator, V.P. SATHE as my Co-screenplay-writer and Associate Producer. GONDHALEKAR, an experienced Marathi artist, was our Art Director.

DHARTI KE LAL

So we – actors, actresses (including TRIPTI BHADURI from Bengal and Damayanti Sahni, the talented wife of Balraj, Usha Dutt who was the same age as Tripti but, with the help of make-up, was aged sufficiently to appear as the old peasant's wife and mother-in-law of Tripti; for the Hero's role I wanted Dev Anand, but as he had already joined Prabhat, I took another youth named *Anwar Mirza*) were all ready to shoot.

The 3-member team, borrowed along with the rags which they had used in their play, NAV-ANNA (New Harvest) on which my screenplay was partly based with a short story of Krishenchander, called ANN-DAATA, came from Bengal to play the characters they had eye-witnessed, dying on their city pavements during the famine and after.

The location of the picture being in Bengal I decided to make it in Calcutta and the surrounding rural area, and for that purpose took my hero, make-up man, art director and cameraman for an exploratory visit to Calcutta. First we took the shots in some side-streets, showing the hero (with make-up, having a beard and wild hair on his head) pulling a rickshaw which some of the younger people did, specially in the beginning of the colossal exodus from the country-side to Calcutta.

Then, one day we were shooting a scene in front of Grand Hotel where we were panning from the well-known facade of the Hotel, highlighting its neon-lighted name, to a dust-bin where some children, derelicts of the famine were scrounging fighting off a dog, for the left-overs from the kitchen dumped by some hotel staff there. It was one of the most striking shots which was montaged with the shot of the mad teacher who, in his hunger-induced madness, was saying, "I was once

taught that Man descended from the apes, but I find now that he must have come from dogs!" As a pure coincidence, three or four Tommies are seen in the background of this shot, looking smugly behind at the dog and the children fighting for scraps of rotten food. The next moment we were questioned by a military patrol which ground to a stop near our camera, and put us to gruelling questioning.

"Whose camera is this?"

"It is ours!" I replied.

"What are you shooting?", said the officer.

"We are shooting a documentary about Calcutta", I blandly lied, not to divulge the theme of our film.

"Do you know," the officer went on gruffly, "that Calcutta is under Army rule and to shoot any scene you have got to get a permit from the Army authorities?"

"We did not know it, Sir, we have been sent from Bombay to photograph the best and most impressive buildings of Calcutta—like the marble Victoria Memorial and other such places. Actually, we were now going to Victoria Memorial. Can you allow us to shoot it without any permission? By tomorrow we will surely obtain the necessary permit!"

"Victoria Memorial you can shoot, tomorrow I don't want you to shoot anything without the military permit."

"Yes, Sir," I pleaded, "Tomorrow we will not shoot *anything* without military permit."

So, from there, we went and took a shot of Victoria Memorial which we needed for the Montage of Calcutta, from the view-point of the starving famine people of the village! And, on the way to the station, from our taxi, we took a shot of the Howrah Bridge, and, then, sending all our luggage from where we were staying, we took the evening train from the Howrah Station, my mind already planning how we would shoot in Bombay.

There was "Standing Room Only" in the unreserved compartment, so I could have a talk with my art director, Mr. Gondhalekar, while we were standing squeezed between perspiring humanity—the right atmosphere for the kind of film we were planning to make.

"Mr. Gondhalekar," I asked him, "do you think we can

celebrated Bengali veteran writer and intellectual, became Tripti Mitra.

(Twentyfive years later, when I went to Calcutta to persuade Tripti's daughter, to act in my film on NAXALITES which was, in a way, the sequel to her parents' work in *Dharti Ke Lal'*, I was dismayed to find Shombhu and Tripti living in two separate flats, and I was given to understand that this separation, with or without a divorce, was permanent. I think her parents' differences were at the back of the married daughter's reluctance to act in my film. On my return from Calcutta, I took Smita Patil to act in the same role. But this is a *flash-forward!*)

When the shooting was over, and editing too was concluded, we held a preview in the big projection hall of the Shri Sound Studio. The place was more than packed to capacity. I and Sathe were among those standing at the back of the crowd, near the Exit. When film ended with the hero and heroine quietly returning, after having a look at their son happily participating in a folk-dance, and the boatman's song (with which the picture had begun) was repeated—a haunting *Bhatlali*, and the end-title came on the screen, for two minutes there was complete silence.

We were very disturbed, we thought even our friends and comrades did not like the picture, till the audience suddenly broke into applause. They gave us a standing ovation for full five minutes. Most of them were so moved by the stark realism with which we had depicted the tragedy of the famine situation that they had tears in their eyes. That is why they were too stunned at the end of the picture to clap and cheer!

But the picture flopped in Bombay on the third day. The same day, when the advance booking was "HOUSE FULL"—the People's Theatre had a good reputation in Bombay, as though there was no Film Society then, we had created a taste for realistic films with the success of our plays. But, as fate would have it, on the third afternoon the communal riots broke out in Bombay, and no one cared to defy the Curfew Order to see our film. Only a few persons from out-of-

Bombay, My Bombay!

Curfew areas came to the theatre but, without the backing of a full-house behind them, they were depressed, rather than moved, by the realism which looked too drab and lifeless to them.

We knew we had been stabbed in the back by the rioters' daggers and knives, so we tried not to be too depressed by the collapse of the picture in Bombay. We thought of some possibility of bringing it to the notice of the world press and national politicians.

This was 1946, and the Cabinet Mission was in India and the political conclaves were being held in Simla, and so with the sensational coming together of Gandhi and Jinnah, to see *Dharti Ke Lal* in our mind, I and Sathe landed in Simla. But our "scoop" in getting together Mr. Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi, seeing the plight of famine-stricken Bengal which was representative of the whole India, and got reconciled to each other for the sake of their people, both Hindus and Muslims, who were equally starving—as symbolized in the characters of Pradhan and Ramzan Dada in our picture remained a dream. The CLIMAX of both communities doing collective farming, we thought in our innocence, would be an ideal solution of the communal tangle. But all this was our pious hope—Gandhiji was too busy with his political work and it would take much forceful pleading than our feeble requests to see our film, or any film. As for Mr. Jinnah, he disdainfully dismissed the invitation to see our film, at that an "Indian film", which was much below his Anglicised dignity. Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel had agreed to come, but suddenly a meeting of the Congress Working Committee kept them away. So we had to compromise by getting Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Begum Mohammed Shafi, and the whole pack of American, European and Indian Special Correspondents who were, at that time, collected in Simla.

So we failed in our political objectives, but we got tremendous publicity in the Press, specially international press, *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune* (International Edition printed in Paris), *Time*, *London Times*, and *La Figaro* of Paris, were among the papers whose corres-

pondents were thrilled to see the picture so realistic that it took one's breath away. The only comparison they could make was with the Odessa Steps scene of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. Both Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Begum Shafi who were sitting on adjacent seats, came out with tears in their eyes.

But we returned to Bombay to see the fulfilment of the Mountbatten Plan and to hear the broadcast of acceptance of the Partition Plan—just as my dear friend, Inder Raj Anand, had orally predicted, and as he had portrayed in his Prithvi Theatres' play of *Diwari*. Our picture had come too late, or too early, to be appreciated in the climate of communal riots and to be followed by the mutual Genocide from both sides.

“MAIN KAUN HOON?”

With the background of these riots and privations suffered by Hindus of Western Panjab and Muslims in Eastern Panjab, I wrote my play, MAIN KAUN HOON? (Who Am I?) about an unidentified corpse of an unknown Indian who, miraculously was alive on the eve of Partition, and blames both the communities for killing him, but he would not reveal his identity, for he would like both to think if they have, by a grim mistake, killed one of their own kind. He concludes, “That’s why I am a Hindu or a Muslim—*Who am I?* I would like this question to scald your consciences, if you murderers and bastards have any!”

Far away, in distant Kashmir was being played a grim drama which I need not elaborate. But the Kashmir war by Pakistani raiders took a group of Urdu and Hindi progressive writers from all parts of India—Rajindar Singh Bedi, Ramanand Sagar, Chandrakiran Sonrexa, and a few more including me! There it was winter, and in the evenings we used to gather in the State Guest House, along with some young literary-minded officers (mostly Sikh) of the Indian Army, and we would all read the latest stories or parts of novels that were mostly topical. So, there, I heard Ramanand Sagar’s Urdu novel, AUR INSAN MAR GAYA I (And Man Died!). It was the most hauntingly beautiful narration of the madness which had gripped all the communities of the Panjab—the Muslims, and the Hindus and Sikhs during the days before Gandhiji gave his life to ensure peace in the country. I liked the novel so much that I offered to write a Foreword to it! And when I returned to Bombay, I looked myself in my room and in three days and nights wrote that Foreword—and thereby hangs a tale!

For I pointedly charged *all* the political parties in the

country—the Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Akalis, and even the Communist Party—for not doing anything to *humanize* the Indian humanity. “You have all been making your followers militant, and so they were fighting and killing their neighbours and friends, you have made them militant exponents of your different warring ideologies, without instilling humanity and compassion in your followers—I hold you *all* guilty!—for the murderous beastliness practiced both in India and Pakistan. I hold you *all* guilty of Genocide!”

I wrote furiously and at some length—my tone did not, could not, appease, or forgive, any one!

May be I was too hard and violent in my expression. But from what I had seen with my own eyes in Bombay, and from what I had heard about the details of the riots and arson and humiliations of women, about men and children being killed brutally, in both sides of the Punjab, in Bihar and atrocities in Bengal, I felt very deeply about what had happened. “*Hum Wahshi Hain*”, proclaimed the book of Krishanchander’s Urdu short stories. Ali Sardar Jafri, the Communist, had paraphrased it in more bitter words in the Introduction that he had written to it!

But, within a few months, all this had been forgotten when I was pilloried and condemned for taking an ANTI-PEOPLE stand in my foreword, because I had blamed the Communist Party for not teaching its followers elementary humanity towards their fellow-human beings. “You turned them into fearless fighters not only against their exploiters but never taught them to regard every Hindu (or Muslim) worker as their brother.”

So I was anti-people, an anti-Communist, a Fascist, *petit bourgeoisie* sentimentalist, and what not!

So, despite my arguments for my defence, I was formally expelled by my own comrades, from the P.W.A. and even from the I.P.T.A., the organization which I had helped to found, of which I was General Secretary even at that time, and also the co-editor (with Krishanchander and Ali Sardar Jafri) of the magazine NAYA ADAB (New Literature) and could not write an article in my own defence in a paper *edited*

by me!

So one night, I and my wife quietly walked out of Deodhar Hall opposite Royal Opera House. We took a taxi to Grant Road Station from where we had to take a train to DADAR. That day we walked by ourselves, and on the way, Mujji took my hand and pressed it affectionately.

"Are you *mad*?", she enquired.

No, I am *sad* at the behaviour of those whom I regard as my comrades and friends. But, one day, they will have to repent it, what they have done to me, will recoil on them like a boomerang."

Mujji used to be a near-Communist, always siding with them in any discussion with me!

But she, too, was hurt by their unreasonable attitude, and gripping my hand, she paused to say, "I am with you, my dear!"

It was a dark corner on the way and I knew that her lips were waiting for mine, so I kissed them, with more warmth than usual.

We went home, and, while washing my hands at the wash-basin, I involuntarily threw up all the bitterness that was inside of me to be vomitted out!

It was all very well to say that I did not mind the expulsion but the P.W.A. and the I.P.T.A. were part of my life and I was part of their creation and functioning! I had undertaken to pay back (along with V. P. Sathe) a loan of about two lakhs which was the net loss of making *Dharti Ke Lal* for the IPTA. There was a creative vacuum in my life which I tried to fill in.

Hindi has become the national language, I had learnt to read and write it, now I thought of starting a monthly magazine, SARGAM, which would serve to introduce Urdu literary writings—both prose and poetry—in Devnagri *lipi*! So I had to become the proprietor-editor of the magazine, and my Punjabi friend, Manmohan Sabir, undertook to play the managerial role. We sub-let an office in a building on Sir Pheroze-shah Mehta Road, as our office. It was a cubicle with a table and four chairs. I, Manmohan and my Assistant,

Kulbhushan, occupied three of these chairs so that if a pair of visitors came in, either Manmohan or Kulbhushan had to go out! Manmohan undertook to edit a Film Section and get advertisements on that score. Of course, we would write about only worth-while films—like those, for instance, that were produced by Shantaram or directed by Guru Dutt. But film advertisements were our backbone. They also were our undoing, as many of the producers were willing to give their advertisements, but would not pay for them in time!

But the real thing was the literary contents—the stories and the poems. I had made it a principle not to publish anything unless we paid the authors, adequately, if not handsomely. We got Krishenchander to write a serial novel, *Toofan Ki Kaliyan* about Kashmir, which was his favourite locale. We had also stories by Rajinder Singh Bedi and Kartar Singh Duggal, a specially long poem from Firaq Gorakhpuri, Sahir and others. The circulation of the magazine, which began with 3,000 copies, soared, within a year, to seven thousands. But we were losing on every additional copy printed—about eight annas, since the price was only a rupee per copy.

The economy of magazine publication is peculiar. First you must be prepared to lose till you reach the optimum circulation of at least 20,000 copies. I learnt a few more hard facts—our circulation was more in the Southern states—specially in Karnataka and Kerala—and much less in United Provinces and Bihar while, in the beginning, we expected the situation to be the reverse.

I had been furiously free-lancing, meanwhile, apart from the *Last Page* which, for mercenary reasons, I had transferred with the Independence of the country, to BLITZ, I was writing and syndicating another column called AZAD QALAM to fourteen papers in English and other national languages. Also I was writing wherever a rupee could be earned. One day my friend Sathe informed me that we had paid back all the *difficult* creditors, and so we could start production of films. I had, upto then, written a few screenplays and directed *Dharti Ke Lal* for I.P.T.A., so now I had to start on my

own. I named my company **Naya Sansar (New World)**, not after my own name or initials (like R.K., S.K. and so on) but after the theme and ideal of our films as of other expressions.

I had already written a story, *Awara*, for Raj Kapoor and Prithviraj Kapoor, so now I had to write a woman-oriented story for NARGIS !

STORY OF TWO SISTERS

I wrote *Anhonee*, a story with two sisters, daughters of the same aristocrat, which are deliberately exchanged at birth, by the revengeful prostitute, so that her daughter is brought up in an aristocratic household and grows up into a beautiful, educated and cultured young lady, while the aristocrat's daughter, by his own wife, is brought up by the prostitute, and has all the bad qualities of a prostitute's daughter. She was a loud-mouth, used prostitute's slang, had a cigarette always dangling from her lips. In short, she was the direct opposite of the prostitute's daughter brought up as a young lady.

And since they were both look-alike sisters, Nargis was thrilled to be playing both the roles which would bring out the whole range of her histrionic talent. She played the "bad" Nargis with a gusto, investing it with a dark, menacing quality, the way she called Raj Kapoor (who, of course, was loved by both the sisters) "*Arre, Vakil Saheb*", she would bring the house down with laughter. But, between the sisters, once the mystery of their exchange at birth was revealed, there were really dramatic emotional scenes—e.g. when the "bad" Nargis says to her sister, "Now, you know, that we were exchanged at birth, all that you have got—education, culture, manners, clothes, even the love of Raj—is mine of which you are in illegal possession. It all rightfully belongs to *me!*"

The picture was shot by my old friend and cameraman, Ramchandra, who admirably managed the double roles of Nargis, along with tricks of lighting each shot differently in keeping with the character Nargis was then playing.

Once there was a near-accident when Ramchandra was explaining to Nargis how to handle a revolver. "All you have to do", he said, demonstrating how the trigger had to be pressed, when the revolver exploded with a Bang, it was fortunate that it was loaded with only Blanks! So there was

no tragedy, but it was a near-miss, which unnerved all of us, except Nargis who was the first to recover from the shock of the shot!

She shot at the portrait of her father, saying, "You are my real enemy, you coward, basking in false glory, while I was subjected to all kinds of indignities and humiliations in a prostitute's house. I will shoot at you, even if you are dead, even if you are only a portrait mocking me from your gilded frame!"

So she shot at the big, over-sized portrait, hit the cord with which it was hanging, and the huge portrait, with the heavy frame and its thick glass, came down on her, killing her. In the end, she was, symbolically, killed by her own father—the unwitting author of her tragedy!

It was Nargis' own picture which she played, drawing out the contrasting personalities—one, dressed in sober white, the other, in gaudy finery from the prostitute's quarter who was destined to be killed by her own forsaken father.

The picture was "sold" to a new firm of distributors, the Modern Movies, which began with modest ambitions, but which has since become one of the richest and most important distribution (and production) offices in India! The proprietor, Gulshan Rai, a genial, but bumptious person, still remembers his association with Naya Sansar. He has not forgotten his humble beginning, that he had made his start with my maiden production. *Anhonee* was not a failure, but was not a big success, either! We did not expect it to be a block-buster, but it did moderately well, no one lost any money on it—neither Naya Sansar, nor its world-right controllers, the Modern Movies, nor any of its distributors. Manmohan Sabir, through whom I was introduced to his partner, Gulshan Rai, got Rs. 50,000 as his half share. Due to differences of opinion, he parted company with Gulshan Rai, and joined me as Associate Producer. Together we made several pictures—*Rahi*, starring Dev Anand, *Munna*, the Indo-Soviet Co-operation, *Pardesi*, and *Char Dil Char Rahen*, etc. with varying degrees of success or (commercial) failure. I got a name for making artistic flops which were appreciated by some cine-goers, but they did not appeal to the *lumpen proletariat* which dominated the box-office.

IN RED CHINA AND SOVIET UNION

Meanwhile, I got invitation to go to China, with a Goodwill Delegation led by Pandit Sunderlal, the veteran Gandhite, and including Mulk Raj Anand, Editor R.K. Karanjia of *Blitz*, Raja Hutheesing, V.K.R.V. Rao, the famous economist, who was to be later, Pandit Nehru's Finance Minister and economic conscience-keeper! We had fifteen days of an interesting trip all over China by Special Train and saw everything—beginning with Peking, Mukdem, and the Great Wall of China! We met Mao Tse Tung and Chu Teh and Chou En Lai, about whom I had already read in the pages of *Red Star Over China*.

These years later, I got another invitation to visit U.S.S.R. with a Film Delegation consisting of five producers—Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor, Vijay Bhatt, Chetan Anand and me, stars—Raj Kapoor, Nargis, Dev Anand, Balraj Sahni and Nirupa Roy, and the rest were technicians including Music Directors Anil Biswas and Salil Chaudhary, Cameraman Radhu Karmakar and Editor (later famous director) Hrishikesh Mukerjee, and Rajbans Khanna, the Production Controller of Bimal Roy.

Together we had four varied films—*Do Bigha Zamin*, *Awara* the musical *Baiju Bawra*, Chetan Anand's *Andhian* and my own *Rahi*. The release of *Awara* was phenomenal, the Stalin Era had just ended with its Boy-Loves-Tractor, Girl-Loves-Tractor type of stereotyped ideological films without entertainment. The Soviet audiences were waiting for a picture like *Awara* and did they lap it up? Raj Kapoor and Nargis suddenly became the most popular of film stars, substituting their own national stars, and on par with their own ballerinas! All the five producers were asked to submit ideas for an Indo-Soviet co-production, but the condition was that subject should be equally popular both in India and the Soviet Union. One suggested Gautama Buddha, while another sug-

gested Life of Ashoka. But the Soviets were not yet interested in these people.

Then I suggested a film on Life And Adventures of Afanasi Nikitin, the young Russian traveller and trader who had journeyed to India by the Overland route, in the 15th century, and written a book about it, after staying in South India for 3 years. This suggestion was immediately lapped up by the Minister of Culture who was waiting for just this kind of suggestion—it would be of interest to the Soviets, for after all, it was about one of the Russians—the first European to visit India.

PARDESI—A THREE-LEGGED RACE

The suggestion was promptly accepted by the Minister and it led, eventually, to the production of the first Indo-Soviet co-production "PARDESI" which was a landmark. Nargis and Balraj Sahni played prominent roles in it, but the title role of Afanasi Nikitin was played by a young Russian actor, Oleg Strizenov, who was made-up with a blonde beard to keep the colour of the culture of fifteenth century Russia.

The picture was a flop in India, but it was a raging success in the Soviet Union. I saw the picture along with the pit-class audience and asked a spectator why he did not like it. He said, "I would have liked it if Nargis had loved an Indian hero and not a bearded foreigner." So there were two prejudices against our hero and our picture. "The hero was a foreigner and had a beard!" That was the opinion of the common man of India who has these prejudices ingrained in him. This "male" chauvinism is also responsible for certain traditions of Indian cinema—for instance, the heroine can be of a different community—a Muslim or a Christian or a Harijan, but the hero must be a true-born high caste Hindu. Of course, he can be a Muslim, too, but then the heroine whom he loves must also be a Muslim! This is the way mass psychology dictates what can, or cannot be, shown in Indian films!

But the making of PARDESI was a lot of fun. I and my wife, Mujji, had to travel to Moscow three times during the writing of the Scenario which I co-wrote with the veteran Soviet scenarist, Maria Smirnova who also once came to India, as my guest. Then, during the making of the picture, I had to visit Moscow three times—twice during the shooting of the picture, and once when it was premiered. The Soviet team came to India for the Bombay premiere and the New Delhi premiere, where they had the honour of being invited

for lunch by the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

My wife, meanwhile, had contacted heart-trouble, and I thought that Soviet doctors and Soviet hospitals were better, and so the last time I went there for the premiere, I left her there in hospital. She apparently recovered there, and came back on her own by an Air-India jet. I went to the airport to receive her, and when I saw her, I felt a pang of doubt and misgivings.

“You are not well ! Why did you come here—that also alone? You should have wired to me. I would have come there.”

She insisted that she was all right and even said, “Don’t you see my weight has increased? I was in danger of becoming fat there. They feed you so much!”

JUHU AND DEATH OF MY WIFE

I took her to our Juhu flat which was near the sea-side. It was like a two-storey bungalow with a garden right in front. She liked this place, and congratulated me for coming out of the city to the suburbs. "This is where I will feel better whatever remains of my disease will disappear in the quiet of Juhu and the sea-side breezes."

I hoped that it would be so. Juhu was an ideal place for a heart patient. The road in front of the house was unused except by about a dozen bullock carts that trundled along slowly from the village that was a half a mile from our place. We had not only sea-side view but there was nothing except a palm-grove between our house and the sea. Breezes blew straight to our flat, cooled by the palm-grove through which they passed. A bus came from the Santa Cruz Station every hour and returned from the Church which was the only *pucca* building in the village, which consisted of thatched huts.

Our house, then known as Philomena Lodge, built by a Christian gentleman, had four flats in all, two on each floor—two of which were occupied by the owner's family—I occupied the ground floor flat and my friend, Rajbans Khanna, whom I knew since he was a member of the Film Delegation to Moscow, lived just above me!

The only difficulty was that whenever I had to take my wife to town to see some doctor or some friend, I had to send a servant by bus to the station which was the only place from where to get a taxi.

But with all this, we were grateful for living in Juhu, despite the occasional difficulty of getting a taxi.

Roughly opposite our house was a cluster of comparatively stylishly-built thatched huts of the Theosophical Colony, in

one of which Balraj Sahni came to stay. Like that more and more people among my friends migrated to Juhu and preferred this semi-rustic life to being one of the three million people in what was even then considered the congested and sweltering city, whose population had swelled to three-and-a-half millions from half a million in 1935, when I had arrived in Bombay.

"Inspired" by my wife to start something after several years spent in the co-production which had failed, she pointed to my new novel as suitable for a film. It was called *Char Dii Char Rahen*, and that was the title we chose for the picture. It was an episodic story—or a series of stories!—with a common ending and the most unusual character in it was that of a Harijan girl called *Chavli*. I approached Meena Kumari and gave her the book to read, and select any character in it. As I wished, she chose the character of Chavli, but said, "There is a condition from my side—I will be made-up *Black* as described by you in the novel, that's why Govinda (the character played by Raj Kapoor) calls her "*Kall Kalooti*."

I said these were words out of my own mouth and mind, but I was afraid to utter them lest she, like most heroines, would resent being painted as Black. She said there is another condition also, "If you are taking me to play Chavli, all roles will be played by comparable artistes." That was a problem, so I had to go to the *Stars* and fulfil their conditions and demands. No one took it in the right spirit, everyone demanded his "pound of flesh". "After all," they said, "I don't mind playing this small role but you have to pay *my price!*"

So it became a star-studded picture—the first multi-starrer to be made. There were two Kapoor brothers—Raj and Shammi, besides Meena Kumari, Nimmi, Anwar Hussain playing the Nawab, opposite Nimmi who was the courtesan who rejected the Nawab for the sake of his Pathan chauffeur (Ajit), while Kum Kum, a heroine at that time, was the girl who played opposite Shammi Kapoor. David was villainous hotel proprietor and Jairaj as the Socialist agitator who makes the cooperatively-built road which was symbolic of the NEW

INDIA which people of all classes had to combine to build !

The film was only a moderate success, because I had de-glamourized the *stars* —Meena Kumari was a coal-black Harijan girl, Raj Kapoor was a dhotie-clad buffalow-owning *Ahir* villager, Nimmi was a courtesan, Shammi Kapoor was a hotel "waiter", and Kum Kum was a rich family's *ayah*! This did not suit the taste of the audience, they liked the picture but found no "repeat value" in it! So, it was a small success and not a success to support the multi-star cast.

My wife's heart condition, during the making of the picture, was deteriorating. I had to shoot the CLIMAX of the picture in a place near Nasik, and I had to motor down every night after the day's shooting, back to Bombay, to look after my wife who always put on a brave face, and told me not to leave my shooting for her sake, and return the next morning at the hour of dawn to drive down to Nasik, and rejoin my unit on the top of the hill, from which I was shooting the triumphant procession on the *new* road, with all the important characters.

During the editing stage, I showed Mujji to Dr. Baliga who was a friend more than a doctor, and took his advice about her. He frankly told me and her that an operation of the heart was necessary!

I asked him. "Shall I take her to Moscow or New York?"

"Neither," he replied, "It can be done in Bombay as efficiently as Moscow or New York."

"Who will do it?" I asked him, "You?"

"No— someone younger and more experienced in Heart Surgery—Doctor Sen of the K.E.M. Hospital!"

"But, I will agree to be operated by him only if you are also present there," said Mujji.

"All right," he replied, "if you so wish, I will serve as an assistant of Dr. Sen—if he will let me be present."

So I took her to Dr. Sen at the K.E.M. Hospital. After elaborate examination, and refering to her X-rays, he agreed to operate, even fixed a date a week hence.

"But she will have to live with the common women patients. I have no SPECIAL rooms in my hospital."

"Can't you do it in a more convenient nursing home?"

"No, I am a Government servant," he declared, "I can operate only here in my own Operation Theatre!"

"What will be the fee of the operation?", I gingerly asked.

"Nothing," replied the doctor who was famous as the best Heart Surgeon in Bombay! "I am working in a Government Hospital, and there is no question of my charging any fees for a Heart Operation!"

I remembered all the films in which I had seen how doctors were demanding five thousands and ten thousands for a much less serious operation! In a Government Hospital, the Doctors cannot charge anything for an operation.

After that Mujji became a great fan of Doctor Sen. She was admitted to the General Ward but Dr. Sen had provided a balcony jutting out of the General Ward and got a *chik* curtain to hang down between the General Ward and her balcony-room.

My friend Manmohan was with me when I slept on the floor of the verandah of the hospital all the six nights before the operation. Mujji had bravely reconciled to the operation. She was braver than me in this respect. As for me, even while I spent the day in the Editing Room in Famous Cine Laboratory at Tardeo, and arrived in the evening to look after my wife who was cheerfully meeting the surgical patients in the ward, and reporting about them to me, "Number Nineteen is a woman whose husband bit off her nose. Husbands are very bad—" she would proclaim, and then add—"all except you! Go home now. You must be dead tired."

I would assure her that I would go home, and even produce my friend Manmohan to say that I was going every evening, but I was not—I was sleeping on the stone floor of the verandah along with Manmohan who was my constant companion both during night and day!

The morning before the operation, she said, "Why are you looking so dirty? Why have you not washed and shaved?"

I made some excuse, but she said, "The nurses have told me everything, that both of you sleep—or try to sleep—

in the outside verandah, that is why you come so early all the way from Juhu. But tonight I will give you some work to do which you cannot do here. Write to me a *love letter* tonight, and then come looking fresh and clean tomorrow. I want to go into the operation theatre after reading that letter."

So I had to go home that night, as I had been entrusted with a literary and emotional task. I did my best to write to her a cheering letter in which I said that I was sure the Operation will be successful and that I will take her to Kashmir for recuperation. You must go into the Operation Theatre with the full conviction, "I will come out alive! I will get well! I will get well!"

I did not sleep that night, nor did Manmohan, at five we both shaved and took our baths, and by six a.m. we were back at the hospital.

"I am waiting for my letter!" she said cheerfully.

I gave her the bulky envelope, and she said, "I will read it now—and take it into the OPERATION THEATRE!"

And she, then, read my letter and, after half an hour, told me, "This is the BEST thing you have ever written. I will not disappoint you, I will come out alive—if Doctor Baliga keeps his promise!"

Doctor Baliga did keep his promise, and arrived half an hour before the Operation. "It is an honour to have you, Sir," said the junior Sen, and Baliga replied, "It is just to give Mrs. Abbas moral support—otherwise I know you can manage it without me!"

Punctually at 9, she was wheeled in on a trolley-stretcher, waving to me cheerfully till she disappeared. She was clutching my letter to her bosom.

The two eminent doctors, ready with the anaesthetic masks, removed the letter only after she was unconscious. Dr. Baliga brought it out and gave it to me, smiling "She does not know that we have removed it, we will restore it to her hands after the Operation is over."

"Thank you, Doctor Baliga for taking all this trouble."

"Nonsense, I will enjoy this Operation and probably learn a few things from Sen!". Then he went in.

For the next three hours, I was left, muttering to myself, "She must live! SHE MUST LIVE!" Besides Manmohan, nearly a dozen of my close friends whom I had told about the date and time of the operation came to console and comfort me—the Inder Raj Anands, the Sathes, the Sardar Jafris, my cameraman Ramchandra and my film editor, Mohan Rathod. They were all there to share my suspenseful agony, while inside, the operation went on, and we watched the Operation Theatre for any meaningful exits or entries.

I noticed that there was something like a pack of cards wrapped round in a newspaper which Inder was holding in his right hand. When, for want of something to say, I asked him what it was, and he told me it was the biggest advance, he had received so far for a film story—Rs. 5,000—and he had brought the whole amount, hoping it would help me to pay for the operation. I told him the operation, like any other Heart operations that Doctor Sen performed almost every day, would cost me not a single rupee. My friends were not *all* glad to hear this. Some of them thought that I had not been careful enough to let my beloved wife have a "free" operation in a charity/ward of a Government hospital. Others, who knew about Dr. Sen's undoubted qualification—years spent with the best Heart Surgeons of the U.S.A.—were suitably impressed by this social health-programme.

The argument went on in whispers, and it at once assured me and distressed me. Had I deliberately put my wife—who was to me the meaning of all things in my life, to a terrible risk, just to save a few thousands?

The doors of the Operation Theatre at last opened and both Dr. Baliga and Dr. Sen came out, their faces strained and their hands which had just pulled off surgical rubber gloves looking ghostly white! But Dr. Baliga raised his two fingers to make the V for Victory sign. Mujji had survived the delicate operation. "THANK GOD FOR THAT"—the agnostic in me reluctantly whispered to myself.

My mind went back to a few months to a night in St. George Hospital where beds were lined up in the

moon-lit lawn. There were five "operation cases" who were all trying to sleep before they were to be taken in, one after another, before the World Health Organization specialists who were then in India!

The first patient had died that very morning on the operation table. She was a rising actress, and the whole film fraternity was in mourning. The second number was that of Miss Kishwer Kidwai, an old college friend of my wife, and we both had come to see her a few hours before her operation that next morning. Kishwer was talking as usual, I did not see any tension on her face. "If I die like her on the operation table (she mentioned the actress) under anaesthesia, I won't be sorry. I won't *have chance* to be sorry. When your time comes for an operation," she said, "I will expect you to remember that this operation is still a lottery – either you hit the jack-pot or the jack-pot *hits you*! Either way, you will be out of your constant pain." Kishwer came out alive, she not only survived that operation but for many years after that, she is still *alive*—running a village school founded by her in memory of her uncle, the late doubtable Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. But we have not met since then. Perhaps my wife's death had made both of us self-conscious.

But death was still a month away. That morning, it was important that Mujji had survived one of the earliest Heart operations.

After being bandaged, still unconscious, Mujji was wheeled out of the operation theatre and put in a special room which was the fore-runner of the 'Intensive Care Units', which are now an established feature of all big hospitals!

No one was allowed in, without a mask on his face to guard against infection, and I was permitted to enter for a few minutes, during which she opened her eyes for a brief while and asked me, "Where am I?" I told her that she was still alive and had survived a delicate Heart operation. Both the surgeons were satisfied with her behaviour, though they had confiscated my letter and returned it to me. "Here it is"—I took it out and offered it to her, she accepted it and

pressed it to her heart. "Thank you for it," she said and drifted back into sleep.

On the third day she was back in her Balcony Room, and I found her propped up against pillows and cushions, palely smiling.

"Do you know the Bengali Magician says tomorrow he is going to make me walk through the ward?"

I said I would like to be present when the Magician does this trick, and she said, "Don't be jealous. If he can make me walk tomorrow, I will fall in love with him!"

"I won't mind. The Doctor deserves all love for the miraculous operation that he has performed!"

She smiled and spoke slowly, so that there should be the least strain on her wound and the sutures in her lacerated Heart!

Next day, when I arrived in the morning, the Doctor was already there.

"Mr. Abbas, I hope you don't mind my gripping your wife's hand!"

"No, doctor, she is all yours," I replied.

"Get up!", he commanded.

She could not, only smiled.

Then he extended his hand to her and she gripped it! Then the miracle happened. She slid off her bed, she stood on her feet, then she was walking, led by the doctor, she was out of her room, bare-footed. The whole female ward watched, with faces, upturned with mixed feelings of awesome relief, and admiration for a Heart operation case being led to walk, only four days after the operation. That walk through the ward and back caused quite a sensation, and the general remarks were full of admiration for the doctor as well as the patient.

When he brought her back, and re-established her on her throne of pillows, Doctor Sen turned to me, "Mr. Abbas, what are you doing?" I said, "Nothing particular!" Then he asked me, "Would you like a clinically dead dog being brought back to life?"

"When can I see that?" I asked, getting up on my feet.

"Just now I am going to do it! Come with me."

So I followed the doctor to his Experimental Laboratory where I found a "dead" dog strapped to an operation table. The doctor pointed to the three instruments which all recorded the clinical death of the dog—the thermometer which showed the mercury to have dropped to 0 degree, the Blood Pressure instrument which registered the lowest of low blood pressure, and the Cardiogram machine which was also "dead". Yet, when he inserted the needle of a syringe into the body of the dog and, within a few minutes, I could see the slight hearing of the dog breath, the Blood Pressure instrument also was now working and going upwards, the last to register life was the Cardiogram Machine which started ticking away, and soon showed the heart-beat to be NORMAL.

"How do you find it?" the Surgeon asked me.

"I wish I was a dog," I said.

And that was the headline of my next LAST PAGE, where I did not describe my wife's operation (because it was too personal a matter !) but described in detail the miracle of the resurrection of the dog !

It was less than two weeks later when Dr. Sen advised me to remove my wife to a private nursing home and recommended the Bombay Hospital for the period of one month of recuperation.

That taxi-ride from Parel to Marine Lines, I can never forget. Everything she watched delightedly like a child. "The Population of Bombay," she said, finding the way blocked by a procession (religious or political, I don't remember !), "seems to have grown during my operation. What must be the population now?"

"It was four million yesterday, but that does not include the thousands that must have come by this morning's trains."

She got admission to the Bombay Hospital on the floor which was used as a Nursing Home. She seemed to like the place, the nurses, her room which had a balcony of its own. The doctors were quite nice, but she missed the magical touch of her Magician! I telephoned him every alternate day to convey her welfare. She wanted to laugh but her heart had been operated only a few weeks ago, and laughing caused a strain.

She spent two of the happiest weeks of her life in that nursing home—her special friends—Sham Bahen, Sultana (Jafri) and Shakila—regularly came to call on her. Her younger sister, Chhadi, had gone to Delhi, and an elderly lady from Bhandi Bazar gave her maternal care and attention. One night, when I arrived, her room was full of nurses.

“What are you discussing?” I asked.

“We are planning revolution,” she said, with a carefully low chuckle, “We are going to form a Nurses Trade Union”.

I was not looking my best that day to be enthusiastic about the trade union of nurses, as that day I had a bad time in the Editing Room where I was busy, editing *Char Dil Char Rahen*. Two of the topmost stars that day had given me legal notice that they would be filing court cases to recover their dues (which came to be, both together, less than fifty thousand rupees!)

When the nurses departed, she asked me, “There is something on your mind today”. Won’t you tell me what, or rather, who is it?”

I told her the whole sordid story, how the stars had threatened me with legal notices at a time when, they knew, she was lying ill in a hospital. The callousness of their timing had really hurt me!

“Cheer up and promise me, one thing!” she said and I asked her what was the promise she wanted.

“Never again to take any star in your films”, she said. She asked me to solemnize my pledge by placing my hand on her heart. I did so and felt the injured but brave heart palpitating under the gentle pressure of my palm.

“I swear”, I said.

“I believe you. You are quite capable of *making* Stars, so you need not worry about them. I didn’t like that haunted look on your face.”

I said no, it was nothing—“So long as you are with me, I won’t ever look at a *Star!*”

“Even when I am *not there!*”, she said very seriously.

A week later, I left the Editing Room in a good mood. Something positive had been done about the *Star’s* Legal

Notices and the editing work had been completed. Now only the technical work of cutting Negative remained to be done and then the FINAL print would be prepared for the Censors! I was already relatively in a better mood, because Mujji had been showing signs of steady progress. Now only a week or so remained when she will be allowed to leave the hospital. As I drove to the Hospital, I mentally decided that it will not be a bad idea to consult Doctor Sen, the Bengali Magician, before taking her home, because I, and *she*, both considered him to be the doctor-in-charge. As I went up in the lift I thought that she would be heartily happy when I tell about calling Dr. Sen. The formal dinner to Doctors Baliga and Sen that she was planning to give at her house where she wanted to receive them, walking steadily on her own two feet and wanted to present them some mementos of her health, for which she gave all the credit to the doctors duo—would come later!

Relishing these optimistic thoughts I entered the room—and found Mujji apparently sleeping.

There was a look of worry on the maternal face of the lady who was her constant companion.

“Why, what’s the matter?” I quietly asked the elderly lady, “Didn’t she sleep well last night?”

She said, “The Head Nurse will tell you all about it.”

That “*it*”, the way she emphasized it, was loaded with apprehensions.

I pressed the call-bell, a nurse came running in some alarm, but I whispered to her to call the Head Nurse.

The fat and fiftyish lady came and I talked to her in the verandah, out of Mujji’s hearing.

“What’s the matter?” I wanted to know the cause of the old lady’s apparent feeling of apprehension and alarm. “She has got high fever!”—the Head Nurse began, “the doctors suspect that it is Pneumonia.”

Even the mention of Pneumonia did not alarm me as I knew that this once-dreaded disease was now curable with judicious doses of Penicillin and other drugs!

So I went in, looked at the Fever Chart, the temperature had gone up to 104. That, in the post-operative state of her

health, was alarming enough

I touched her arm, it was burning with fever. She knew my touch, and opened her eyes, with a smile to greet me "What is this I hear about your having fever?"

"It's not ordinary fever—it is *Pneumonia*. The doctor told me himself when he gave me a Penicillin injection. It pained me a lot."

"And you bore it with your proverbial patience." I said trying to stick to the lighter mood.

"Not—exactly this morning," she said, "I think I oohed and aahed a little!"

"Oohed and aahed a little. Do you know anyone else—I, for instance, would have sent the roof up with his cries of pains."

"I don't know," she quietly observed, while telling the Head Nurse to call the doctor, I sat down beside her, taking her hand in mine.

"You know, Khwaja Saheb"—she was being very serious, I perceived by the tone of her speech and by the formal form of address, "You *will* not take Stars, but you will continue to make pictures of your own type."

"Of course, you will see for yourself. By the way—our *Char Dil Char Rahen* has not turned out so badly. You won't recognize *Meena Kumari*—she is so *black*. Like our *Chavli* of Panipat." The reference to a sweeper woman whom both of us had known in our hometown, and the remembrance made her smile and open her eyes. She repeated her admonition, "*No Stars*".

"You and I will make our own stars—I will train the boys and you will train the girls!"

"Won't you enjoy the reverse arrangement?" she said with a smile but her voice was perceptively weak—drifting to a whisper!—which alarmed me. "I won't be there, anyway!"

Then she quietly closed her eyes. These were the last words that I would hear uttered by her.

The doctor came and took me to the verandah, where he revealed that her *Pneumonia* was alarming, as her high fever was not showing any sign of being controlled by the Penicillin which didn't seem to be working on her.

"Anyway, I will try another injection in your presence right now."

He found the vein, and injected the second penicillin injection. There was low moan from her unconscious lips. Then she seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

The next day, I went early to hospital and was with my unconscious wife for more than one hour, during which she opened her eyes only once and started hard at my face which was looking down upon her. A faint recognition appeared on her face, she faintly and painfully smiled at me, and then closed her eyes as if the strain of recognition was too much for her.

I came back, reassured by the Doctor, "Don't worry, Mr. Abbas. We are doing our best for your wife."

The next day, Manmohan informed me I had to go to the Court to sign some papers to re-assure the two Stars who had threatened legal action against me though, in my agreement with them, it was clearly stated that I would complete the payment to them *before* Bombay release! The document had to be countersigned in the Laboratory that they would not deliver any prints to the Bombay distributor without making sure that these two Stars' accounts were settled! This took a lot of time and by the time I was free to go to hospital, it was 3 p.m. While coming out of the Laboratory, the girl at the switch-board informed me that there was a phone call from the Bombay Hospital where I was urgently required.

This was the clear hint of a crisis, and I and Manmohan raced to the hospital through the Red Lights and the crowded streets. Never has the population of Bombay been so much in my path as on that day.

Who said the population of Bombay was only four millions—it seemed to have suddenly become eight millions—or so it seemed at that hour when we had to get to the hospital in a hurry.

The car had not come to a complete stop when I jumped out of the vehicle, and raced to the lift. It was ready to go up, when I squeezed into it, pleading with the liftman that I had to rush up.

The doctor was inserting the needle of a syringe into the

pale and seemingly bloodless calf of my wife. Seeing me, he straightened up, and said, "Have you brought CORTIZONE?" I had not heard of this medicine up to that time. The Doctor explained to me, "Evidently, after operation, all sorts of antibiotics have been given to your wife at the K.E.M. (Hospital). Therefore her body has become immune to them all—including PENICILLIN. The only chance is with CORTIZONE. Perhaps it has not been given and may work on your wife."

I looked at the pale and unconscious face of Mujji, and said to the doctor, "I am prepared to pay anything for a dose of CORTIZONE—don't tell me you haven't got it in your hospital!"

"Plase rush up to a Chemist's shop—there is not time for arguments—".

So I rushed out to the Chemist.

As soon as the lift-door opened on the ground floor, I rushed out of it, and forgetting my own car which was standing there but would take time to start and take all those turns and twists, NO LEFT TURNS and ONE 'WAY *only*, so I preferred to walk to QUEEN'S CHEMISTS which was on the Queens Way, not far away. But at that time, it seemed a long distance.

"CORTIZONE? Please. Please hurry up."

"Injections or capsules?" the druggist asked.

"Injections—but give both," I said in a hurry.

I offered him a hundred-rupee note, and sped away without waiting to take the change while he was taking time to calculate and count.

I rushed back to the lift, and the lift-man was wonder-struck at my speed.

Before the lift door could open, I knew my wife was DEAD because I saw the old lady shedding copious tears.

Still I rushed past her and into the room.

The white sheet covered my wife's face, the doctors were taking the useless syringe-needle out of her calf.

"We are sorry, Mr. Abbas," said the doctor, "We could not save your wife!"

The CORTIZONE injection and capsules both slid from my hand. There was a slight tinkle as the fragile glass of the

phial broke on the tiled ground, and a blot expanded—as a mark of my useless hurry and hustle. Could it have saved her if they had CORTIZONE available in the hospital? Would it have saved her if I had arrived half an hour earlier? Would she have lived longer *if* the two STARS had waited a while to secure their money and relieved me to look after my wife?

All these thoughts tortured me, made me nervous—even slightly and temporarily MAD!

I could not see clearly through my tears-filled eyes—but I knew that a small crowd of my friends including Manmohan, the Inder Raj Anands, the Sardar Jafiris, Shakila and Farooqui—and many more! I could only perceive them—I could not see them! The body was wrapped-up, and conveyed to the ice-cold Morgue. Someone asked me for the funeral. I said let it be in the common public cemetery just near the Hospital as she would not like any other place. Telegrams were sent to relations in India and Pakistan and wherever possible, telephone calls were made to Delhi and Karachi. Suddenly, during that 'spell' of madness, it occurred to me that there was no blood-relation among all those who were gathered in that moment of crisis.

The question arose: should I go back, 27 miles, to Juhu or stay somewhere in town that night? Inder invited me to spend that night with him at his flat on Warden Road, and I accepted his suggestion!

Next morning, we all got up early, and returned to the hospital to pay the bill and recover the body from the Cold Room.

Raj Kapoor was the ONLY other friend who turned up at the funeral—he has a knack of being present on such occasions! No other representatives of the film world were present there.

When the shrouded body was being lowered in the grave, I could not afford to see the sight and raised my eyes heavenwards, where, symbolically enough, a mass of dark monsoon clouds were gathering with the promise of rain and threats of thunder!

P. S. There was a post-script to what happened in the

hospital which I visited once more.

The Doctor was polite but now self-assured.

While repeating his sympathies with me, he declared that, in such cases, it is difficult to know who was the carrier of the fatal infection of Pneumonia.

It might have been *me*, for all I or you know, I don't rule out that possibility, because I meet all kinds of patients. One can be a carrier of infection without being infected with the disease oneself.

"Or it might be one of the many nurses who were coming and going in the room. Or it might have been one of her friends who were coming to see her," he said.

"Or it might have been—" he paused before uttering the bomb-shell, "It might have been *YOU!*"

I felt GUILTY—because I knew (no one else did) that one day, in sheer desperation, she had kissed me on the lips and I had kissed her back—even exploring the inside of her mouth".

That sense of guilt has not left me to this day.

Was I the Murderer of my own wife, the destroyer of my own happiness? I shall never know. . . .

On a certain day in early 1964—

The train (Air-conditions chairs cars) was travelling at a speed which was conducive to thoughts of a nostalgic nature—concerning the film *Shehar Aur Sapna* (City And The Dream). It had won the President's Gold Medal as the Best Feature film of the year 1963, and we were all—twenty of us—going to Delhi to receive the award. I did not feel that I deserved the award myself, without my friends and colleagues who had worked for this film venture.

"No Stars"—these were my wife's last words to me. So it became our principle of casting, indeed our sheet-anchor.

Among the fascinating features of Bombay that I love is the *Chore Bazar* (or the Thieves Market) where old and secondhand goods, only some of which might have been stolen or robbed, are sold. That is always the first place I visit while preparing to produce a new film. From there we acquired the very old and unique time-piece which plays such an important part in the film, a pair of hob-nailed army

boots for Bholu, the hero, an old railway uniform coat which the hero was supposed to have inherited from his father, an old north Indian *surahi* which breaks at the appropriate dramatic moment, and a battered old violin with its moth-eaten case for Johnny, the beggar violin-player.

Now I was on the lookout for a likeable young pair—the boy must look like a *Jat* from Haryana—uncouth and unsophisticated in his manners in the beginning, till he matures in the city of Bombay, and the girl must look like a Maharashtra village girl whom the cruel and heartless city has made a desperate knife-wielding wench. She represents the flowers of chastity trampled upon on the city pavements.

Whoever I chose had to conform to the "NO STARS" pledge I had given to my dying wife. So I was looking at unconventional faces in unconventional places.

LEARNING TO WALK ALONE!

One day I went casually to my friend Jairaj's house and there I met the young man I wanted. He was Dilip Raj, son of my great actor friend, Jairaj, who had just completed his work as a socialist idealist in my *Char Dil Char Rahen* and whom I owed a lot for his full and unstinted cooperation. He introduced me to his son, whom I had not seen for years, while he was assisting Hrishikesh Mukherji. Contrary to the general belief, he was christened at birth as Dilip Raj, a combination of two of the closest pals of Jairaj—Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor. We did not foist this name on him for publicity's sake.

"If you were not already working with a great director, I would have offered you the leading role in my next picture."

"Leading role in your next picture? I will take permission from Hrishi-daa straight away, Mr. Abbas."

And so the hero was fixed. When the picture was started one day a real peasant lad from Haryana knocked on my door. He was Dharmendra who was seeking work and really looked down a right *Jat* lad. He had made a promising debut in Ramesh Sehgal's *Railway Platform* which had not done so well at the box office. Dharmendra would have been our ideal choice—if only he had come to me a few months earlier. But now Dilip Raj had been signed, had started work, and now to take the role from him might break his young heart.

I put it to Dharmendra straightaway, after explaining the situation. He said, "You are absolutely right, Mr. Abbas. Carry on with your earlier choice. Wish you all the luck."

I was tremendously struck by Dharmendra's open-hearted sincerity, the hallmark of the Haryana farmer. And he parted after a cup of tea and a hearty handshake. "Remember, Mr. Abbas, one day I will work in your picture." I remember—but

did he?

But to return to the problem of the heroine of *Shehar Aur Sapna*. One day my friend Sathe dropped in. He was accompanied by a journalist-publicist-social-worker from Konkan, called M.A. Parkar whom I already knew as a film publicist. In turn he was accompanied by a young slim girl whom I did not even see properly, for it was not decent to stare at a girl who had been just introduced to you. She only wanted me to be present at a dramatic performance in her Ruparel College and, being in those days in search of a girl to complete my cast, I readily agreed. The show was two days later.

I arrived in time to get the surprise of my life. The girl who had come to see me was called Surekha Parkar and the moment she came on the stage, I knew that she was the girl for me. Afterwards Parkar told me that Surekha was really his daughter, but he was too shy to say so. Anyway he wanted me to judge whether she had acting ability.

The play was a Hindi adaptation of a Marathi social play (I forget the name after all these years) but the heroine was unique. She had a wide range of expressions and she had drama in her eyes, which was what I wanted in my artists. I certainly was lucky to be present and at the end of the show gave the good news secretly to Surekha and her father. She would play the leading role in my picture.

I was talking about all this as if I had several lakhs in the Bank and all the paraphernalia at my beck and call. All I had was the confidence and support of four of the best character artistes who played the destitute god-fathers of the hero and heroine—the late David Abraham, the late Nana Palsikar, veteran Anwar Husain and Manmohan Krishna.

A few colour pictures had begun to be produced but, of course, I would make my experimental picture in artistic black and white. It was a simple matter of rupees and *paise*.

As a matter of fact, I did not have a name to peddle in the financial market, neither a music director whom I had not chosen, nor the hero and heroine, nor the four veterans who would play character roles had any market value. I sent my screenplay to some of the (allegedly) literate film distributors

but they turned down the script, saying they saw no commercial market in it. Sorry and all that . . . in effect, said the distributors.

The only thing I had tangible with me was the script and the city—the city of Bombay. I wandered all over the city—in wet weather and dry weather—and “shot” my film figuratively. Most of it was to be outdoors, anyway. I imagined from where the railway line would be shot, where the embankment would be on the edge of the *jhonpadpatti* where the boy and the girl would be dwarfed by the background of four over-sized electric pylons. A remote symbol of power—electric power—that haunted me for months.

Meanwhile, the hero and the heroine, breaking the tradition of usual heroes and heroines, did not mind coming from their homes by bus to Juhu, just like students going to college, with their notebooks under their arms. To acclimatize them to living and working under the restricted space of a drainpipe, I told them to rehearse their scenes under my office table. There they were discovered one day by a senior (and orthodox) producer who had come to discuss a script with me. He looked askance of my obvious connivance of this romancing under my table. He left me abruptly with a loud opinion of my permissiveness—till he saw the picture and then he knew that, to get used to working in a drainpipe, the “permissiveness” was simulated.

From the royalty that we received from the Gramophone Company (for the records of our old pictures) and from the royalties received from publishers, including foreign publishers, we got together some twenty thousand rupees. The price of raw stock was not so high then as it is now, so we bought eight reels of negative and hired outdoor shooting equipment on credit. We also spent about a thousand rupees on preparing a drainpipe which was made with plywood and covered with plaster of Paris. It was made in sections to make it convenient for cameraman Ramchandra to place his lights.

The first day’s shooting was done at Mudh Island which looks a little like Juhu. While we shot there (away from the literally “madding” crowd) we had two bus loads of our own

friends and the super extras, including bikini-clad girls, to get the atmospheric background on the beach for the love scenes of Radha and Bhola.

I don't believe in *mahurats* but most of the colleagues and assistants do and so for their consolation I took the very first shot at a beachside temple where Bhola and Radha get married and come out hand in hand with garlands round their necks. Soon we were doing a more dramatic scene.

One day Surekha was almost drowned in the sea when she had to stand on a rock on which the mountain-sized waves of the stormy sea dashed. The hero had to rush there and find her as a mountain-sized wave completely enveloped them as they clung to each other. It is significant that these scenes were shot when the sky was overcast but Ramchandra had no difficulty in giving me the pictorial effects which I wanted.

Later, the cylindrical drainpipe was carted to the studio for a few days and we took some realistic interior scenes to show the people what it feels like to be cased in a pipe where you cannot stand up. Bhola every time had difficulties when describing the big borne that the cows and buffaloes have in Haryana.

At last we were able to complete four edited reels (not in sequence, of course) and were excited to show it to the Film Finance Corporation. The viewing committee consisted of a super-annuated chairman who did not know the ABC of film-making, and Mehboob Khan, the renowned film-maker who knew film-making from A to Z but since he was not familiar with the ABC of English he could not read the script, which was necessary to understand the significance of the different sequences which we had shot.

At the end of the screening Mehboob Saheb putting his arm around me affectionately said : "*Khawaja Saheb, aap jaisay divanay loge hi aisi filmen bana sakte hain. Jahan tak mera talluq hai main to Government se kahoonga aap ko loan zaroor den.*"

We waited and waited for the FFC decision, doing whatever shooting we could. At last the resources were completely

exhausted. No further shooting was possible.

In March 1961 the FFC had "great pleasure" in informing me that our application had been finally rejected because the committee thought that the direction was not up to the mark and that in the opinion of the Censor Board the script would not be passed when made into a film.

I called personally on Mehboob Saheb and he said his vote was in favour and the chairman's vote was against but the Chairman had a casting vote. From there I went to the office of the Censor Board and asked them to what scenes they had objections. They would not give me in writing but told me orally that the scenes of the bulldozer demolishing the *bustee* and that the scene where the heroine tells about her rape could not be allowed. I informed them that I would see them again when the picture would be completed and proposed to keep both the scenes.

For *thirteen* months there was no money and no shooting.

Man does not live by bread alone—he must have elections, too. And when the machinery of distribution is malfunctioning there must be elections to straighten things out. The plebian and undernourished north Bombay — that enormous land spreading from Juhu to the Dharavi slums and the King's way Kemp and the *jhonpadpatties* mainly of south Indians—is one of the densest, most polluted, poorest, dirtiest, areas even in India, even in Bombay. It was here that a titantic electoral battle was fought between right and left, between the progressive Congressmen (aided and abetted by communists, progressive-minded socialistic and other segments of the nameless left).

They were opposed by the Swantantras and Swatantarians, the big industrialists, the communalists and obscurantists of the Jana Sangh and the Shiv Sena, and by what is known as the American lobby in India.

At Kemp's Corner there is a hoarding site reserved for Air India cartoons. Every time I pass along that side I look it up, for sometime Mr. Kooka used to come up with really pungent satires. But his politics is of the right, and he rubs it in. For instance, there was cartoon of Krishna Menon and Acharya Kripalani who were shown at the starting point of the

race. So far so good. The election between these two was the crucial one in which everyone was interested, if not involved.

But there was something else in the cartoon which provoked many people and there was a storm in parliament raised by the *enfant terrible* of Indian politics—Shri Ali Mohamed Tariq. Kripalani, as a runner, was wearing blue shorts, which was all right—because he did have open Swatantra support. But the colours of Krishna Menon's running shorts was red and it had the insignia of the Soviet Union—the hammer and sickle—emblazoned on it. That could not be an electioneering fun and games.

It had political—even international—implications which could not be allowed to go unchallenged. There was a storm in parliament, heated words (for and against) were exchanged. And after forty-eight hours, the hoarding was removed from Kemp's Corner and all the other sites.

I hardly knew Krishna Menon. I had met him only once when in London where Rajni Patel took me to see him and he had not endeared himself to me because of his abrupt and vitriotic style of speaking.

But I was sufficiently against the parties of the right and their wrong political approach. The victory of Kripalani would be a disaster for the forces of the left in the country. CIA money was said to be involved in the process of destabilization though it was difficult to prove it to the hilt just then.

When Dr. Baliga asked me if I would do some electioneering in the Hindi-speaking areas I immediately agreed, and pitched in with all the strength of my vocal cords.

In one particularly exciting night I addressed as many as ten meetings of from a few hundred to several thousands—including a Jana Sangh meeting where I converted the mistake of our organizers to my own advantage.

Our headquarters were at Heptulla Park in Hasanabad Lane, Santacruz. There was blackboard there to indicate who was to address which meeting. Along with my friends Ramesh Sanghvi, the late Rajni Patel, who generally spoke in the Gujarati-speaking areas, and Balraj Sahni, I was much in demand in Urdu-speaking areas and in south Indian areas

where I could speak in English, and seemed to have a following of the *Blitz* readers of the 'Last Page'.

One of these meetings I will never forget.

The incident could have been fatal for me. The jeep from the headquarters was searching for a meeting site in a huge cluster of trees somewhere near Chambur (it was quite a jungle then), and the driver obviously had lost the way in the all pervading darkness. At last when he saw a patromax lamp hanging from a tree and a cluster of people around, he presumed it was the meeting at which I was awaited. Telling me that they would pick me up from the same spot in half an hour they dropped me there and raced back with another speaker who had to be dropped at some other place.

I turned back to face a crowd of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh with saffron flags and their symbol of the magic lamp. I knew it was a trap or a mistake but the Jana Sangh were equally astounded to find the wrong speaker. Some of them knew me by face, and started a polite conversation. I told them that it was a mistake all right but now that I was in their midst would they mind if I spoke to them for just a few minutes. I would stop the moment their speaker arrived.

I don't remember what I said that night but I do remember drawing reluctant cheers from the little crowd of eighty or ninety. I began by abusing the Muslim League. My accusation was down-right. But for the League our country would not have been partitioned. They were the *Hindu* Muslim Leaguers. They were as great enemies of Indian unity as *Muslim* Leaguers.

I recognised the horn of our jeep which was coming back for me. I concluded: "There are Muslim Leaguers camouflaged as Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, South Indians and North Indians, some of them wore *dhoties*. All those who are opposed to the unity of India and strive for their parochial interests whether they call themselves Jana Sanghis or D.M.Ks are obviously Muslim Leaguers in their heart of hearts. Against them we have a tall man who has never allied himself with any communal or parochial cause. He is Mr. Krishna Menon. Thank you, friends, for your patient hearing."

Before the audience could recover from their shock I

was sitting in the jeep and it was racing away at breakneck speed.

Mr. Krishna Menon won a resounding victory in the election but I lost my voice.

In February 1963, after about a year of filmic inaction, Satyajit Ray came to Bombay and I thought of showing him the four reels of our incomplete film. It happened to be a second Sunday and all screening rooms were closed. We had to borrow the screening time from the Tea Board auditorium.

This was an occasion to collect all our artistes. The show was a great success. Satyajit said, "The story is the story of *Pather Panchali* all over again. All that you need is a little bit of money which I am sure you could easily raise."

He particularly liked the two newcomers. That show and that encouragement changed the destiny of the picture.

On the very next day I went to the Laboratory and secured from them a loan of up to fifty thousand rupees for the raw stock of the picture. Then I wrote twenty-two letters to as many friends, explaining my difficulties about the picture and asking for loans of anything between five hundred rupees and twenty-five thousand.

In a week's time money in the form of cheques and moneyorders started coming in. My great friend, the late Ramesh Sanghvi, topped the list by giving twenty-five thousand rupees loan on behalf of some person who I had a hunch was none other than himself. Then there were others including the late Rajni Patel, (later the Congress leader of Bombay), then only a progressive-minded lawyer, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, Editor R.K. Karanjia of *Blitz*, the late A.S.R. Chari, etc. The total came to fifty-five thousand rupees. But the greatest contribution was from fifteen members of our unit—nine technicians and six artistes—who all said that they would not accept any money till the picture was completed and sold. So I proposed to make them all equal partners in the profits, if any.

There were tears in many eyes when this unique document was signed by everyone. We had already adopted J. P. Kaushik, an ex-air force officer, as our music director. There was to be no song in the picture but a poem of Sardar Jafri

was to be actually sung by Manmohan Krishna who was playing the mad post in several parts, and at several places, like a Greek chorus.

The recording of this "song" was also unusual in some ways. We had to pay nothing to the singer who was a member of our co-operative. We had to pay nothing to the orchestra (for there were no orchestra). The whole rendering took exactly one hour. So we had to pay two hundred rupees for recording. And that was all.

We had kept the climax of the *bustee* of hutments being demolished by the bulldozer of the proprietor (the Establishment) and after selecting a site of a real *bustee* we had additional huts of our own built which would be demolished by the bulldozer. We had set about the task of filming the climax.

On a cloudy day, we bought a bulldozer and it started to systematically demolish the huts. Everyone thought we were the police and the people of the *bustee* stood with sullen and angry looks showering curses upon us. At least two of them challenged us to produce the authorization but they were satisfied when the sequence of the film was explained to them. The sound of the bulldozer was also recorded simultaneously and when it trampled the bamboos of the huts the sound was eerily like the crushing of human bones. At last only Bhola's hut remained wherein Radha was delivering her first born. The four self-appointed guardians of Bhola and Radha approached the bulldozer and stood in its path.

"Get out of the way," said the bulldozer driver.

"We shall not bulge from here," they said, "Don't you know what is happening inside?"

"What is it?" asked the driver contemptuously.

Said Anwar Husain, the old actor melodramatically. "A man is being born—Bhola and Radha's first child.

I loved this moment. For me it was the soul of the film when one worker (the driver of the bulldozer), out of compassion and humanity, demonstrated the worker's solidarity by declaring that bulldozer had broken down and switched it off.

The overseer, played by the late Rashid Khan (that great-

hearted pigmy of a man!) asked the driver, "How long will it take to repair the bulldozer?"

The driver replied, "Two or three days," When the tycoon asked the overseer. "How long will it take to repair the machine?" he bluntly said, "At least four or five days or may be never."

And just then from inside the hut the first cry of the new born baby was heard. The forces of life had triumphed over the forces of evil, the legions of the tycoons had been vanquished by the people who were no longer afraid of them. It was a moment to remember, to treasure! And spontaneously the *bustee* people who had gathered broke into cheers.

When I edited the film I added a gimmick to the scene. I began the process of a demolition with the words of the mad poet—*Diwane*—"Woh aarahe hain, woh aarahe hain". (They are coming, they are coming). And as he pointed in the direction of the bulldozer, I put in a shot of a whole Nazi tank force, relentlessly charting forward. After that I intercut the faces in the crowd full of anger and hate for the system which the bulldozer represented and intercut shots of the bulldozer with Nazi tanks. Throwing realism overboard and taking advantage of the poet's vision who saw in the single bulldozer a whole Nazi Panzer division, I intercut the shots of Nazi tanks crushing masses of people and their dwellings.

The sound of the bulldozer crushing the bamboo of the huts was eerily like the sound of human bones being crushed. The allusion was so direct as to be understandable to the meanest intelligence.

In the original scenario this is where the picture ended. The *bustee* demolished, Radha and Bhola took to the road again, silhouetted against the flaming sunset and the electric pylons representing power. But at our first preview, while all our friends were enthusiastic about the film—one old and valued friend, while congratulating me, took me aside and asked, "Can't you change the ending? Put something positive instead of the conventional shot of the hero and heroine walking into the sunset!"

I said I got his point but would have to think it over.

In a week we were back for a day in a studio. Here we built a drain-shaped house, very artistically furnished, with a picturesque Kathiawari *paalna*, also a double bed with two embroidered pillows, for this was their dream house. In the previous shot we had already shown Bhola and Radha, hopefully walking in the direction of an abandoned drain-pipe.

The rim of the pipe was seen and these two were entering.

Now I showed where they had entered. The simple Radha, the mere unsophisticated of the two, looked around in awe, put her baby in the Kathiawari coloured *paalna* and asked, "What city can this be?"

And Bhola replied, "This is no city—only the dream! *Yeh shehar naheen—sapna hai!*"

The frame froze and over it appeared the last title which conventionally should have been "The End"—but (another gimmick) I put the more optimistic "The Beginning" and have been doing so ever since in every one of my pictures which have the "Beginning" as its last title.

The picture was completely edited but there were no buyers.

In an effort to persuade some distributors to buy the picture we arranged a record number of forty-seven screenings of the picture, one after another, over a period of six months. Meanwhile, we entered it in the state awards which was a very complicated system at that time.

The regional committee selected six pictures and there being four regions, these twenty-four pictures were then submitted to a central committee which decided the first, second and third awards, as well as the pictures for best photography, best sound-recording, etc. We expected at most one of these minor awards—for best black and white photography, which was really outstanding.

Jealousies and animosities played their part at the regional level, and, I suppose, also at the central level. Six pictures were selected and (I was not surprised) *Shehar Aur Sapna* was the sixth. What was surprising, however, was that year only five pictures would be sent from Bombay! But I did not

know it and was not surprised to know it.

The political developments were marshing along. The trial of Shaikh Abdullah was dragging as it had dragged on for eight or nine years. In early March 1964 I received trunkcall from the P.M.'s secretariat that, some time ago (some years ago would be better!) I had written to seek permission to interview Shaikh Abdullah in jail. Now the Shaikh was being tried in an open court for conspiracy in Jammu and there was a chance that if I was still keen on it, my application could be favourably considered. I took the next plane to Delhi. Fifteen years ago, I had once written to Panditji under the influence of Upton Sinelir's Lanny Budd's services that I was ready, willing and available to play such a quasi-political role in Indian politics.

"Still want to play the role of Lanny Budd?" Panditji asked me when I went in to see him in his office. But I noticed that he was not as healthy as always. There was a sickly pallour on his face.

I said, "Yes, Sir."

"Well, you can't interview Shaikh Abdullah in court—not in prison—that would put the spotlight on you—make you the conspicuous—while in an open court, you will be in a crowd of many journalists who would be present—and it would be normal for you to ask him many questions including the question on the Plebiscite front—".

"Make *three* copies of your report. You can catch the early morning plane to Jammu tomorrow. Will expect you back tomorrow evening".

I knew this was the signal for me to depart. I spent the evening going through the proceedings of the case—Shaikh Abdullah versus the President of India!

I concluded that while among his followers, there were, and must have been people prepared for an independent Kashmir, so far no one had come forward to testify to any thing said or heard from Shaikh Saheb directly.

This was the tourist season and I was, therefore, extremely lucky to get a seat to Jammu on the early morning plane. A car was waiting for me at the airport. I was driven straight to the State guest house. When I arrived there I was asked

if I would like to have a bath or to see the Chief Minister, my very old friend, G.M. Sadiq.

I preferred the latter for work came before any ritual of bathing. The late Sadiq's handshake was firm and warm. He seemed to know why I was there and within five minutes he issued a press card which enabled me not only to enter the special court room but also to meet and talk to Shaikh Abdullah.

Armed with this pass, I entered the courtroom and security men guarding Shaikh Saheb conveniently walked away when I approached the Shaikh Saheb with formal greetings.

He looked healthy, cheerful and mentally alive and vigorous. Due to the fact that conversation in court had to be carried on in whispers, a sustained political discussion was not possible. But still he said enough to give an idea of his mood and the trend of his thinking.

He emphatically stated more than once that he had *never betrayed India* and would never do so. "I have never *consciously* said or done anything to harm the interests of India!" he said. There was slight emphasis on "Consciously" (jaan boojh kar), presumably implying that in the heat of some moment he might have said something which could be construed as being damaging to the cause of India. He said, "I am prepared to face any judicial tribunal to prove my innocence."

He showed great concern for the health of his old friend, Jawaharlal Nehru, for whom he still seemed to entertain both affection and respect. But he also said, "One day I would like to confront Jawaharlal as his Kashmiri brother and have a heart-to-heart talk just between the two of us. I want to ask him one question: knowing me as he did, how could *he* believe what Bakshi told him about my being a traitor?"

I was glad to find that he welcomed the Sadiq Cabinet and said, "At last the people of Kashmir will have an honest administration." But he added that if the discredited members of the old group were taken into the Cabinet, the people would lose confidence in the Sadiq Cabinet, too.

I said to him that with all the dramatic events that were

happening, he might suddenly find himself forced to take part in political life. But if that should happen, he should not look at problems only from the view-point of the Kashmiri people but of the people of the whole of India because an Indian Kashmir meant the guarantee of continuing secularism in India. He thoughtfully replied that he felt this situation and this responsibility but added, "How can I face the people in India who have been told I am a traitor? At least there should be an honourable acquittal from this court. . . ."

At this point I had to leave to catch my plane but while parting he specially asked me to convey his greetings to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Indeed his last words were, "Panditji's health is the all-important issue. If he remains well, then all will be well."

On my return flight I opened my typewriter and placed two carbons between three sheets and typed the gist of my conversation with Shaikh Saheb. Not only because I had to deliver it the same evening but also because I was afraid I would forget something important he said. From the airport I proceeded to Teen Murti House. Panditji seemed to be unwell, and received me in the bedroom. I had not noticed the deep lines of worry and anxiety on his face in his well-lit office the previous day. I gave him my two-sheet report and when he read it his face brightened up and he said, "*Shabash*. You have done well. It might help us but now you must go to Shastriji's house and give him the other copy. I hope you did make a spare carbon copy for him".

"Yes, Sir," I replied, "How could I forget your instructions?"

Then from the huge Teen Murti House I went to the modest bungalow of Shastriji. It was past sunset and I gave my card with "Urgent Report From Jammu" written on it. The diminutive man had devised a strange procedure to deal with his visitors. He was talking to some provincial Congress Chief and held him by the arm while the two walked together in the garden. It seemed that Jawaharlal Nehru, advised complete rest by his doctors, had compromised by transferring the authority to make important decisions to Shastriji. When my turn came the little man also caught

me by the arm and led me for a walk over the grassy lawn. I gave him copy number two of the two sheets and when he asked me if it would be safe to release Shaikh Abdullah, I replied, "I don't know if it would be perfectly safe, but certainly it would be less dangerous."

Having delivered two copies I returned to the hotel and had the long deferred bath.

When I left, it was not cold and it was not hot. March was the best month for a before-midnight walk. Consciously or sub-consciously, my feet dragged me to the little auditorium where the decision about *Shehar Aur Sapna* was going to be made. I knew some of the projectionists, and one of them told me that my picture had not been received from Bombay and, therefore, the members and the projectionists had been unable to see it. They also told me that while the three other centres had sent six pictures each, Bombay had sent only five.

So I returned to the hotel and again took out my typewriter. I wrote a polite note to the chairman (I don't remember who it was that year. May be Justice Khosla). But I wrote to him that since every other centre had sent in six entries, why had Bombay not sent in the sixth entry? I didn't mind if *Shehar Aur Sapna* did not win an award but I certainly demanded that it should not go unseen by the Central Committee. I sent him the letter by express delivery and having mailed it, turned in to sleep early because I had to catch the morning flight the next day.

Back in Bombay I forgot both my Jammu trip and the letter which I had written to the chairman of the awards committee. Political events were moving very fast. In less than a week, Shaikh Abdullah was unconditionally released, and was given a rousing reception by the people of Shrinagar.

On the Awards front, I was informed by someone in the Films Division that an urgent call had come for *Shehar Aur Sapna* and eventually the print was seen first by two members and then again by the whole committee.

It was late April evening and I was in the flatlet of a neighbour of my friend, Inder Raj Anand. We had all clustered round the telephone which would ring any moment

because I had given that number to a friend in Delhi to pass on the important news the moment it was released in Delhi. Dilip Raj was also there. At last the telephone bell rung.

"Yes, this is Abbas speaking on this side".

"Congratulations, you have won the highest award this year".

"What award did you say?"

I couldn't believe it was the Gold Medal—so as to avoid possible disappointment, I pretended not to hear it. "Which award do you mean? The silver medal? Or is it the bronze?" I knew very well there was no bronze medal in the awards. I was deliberately confusing national awards with the international awards given at Karlovy Vary and other film festivals.

"You have won the Gold Medal—g for God —o for Orange —l for London —d for donkey that you are!" I whispered to Dilip Raj, "We have got the Gold Medal."

He went berserk, laughing and weeping at the same time. No one was paying any attention to him. We were all congratulating and embracing each other. We were bursting with the news. We wanted to shout it to the world. But I would not let anyone know anything lest it may appear to be a hoax or a joke. We all piled into Dilip Raj's little Fiat car and went over to Tarabai Hall where some Polish film was being screened and everyone who should hear about it was there. From there I telephoned home and was told there were two telegrams from Delhi, both confirming the good news.

"Hold on," I said, "Let's go to the office of *Screen*. If the Press has got it, then we will wake up every single member of the unit.

And so, that night, there was no sleep for fifteen citizens of Bombay! six artistes (alphabetically—Anwar Husain, David, Dilip Raj, Manmohan Krishna, Nana Palsikar and Surekha), and nine technicians (again alphabetically—Athar Siraj—associate director, Bannerjee—art director, B.P. Bharucha—sound recordist, J.P. Kaushik—music director, Mohan Rathod—editor, Pandhri Juker—director of make-up, Ramchandra—director of photography, and Sardar Jafri—lyrics writer.)

By 2 a.m. had been rounded up the whole gang, all the

way from Girgaum to Andheri and brought to our place where an official congratulatory telegram had been received from the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. There was a great *ha-ha* besides *gup-shup* over cups of tea and coffee which my elder sister gladly prepared at that unearthly hour. Phonograms were sent to our financing partners while the local ones were telephoned and woken up. By 6 a.m. the all night *jamboree* was dispersed, to meet again at 10. a.m to make the necessary changes in our publicity.

We had a solitary hoarding at a strategic place that was above an Irani restaurant in Bandra on the right side of the road as we went from the suburbs to the city. Here, we got the replica of the Gold Medal enlarged, some twenty times its normal size with the legend, "India's Best Picture—*Shehar Aur Sapna* Gold Medal Winner". Just a few weeks earlier another very important producer had taken the space above us to advertize his forthcoming film. By next morning, when our new hoarding went up, they moved theirs somewhere else where it would not have to compete with "India's Best Picture".

The whole day, we kept a man to monitor our telephone. Except for two trunkcalls, several phonograms, mostly from my publishers in Delhi, there was not a single call of anyone from the so-called "film industry". Since our office was in the Famous Cine Laboratory and Studios Building, in Mahalaxmi, we kept on meeting our friends and acquaintances from among the producers, directors, technicians, and even stars, but received not a single congratulatory greeting from anyone and it seemed very improper for us to stop these people and tell them that we have won the Gold Medal. The only exception was my new friend O.P. Ralhan who, two days later, hosted a grand dinner for our unit at which members of his *Phool Aur Pathar* unit, including Dharmendra, garlanded the corresponding members of our unit. The news appeared on the front page and in banner headline in the *Screen* and then a few directors and stars reluctantly became aware of our good fortune.

In Delhi, where we reached the next day, we exchanged each other's addresses and telephone numbers and promising

to meet at the rehearsal we parted. But as to my special request that the four veteran actors were no less important than the hero and the heroine, the Ministry officials kindly agreed that they would also receive souvenirs along with Dilip Raj and Surekha. This itself was a big victory for us.

I had heard that Panditji was not well and had drastically curtailed all his appointments and engagements. At about 4.30 p.m. on the day preceding the awards function, I went over to his house to personally enquire after his health. Just by luck, I saw my friend the late A.M. Tariq, M.P. from Kashmir with a bundle of detective novels under his arm, going up the stairs. I asked him how and why he was being allowed to go in and he said he was only going to deliver these harmless books that Panditji knew that Ahmad Abbas was there and he just wanted to look at him for a few minutes. Five minutes later, Tariq came back and indicated from a distance that I could go up. "He is sitting in the sun which the doctor says is good for him. He wants you to go up". And so I did. Now I found the broad sunny balcony. I gently knocked on the door of the sitting room and hesitatingly entered. Imagine my surprise when I saw the great man leaving his *mondha* chair and coming to receive me.

"Panditji, please, please," I pleaded loudly and ran to him. But by the time I could catch him, he had traversed half the room on his (I could see) tottering feet. Gently I caught Panditji by the arm and led him back to his chair.

"Panditji, aap kyon hamein gunehgar banate hain?"

The voice was feeble as he replied, *"Kyon kyon kya huwa?"*

"To kya hum doctrronke kahnese apni culture bhula dein?"

"Mahmanon ka swagat na karen? Kaho kaise aana huwa?"

I briefly explained about the awards function. I said that as he would not be able to come to that function, I sought his permission to bring my unit here for five minutes so that they could have his blessings. Panditji said that whether he came or not, he would like to meet the unit at 10 a.m. on the day following the awards function. He wrote it down in his famous little red diary. Then I took leave of him and insisted

on his remaining seated. "We are your juniors, it is not necessary for you to get up even to show respect to youngsters like us". I came away quickly but not before that man of culture had made half an attempt to leave the *mondha*.

Next day when all of us arrived in our uniform of white *khaddar* Jodhpuri coats and trousers, you could have knocked me with a feather when I saw the VIP entrance open and Panditji looking "spick and span" as ever in his white *sherwani*. He refused my arm for help and unaided climbed the ten or twelve steps which led to the rostrum. What marvelous energy and will-power! I followed him up and introduced Surekha to him and then Dilip Raj and others. Now Panditji congratulated each of us.

When my name was called, according to the previous programme, my six main artistes on the dias and others rose in their seats. I was receiving the Award on their behalf. At the end of the ceremony, I gently reminded Panditji that my unit would be at his place at ten o'clock punctually.

At an awards function hardly a quarter of the audience had seen the complete award-winning picture. It had been released already or it was in a language other than Hindustani, in which case, the people were not interested. That year the picture was in Hindustani and no one knew what it was like and what it was about. The "dark horse" had won and it was a very dark horse. Not a soul moved out of the hall (except Jawaharlal Nehru whose doctors, and I, escorted him to his car). At the end of the picture, in trying to struggle our way out with much difficulty, I was the recipient of hundreds of congratulations, mostly from strangers.

We came to "Moti Mahal" where I had invited all the Awards-winners to dinner. There was a scramble for seats as many "gate-crashers" had also managed to come in. It was about midnight when I received a telephone call. I asked the caller who it was, "I am Kapoor, a distributor, and I want to buy your film. Where and when can I see you?"

I told him I was staying with my niece at Sujan Singh Park. I asked him from where he was speaking. He said he was speaking from Hauz Khas which, I knew, was then on the outskirts of New Delhi. The Qutab Minar was a stone's

throw from there. So, I said, it is too far for him to drive at that late hour and he could see me at 8 a.m. next day at Sujan Singh Park.

About the terms, we had a fixed schedule. The picture had cost one and three quarter lakhs and so we had declared that if anyone wanted to buy it, before any award was declared, we would give it to him for only thirty-five thousands. After the Award, however, there would be a slight increase and each distributor would have to give fifty thousand rupees. So far only one distributor would have to give fifty thousand rupees. So far only one distributor from Bengal who heard about this ridiculously "cheap" picture had signed paying us five thousand rupees advance. At Bombay, three men, among others, had come to a show of the picture which we had held on the day we got the award. When they asked for the price, I had asked for fifty thousand and they said that the price should be thirty-five thousand as it was for Bengal. I told them that it was before the Gold Medal, now it was fifty thousand. So the three of them got together ten thousand rupees which was paid as advance and Bombay territory was also signed. In Delhi, before 9 a.m. when we went to receive the blessings of Jawarhalal Nehru, we signed with Kapoor of Cine Universal.

At Panditji's house, we were told not to take more than fifteen minutes of his time. So said the security men and the doctors. I agreed, but I had my reservations whether Panditji would let us go so soon. I had already done my "home-work" about the equal division of twenty-five thousand rupees between the fifteen us. *Naya Sansar* cheques of that amount were kept in special souvenir purses and when Panditji arrived, we requested him to remain in his chair and to honour us by giving away these purses. While giving the purse to Surekha, Panditji looked at the cheque and jocularly said, "I hope Abbas has not committed any arithmetical mistake in dividing the almost indivisible amount into fifteen shares." Having given away those purses, Panditji asked, "Isn't there a song in the picture?"

I said, "There was a poem, which was recited *tehtul-lafz*, and introduced Sardar Jafri, the lyrics writer and Manmohan

Krishna, who sang it. Panditji asked for the poem and Manmohan Krishna chose a piece of just eight lines which was most tragically appropriate for the occasion, especially the last two lines:

*Voh jo kho jaen to kho jaegi duniya saari
Voh jo mil jaen to saath apne zamana hoga.*

There were tears in the singer's eyes as he recited the last lines and everyone present was deeply moved for everyone knew that Panditji was acutely ill.

The security man showed me his watch. It was nearly 10-30 a.m. I understood the hint and said to Panditji, *Panditji, ab ijazat dijiye.*"

Panditji said, "Why! Why! I have no other appointment." "Then please take it that we are very busy", I said, folding my hands in salutation. The doctors and the security men heaved a sigh of relief when we were allowed to go, though it still took five minutes more because everyone wanted a souvenir photo along with the Great Nehru. Then the doctors supporting him from both sides took him away to the lift. As the lift doors closed, he was taken up, and up and up, I saw him smile and wave back. I had a premonition that I would never see him again.

"NEHRU LIVES"

Editor R.K. Karanjia is one of those early risers who finish their Yoga plus a two-mile walk along Marine Drive and read the morning newspapers over breakfast, much before lazy folks like me have reluctantly opened their eyes and consumed their cup of morning tea. It was quite early, therefore, when on 27 May 1964, the telephone bell rang at 9 a.m. Karanjia was on the line, "Hello, Ahmad." He calls me always "Ahmad", never Abbas!

"Good Morning. Russy."

"Something terrible has happened, or rather it is happening now."

"What is it Russy? Jawaharlal Nehru has not.....?" His continuing ill health was on my brain, and I expected the worst.

"No, he has not. But he has had another stroke. Come immediately to the office. Anything might happen any time. I want you to write a four page feature. So think about it in the taxi on the way."

I gave up the idea of shaving and jumped into my clothes. It was the first time in my life that I did not tell the taxi driver to go slow. "Fast, faster, faster", were my instructions. I told him that Jawaharlal Nehru was dying. "Saheb, it will be terrible. One can't imagine India without Nehru."

Nor could I. Paying off the driver after a twenty-five minute drive, I raced up the stairs and burst into Russy's little air-conditioned room. I noticed that Russy, too, had not shaved that day. For the first time, I noticed that there were white stubbles among the hair on the chin and cheeks.

"How is he now?"

"The same as before. Still unconscious". He told me the

details of how he fell down and had a stroke, while returning from the bathroom.

"He will pull through. He has great will power!" I said to reassure myself.

But a newspaper office is an unemotional machine. Deadlines are deadlines. Editors cannot afford to be sentimentalists. Russy said, seeing the state I was in, "Let's hope for the best and prepare for the worst. You have to give the copy by this evening, the deadline is 6 p.m. But the art department has to prepare the headlines. They must have yours now, because we will have at least three inch high letters. And block-making takes time."

"Okay", I said, "Give me a room to sit where I can think."

"You can have the advertising manager's room", said Russy handing over the keys to me.

I went there, opened the room and the windows because I felt suffocated in an air-conditioned room. The man from the art department was there to receive the two or three words from me.

"Better make it two words. I suppose one of them has to be Nehru."

I wrote "Nehru" on the scratch pad. How could I say, "Nehru Dies" or "Nehru Dead" or "Nehru No More", when the great spirit was still struggling for life in that yoga-perfected body? At last I knew what it may be. I wrote on the pad "Nehru Lives" and gave the torn sheet to the art department. It could be a prayer or a benediction or an additional reinforcement to the great will-power.

I gave the heading but could not write though the flash messages which Russy Dulay passed on to me were steadily assuming a fatalistic tone.

"Nehru still struggling."

"The struggle continues."

"Nehru Gasping For Breath."

And still I could not bring myself to assume Nehru would die. How could he die at the age of seventy-five? Hadn't I seen him only a month ago climbing unaided the dozen or more stairs to the dais in Vigyan Bhavan? He was indestructible. He was immortal. Till at one minute past 2 p.m. the fatal

words came over the teleprinter, "Nehru Dead."

Then, I began the obituary, my pen flying over the paper, sending it page by page to the Press till 6 p.m., stopping only for a sip of water for already the news had come that ten stalls in the neighbourhood were closed since the morning.

"Nehru Dead! Nehru Dead!! NEHRU DEAD!!!" The teleprinter message was hammering away at my brain.

When Nehru died, we died—for Nehru was us, the soul and spirit of India.

And it was literally so for the sixty-year old film director and producer, Mehboob Khan, whose devotion to Nehru and his ideals was so great that as he heard the fatal news he felt a stab of pain in his already diseased heart and saying, "*Ab is mulk mein rehney se faida?*" he collapsed never to rise again.

But the late Mehboob Khan did not know the miracle of resurrection. Nehru is not dead. *Nehru Lives.*

A TALE OF THIRTEEN DEVILS

The award of the President's gold medal for *Shehar Aur Sapna* made me almost lose my head.

Legends were started about its success. It had a moderate success in the cities of Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta because of the big publicity which we had received for a little and unknown picture winning the prestigious award.

I divided all the money that I received among my fifteen partners which came to roughly fifteen thousand each. This is an infinitesimal amount of what the stars of the commercial so-called, "film industry" get. But it was more than enough for two new-comers. For all the character artistes and for the cameraman it was just sufficient. And for my associate director, for my make-up man, for the sound recordist and the editor it was God-sent.

I have still got all of them, though in some of my later pictures, I have not been able to pay them even five thousand. The whole point was that for the triple role of writer, director and producer I received no more than one share.

Out of our earnings we sanctioned thirty thousand rupees for sending a delegation to the Karlovy Vary Film Festival where the Government of India had entered *Shehar Aur Sapna*. We took, besides myself, my friend and co-scenarist-publicist V.P. Sathé, hero Dalip Raj, heroine Surekha, who said she did not need an escort (which is normal for film heroines when they are taken abroad), and so we took the senior-most actor of our group, i.e. Nana Palsikar. I must say we all thoroughly enjoyed it. For the fifteen days that we were in the health-restoring spa of Karlovy Vary, we ate, drank, and discussed cinema all the time. Some of the world's finest films and film-makers, including beautiful and talented film stars, were there.

We received the Crystal Vase from the Art Academy or Prague, and a citation from *Rencontres Internationales du Film pour la Jeunesse* (an association of young cinema enthusiasts located in Paris) for Dilip Raj and Surekha as "Two of the best and the most attractive young artistes featured in that year's Karlovy Vary Film Festivals! The French critic, the late Monsieur Georges Sadoul, who had already seen *Shehar Aur Sapna* in India and described it as carrying "the powerful impact of the personality of its maker, K.A. Abbas. Its poetry, humour, fantasy and lyricism give an acute sense of contemporary and national reality. This film, by its art and its sincerity does honour to the Indian cinema." He was among its great supporters. So was Mr. A.M. Brousel, the Nector of the academy of the art and of the most knowledgeable veteran filmicists of the world, happily still alive.

From Karlovy Vary I took my team to Moscow, a city which I claim to know almost as well as Bombay, to Paris and London which I did not claim to know though I had visited both the places earlier, and then back to India.

Now the problem was *what next?* We had established ourselves as film-makers of some consequence, and feelers were sent to us on behalf of some of the big name stars. But here I had to honour a pledge that I had given to the late Jawaharlal Nehru. On the last occasion when I had met him in Delhi he had asked me, "When will you make a film for *me?* and when I had replied, "Panditji, every film I make is really for you. The moment your doctors allow you to sit through a two-hour film we will have a special screening for you."

"That is not what I mean," said Panditji, "I mean a film for the children of India that would teach them to live with each other in peace and harmony." And I rashly promised him that my very next film would be for children and on the theme of national integration. And that was the dilemma. Had he been alive I could have asked him to postpone the children's film for a year or two. But he was, alas, no more. And so there was no one to release me from my oath. I had

to make the children's film!

My mind being full of festival films, I asked my friend Krishenchander, with whom I had such a perfect understanding, to collaborate with me on this then. The result was the story of *Hamara Ghar*. It was a story for children but it could be interpreted on an adult level, too. The children would find in it a drama of adventure, an example of do-it-yourself.

We took a party of thirteen children who find themselves marooned on an uninhabited island. There is a rich boy among them but his water-soaked hundred rupee note had no value. His knife has to cut the fruits and vegetables which grow wild on the island. And the transistor, which was in his pocket, brings them news and songs to relieve the tedium.

The theme of the film was that the children find out that without each other's help they cannot make a house for themselves. And when the house is built with socialised labour, Krishen suggested another theme.

The rich boy and his two *chamchas* find a hidden treasure which, of course, has no value but they also find a couple of rusty old swords and spears. With these in their hands, they set up a dictatorship in which the other ten children are explicated to break coconuts from the trees which they had to surrender to the three bosses. Then there would be a revolt and revolution and, out of frustration and anger, as the rich boy wanted to wreck the house, which was the product of their labour, an aeroplane would pass over and spot them and send a helicopter to rescue them all.

Having developed the theme I asked Krishen to write the detailed story. Then I asked his brother, the late Mahender Nath (who was the General Secretary of the Film Writer's Association and whose death some years ago was such a blow to the community of film writers) to write the screenplay which again I rewrote in my own way. It was enjoyable to collect the thirteen assorted children.

Once upon a time (according to a fable) the devil heard that in the world of man there were bigger devils than himself. Feeling curious, he came to the earth and there, instead of sinister and devilish creatures like himself, he encountered a group of innocent-looking children. So the devil assumed

the shape of a donkey, chuckling within himself: "Let them come near me, and I will give them a kind kick." But he had not reckoned with his rivals, in no time three boys were mounted on his back, while two pulled at his long ears, the rest twisted his tail, and finally tied a string of firecrackers to it! The devil went back, chastened, acknowledging his defeat at the hands of his superiors.

The rabie does not identify the children who outwitted and out-devilled the devil. But I suspect I know their names. They were the nine school boys and four school girls whom I unsuspectingly selected to play the roles of cast-way Robinson Crusoes in my film *Hamara Ghar*.

I had successfully directed the little Romi in *Munna* and had enjoyed the experience. Now I looked forward to making a film with whole group of children who are at least thirteen little devils.

There they stand on the screen of my memory—the thirteen little devils!

They are (from left to right).

The stocky and cocky Ghanshyam Bohera (16);

The lean, lanky and hungry-looking Levy Aaron (15);

The unpredictable Tanya Siraj (13) who would be giggling one moment and shedding the tears next;

The squeaky-voiced and delicately-built Sardar Jaiprakash Singh Nirula (12) whose long and silky hair was the envy of all the girls.

Rekha Roa (12), the doe-eyed beauty who could not forget that she played the heroine's childhood in K. Asif's (partly completed) *Love and God*;

The dark-complexioned and deceptively sad-eyed Narain Dattatraya Devanpalli (12) who was just as mischievous as anyone else;

The starry-eyed Dipak Prasad (11) who could look like an angel when he was not up to his usual mischief;

the beatsnik-like, mop-haired Sunil Kaushik (11) who looked soft and naive as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but when it came to fisticuffs he could give lessons to the Yankee hoodlums of *West Side Story*;

The pot-bellied Maruti, who at eleven, must have been

the Junior heavyweight champion of the world—but he could swear like a stevedore, and disproved the theory that fat boys are non-violent by nature;

The agile Noel Moses (11) who, at a pinch, could clamber up to the top of a coconut tree like a monkey—he had quite a bag of other monkey-tricks up his sleeve;

The curly-haired Pasha Azeem (10) who looked like a Little Lord Fauntleroy but who had a temper like a *prima donn*s;

Yasmeen Khan (8), looked like e China doll and just as likely to break into pieces;

and finally, the six-year old dusky damsel Sonai Mehta, who insisted on laughing when she was asked to cry and went on crying when she was asked to laugh! Where are they now?*

** GHANSHYAM ROHERA is playing the role of a Havildar in Bombay produced T.V. serials,

LEVY ASRON has migrated to Israel,

TANYA SIRAJ was an Air Hostess before getting married to an Airlines official,

JAYAPRAKASH NIRULA's whereabouts are unknown. I hope he has not joined the "extremists",

REKHA RAO has achieved film fame as an actress in Kannada films as well as in Hindi films,

DEVANPALI's whereabouts are also unknown,

DIPAK PRASAD is a young man who is now in Dubai or somewhere in the Middle East, doing work.

SUNIL KAUSHIK had followed in the footsteps of his father and became an A-Class musician and earns the most of them all,

The pot-bellied MARUTI was doing some roles in films but I have not heard of him recently;

NOEL MOSES' whereabouts are also unknown,

The curly-haired PASHA AZEEM is an M.A., a Reader in English Literature, married to another lecturer, and has got a baby,

YASMEEN KHAN's whereabouts are also unknown—perhaps she is married now, and has babies,

SONAL MEHTA has done very well, she went to Paris, and did her doctorate in French Literature, and has married a Frenchman.

So, most of them are doing very well, and are to be found in different parts of the world!

Did I say that's how they stand in that order (from left to right) on the screen of my memory? That's how they were a moment ago.

But even before I had finished introducing them, with a wild whoop of joy they were gone to all points of the compass, but mostly in the direction of the sea. Four of them were in neck-deep water, playfully trying to drown each other, and must be hauled out before one of them went down for the last time. Meanwhile, Dipak and Sunil were hurling stones at each other, while Maruti the fatty lay in the shade, enjoying a siesta after a heavy lunch. Tanya and Rekha were dancing on the sands, while Yasmeen provided the rhythm by clapping her hands. And the little Sonal? Where was she? She was (believe it or not) trying to climb the conveniently crooked coconut palm. And that was how they would all be engaged till I cried myself hoarse and five assistants had to physically drag the truant thirteen to face the camera for the day's shooting.

Shabana, the famous doe-eyed star of *Faslah* directed by me for Khanna Production, and *Ankur* also should have been there except for the fact that on the day I was making my selection she came to see me, looking at least a seventeen-year old—too old for my film! Later, when she worked in my *Faslah* she told me how she had deliberately tried to look older and glamorous, with make-up and high-heeled shoes for that was the look demanded by the producers. She also said she actually cried when she was not selected!

Since the story of *Hamara Ghar* concerned a group of children marooned on a desert island, and the shooting was being done entirely on location, on a deserted beach, I was always perilously and literally poised between devil (I mean thirteen devils) and the deep sea! Out of them only two knew how to swim, but all wanted to plunge in the waves, even when the sea was at its stormiest or when, in December, the water was ice cold enough to give any normal person the shivers. But devils are not normal persons, and so they wanted to bathe, dive, splash water on each other in binding cascades, catch fish with their bare hands, dive again and again to explore the life under water and in gene-

ral to do everything possible to endanger their lives.

They welcomed scenes which required them to be in water, for it gave them a director-given opportunity to play the fool. If I made them stand in ankle-deep water, before the cameras had been set up they would all be in the neck-deep water. Had they strayed away from the given position? "No, uncle, we are standing exactly where you asked us to stand." All that had happened was that each of them under cover of the water, had been using his or her toes to dig a hole in the soft sand, and was now standing in that hole!

Farooqi, one of my assistants, was on full-time duty to make them behave. But there were times when even he felt defeated by the devils and then he would use his cane which exercised the devils in them.

The hardest directorial task was to make them act those scenes which required them to look frightened. "But, uncle, why should we look afraid? We are not afraid". Naturally, how can devils be afraid of anyone or anything?

Exasperated, I would shout, "Now you do what I tell you—look afraid!"

"Afraid of what, uncle?"

"Of a snake you have seen in the jungle."

"But we haven't seen a snake."

"Well, then, you are going to see one now. I'm going to ask the snake-charmer to let loose his cobra."

The cobra slithered out of its basket, but do you think it frightened them? Oh, no.

"Uncle, may I pick it up?" One asked while another tried to catch it by the tail. The snake-charmer protested that his cobra's life was in danger.

Next time I tried a python. "Now all of you walk past the tree where the python is coiled up, and you have to look at it fearfully."

As they walked past, each one of them tried to tickle the python's nose or his tail, and I had to shout, "Out! Retake. You must keep away from the python. You are supposed to be afraid, damn you". In the next "take", they obliged me by simulating some sort of fear but hardly had I said "Out. O.K." when one of them was getting himself photographed

with the deadly python garlanded round his neck!

To make them look sad or dejected was as difficult as to make them sit still or to keep quiet!

I told the littlest of the devils, Sonal Mehta, "Now, in this scene, you must cry."

"I won't cry," she firmly informed me.

"But you must—do *oom—ooooon—ooooon!*"

"I won't".

"Please, Sonal, imagine your daddy had beaten you".

"My daddy never beats me."

"All right, your mummy has beaten you!"

"My mummy has not beaten me."

"Araay, do as I say—cry—weep—shed tears—do *oon—ooooon—ooooon.*" I was now getting desperate.

"I won't, I won't, I won't," the little devil repeated, chuckling all the time, even clapping her hands.

She was laughing, and I was on the verge of tears.

"Sonal!" I shouted like a military commander, "you have to do as I tell you. Look serious and sad. You are all alone on this island. You are thinking of your mummy or daddy. You are hungry. You have nothing to eat"

That gave her an idea.

"Chocolate", she said simply—the little blackmailer!

"All right," I agreed, "Chocolate".

"And *naryal paani*, too. But after the shot."

"No, now. Only then I cry".

So the chocolate bar was ordered. She munched it leisurely, then drank coconut water, only then did she relent.

"Now I cry". And she did!

Devils must be always up to mischief, or they won't be devils. Everyday as I reached the location (the devils were always there before me). I accepted and duly received a first-aid report; this one had cut his hand fooling about with a cactus plant, that one had cut the soles of his feet running barefoot on the sharp-edged coral rocks, one fell down from a palm tree and bruised his back. (In sixty-three days of shooting, we used up the three bottles of iodine and at least a hundred pieces of medicated adhesive tapes, and on three occasions the doctor had to be summoned to give anti-tetanus injections). X reported that Y beat him up, Y

defended himself saying X had abused him. I got so used to these early morning reports that if I did not receive them I was quite disturbed.

So one day when Sunil and Dipak, who were otherwise always quarrelling, both told me in duet, "Uncle, today we have not done anything," I was more than surprised.

"No quarrels?"

"No, uncle".

"No fights?"

"No, uncle".

'No one even abused someone else?'

"No, uncle."

"That's wonderful. *Shabash*. You all deserve a prize." Little did I realize how cleverly I was being trapped.

"Uncle, can we all have a coconut each to drink?"

"Well, yes, all right. Go ahead I"

"Thank you, uncle. We have had *naryal paani* already. We knew you would never say 'No'."

"All right, then so that is finished. Let's start work".

"Uncle I"

"Now, what is it?"

"Can we have one more coconut each?"

"No, you can't."

"But you just promised"

"All right but" They never waited to hear the "But". They were already round the *naryal paani* vendor, and their whoops of joy were like the war-cries of African head-hunters.

That day the *naryal paniwalla* presented a bill of twenty-six rupees for fifty-two coconuts consumed by the children. The thirteen devils, of course, could not be expected to keep count with arithmetical precision.

At last came the day when the last shooting was done. I heaved a sigh of relief, as I called the parents of all the little devils and asked them to sign receipts for the safe return of their respective little devils—all in one piece! Now, I told myself, I am rid of them. Now I can sleep in peace.

But I couldn't. For a long time I lay awake thinking of the sixty-three days I had been haunted by the thirteen little

devils. They had been a nuisance, no doubt, they had caused many anxious moments and been the source of endless work. But hadn't it been fun, too? Life indeed, would be dull without their daily devilry.

The completed film which we screened for children and adults was unanimously voted as most successful. The children found in it what they were looking for. High drama and adventure. The adults could take it as an allegory on national integration. The house that the children built with co-operative labour was *India*. And the children represented all the major communities and regional groups. They had to work together to build India and to defend India!

There was a Prime Minister's gold medal instituted some years ago in the national awards. We were absolutely certain to win it, so much so that we delayed the release of the film. About the President's gold medal for *Shehar Aur Sapna* we were nervous and uncertain upto the last. After all there were other and more formidable film-makers like Satyajit Ray and Bimal Roy. But this time we were over-confident for no director of any consequence had made a children's film. Yet when the results came out the committee refused to even recognize it as children's film. And that was that!

Except for Delhi and Bombay the economic picture of my new film was again a disaster. In Bombay the picture was liked by Miss Madhuri Shah, then Education Officer of the Corporation, and was recommended to all the municipal schools of Bombay. We had good block-bookings but that meant that the matinees and the first shows were full of eager children. The late night show was almost deserted. The picture ran for several weeks but almost all the income went to pay the rent. But, meanwhile, we were informed that at the International Festival of Children's Films, where we had just sent the film with nobody to accompany it, to Gottwaldov in Czechoslovakia, it won the second prize. We had no information who got the first prize.

Any way in later years it was consolation that a film which was branded as "not a children's film at all", in India, won three more prizes at Children's International Film Festival—

at Gijon (Spain), Gottualdov (Czecholovakia), and at Santa Barbara (USA) where, of course, I was present.

What next was the problem. Again I turned to a friend, Inder Raj Anand, who, out of his experience of Hyderabad State had written a most moving story about the decline of feudalism, called *Aasman Mahal* (PLACE IN THE SKY). Prithviraj Kapoor, tall, heavybodied, with a leonine face, was the obvious choice to play the central role of the feudal lord. For the romantic leads, I took the *Shehar Aur Sapna* pair, Dilip Raj and Surekha, the latter duly deglamourized, a cycle-rickshaw driver's daughter. Dilip Raj would be the rebellious son of the Nawab in love with a young teacher who was the rickshaw driver's daughter.

We made this film in Hyderabad in the decrepit house of a nawab, who was glad to get from us five thousand rupees per month which would help him to get the place painted and white-washed. We got a little money from financier in Madral who was willing to give us one and a half lakhs rupees charging us only twenty-five thousand by way of interest. Rarely does such a financier invest money in films. With all sorts of credits and delayed payments we were able to make the picture within the limited budget. Towards the end of the story Prithviraj in all his tardy glory is going down the stairs, for the first time in years, when he has a stroke. He lies helpless, paralyzed. An obvious symbol of feudalism, helpless against the advancing forces of capitalism.

I enjoyed making this picture. It was shot virtually non-stop on one particular location. All of us stayed in a rented bungalow near the palace, all of us sleeping on the ground, and eating together. A sort of commune. To encourage the members of my unit to give up their drinking habit I took a vow not a touch meat throughout the three months that we were in Hyderabad.

Back in Bombay we edited the film and saw a preview with friends and some business people. Everybody's first reaction was that it was a brilliant film, that it would also be a hit, that *Aasman Mahal* would raise us to the skies. I was a fool to

accept only one and quarter lakh rupees per territory, that they would get it from us for Delhi-UP territory for one and three-quarter lakh rupees and would sell it to a buyer for two and quarter lakh rupees thus ensuring profits all round. I knew that both my friends, between them, didn't possess one thousand seven hundred and fifty rupees but nevertheless their praise was genuine and what they were saying was what they would do if they were in business. So I played along with them, held a few preview for their "parties" and stuck to my original demand of one and a quarter lakh rupees (royalty).

None of the distributors who came said the film was bad, each of them said they would let us know their offer, but none of them did. We were keen to release it in Delhi and U. P., imagining that the courtly Urdu Language of the nawabs of Hyderabad, which we had used in the film would be better appreciated in the north. So when one distributor came forward and offered us one and a quarter lakh rupees royalty, we promptly said "yes". He fixed some date for the national premiere to be held at Delhi, and he gave us some advance which helped us to pay for the publicity and posters, etc., which we had to give them. On their part they started giving previews to members of their families and it seemed that someone among their relations did not think that the film would be a hit.

So, one week before when they had to take delivery of the prints they offered us twenty-five thousand rupees less. They said they were rather short of money and would make it up within a month after the picture was a hit in Delhi. I had no choice but to agree to the lesser amount though I knew that was the final price. I would get no more.

The story writer of the film Inder Raj Anand, was then in the United States dealing with some producers and agents to sell his script of *Ka hil Gibran*. I sent him a cablegram inviting him to the Delhi premiere. The press show in Delhi was a great success. At least the critics were raving about it, congratulating me and Inder Raj Anand (who arrived just in

time, Hollywood style).

It was enough to inflate my ego and vanity, but the disillusionment was soon to come.

No one was surprised when it was announced that Karlovy Vary Academy of Art had given the best actor award for the performance of veteran Prithviraj Kapoor!

AMIT—THE SEVENTH INDIAN

According to a poll conducted by eminent selectors chosen by the Bombay monthly, IMPRINT, Amitabh Bachchan is one of twenty-five of the country's most important men sharing the Power and the Glory, along with his friend, RAJIV GANDHI, Arun Nehru, Arjun Singh and General.

How was it that the son of a Hindi Poet and an executive of a commercial firm in Calcutta rose to such dizzy heights of popularity, and (political) power, within less than fourteen years?

Since I had a hand in this catapulting of Amitabh's affluence and political popularity, I must explain that it was the triumvirate of Tinu Anand, Jalal Agha, with their friend, Ajitabh Bachchan, that brought the talent of Amitabh Bachchan to my notice. (He had some time before been to Bombay and seen all leading producers—naturally excluding me for I was certainly not a "leading" producer) but was rejected as too tall, too thin, non-photogenic and generally, unsuitable for a film-break!!

I was shown a snap-shot of a tall young man—the tallest actor I had yet seen in Indian cinema, and he corresponded to the description of the *Seventh* Indian, who, according to my script, "must be very tall, thin like the late *Majaz*, must have a good voice, must have good pronunciation of Urdu, specially good for reciting Urdu verses and *sheirs*. He must look a non-adventurer but must eventually turn out the bravest of them all. Also he must be NON-MUSLIM since he has to act a MUSLIM's role."

That was my whim (or brain-wave) to cast all of them in a "scrambled" manner so that no one was to act (or react) according to his religion, or according to his place of birth. Thus the Bengali (Utpal Dutt) was to be a Punjabi, Anwar

Ali would be a Hindi fanatic, and Amitabh Bachchan, the son of Bachchan Saheb, the famous Hindi poet, would be the Muslim Urdu poet.

I almost did not sign him the moment he gave his address.

"Are you the son of Harivanshrai Bachchan, the Hindi poet?" I asked him.

"Yes, I am," he replied.

"Then I won't take you unless I get his permission."

"WHY?"

"Because he is my friend and I don't want to displease him by inducing his son in films, against his wishes. If he says 'O.K.' you are 'in'. But you will have to wait for two days."

I sent a phonogram to Dr. Bachchan in Delhi and telegraphically got his reply the next day. "It is good that if Amitabh will be in your film."

And that is not the END but the BEGINNING of the story—the legend—of AMITABH BACHCHAN.

"Did you imagine Amitabh would become so BIG?" I am always asked.

And I frankly admit that I couldn't. But I knew he was a fine actor.

Starry success does not only require *acting ability*, otherwise Jalal Agha would have been as successful as Amitabh. Stars are made of their acting ability, plus their personalities (the department in which Jalal lacks and Amit excels) and a good voice, the mood and the quality of his first directors, the kind of roles he plays in his first or first three, or first six pictures, plus (they say) his luck (though I do not believe in it).

Amitabh had all these. In his second picture, *Reshma Aur Shera*, Director Sunil Dutt did not use his voice at all, he was a dumb mute, but he made it up with his silent acting.

But the role which made him most famous was that of "*Doctor Moshai*" in which he was co-starred with the then famous RAJESH KHANNA.

The ingredients of his present image were present in *Saat Hindustani*. He was, apparently, the meekest of the seven, but really he was the toughest and the bravest. He

allowed himself to hang up by a rope over a deep chasm, he was pulled up by all the six, he was the toughest in the encounter with the Portugese, and he survived their worst tortures, and in the climax he walked bare-footed on lacerated feet—the one scene which proved that he *was* the 'Angry Young Man'.

That image in a psuedo-military uniform, has stuck to him in all the thirty or forty pictures he has acted in so far—bad ones or good ones, memorable ones and the ones he would like to forget.

FLASH-BACK!

The story came out of the Goa struggle reminiscences of my then assistant, Madhukar, who would often regale us with the adventures he had while trekking up with the non-violent commandoes to hoist the tricolour on every police station they came across. They had to do it surreptitiously—they should not be seen or arrested till they reached Panjim—where they should make a public demonstration of their flag hoisting and their eventual arrest.

The story, to my mind, had cinematic possibilities—Madhukar had already told the story to several other producers and none of them had taken it up. I saw it as an epic of our freedom struggle, as the commandoes had come from all parts and provinces of India, a comment on national integration. A Goan girl's character had to be woven in it, and I would show her several years after liberation in a critical heart condition. She remembers the old adventures she had with her comrades.

I had reduced them all to *seven* instead of the original *eleven* of Madhukar's real life adventure story.

There is something mythical about the number seven. There are seven basic colours in the rainbow. The ultimate Truth is supposed to be hidden behind seven veils of mystery and no Hindu marriage can be solemnised without "Saat Pheray" or seven rounds of the sacrificial fire. In the fairy tales, the king always had seven daughters, seven sons, or seven wives. . . . snow-white had seven dwarfs!

Once upon a time (and this is no fairy tale) a director, got into trouble by selecting a story requiring seven main artistes:

six young men and a girl. He could not even tell the writer to reduce it to the conventional trio—hero, heroine and villain—because he himself was the writer. And he could not tell the producer to find another story, or another story writer, for the producer was an obstinate and impossible fellow—himself!

Having secured postponement of her heart operation for a week, the Goan girl had six telegrams sent to Calcutta, Jullundur, Banaras, Ranchi, Madras and Karad in Maharashtra.

The telegrams were duly delivered. But each of them was involved in sectarian and parochial struggles. One in Banaras was getting the glass panes of shops with English lettering broken by his Hindi Sena, the one in Ranchi was ridiculing Hindi, from the point of view of the Urdu purist and fanatic and getting his house burnt by Hindi fanatics; the one in Calcutta, a football referee, was getting a serious head injury, by stone-throwing and chair burning students, while the *powads* singer in Maharashtra was being dragged into the struggle about the Maharashtra-Mysore border agitation. The prosperous Punjabi farmer was to come home and listen to yet another partition of Punjab and was lamenting it while the telegram from Goa lay unattended. And finally the Tamilian who was once a Hindi Pracharak was being swept off his feet and throwing his Hindi signboard into a bonfire of Hindi books and refusing the telegram till it was brought, translated into Tamil. The young Goan woman, the adventurous journey across Goa, as a guide to the other comrades through struggle and suffering, they became known to be what they were—*Seven Indians*.

All this time she would remember in flashback as she lay there in the hospital waiting for her companions. "One for all and all for one" was their motive once. They had locked her up in her house while they went out to do their flag hoisting and they were beaten up by the Goanese police, tortured in cells and finally thrown over the border. But she would not remain idle. She would join in with the Goan commandos' activities, blow up a bridge over which the Portugese army was to march, and would be finally deported to a prison in Portugal. From there she would return with an

incurable heart disease.

At last the six Hindustanis, no longer the young patriots but middle-aged, grey-haired individuals, who did not recognize each other, for the light of loyalty was no more in their eyes. Six taxis would approach the hospital gate just as the coffin carrying the young Goanese woman was being carried out. The old doctor, seeing six strangers approaching the coffin, asked them, "Are you the Seven Indians?" And when they nodded "Yes" at last looking at each other, the doctor said, "You have come too late. She could not wait for you."

As the body of the woman in the coffin was lowered in the grave, the six surviving Indians would clasp each other's hands and they would march singing the song of togetherness. They would no longer be the "Six" but, like olden days, they would no longer be Hindu, Muslim, Tamilian, Punjabi, Bengali and Maharashtrian. They would be the *Seven Indians* including the Goanese girl, Maria, her soul marching along with them.

I was so excited when I finished the screenplay that I telephoned all my friends and informed all my assistants, including Madhukar, to come and hear it in my fourth floor office on the very next day. That was a ritual which they never missed and I would get their suggestions for casting the film.

I wanted to prove by my casting that there was no particular Hindu or Muslim, Tamilian, Maharashtra or Bengali ethnic type. To begin with, I would transform the smart and sophisticated and versatile Jalal Agha into the Maharashtrian *powada* singer. Even Jalal was shocked to hear this. But I reassured him that, with the proper make-up and get-up, nobody would recognize him that except as a Maharashtrian rural folk singer. Madhukar, who hails from Meerut, would be a Tamilian, Sharma (Brahmin by caste) would also undergo a similar transformation and Utpal Dutt, the cigar-chewing admiral of the play Kallol, would be the tractor-driving Punjabi farmer. So far the casting was clear in my mind. On one of my visits to Kerala I had met Madhu, the handsome hero of the Malayalam

screen, and he had approached me and expressed his desire to work in a Hindi film with me. I would make him the sensitive Bengali, I wouldn't have to work much on his Bengali accent for he had lived with a Bengali family. Now only the Hindi and Urdu fanatics were left. Jalal one day brought with him his friend Anwar Ali (brother of the comedian Mehmood) in whose eyes I saw the Jana Singh fanaticism. So I decided to make him the Swayamsevak who hates Urdu and speaks jaw-breaking Hindi. That left one Indian, the Muslim Urdu fanatic. One day Tinu Anand brought a snap-shot of a tall young man and I thought that the boy was in Bombay. I said, "Let me see him in person."

"He will be here day after tomorrow evening." Again, presuming he was in Bombay, I thought he must be working somewhere and wouldn't be free till the evening.

On the third day, punctually at 6 p.m., a tall young man arrived who looked taller because of the *churidar* pajama and Jawahar jacket that he was wearing. This young man would one day be known as Amitabh Bachchan, the heart-throb of millions. But I did not know his name. Roughly the following dialogue took place between us:

"Sit down, please, Your name?"

"Amitabh." (Not Bachchan).

It was an unusual name—so I asked, "What does it mean?"

"The Sun. It's also one of the synonyms for the Gautama Buddha."

"Education?"

"B.A. from Delhi University."

"Have you worked in films before?"

"No one has taken me so far."

"Who were they?"

He mentioned very prominent names.

"What did they find wrong with you?" The boy spoke with frankness, "They all said I was too tall for their heroines."

"Well we have no such trouble. In a way we have no heroine in our film. Even if we had, that wouldn't prevent me from taking you."

"Taking me? Are you really going to take me? Without

even a test?"

"That depends. First I must tell you the story. Then I must tell you your role and see if you will be enthusiastic about playing it. Then I shall tell you what we can afford to pay you. Only then if you agree, shall we sign the contract."

I read him out the complete story and saw his face become alive with interest. When he was the cultured, decent Indian, feeling patriotic at the end of it, I asked him which role he would like to play. He told me the two which particularly impressed him. The role of the Punjabi, and the role of the Muslim. I told him he was perhaps a Punjabi, and that made him unfit to play that role. He asked me why. I gave him the reason, the reason of having a scrambled cast. The idea appealed to him greatly. He said, "I think, I know what you mean. Then I would like to play the Muslim role specially because he is under a cloud of suspicion. And only at the end the suspicions are removed and he is proved a patriot."

Then I told him we could pay him no more than five thousand rupees, which was the standard figure for all the roles.

He seemed a little hesitant, and I asked him, "Are you earning more than that?"

"I was," he said.

I asked him what he meant.

He said that he was getting about sixteen hundred a month in a firm in Calcutta, "I resigned the job and came over."

I was astonished, "You mean to say that you resigned a job of sixteen hundred rupees a month, just on the chance of getting this role! Suppose we can't give the role to you?"

He said, "One has to take such chances," with such conviction that I said, "The role is yours." Then I called my secretary, Abdul Rehman, to dictate the contract. I asked the tall young man for his name and address.

"Amitabh—" after some hesitation, "Amitabh Bachchan, son of Dr. H.R. Bachchan. . . ."

"Stop", I said.

"This contract cannot be signed until I telegraph and get

your father's consent. He is a colleague of mine on the Soviet land Nehru Award Committee. I wouldn't like to have a misunderstanding with him. I am afraid you will have to wait for two days more."

"You can ask my Dad but frankly, do I look like a runaway?"

I told him that runaways don't have any particular look.

So I dictated, instead of the agreement, a telegram to Dr. Bachchan in New Delhi and asked him if he was willing to let his son become an actor. Two days later a telegram came reading "No Objection Where You are Concerned." This is the whole story about how Amitabh Bachchan came into films. For a month or more I had to teach him the phonetics of the difficult Urdu words which would occur in his poetic dialogues. Similarly Anwar Ali was trained to speak like a fanatical Hindi-walla. As most of the passages at arms were between these two, the dialogue could also be rehearsed.

It is important to clarify this at length because a lot of exotic rumours have been set afloat about Amitabh and myself. It had been said, for instance, that it was the recommendation letter of the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi that got him the role in my picture. I don't give roles to people who bring introduction letters. And in any case the Prime Minister did not write and communicate with me—to cast Amitabh Bachchan in my picture.

After signing with us he also got a small significant role in Sunil Dutt's *Reshma Aur Shera* but it was I who introduced him to Hrishikesh Mukherji which led to his being cast in *Anand*. But that is neither here nor there since "Rishi-da" has his methods of selecting artistes. If I had not introduced Amitabh someone else would have done. I am glad for Amitabh's success for I know that he is a better actor than several matinee idols.

The point is that whether *Saat Hindustani* ran for ten weeks or ten days or ten matinee shows, Amitabh's performance in it was a thrilling one, winning for him the coveted and outstanding *special mention* in the national awards.

When he was married, Amitabh surprised me by coming personally to my house to invite me and when Jaya had their

first child, I reciprocated the feeling for her father by presenting her with first silver "Chhagal".

Our new heroine was Jalal Agha's sister, Shahnaz, who was the daughter of the veteran comedian Agha, who was introduced not by Jalal but by Virender (Tinu) Anand, who was my assistant till he migrated to Calcutta to assist Satyajit Ray. His interest in *Saat Hindustani* was not strictly professional but, as I came to know much later, was romantic. (Today, they have been married for years and are the proud parents of two daughters, called *Isha* and *Diksha*, and creative by-products of *Saat Hindustani*.)

Poona to Belgaum where we got down from the train. Now we had to go to Molem. This was in Goa. This was the old border town in Portuguese India. Here were Portuguese signs and symbols engraved all over the village. The villagers were very friendly. So was the Government of Goa which had allowed us the use of the two-room dak bungalow and also given us permission to shoot anywhere in the forest. Here we stayed for three weeks. We were a big group as the sound track people were also with us. We also had to arrange for their boarding and lodging. There were three rooms which were small and a big hall with wide verandah. One bedroom was assigned to Mr. and Mrs. Utpal Dutt, who also had to accommodate Shahnaz who prefers to be called by her pet name *Pushi!* Utpal Dutt, who also had been a Marxist and old revolutionary did not mind the arrangement.

His wife was a veteran of the People's Theatre stage. She volunteered to look after our cooking arrangements. One room we gave to the sound track unit, where they could take their cameras apart and then after cleaning them up, reassemble them. One little room we assigned to Madhu of Kerala and Ramchandra, the cameraman. They had to be segregated not because of their eminence or because of any contagious malady but because both of them snored.

The rest of us, including myself and all my assistants slept on the ground in the big hall. Each of them had their trunk or suitcase against the wall and their bedding spread alongside. There was only one exception, it was Amitabh Bachchan who had chosen to bring one large tin trunk which also con-

tained his bedding. Every night he would open the trunk, take out his bedding and spread it out. He would eat in the last shift because before eating he had to write two letters every day. One was to his mother or "Dad", (as he called him) and other presumably to his current girl-friend.

Everyone had his own mannerisms and idiosyncrasies. Utpal Dutt played chess with Jalal Agha, Anwar Ali and Amitabh, when he was free from his letter writing. I would sit down with my production manager to do accounts. The problem of rupees, annas, and pies was no less important than the foot-age we had canned. In my script I had two ladders—one for the expenses, the other for the edited foot-age shot. The ideal was that both the ladders should rise up equally fast, or better still, the ladders of expenses should lag behind the ladder of edited footage.

I always play such gimmicks with myself. I have a whole page divided into squares and each is numbered according to the number of scenes. As soon as the scene is completed it is filled in with a red-coloured pencil. One look at the diagram gave me the complete picture of how much work had been done and how much work remained to be done. To economize on time some of us shaved in the morning, others in the evening. Those who shaved in the morning, bathed in the evening, and those who shaved in the evening, bathed in the morning. Everyone who got ready had his meal in the first shift. As there were not enough chairs, the rest had to eat in the second shift. There was no distinction whether the last comer was Amitabh Bachchan or the driver of the sound truck. Unless we were shooting at night—and we were shooting for many nights for which we carried generators and artificial lights!

During the two months we were in Goa we moved to three different villages and then on to Panjim. From the second villages we hitchhiked, alongwith our equipment, on a freight train and got down at the next signal station to climb a mountain where we were to shoot some of the most amazing scenes of the picture. Everything had to be carried on our shoulders—whether it was a camera, or a bundle of lunch of packets. It was a tremendous waterfall but we had

to actually crawl along the racks—one foot slip could throw us in the gorge.

Here we photographed the Seven Indians tied to each other with a rope like mountaineers. Everyone was climbing with *everyone's help*. Amitabh Bachchan was last in the line. His boot slips on a loose rack which goes burling down the wet slope. Next to him was Anwar Ali, playing the fanatical Hindu, who gets a terrific jerk for the whole weight of Amitabh (playing a Muslim) was on him. But with super human courage, Anwar Ali held on to the rope, helped all the five tied to the same rope. While Amitabh was dangling in the air at the end of the rope it is shown that Sharma (Anwar Ali) takes out his knife. You feel, because of their earlier hostility, that he is going to cut his rope and send the tall Muslim (Amitabh) to his doom. But he doesn't. He fixes the knife in a crevice and uses it as a lever for his feet. The spray from the fall was so strong that we were drenched where we were standing with our cameras two hundred feet away. Sharma pulls inch by inch hauling up the Muslim dangling from the rope. At last a hand appears above the edge of the ledge and your heart was in your mouth. All six Indians were pulling at the rope so that their hands are bloodied but it is not the blood of an Indian killed in a riot. At last Anwar Ali (Amitabh) crawls up to the slippery ledge and two bloodied hands are extended to him. He too, extends his bloodied hands and the two men, enemies and friends, fall into each other's embrace. It was a moment of real excitement and joy. For the meaning of "one for all and all for one" was never more explicit. The whole unit of technicians, who normally take such emotions in their stride, spontaneously burst out clapping for the new meaning of the scene just pictured on the top of the mountain.

Coming down the slippery slope was even more dangerous. Everyone was drenched to the bones. They were all shivering. Someone said, "If only we could get some brandy!" *Someone*—I, of all people—had taken brandy with me just for such an emergency and when we reached the signal station it was poured down the throats—first to the shivering artistes and then of the drenched technicians.

We took the freight train and, going back and, warmed by the brandy, the whole unit burst out into song. The whole group was riding in four freight cars and so there were four songs:

1. *Saare Jahan se achcha Hindustan hamara.*
2. *Jana gana mana adhinayak jaya hay.*
3. *Dekhna hai zore kitna baazu-e-qaatil mein hai.*
4. The "Saar Hindustani" theme song.

We arrived back at the dak bungalow, changed into dry clothes and there was another surprise waiting at the dining table. Chicken for all, with hot *chapatis*, which I had already ordered. In all my hundreds of days of shooting films this was the greatest day.

And then it was the last day of our shooting in the villages of Fenda and Jalal said at breakfast that he would like to order chicken dinner for everybody as it was his birthday. I said to him, "Say no more, everything will be done." And it was in the evening when they returned. The hall was swept clean, the trunks and the suitcase had mysteriously disappeared, there were posters on the walls giving Jalal Agha greetings for a happy birthday. The place was supposed to be a combination of the Taj Mahal Hotel, the *Folios Bergere* of Paris and the Ritz of London. The birthday was caricatured in his birthday suit and nipple in his mouth!

That night there was singing—Bengali songs, *Bhatiali* folk songs of U.P., Laavni of Maharashtra and unprintable songs in all languages and dancing in all was mostly done by the birthday boy himself, Jalal Agha, one of the most popular of our unit or any unit. Amitabh sang his "*Jis ki Biwi lambi . . .*" a funny song lampooning all wives—tall, short, black and white. This was among the most memorable moments of our stay in Goa.

DRAMA IN THE DESERT

Towards the end of March 1974 my friend, Inder Raj Anand had a heart attack. He says that it was written in his *kundli* (horoscope) that at the age of forty-five he would fall like an oak tree by a disease caused by a blood clot in his veins. Three days after I got the news of my winning the President's gold medal, and three hours after he had taken the last shot of his first (and the last) directorial venture, Inder was stricken by a massive attack of thrombosis.

I remember the occasion very well because I was dining at the house of my friend D.R. Mankekar, then the resident editor of the *Indian Express*. Among the guests were several literary figures including the well-known novelist Manohar Malgonkar, a retired military officer, who had nothing military about him and looked what he was—an intellectual—who must have looked most awkward in his military uniform. Also present there was the doyen of Marathi litterateurs and the great humourist, the late Mr. P.K. Atre and the idea had just struck me that Atre, with his huge frame and big booming voice, would have looked the part of a colonel much better than Manohar Malgonkar.

Atre was the first to win the President's gold medal for his Marathi picture *Samchi Aai* based on a story by the late Sane Guruji, the great Marathi writer. I saw the picture only recently on television and it certainly deserved the award for its very human quality and artistic simplicity. I was trying to persuade Atre, who had also once been my neighbour when I was living in Shivaji Park, to lend me his medal for a day so that I could get it photographed and enlarged for the artistic painting of a hoarding and six-sheet poster.

Atre was narrating to me how he had almost decided to sell gold medal because at that time there was no cash

award to go with it, not even a return airfare from Bombay to Delhi. So he misunderstood my request and thought I wanted to borrow the medal to put it round my neck and get myself photographed. "Take my tip," he said, "and wear the medal on a black *sherwani* and then get yourself photographed. The black background sets off the gold of the medal beautifully." I had no such intention but before I could say so, the telephone bell rang. I don't know why I stopped in my conversation, for the telephone call might have been for anyone and presumably it was for the host. Was it a premonition?

Mankekar answered the call and then he looked at me, "It's for you," he said.

I had an inexplicable sense of anxiety. There was no "hello" from the other side.

"Bachchoo Bhai," said the voice of Sham Bahen (Mrs. Inder Raj Anand), "Inder has had a heart attack. Please come at once."

I was not very far from their flatlet on Warden Road. Explaining my situation to Mankekar I took a taxi. I was there in a few minutes. The doctor had already arrived, similarly called by the neighbour's telephone. He was examining Inder. They had no bed in the flat and in any case Inder preferred to sleep on a mattress on the floor. Their children were away to school in Ajmer. I knew very little about heart attacks at that time. So I waited for the doctor to finish the examination. When he came out he said to me frankly, "I suppose you know what cardiac thrombosis is?" I nodded my head, only partly hearing what the doctor said,

"If you can get an oxygen cylinder from somewhere he will feel easier to breathe. . . . We shall remove him to the hospital in the morning. . . ."

I started out in search of the oxygen cylinder and was shocked to find how difficult it was to get this life-saving device. I went to every hospital and nursing home within a radius of about four miles. I went to all the chemist shops in the area up to Fort and each one referred me to someone else. At last at about 12 p.m. I found it in a third floor room

in a narrow and odorous lane which was cluttered up with all kinds of junk but it had a gas cylinder as well. I and Inder's driver took it home. After we applied the tube to his nostrils he felt a little relieved. Merciful Sham Bahen has a flair for nursing. I suppose she must have acquired it while nursing her father who died of cancer. But she was not a hysterical weeping type.

Next morning we took Inder to the Breach Candy Hospital which was one of the best nursing homes in Bombay. Here Inder passed through a series of crises. One day the doctor asked me to remain near the telephone somewhere near. But Inder was a giant of a man and pulled through. His will-power was tremendous.

One day I brought Dr. Baliga to see Inder. He hesitated because Inder was another physician's patient. But I said it would be a friendly visit. Dr. Baliga had himself had a heart attack a year ago, and joked about it to Inder. "Soon it will be rampant like flu and just as easy to cure. Hope to see you, Inder, after I return from Vienna." Alas, he had a sudden heart attack and died in Vienna. That was the last occasion I saw him.

There was one other man who helped Inder to survive. He was Kahil Gibran, the Lebanese mystic and humanist whose *Prophet* translated into more than thirty languages after his death, has become the gospel of this material age.

All the time that he was conscious, Inder was obsessed with idea of going to Lebanon where Kahil was born and then to New York and Boston where he died. He had read almost everything that Gibran wrote and, unknown to his doctors, he got me to provide him some more books of Gibran. He was a voracious reader, and is still a voracious reader, despite the cataract in his eyes. In the course of time he had a whole library hidden under his mattress. Two subjects possessed him—Kahil Gibran and the heart attack. As he slowly recovered he became an authority on both.

In six weeks he was allowed to take a train to Madras to write some film scripts or the other. In six months he was in Delhi to persuade the Finance Ministry to give him foreign exchange for his research on Kahil Gibran. I always believed

in starting from the top and so I telephoned the late Mr. T.T.K. and he said, "Bring along your friend."

T.T. Krishnamachari was well aware of the importance of Kahil Gibran or any project to film his life. He knew it would require some foreign exchange to go to Beirut or New York to complete the research. He needed no persuasion and agreed to sanction the required exchange. Then the talk turned to other matters like the government's economic policies, of which Inder is a knowledgeable and rigid critic. I also let the Finance Minister have it, regardless of the fact that I had gone to seek a favour.

"What are you planning and doing to assure the people two meals a day?" I asked.

"Nothing, for argument's sake. But you are worried about meals when there are places where village women have to trudge every alternate day thirteen to fourteen miles to fetch a pot of water because the well in their own villages have gone dry. I have just returned from such a place."

"Where is it?" I asked aghast.

"On the Indo-Pak border in Rajasthan. Have you ever been there?"

"I haven't". I replied, "But certainly I would like to".

It seemed the Finance Minister had gone there to see the situation with regard to border roads and had come back concerned with the water situation in that region.

The idea occurred to me, "I must tell this to Panditji". But alas, he was no more. So I sought an interview with Prime Minister Shastri and straightaway put it to him, "Sir, do you know there are places in this country where women have to go thirteen to fourteen miles to bring a pot of water on their heads?"

He smiled sadly and said, "It seems that T.T.K. has been talking to you. Yes, it is true. There are such places. But do you know what we are doing about it?"

"I suppose, you are making a scheme of digging some tube wells."

"No, no". The little man said, "We are doing something bigger and greater. We are building the greatest and the biggest canal, greater than the Fargana Canal in the USSR,

to bring the water from the Punjab and take it hundreds of miles into the Rajasthan desert. Don't you think this is a theme worthy of your talent?" He pointed out the course of the Rajasthan Canal on the map of India hanging behind him.

"Sir, do you mean a film?"

"Yes", he said, "Why don't you make a film about this great human drama?"

So now, after several years, this would be the theme of my film. It was a subject after my own heart. Before I surveyed the place, however, I wrote a tentative synopsis and named it: *Do Boond Pani*.

But this synopsis needed local colour and numerous details of village life in Rajasthan. I had to go to Jaipur and may be also Jaisalmer. The difficulty was I didn't know anyone in Jaipur. When I mentioned this difficulty to my friend Uma Vasudev, the writer, she said, "Of course you know the Hoojas. At least they know you very well. Years ago they were both in the BBC, London." In the meantime Mr. Hooja had become secretary to the Government of Rajasthan. Then she added, "Also if you want to know about the Rajasthan desert, come and meet my father for years ago he was an engineer who made a survey of the Rajasthan desert and wrote a massive report about it."

Mr. Vasudev turned out to be a most amiable and hospitable old man. He was most interested about my project and told me a legend that he had mentioned even in his report. And that provided me with the emotional base of my story.

Years ago there were a husband and wife who were walking in the waterless desert. They had only a few drops of water in their *chhagal*. Each wanted the other to drink those precious drops of water and they died saying to each other, *Tu pi, tu pi*. This legend was carved on two stone pillars which were buried somewhere in the desert.

I was so excited by this legend that I could not sleep the whole night. I kept on thinking how best to integrate the "*Tu pi, tu pi*" legend in my screenplay.

From Delhi to Jaipur was nearly an hour's hop by Indian Airlines. That very evening I was talking to the Hoojas at their bungalow where Mrs. Usharani Hooja's sculptures were

cluttering up the place. I asked the lady if she had any objection to being the art adviser of *Do Boond Pani*. "What will I have to do?" she asked. I told her the "*Tu pi, tu pi*" legend which simply fascinated her. Then I came to the point. "You have to design and execute this legendary pillar which has been lost in the desert."

"What makes you think there was one pillar? For all I know there might have been two. Anyway, where do you want them fixed?" she asked.

"Anywhere in the desert", I said, "I want them to be portable. They will be our landmark to indicate the village where the hero and heroine live and love each other. They will also be the last thing the caravan of migrants leave from on their camels. There I will take them and install them on the bank of the canal to show that the canal has at last reached the waterless village."

She agreed to the proposal and there and then sketched the two pillars—one with the profile of a man and the other with the profile of a woman.

Through Mr. Hooja we met the government officials. The Chief Minister was my old Aligarh junior, the late Mr. Barkatullah Khan, and he promised us all kinds of facilities including permission to shoot anywhere.

We went to the bazar and bought the colourful clothes and silver jewellery which is typical of Rajasthan villagers. When I learnt from a local poet that a sword is the proud possession of every Rajasthani I also bought an old sword in a red velvet coloured scabbard. I still don't know if it was illegal to carry that sword about. But after the commercial failure of the picture it is still balanced on a bookshelf which I can see as I write these lines—to prove that the pen is mightier than the sword.

From Jaipur I and my associate director Athar Siraj went to a taxi and arrived in the fantastic city of Jaisalmer, which Satyajit Ray has so well exploited in his film *Goop Gayen Baga Bayen*. The desert had already begun at Jodhpur and the road and railway track were often cut off by sand drifts. In the ocean of sand, Jaisalmer was an oasis sitting on top of a hill. On the way we had seen the dry soil

experimental farm and wondered how dry farming would transform the desert.

We stayed in the dak bungalow through the courtesy of Mr. Hooja who had given us a letter of introduction. We learnt of another film unit, the fabulous Sunil Dutt who was filming his *Reshma Aur Shera*, a Romeo and Juliet type of love story, in which we were interested because our old cameraman Ramchandra was photographing it. We took a jeep and reached their camp which was in a village not far from the Pakistan border. We reached there at night and had to wait an hour for the unit to return from location. We started back after meeting our old friends at about 10 p.m. And as we were warned we lost our way in the scrub and the sand. On an elevation our jeep stopped dead. We could hear the Pakistani border guards talking, presumably about us.

After that we thought that silence was golden and discretion was the better part of valour. We had evidently twisted far from our road, which was of course no road at all, but a track in the desert. We had obviously drifted westward to be within audible distance of the Pakistan border. It was a dangerous situation so we decided that before sunrise we should push the jeep down the scrub covered slope. We pushed and heaved silently lest the noise gave the location away. It was just in time for soon it was dawn and with our binoculars we could now see the serpentine track about a mile away. We had not drifted far from it and evidently had been going around it. At last, we brought the jeep to a place where it could not be seen or heard by the Pakistani guards. It was a narrow escape and despite the desert cold, we were perspiring from the effort of pushing the jeep. When the jeep started, we raced along to the Jaisalmer dak bungalow and it was broad daylight by the time we reached there.

We saw a remarkable sight which we had not noticed before. There were bulldozers, earth-movers and gigantic draglines, American equipment worth billions of rupees which had been standing so long that they had sunk deep into the sand and seemed to be permanently installed there. When

we enquired about it, we learned that this was the earth-moving machinery which had been bought and brought to make the border roads so that the tanks and other military vehicles could pass over it. Technically, it belonged to the Border Roads Organization. But the same machinery could be used for digging the Rajasthan Canal. Why was it? Why was it resting and rusting in the Jaisalmer dak bungalow? That we could not find out.

I and Athar returned to Bombay satisfied that our location hunting had been fruitful.

We began shooting in Bombay at R.K. Studios where we had prepared a fantastic set representing the interior of the hut, with other huts in the background. For this hut, we needed a typical door which we would take to Jaisalmer and there instal it in a similar round hut to match the continuity of the indoors and outdoors. With great difficulty we scoured the shops that deal in building material, whenever any house is dismantled. At last, we found the door which we wanted. It was carved in the Rajasthani style and it fitted the entrance of our hut. It was sufficiently peculiar so that when carted to the desert in Rajasthan it would seem to be the same hut, the interior of which we were now going to shoot. On a particular day, we started shooting the marriage song which the sister of Ganga Singh (Jalal Agha) and her "sahelis", in typical Rajasthani costume, bought by us in Jaipur and Jaisalmer, sing to welcome their revered sister-in-law. But before the scene was finished, I had to contend with the star system which ordained that the poorest heroine could look like a beauty queen. We had provided a beautiful dress and jewelry to make Simi look like a Rajasthani bride. She is a very good artiste, remembered her dialogue, and even enacted them according to the Rajasthani dialect, for which we had hired a coach. But when it came to "make-up", she would not listen to the make-up man and arrived looking like a Rajasthani princess who had never carried a pot of water on her head nor trekked miles across the burning sand. She has Rajasthani features of the patrician kind and she argued that she looked every inch a Rajasthani. I found it impossible to convince her that the make-up of a working woman of Rajas-

than had to be different. Anyhow, she agreed to make certain amendments to her snow-white complexion and reduced the quantity of mascara on her eyes, so we took the shots. We had hired a camel to sit in the foreground to give authentic local colour. But this beast's gruntings spoilt quite a lot of soundtrack.

Madhu Chhanda, a newcomer, was a marvel as a spoilt child of the family and it was difficult to believe that she was a Bengali and not born and bred in Rajasthan. Within the hut, we completed all scenes in Bombay, including a love scene between the newly married couple, which people felt was daring enough for what they call the "puritan name of K.A. Abbas." Still no one was prepared to buy the picture because of Jalal Agha's short structure. We had to borrow money from a Rajasthani businessman who was interested in making his daughter into a heroine. I politely and diplomatically got his daughter admission in the Film Institute and borrowed one and quarter lakh rupees at a fixed interest of twenty-five thousand rupees. With this money in my pocket, one fine day we boarded the train which would eventually take us to Jaisalmer. As we were travelling third class and had to make preliminary arrangements for her stay, we persuaded Simi to come by the next day's train.

We had hired a couple of rooms in the dak bungalow and an old style house for the whole units, where we had to follow the camp-like routine of *Saat Hindustani*. Quite a few actors were tricked by my question: "Are you going to stay with me, or are you going to stay with Simi, Jalal Agha and Ramchandra, the cameraman?"

Naturally, they thought that the producer-director would have a fancy place for himself and so they landed in our old house, sleeping on the floor. It has been my maxim that the producer-director must stay with the lowliest of the low technicians and not with the star or the so-called stars. When we went to receive Madam Simi, she got down from the first class compartment of the train all muffled up in a silk gauze draped around her face. "Oh my God!" she exclaimed, "I never knew that a train journey could be so dusty." I said, "Don't worry, there is plenty more sand where we are going to shoot". "I don't suppose", she said, "there is pot: ble

water anywhere available, so I have brought bottles of Bisleri and Coca Cola with me in my ice box.

We left Simi to rest that day and took some shots of Madhu Chhanda wandering alone in the desert in search of water. But we were actually searching for a village which would not be too far away. By evening time, we had found the village. It was three miles away from the road and only jeeps could go across the trackless road. We had arrangements made to shoot there and hired a camel driver to bring two "*pakhals*" of water for ten rupees a day. Where he brought the water from was his business and I never dwelt deep into it. As a precaution against contaminated water, I had every member of the unit inoculated against cholera and typhoid. So we were prepared to try any water potable or unpotable.

Every morning the caravan would start off at about 7 a.m. and return by night-fall. For the stars we had hired a taxi which would not go further than from where the jeep tracks started. I rode besides the driver, who was an amiable Rajasthani, in the generator truck. The generator was locally hired and was quite cheap. One of the first scenes we shot was the arrival of "*baraat*." We had about twenty camels and on one of them, Ganga Singh (Jalal Agha) was riding with his bride. Simi was so scared that she would not consent to ride the camel. So we had to use a "duplicate" (Tanya, the daughter of my associate director, Athar Siraj). But next day, when a gallant young officer of the Border Security Force offered her his camel, lo and behold, Madam Simi was riding into the village on his camel, with a well padded saddle.

The monument which had been prepared under the supervision of Mrs. Hooja in Jaipur arrived by railway parcel and was duly installed on a sand dune. Next day, however, when we needed them for a scene, we found that in the overnight sand storm they had both fallen down and was broken. We had to send for cement and a mason from Jaisalmer to do the repairs. Actually, the repaired monument looked appropriately aged and we had to also disfigure the other one to show that it was cracked. After that, we would

let them lie flat and bury them in the sand before "pack up." Artistically, of course, they were so good that I have not been able to sufficiently thank the lady sculptor. Besides the faces of the man and the woman the whole legend of their love was engraved on them.

The most spectacular shot that we took and about which we were most nervous was the evacuation of the village. When we talked to the villagers, they understood for they had to evacuate for lack of water every two or three years. The great procession of camels driven by people carrying their entire household was shot with two cameras and in the end only Ganga Singh's family was left standing in the deserted village and, by luck, a wind developed and sand was flying too, as if trailing the caravan.

One phase of our shooting was over, the next phase was at the canal site which was at Suratgarh near Bikaner. Up to here, the canal had only progressed forty miles across Haryana due to the lethargy of the engineers and workers. No one was allowed to take water out of the canal. But still it was impressive and photogenic, the long line of camel carts, the line of donkeys carrying loads of sand from the canal bed to the embankment. There were also occasional tractors, bulldozers and draglines. One of the biggest draglines was sunk deep into the sand and had become useless. Still it could be used for demonstration purposes. That is how we used it. But now a new difficulty arose. The canal was built almost parallel to the border, possibly to serve as a tank trap. Whatever reason it was, the government condition laid down was that we were not to shoot within five miles of the border. It literally meant we were not to shoot at the canal. The engineers were helpless, they were not the final authority. The authority to give us permission rested with the Chief Minister.

One night I and Pinchoo Kapoor got into a car and thanks to the remarkable driving prowess of our driver, we were in Jaipur by morning. Without breakfast we went to see the Chief Minister. He was most cordial and when he knew of our difficulties he ordered the permit to be amended and that

we should be given all help for our shooting. It took us a few hours to meet the proper officials who would give us the necessary permission on paper.

Armed with this document, which was like a *carte blanche*, we raced back to Suratgarh, singing all the way to keep the driver and ourselves awake. The unit was waking up when we returned. There was great jubilation when the unit members heard that we had secured the permission. The first thing we did was to take it to the chief engineer who said that now we could go ahead. We were staying in the club house of the project site with proper beds which were, however, full of bugs in the stringed cots. Water was strictly rationed, but it was available because it could be had from the canal site. The residential colony of engineers where we were staying was like an island in the sea of sand and we were allowed to shoot anywhere we like. But the canal itself had in many years made little progress. The engineer's office and his bungalow were real.

This role was actually written for Amitabh Bachchan who I expected would play it since I thought that it was tailor-made for him. However, the star system came in our way again. Having given the cyclostyled script to Amitabh, I say "No" that meant he was willing. I ordered his engineer's clothes to be ready. Three days before we were to leave for the location, Amitabh came to see me along with his secretary. I sensed the purpose of his visit. I had handed over the cheque for the balance of his payment for *Saat Hindustani*. Amitabh said that was not necessary. I replied that it may not be necessary for him, but it was very necessary for my self-respect.

Ultimately he blurted out, "Mamoojan", as he affectionately continues to call me, "This role doesn't suit me. So I hope to be excused this time." I said that was all right, but if he had informed us earlier it would have been better.

After that, there was a telephone call from Dr. Bachchan, who was staying at Sun-e-Sand Hotel. Both he and Mrs. Bachchan very kindly offered to intercede and force Amitabh to accept the role if his non-playing was going to adversely affect our business. I politely told them that was not needed.

Coming out of their room, I told my boys that from heaven or hell, you have to produce a boy who is six feet two inches tall and thus the way was cleared for Kiran Kumar to step in the shoes of Amitabh Bachchan. The clothes fitted him but Amitabh was Amitabh and Kiran Kumar was Kiran Kumar. As a result of his playing the "Lambu Engineer" in *Do Boond Pani* he got a number of roles but he couldn't become another Amitabh Bachchan! But he drove his jeep like a demon and I took full advantage of it as he goes about after hearing some home truths from Jalal Agha, under the influence of liquor, about the position of the haves and the have-nots. Towards the end of the climax there was a scene between the "Lambu Engineer," Kiran Kumar and Ganga Singh, the donkey driver turned tractor driver, Jalal Agha, when Jalal asked what was the reason for the slow progress of the canal water. The engineer replies that there will have to be an explosion not only to blast the rocks but to shock the lazy minds of the bureaucrats into activity.

Ganga Singh is killed trying to dynamite the rocks which are impending the progress of the canal and his wife (Simi) and his four year old son, born under stormy conditions while his mother lies alone in the village, are invited to the opening ceremony of the canal without telling the wife that her husband is dead. The poor woman puts her bridal dress to meet her Ganga and they drive back in the jeep. Ganga Singh's son presses the button, the canal gates are opened and the first water that comes out is red symbolizing the blood of Ganga Singh which had been spilt for it.

We had thousands of people lining the bank carrying flags, clusters of balloons were let loose as well as flocks of pigeons to dramatize the occasion. At last Gauri (Simi) sees the vision of her husband coming out of water with his arms extended towards her and the dacoit Mangal Singh, who had dishonoured himself by raping the sister of Ganga Singh (Madhu Chhanda), throws his rifle into the swirling water. A man, peasant, a citizen of Rajasthan, had been reclaimed.

This was the last episode that we filmed and it was a "tour de force" for us to film it in a single day, crowds and all, had to use a loudspeaker all along and still my voice was

hoarse from shouting my instructions. Tired as we were, we all still had the feeling that we had helped to achieve something worthwhile.

The picture was commercially a flop though many fine words were spoken about it.

We had a gala premiere. But my feeling after hearing the comments of the lumpen proletariat was that the picture would not be successful. Some people were congratulating me, praising the picture there was a strange emptiness within me which was not wholly assuaged when we learnt that the picture had won the national award for the best picture on national integration.

BRUSHES WITH DEATH

My first brush with death was in 1929 in the United States of America while driving back from Boston to Poughkeepsie. We were a party of five—Yusuf Meharally the leader of our delegation, Renuka Roy (later to be an MP from Bengal), S.K. Bose who was to become a journalist, myself and the driver.

We had left early in the morning for the four hundred miles round trip and were now driving back. It was past midnight and everyone was feeling sleepy including the driver—a very capable one, indeed. But I was sitting next to him and could not help noticing the sleepy-eyed man at the wheel. To keep him awake I started singing some Haryana folk song which I happened to remember.

“That’s good idea, Sir,” said the driver, “Your caterwauling will keep me awake.”

Stung to the quick, I abruptly stopped caterwauling, and after sometime of silence, to my horror, saw the car (a brand new Chevrolet going straight towards the stone pillars of the roadside. And the driver (that superman) was fast asleep. I gave a shout, and acting on an healthy impulse, the driver’s feet jammed on the brakes. There was a squelching of tyres but by that time the white stone pillar had gone clean into the bonnet of the car like a chæese-knife cleaving it into two. When we came out I noticed that the stone post, cleaving the bonnet, was only inches away from my face. Instinctively my hand felt the arm of my shirt inside my coat. It was there on my arm. Then I was not quite such a non-believer as I came to be later.

The aftermath of the near-fatal accident was an anticlimax. The driver led us to an all-night dinner which was not more than half a mile from there, from there he made two phone calls, first to his garage which promised to send a replace-

is a driver with nerves of steel. He stuck to the driving wheel like a leech and landed fifteen feet away from the ramp.

He landed with a thud and we all ran up to him. The guy was laughing, "Did I give you a fright, *Mamoojan*?"

"You sure did, you son of Aghajan—I can't call you son of anything else."

On inspection it was found that all the tyres had burst and there was internal concussion of the machinery which meant very heavy (and very secret) repairs since we had not bargained for such risky shots.

Now I remembered why I had prayed to God or Life Force or Karl Marx. I had said "Let Jalal Agha come out safely today. I will cheerfully face the danger on another day."

I did not know that God or Life Force had such a sharp memory. I thought they would have forgotten the words uttered by a director in panic.

But I had to pay my debt sooner than I expected. Two cameras had failed to register anything of the car—it had gone too fast for them. The Bell and Howell camera (which we had buried in the ground) as a joke had just sixteen frames (less than one and a half foot) of a streak (of what seemed to be lightning). The picture was being edited, in the Famous Cine Laboratory, Tardeo. It was a journey of about fifteen miles—taxi fares being exorbitant even then (in 1967) I went daily by bus, changing buses twice.

The stars let me down rather badly. Peter Vidal, one of the Sunday seers, had informed me "Your relations would have to be entertained, humoured and helped. Their interests are going to take up a lot of your time and attention the next three weeks. Holiday plans will come up for discussion—especially so if you are planning to go for a trip."

I remember it rather well for it was on a Sunday afternoon that it happened. The other Sunday paper predicted this for those born under the sign of Gemini, i.e., me. "Changes where you work or in your daily routine prove perplexing at first. Once the week is half over you will adjust yourself and look at this matter in a more optimistic light. If you are still single, or thinking of reorganizing your personal affairs, then

ment within an hour. Then he phoned his home and said that he had an accident and was safe.

"What about the passengers?" the wife presumably asked him.

"Everyone is O.K. except the one who was sitting by my side as the stone pillar, cutting through the body of the car, miraculously came up to six inches from his nose. It was he whose shouts awakened and saved me."

Years later, about twenty years later, when I was in India, producing *Bambai Raat Ki Bahon mein* starring Jalal Agha and others, there was a car chase scene in it which I wanted to make the most excitingly realistic car chase scene ever filmed. I hired an imported "Fiat" in which Jalal Agha was fleeing, chased by a police jeep (converted and painted over) and a Riley sports car in which Vimal Ahooja and Surekha were pursuing him along with the jeep.

At one point I wanted to show that the road was under repair, and Jalal, nevertheless, clashed through the barrier. As a follow up shot I wanted to show Jalal Agha's car flying through the air. Persis Khambata was "duplicated" for this shot but Jalal would not accept a duplicate and he told me, "Mamoojan, don't you worry—we'll come out with flying colours. It will be the shot of the century". I placed three cameras at three different angles to cover the flight of the car over the ramp—Jalal secretly arranged to tilt the ramp to about a foot from the six inches that I had allowed. He took a longer start, too.

I buried an old Bell and Howell camera below the surface of the road so that it could get a worm's eye view.

"God be with you," I said to Jalal. And he showed me a gold medallion with *Allah* engraved on it hanging from his neck. "So long as it is with me, nothing will happen."

I prayed to *Allah Bhagwan*, Life Force, Karl Marx and the guru of my friend Inder Raj Anand, for the life of a valuable human being—Jalal Agha—depended on it.

"Go," I said.

And Jalal went roaring over that ramp, high up in the air, where he seemed to be suspended. Would the car survive the shock? Would it land on the ground straight? But Jalal

is a driver with nerves of steel. He stuck to the driving wheel like a leech and landed fifteen feet away from the ramp.

He landed with a thud and we all ran up to him. The guy was laughing, "Did I give you a fright, *Mamoojan*?"

"You sure did, you son of Aghajan—I can't call you son of anything else."

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Now I remembered why I had prayed to God or Life Force or Karl Marx. I had said "Let Jalal Agha come out safely today. I will cheerfully face the danger on another day."

I did not know that God or Life Force had such a sharp memory. I thought they would have forgotten the words uttered by a director in panic.

But I had to pay my debt sooner than I expected. Two cameras had failed to register anything of the car—it had gone too fast for them. The Bell and Howell camera (which we had buried in the ground) as a joke had just sixteen frames (less than one and a half foot) of a streak (of what seemed to be lightning). The picture was being edited, in the Famous Cine Laboratory, Tardeo. It was a journey of about fifteen miles—taxi fares being exorbitant even then (in 1967) I went daily by bus, changing buses twice.

The stars let me down rather badly. Peter Vidal, one of the Sunday seers, had informed me "Your relations would have to be entertained, humoured and helped. Their interests are going to take up a lot of your time and attention the next three weeks. Holiday plans will come up for discussion—especially so if you are planning to go for a trip."

I remember it rather well for it was on a Sunday afternoon that it happened. The other Sunday paper predicted this for those born under the sign of Gemini, i.e., me. "Changes where you work or in your daily routine prove perplexing at first. Once the week is half over you will adjust yourself and look at this matter in a more optimistic light. If you are still single, or thinking of reorganizing your personal affairs, then

you will discover a change of heart in someone you admire."

Only that particular Sunday I did not have time to forget it for before the afternoon was over, I was involved in the nastiest taxi accident—which almost cost me my life—and the stars had not warned me about it in advance!

This was how it happened, and I set it down to set the record straight, for in the newspapers all sorts of things had appeared, all the way ranging from "small bruises" to my being "thrown out" and "rendered unconscious" and "having been identified" and "delivered to my destination."

The first thing to be set straight is that I did not take the taxi from my Juhu residence. I never intended to take a taxi. I took a bus to Ghodbunder Road, where I changed to a D bus, I got on the upper Deck and was engrossed in *Time* magazine's article on China. Half an hour later I looked out and found myself only at Mahim. The bus was a "lame duck" and was cruising at a speed of not more than four miles per hour. Any moment it might be declared unfit for further transportation, and I had an appointment with my film editor in the laboratory. I got down and took the only cab at the rank.

Now, by long-standing habit, the first thing I said to the driver was to drive slow—I said I was not in a hurry, though as a matter of fact I was. The next moment I was engrossed in the doings of Mao and Chou.

Near the Worli corner I felt the taxi driver was going too fast. I looked up from the paper long enough to notice the speed—it was about forty-five miles—and to instruct the driver to go slow. Then I resumed my reading of the article on China.

The next thing—or the next things—I saw was a quick series of flashes. The taxi speeding at a peculiar angle. The stones of the traffic island looming large and ominous. Then a lamppost came crazily in view and barred the way. There was a shattering of glass and of metal. The taxi jumped several feet and then landed with a thud. Then there was silence. It all happened in a fraction of a second—no time to react. I only knew I must get out. So since the door next to me was jammed, I stepped through the front door which was

ajar.

This must be death. I felt no pain. I saw the unconscious body of the driver lying sprawled half in and half out of the taxi. I had no difficulty in walking though the right foot felt funny.

"Are you all right, uncle?" I heard a teenaged angel.

"Yes, I guess I am," I replied and wondered why she insisted on escorting me to the other side of the other road.

I walked, rather I floated in spite of the funny feeling in my right foot. To all intents and purposes I was unseen by the crowd that was gathering round the accident site.

The angel led me to her car and I got in without a word. I was surrounded on all sides by teenaged angels. Before starting the car, the angel who was driving asked me, "Did you have something in the taxi?"

I vaguely remembered the *Time* magazine, but it was not worth an angel's trouble. Then I remembered my camel hair coat that lay by my side. "Yes, my coat", I replied and the words sounded funny, too. They seemed to have come out of another pair lips. One of the angels got out and presently came back with the coat. I possessively clutched at it. It won't do to appear before God wearing a mustard coloured tie but coatless. Then the car moved, still unseen by the crowd that seemed to be quite irrelevantly clustered round the taxi. I had nothing to do with it.

One of the angels said, "Where shall we drive you, Sir— what's your address?"

Try as I might, I could not remember my address.

Then the angel asked me, "What's your name?"

I whispered, "I don't know." In death all are anonymous. I was not even surprised by the fact of not knowing my name. It seemed natural.

But the angels were perturbed. One of them asked, "Do you want a glass of water?" It was too much effort to say no, so I nodded my head.

They stopped the car near an Irani restaurant and called a *baharwala*. He rattled off a long list of "murgi-chop-mutton-chop-masala-fry—Coca-cola-Mangola—" but the angels only asked for a glass of water. Do they have Irani restaurants

and *baharwalas* in the other world, too? I was pondering over this question when the glass of water was brought. Curiously enough, there was no strength in my hands, and I let an angel hold the glass to my parched lips.

As I drained that glass of water, it happened. I came back to life. I looked at my watch. It was ticking. The time was one minute to four. The angels were only kind-hearted teenaged girls, one of whom was driving. My identity was restored—I told them my name. And there was a terrible pain in my ribs. "I think I have broken my ribs," I said.

The teenaged girls (God Bless them) dropped me at Inder's place on Warden Road. They offered to escort me to the flat but I said I was OK. So, clutching my coat with one hand, holding the broken ribs with the other, I bravely climbed the stairs to the lift—to find it out of order. I looked down. The teenaged angels in the car were gone. So I began limping up—floor by floor. My right foot was sprained and seemed to be loaded with lead. Second floor. My left shin was bleeding. Third floor. My left ribs were paining. Fourth floor. My right arm was bleeding. At last I rang the bell.

"There was an accident," I declared rather sheepishly.

"Where?" My friend asked.

"Not where but to whom? To me." And I lay down on the *divan* but (anticlimax) I did not pass out. . . .

A week had passed. The X-rays showed four fractures. The doctors said I was doing fine. I could not but agree. I was "strapped" (sounds too much like put in a strait jacket) on the chest. The ribs had to be given time to repair themselves. The tail-bone had a bruise which hurt, because man no longer swung by his tail. Any change of position was painful. Sitting was worse than lying, and lying was worse than sitting. Sleep was possible only with the help of sleeping pills. They were giving tablets and capsules to deaden the pain, and the feeling I got reminded me of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who asked me once during his illness, "Have you taken antibiotics?" When I said yes, he added, "Don't you think the drugs are worse than the disease?"

There was some sort of moral to it all—life triumphs over

pain, or pain triumphs over life, or humanity above all, or antibiotics *zindabad*—but I was too drugged and dizzy to sort it out.

The plaster bandages were taken off (after excruciating torture) after six weeks.

The driver died—poor fellow. The issue of *Time* with the portrait of Mao and the dragon could not be held responsible for the poor driver's death for he was a simple-minded young man. I alone was responsible for risking Jalal Agha's life for a silly shot of only sixteen frames of a streak of lightning. So don't read any mystical message into this episode which is written here for episode's sake.

YOGA INC. AND YOGA

Thirty-nine years ago, I arrived in America from the East and saw Los Angeles before New York. I had heard much about the Swamis of Hollywood and was curious to see their "temples".

Actually, from outside it looked like a mosque. Imitation Taj Mahal architecture. The arched doorways and windows were Saracenic, the latticed work was plagiarized from the Taj Mahal. A big Chinese chandelier threw the entrance hall into dramatic light and shade, a precursor of the latter-day psychydylic light. On the walls were portraits of the holy men of the Himalayas. A truly-Oriental atmosphere, if hopelessly mixed.

What does it matter if the setting is a little incongruous for those who don't know the difference between one part of Orient from another, but what difference it made to the Hollywood tycoons who introduced their hero in a motion picture called *Son of India*, as "Abdul Karim, the son of a High caste Hindu?"

About a hundred people were present when the proceedings began, but more cars were arriving, bringing in members, mostly women. Most of the people belonged to the affluent class but there was a man in blue over-alls sitting next to me. I told myself there must be a true seeker of spiritual guidance.

"What brings you here, my friend?" I asked him as gently as possible.

"The Swami guy sure can speak nicely. Then there is the music and the movies. A chance to go to Heaven. And it's all free. Where in America can I get free entertainment?"

The proceedings began with appearance of the Swami himself. If I was expecting him to be a bearded ascetic in a

loin cloth, I was mistaken. In his flowing silken robes he was more like Ramon Navarro in *Son of India* or a glib-tongued Gogia Pasha. After a harp recital, the lady appeared on the stage to recount her experiences of India, "that glorious land of mysticism and romance!"

The proceedings that evening came to a close with prayers and circulation of the basket "for collections" and I did not blame my over-alled friend for *leaving* the hall just in time to miss these two items of the programme. The business of the day over, the Swami now clad in a gleaming white suit obviously made by some Fifth Avenue tailor, walked away with his American wife!

Next time I was in the United States, was in 1966 at the Santa Barbara Film Festival. I got down from my plane at Los Angeles and was met by the wife of the Director of the Festival who drove me to Santa Barbara and kept on talking about India and "the great lady." (Is she really the wife of Mr. Gandy?) Simultaneously she was manipulating the car through thick homegoing traffic to the L.A. suburbs. I was scared a couple of times but I was going to risk my life but would not show that an Indian is scared of fast driving cars.

The good lady was very curious about India, about the Swamis and the Gurus. Could I recommend her the real Guru in Los Angeles? She was spending thousands of dollars going to psychiatrists and they were not giving her the peace that she craved. "It's spoiling my work. Unless I get a good Gure, I will be ruined."

"What work do you do?"

"Oh, I thought you guessed it by now. I am a Hollywood actress." When she told me her screen name I hazily remembered a lesser known actress in one of these roles that called for a good figure (which she possessed) rather than any dramatic talent.

She got me to Santa Barbara in time for me to be installed in my suite (along with Government of India's PRO S.K. Dhar).

When I met the Director of the Festival, I thanked him for the fast pace at which his wife had brought me but he was

not very enthusiastic. He tapped his forehead and said, "She won't be my wife, I think by the time the Festival ends, we may be separated."

I said I only wanted to warn him against her dangerous driving. He just shrugged his shoulders.

My film *Hamara Ghar* (which I had taken with me) well-appreciated by an audience of American children. There were two juries—one composed of children only. A certain Federal Social Worker who, since the Watts riots, was working in Watts, for several months, asked for my permission to take the picture to Watts to show to a mixed gathering. The picture was shown to an audience of Black and White children and then they were involved in a similar picture made there. The show, I understood, was grand success. It was much more than Second Prize that the picture received in the Festival.

In Santa Barbara, I attended many Indianophiles who insisted on my coming to their houses for dinner or lunch. In one of these get-togethers I met the inevitable Yoga enthusiast.

At least one man I met seemed to think that Yoga, Inc. could be made into as great a business proposition as Ford's automobiles or Rockefeller's oil. He is a hotel-owner-cum-physical-cum-culturist-cum-student of Yoga, who lives on an estate in the suburbs of Los Angeles. A pseudo-Oriental atmosphere pervades his hotel. Statues of Buddha and Persian carpets; Himself a typical cigar-chewing American businessman, he is a great believer in the future of Yoga in America.

"Yep," he said, as he propounded to me his scheme of spreading Yoga in the land of the dollar, "there is scope for Yoga in this country. But one must organize it properly. Send me a Swami with proper credentials from India, a Swami with a big name, and then see what I can do with him. I see a huge net-work of Yoga centres for spiritual uplift as well as physical healing, Yoga magazines, Yoga restaurants for vegetarian food, Yoga camps for the holidays. . . . Gee, there are millions in it, if only it is properly organised."

The discourse was the usual clap-trap of anti-Sovietism

and anti-Public Sectarism, but since the audience consisted mostly of well-to-do people it brought applause. Later I made enquiries and learnt that the white clad Acharya was staying in a posh flat (costing several lakhs. . . a point of enquiry for the Income Tax authorities)—— and he was driven in an imported car by a saffron-clad charming and fair lady.

His oratorical performance had a certain hypnotic quality, while his rage against socialism reminded one of Rasputin, who also a hundred years ago, made mystical and spiritual claims and made similar accusations against Marx. More and more film people were drawn to him by his intellectual talk and his anti-socialist slant which he gave to the most spiritual topics. I felt he was in the wrong country. He should have been in America— had he been there— he might have been sent from there along with a covey of American disciples. I became curious about him and made new enquiries and even bought a couple of books by him. This what I read in his *Meditation Experiment* :

FIRST STAGE: 10 MINUTES OF FAST, DEEP BREATHING

Be relaxed in a standing position with the eyes closed. Begin breathing (through the nose) as strong, as deep, and as fast as possible. Go on breathing intensely for a full ten minutes. . . .

SECOND STAGE: 10 MINUTS. COOPRATE WITH THE REACTIONS OF THE BODY AND THE EMOTION. LET GO COMPLETELY

The fast and deep breathing will continue automatically. Meanwhile the body and mind will begin to move. Do not *control* the reactions. *Cooperate completely with your body.* The movements will take many forms; don't suppress them. Let whatsoever happens happen. *Jump, dance, weep, shout, laugh, anything you like. Let out all the madness inside. Express what you feel completely.* The body will take its own course so don't interfere with its movements. Be a witness to the process. . . .

THIRD STAGE : 10 MINUTES OF SHOOTING HOO— HOO— HOO— HOO—

While the chaotic process goes on, start hammering on your physic centre's by shouting HOO—HOO—HOO—HOO. . . . Now you will become an open flow of energy, your life force will move in an up ward stream bringing the consciousness to the peak energy. . . .

FOURTH STAGE : 10 MINUTES DEEP RELAXATION.
NO MOVEMENT — JUST SILENCE AND WAITING.
BE AS A DEAD MAN. TOTALLY LET GO OF YOUR
MIND AND BODY.

The body has dropped down. All tensions are completely exhausted. You can sit or lie down. But now be relaxed completely, and be empty. Leave everything and just remain as you are. This is the moment of non-doing, neither breathing, nor movement. Just silence.

Foreign hippies are attached to his Ashram and a Japanese girl has made certain sensational allegations in which she say that Black Magic or Tantric tricks were used to seduce a girl. (I have personally read her letter which she wrote to a friend seen at the Acharya's place.) Some of his *chelas* (some say he himself) was arrested for pedding narcotics. His Yoga has a Tantric edge to it which appeals to exotica-loving film people. Quite a number of film stars wear saffron robes and wear his medallion on their persons, which does not mean that the themes of their films have to be spiritual. It is, rather, a licence to make the kind of films they are producing. Yogis, Acharyas, Gurus, etc. are proliferating like mushrooms in India as well as abroad.

Then there is a *Baba* — otherwise known as Muktananda of Vajeeshwari Ashram. I met him once at my friend Inder Raj Anand's house. The hour was pre-down. There were baskets of fruits and sweets, he just touched them and they became the blessed *prasad*. Everyone was kneeling or prostrating. I alone did a simple *namaskar* and even shook hands with him. I did not feel any supre-natural vibrations. But I was touched by his simplicity and humility.

Once Inder dragged me to his Ashram and there when I saw the photographs of film stars and corrupt politicians, I was disillusioned not so much by Baba allowing himself

to be photographed with them but by their cleverness in exploiting even the sacred precincts. Everyday, some rich devotee bears the expenses of the simple vegetarian *Langar* for thous and of people who congregate there.

A certain film star who had struck very low happened to prosper after having the *darshan* of Baba. That became a legend of success — everyone who wanted his film to succeed had just to perform his *mahurat* in the Ashram. Baba's portrait and medalion, too, became popular in the film industry — everyone is wearing either the anti-socialist Acharya's medallion or the Baba's portrait round his neck. Superstition and faith have always been rampant in the film world. But about Baba there is an aura of silent goodness though I did notice it — he is not an intellectual though he can speak on any subject in Hindi or Kanarese. There is an elephant in the Ashram which is run more like a colony of do-gooders than an esoteric place, people come there to meditate, and find peace there even if the Baba is not physically present. Why do rich people specially gravitate to him ? There is another question I would like to ask.

Bhiwandi is only a few miles from the Ashram, and yet when it was burning and a communal riot was raging, mostly the victims were the members of the minority community, why didn't Baba use his spiritual influence to bring peace to Bhiwandi? Is it more important to rouse the *Kundalini* in the hearts of the rich or to put to sleep the serpent of communalism in the bitter hearts of the poor people of Bhiwandi? When I get the answer to these questions I will bow and kneek, before Baba for, of all the pseudo-saints and Acharya who may providing spiritual sanctuary to CIA agents, I have found Baba alone who does a lot of good to the tribals of his neighbourhood, has built a school for them, provided them blankets out of the donations of his devotees. Of all the people I know he alone exudes goodness, just goodness. But those two questions gnaw at my heart.

Baba, my friend Inder tells me, always enquires about me. I don't disbelieve him. My conversion would be the biggest catch all. But Baba says he could see spiritual and humani-

taritan vibrations all around me. Once he said "You mark my words. Abbas will be a big saint one day. I would not give my *Langoti* (loin cloth) to the poor, but he will not even spare that." I won't say I was not flattered to hear that.

At the moment Baba is in America. For the last one year he has been there. He has established an Ashram there in Cleveland, California. There are miraculous legends — a cancer patient in Bombay has got cured just by letting Baba's cow lick in his wound with her tongue. Baba has been interviewed by a galaxy of eminent intellectuals including Allan Ginsberg and the astronauts and the editor of the *Psychic Times*. I hope he has not been caught in the net of of Yoga, Inc.

The Baba says he does not believe in any religion, yet his Ashram observes all the Hindu rituals. What it means, perhaps, is that he is a universalist like Bhakt Kabir. Once my elder sister went to the Ashram and when the time of prayer she came and asked where she could perform her *namaaz*. Baba immediately sent her to the underground hall of Meditation and there my sister performed her *namaaz* and felt the presence of God.

Why the rich are drawn to him? What do they seek and get from him? There are tycoons of all kinds, textile mill-owners are only some of them, film stars and other kinds of millionaires, both Indian and foreign, including a German industrialist. Why don't the poor and the people of the middle class come to him? Perhaps they are not so troubled in their conscience.

Of Baba's miracles the one to which I, as a writer, give most importance is the miracle of having written a book of 241 pages in just three weeks — working six to seven hours per day — in the cool and bracing climate of Mahableshtar. This book, translated into English, is called *Chitshakti Vilas* (The Play of Consciousness) which is a kind of spiritual autobiography. It is signed by (or dedicated to) "Your own, My worshipful Sri Nityanada's own. *Swami Muktananda*."

In this book, Baba says :

This is my prayer to Gurudev :

May everyone's life be a paradise. . . .

Bless me that I may adore thee with the awareness of the Self of all;

May I abandon distinctions of caste, creed and language' and cleanse my mind.

Let me see thee in the high and low, the suffering and the needy, the noble and the foolish.

Grant me a heart free from vanity, simple and munificent. . .

May I always live in Ganeshpuri. . . .

Raise me above the differences of nation, language, sect and race.

Grant me the vision of equality. . . .

It is a poem of rare humility and humanity to which Baba is dedicated. Baba claims to be no intellectual and speaks no language but his own (Hindi, Marathi and Kanarese) but in his devotion to goodness he is the equal of the greatest intellectuals.

His other human quality (besides the spiritual qualities which he may or may not possess) is a sense of utter cleanliness — the Ashram is a model of cleanliness which is all due to Baba — and of unbounded love for everything which God (or Nature) had created — be it human beings, animals, flowers and fruits or common vegetation. For a man of over seventy Baba looks young enough to be sixty — and his skin shines with purity of body. Eating less than a morsel, it is remarkable that this great man can manage his vast Ashram, look to the needs of hundreds who gather there every Sunday or festival day — it is the same in Ganeshpuri (which I have visited) and, I believe, it is the same in Cleveland.

When I went to the Yoga Centre in Santa Cruz (East) for physical course after my recent illness. I heard of the old Swami's younger son who married an Australian girl and has now settled down in Australia near a big prison where everyone is at least a Life. They have been sentenced for

rape, murder, robbery with violence, etc. This young couple have opened a Yogo Centre for the redemption of prisoners there. Evidently I am worse than these criminals. For they have been reformed and I am still a prisoner of my restless thought —— despite daily doses of Yoga.

THE EMERGENCY

For me the EMERGENCY began at about the same time, as the National Emergency. I was in a friend's flat in Nizamuddin East for breakfast (I was just back from Aligarh where I relived the past while making the documentary *Papamian of Aligarh* where the Jamat-e-Islami members had threatened to smash our cameras because they were photographing "our" girls !) and was on my first social call in Delhi. But last night it had rained and my *chappals* were worn out at the heels. I slipped and fell on the cement floor taking my entire weight on my left hand. I felt stunned and had to be carried upstairs by my nephew, Anwar Azeem. Hot milk mixed with turmeric (*haldi*) revived me sufficiently to survey the damage which was, apparently, only bruises on the arm, in plaster the next day presumed that I had received a beating in Aligarh.

The X-ray specialist told me that the orthopaedic surgeon next door was not so good and that I should go to another specialist in far-off Daryaganj. I was escorted by Suresh Kohli, who besides being a poet and publisher, was also the son of a doctor and hence knew all the tricks of the trade. He poohpoohed the whole business of plastering, quoting his won experience of a scooter injury which had healed itself and I had to tell him the simple arithmetical difference between thirty-one and sixty-two. In any case we went to the orthopaedic surgeon who said after examining my wrist, "Well, to me it looks all right." I felt relieved and was prepared to pay him the thirty rupees for giving this opinion. But he got up and started preparing the plastering business.

I looked askance at Suresh. He merely shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Well, you didn't listen to me!" Twenty minutes later my left arm felt like lead but the doctor

to a doctor. He was a disciple of Baba Muktanand and was a student of S. Krishnamoorthy. In short there was nothing in the physical or spiritual world that he did not know. So I went to his house, and induced by the doctor's injection or fright of the neurologist whom Inder had called, I collapsed on his bed and monopolized it for the next few weeks. Inder had heard of the reputation of a senior neurologist of Bombay Hospital, at some medical conference, and so he telephoned him. He was not available and so he called someone from the nearby Nanavati Hospital. The first words he spoke were "hospitalization"—and I have a dread of hospitalization as much from discipline and autocracy as anything else. All the while the doctor examined me I pretended to be asleep and after examination, he left. According to him I had an "incident"—and I didn't know then that an "incident," or an episode, in medical terminology means a paralytic stroke.

Next day I agreed to go and see the senior neurologist. Inder and Sham went with me in their car and went up to the first floor and then down the corridor just with the help of a walking stick. A look at the neurologist and I knew here was not a doctor but a friend. And as, since childhood, I have been treated by Doctor Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Dr. Rehman, all friends of my father, and then by my own friend Dr. Baliga, I am in favour of friendly doctors. The senior neurologist showed his friendship by allowing me to be carried to the fourth floor for the inauguration of the Urdu edition of my novel *Inqilab*. He said, "When the patient is so keen, invitations have already been issued, there is no point in denying the pleasure of an author in preventing his wish. But on one condition, that when it is all over, he must agree to hospitalization."

"Hospitalization?" I repeated.

"You can call it that. But I am interested in a series of tests which will only be done here."

Then it struck—call it emergency or an attack stroke. It happened characteristically at night.

I was at Inder's place, and while alone in my (his) bedroom, changing my trousers for the white pajamas, one leg in one and the other in the other, the creepy feeling came that,

dammit, I can't move my left side, couldn't move at all. It was more absurd than tragic at first. I couldn't even shout as I lay there half on the bed, and half on the floor.

"Babu" I I cried out.

The hefty driver came in and immediately put me on the bed, heaving me like a sack of grain. Sham Bahen also came and ministered to the "fallen angel". Now I knew what paralysis was. It was eleven o'clock. We tried to ring up Dr. Gandotra, but, for once, he had gone out for a party. Only when he came back, could he be contacted.

Tinnu (Inder's elder son) took his father's car and parked it in front of Dr. Gandotra's place. Meanwhile they gave me a tranquillizer and I felt half sleepy. I had no pain actually the absence of pain was pain enough. Was I to die like this?

The doctor came at about 1 a.m., gave me an injection, waited for the reaction, then gave me another injection—with all the injection my hip had become like a sieve. There was a joke which I wanted to share with the doctor, but half of my tongue was also paralyzed so I kept it to myself. Then, under the influence of the strong sedative I slept.

I had a dream—or a vision—or a hallucination—say what you will.

I saw that three men were dragging me out of the deadly swamp into which I had fallen. They were Bu Ali Shah Qalandar, Guru Nanak and Baba Muktanand. There was a reason why these three were in my subconscious. Bu Ali Shah Qalandar has been a part of my subconscious ever since my childhood and the "Three Graves in Panipat." The same was true of Guru Nanak whose birthday had just been celebrated and there was a large coverage on the television. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh poets had recited poems in his honour. Why Swami Muktanand came into the picture I had to sort out later.

The cock's crow woke me up and my left side felt cold. I used my left hand to cover myself and then I wondered. How could I use my left hand? It was paralyzed.

"Sham I!" I shouted and then rang the bell.

Sham came running.

By now it was about 6-30 a.m.

"I didn't die after all. The doctor has saved me."

"The doctor and the Baba !"

"Which Baba ?"

"See there—he was lying beside you all the time."

I saw the book which I could have sworn was the front page up. Now it was back page up, where a portrait of Baba was smiling at me. Then I remembered the dream.

This was the research centre of Bombay Hospital. My wife had died in the opposite building where I was also taken for X-rays and an ECG. No wonder my blood pressure shot up. Even to Dr. Singhal, when he expressed surprise at the high blood pressure, I couldn't explain what had happened to me when I went to the X-ray room and saw besides it, the signboard "Morgue." But Inder, who was present with me, guessed it and reminded me of Buddha's advice to the woman who wanted her dead child revived: "Bring me a few ashes from a hearth in a house where no one has ever died."

Hospitalization for tests or otherwise meant a series of doctors (Dr Singhal called all his specialist colleagues). Each came alone, with only his four assistants—a series of nurses who began their day at 6 a.m., a series of tasteless meals, the requirement of putting on a bloodstained hospital dress.

Sister De Souza.

"Yes, Sir."

Sister De Mello.

"Yes, Sir."

Sister Benedectine.

"Yes, Sir."

All from Goa or Trivendrum. Why ?

Why no Sister Seeta ?

Why no Sister Salmah ?

Why no Sister Lakshmi ?

Why no Sister Zainab ?

One day, lying on a table while a brain-scanning test was going on, with nineteen electrodes plugged into my brain I felt secure, warm and sleepy. I dream that the Bombay Hospital was India, with the 20-Point Programme fully imple-

kindly made a sling in which it would rest cradled for the next three weeks. The doctor said "Have another X-ray after three weeks." When we came back to the Press Club, I was quite a hero and did not bother to contradict the fantastic stories being circulated of how "veteran" Abbas was manhandled by Aligarh ruffians.

Next day I came to Bombay by the Frontier Mail (one of my idiosyncracies, whenever I have a lot of money I travel by ACC first class, the practical advantage is that I can finish a short story or a script during the twenty-four hour journey).

After exactly three weeks I went to a Bombay orthopaedic surgeon, and he said he would only give his opinion after seeing the new X-ray. So I went back to the X-ray specialist and had two X-rays taken front and then profile the report of which was promised the next day. We went the next day. The orthopaedic surgeon saw the X-rays and said, "The plasters have to remain for another three weeks." By now I was really tired of it, for everyone solicitously enquired how it happened and what was worse was that I had no dramatic story to tell. I wished the Aligarh boys had really given me some blows—they almost did that but not quite.

Three more weeks passed and at last the orthopaedic surgeon agreed to out the plaster. I felt very light—too light. I could fly in the air, I felt.

Then a clot in my brain began to misbehave. It got into places where it had no business to go. But, being a devotee of freedom, it insisted on its rights. The result was that one day when I went for a walk along the beach I found I was dragging my left foot more and more. The left side seemed to grow weaker. This was a peculiar sensation. I cut short my walk and limped my way into Doctor Gandotra's clinic which is almost next door to my house. He gave me an injection but said I had to see a neurologist.

I got into my car and motored straight to my friend Inder Raj Anand. He was luckily in town, for so often he was in Madras writing some damn script or the other. He had one major heart thrombosis, an odd attack of diabetes, and a permanent flirtation with gout. He studied medical books by the dozen and I would rather entrust myself to his care than

to a doctor. He was a disciple of Baba Muktanand and was a student of S. Krishnamoorthy. In short there was nothing in the physical or spiritual world that he did not know. So I went to his house, and induced by the doctor's injection or fright of the neurologist whom Inder had called, I collapsed on his bed and monopolized it for the next few weeks. Inder had heard of the reputation of a senior neurologist of Bombay Hospital, at some medical conference, and so he telephoned him. He was not available and so he called someone from the nearby Nanavati Hospital. The first words he spoke were "hospitalization"—and I have a dread of hospitalization as much from discipline and autocracy as anything else. All the while the doctor examined me I pretended to be asleep and after examination, he left. According to him I had an "incident"—and I didn't know then that an "incident," or an episode, in medical terminology means a paralytic stroke.

Next day I agreed to go and see the senior neurologist. Inder and Sham went with me in their car and went up to the first floor and then down the corridor just with the help of a walking stick. A look at the neurologist and I knew here was not a doctor but a friend. And as, since childhood, I have been treated by Doctor Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Dr. Rehman, all friends of my father, and then by my own friend Dr. Baliga, I am in favour of friendly doctors. The senior neurologist showed his friendship by allowing me to be carried to the fourth floor for the inauguration of the Urdu edition of my novel *Inqilab*. He said, "When the patient is so keen, invitations have already been issued, there is no point in denying the pleasure of an author in preventing his wish. But on one condition, that when it is all over, he must agree to hospitalization."

"Hospitalization?" I repeated.

"You can call it that. But I am interested in a series of tests which will only be done here."

Then it struck—call it emergency or an attack stroke. It happened characteristically at night.

I was at Inder's place, and while alone in my (his) bedroom, changing my trousers for the white pajamas, one leg in one and the other in the other, the creepy feeling came that,

mented. It was open to everyone, regardless of caste or creed, income or profession. In the dream the big doctor of the Hospital came to me with his four assistants. Pointing to one of them he said, "He will besuc cessor."

'Is he your son?' I asked.

"No. He is not even remotely connected with me. Medicine is not Politics."

Then the dream ended, the plugs were withdrawn, and I was to go home.

As I came out of the hospital the driver of the car asked me. "Thank God. You are alive, Sir."

"Why? Did I look dead before?"

"If you will excuse my impertinence I would say yes. I heard two doctors. They were not giving you more than a week. What cured you?"

I said, "The senior neurologist, of course."

"Then what is this in your neck?"

I felt it. It was a small medallion on which a word in Arabic., *Allah*, was engraved. My left hand happened to touch a pile of books. On top of that was Baba Muktanand's *Chitshakti Vilas*. On its back cover it seemed to me that he was smiling encouragement to me. Beneath it was another book, *The Life of Lenin*. I knew Lenin was hearing the long short story by Jack London called "Love of Life" when he was dying. There was also a yellow silken cloth in which was wrapped the *prasad* that Mrs. Kapoor (the motor-in-law-to-be of Inder's younger son Bittu) and specially brought for me from Amritsar. So what had saved me?

Was it the solicitude of my innumerable friends like Inder Gujral, Shaikh Abdullah and A.M. Tariq who both gave me their blessings, or friends like the Anands, Sathes, Sabirs, Karanjias, Krishenchanders, Sardar Jafiris, Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Sunil Dutt, and the stunt men I used to meet on the beach?

Or was it allopathy which could cure TB could not cure the common cold?

Homeopathy, the Dr. Barlas' little sugar pills which I surreptitiously swallowed?

Ayurved? "The Unani Hikmat of the late Hakim Ajmal

Khan ?

Or the love of my two sisters, one natural Muslim, the other adopted Hindu ; one prays five times a day and each time asks *Allah* for His benediction for me, the other fasts and prays for me before the little temple who were sitting by my side to give me comfort and support ? Was it any of these, or all of them, or my sheer good luck and will power which had conquered the little clot ?

What am I then ? A Muslim as all who know me believe? A Vedantist Yogi and Baba Muktanand believed ?

Am I heretic, at best or an agnostic ?

A disbeliever in disbelief also ?

The big doctor of the dream had said, "Good luck to you. May you never have to come here again."

"Are you breaking relations ? Am I nothing to you but a name in a file ?"

He said, "That is not what I mean. Come home by all means. We will all be glad to see you."

"We ? Who are WE ?"

"Goodbye, Sir."

The Bombay Hospital was India. It is the world !

Here I was involved in mankind. And mankind is involved in me. Ram and Mohamed, Gandhi and Goethe, Shakespeare and Shelley, Lenin and Jawaharlal Nehru, they were all part of me I was a part of them.

In the meanwhile the clang-clang-clang of the Emergency Ambulance was heard. I did not know who it was and whether he was dead or alive. But it could have been *me*.

17 MONTHS FOR 16 MINUTES I

It was quite a surprise for me to be put on the venerable Khosla Commission on Film Censorship. Justice Khosla was an intellectual, and I was sure of benefitting in his company. So I said Yes when I was asked if I would travel with the Panel to all corners of India. The sittings began in Delhi. There was a medley of all sorts in the Commission—film producers and directors, M.P.'s including an ex-Maharajah who created quite a furore by appearing with a collection of sporting rifles and guns and claiming airfreight on them! There were some academics also, some judges along with the President. From Delhi we moved to Bombay where the incident happened which was to make me a complainant in the Supreme Court. This is how it happened.

We were examining the evidence of the then Chairman of the Board of Film Censors. The worthy deposed that Indian producers, as a rule, were indifferent to social and political issues. He said quite frankly that most of the producers were indifferent to social and political issues, in fact he decried that the bulk of them quite *apolitical*. I knew a thing or two about socially and politically-conscious producers and how they feared in Pre-censorship of their scripts. For instance, my late lamented friend, GURU DUTT had submitted a script based on Kerala writer, Thakazi's novel, *Two Seers of Rice*, and was discouraged when the Censor Board took objection to the scene where the dead body of a poor man was given a watery grave by drowning it, tied to a heavy stone to ensure that it would sink to the bottom of the backwater. The sensitive Guru Dutt was so disappointed that he gave up the idea of filming *Two Seers of Rice*!

Then there was the pre-censorship of my own script of *Shehar Aur Sapna* in which the Censors (or pre-Censors I) had an objection to scene of slum lord having his bull-dozer trampling the jhonpadies of the poor people and the poet

visualizing the bull-dozers as Nazi tanks, over-running the dwellings of the subject people. "That cannot be passed," I was plainly told. Actually, a year later when the full-Board saw the complete picture that scene was not only passed but highly praised for its imaginative creativity ! The picture itself went on to win the Best Picture of the Year Award in that year's National Awards !

One producer obeyed the Pre-censorship Orders of the Board of Film Censors. The other held on to his script, whatever the opinion of the Pre-censorship which was not obligatory to carry out. But the opinion of the Board could not be dismissed as trivial. It required lot of conviction and guts to defy it ! Not every producer could have so much guts and most of them were scared away by the Board's antipathy for political and progressive social themes.

"Will you pass a film which I will present to you before this Commission concludes its labours ?"

"Certainly. Why not ?" said the Chairman, who shall be nameless, expressively, taking the progressive stance.

"Yes—by all means," said the Chairman of the Censor Board, "If it is good, we will not only pass it but praise it as a sign that our producers are, indeed, socially conscious. I will then withdraw whatever I have said today."

My mind was already working on my projected film. Of course, I could not afford to spend a few lakhs of rupees, on a feature film that will cost lakhs. My mind was working on a documentary film which could be finished soon.

So I decided to make a picture about the four principal cities of India and about their most unfortunate citizens. Just the visuals without any dialogue or commentary.

I started with Delhi at took the help and advice of RĀGHU RAI whose photographs I had admired for many years. He was then with *Statesman*, and I consulted him about the *jhuggie* colonies which, I knew, were miles out of town limits. I took some two dozen shots of New Delhi's most fabulous buildings—also of buildings under construction, bricks upon bricks being laid by masons from Haryana and Rajasthan. I showed the places from which they were brought—drought-ridden Bihar and waterless Rajasthan from my *Do Boond Pani*

that I thought would go home—emphasizing the distance from the capital and where its makers were obliged to live in barack-like buildings unashamedly called SLUMS under a Deputy Commissioner (SLUMS). But, even in these slums, I showed the people smiling and laughing, with flowers in rustic tin-pots, and women doing embroidery work on pieces of cloth. The people, however poor, were full of life and energy and good cheer! A Haryanvi song provided the counter-point!

In four minutes I made my point—that the real builders of New Delhi's opulence were forced to live twenty miles away in SLUMS, but they were happy even there!

I followed the shots of Calcutta, where I took the life of the rickshaw-pullers, who carried loads for an eight-anna piece! By montage of the posters of AADMI, current box-office hit picture, I showed the degradation of real AADMI who, a skeleton with bones stricking out of his body, was obliged to pull a fat man who sat comfortably in his rickshaw. A paste-like meal of gruel mixed with water was all that the average rickshaw-puller got! He, too, was driven by drought and famine in Bihar and Eastern U.P. villages, to seek a living in heartless *bustees* of Calcutta with its grand Victoria Memorial. I showed a subjective fantasy from the point of view of the rickshaw-puller—he imagines the roles to be reversed—the fat Seth is pulling the rickshaw, while the rickshaw-puller is enjoying his free fantasy ride!

For MADRAS I took the Marine statue of LABOUR as a starting point. The statues of TAMIL heroes provided a natural contrast with the miserable huts where the proletariat of modern Tamil Nadu lived, right opposite to the statues of Tamil history's great men. The cart-pullers of Madras—who are cheaper than bullocks!—are seen trudging and pulling their heavy loads—and compared to bullocks, step by step, till, finally, the man collapses while the bullock goes on, while the poet BHARATI, points the scene of human degradation and tragedy!

This was the most important episode in the whole film where a man's life is much less of value than an animal's.

The fourth city was Bombay and the fourth chapter was

the "red-light" district of Kamathipura. The "girls", overmade up and dressed in revealing clothes, were shown in various poses of shamelessness, were photographed from a moving car with a portable flashlight. Their pimps and agents tried to pelt stones at us and, specially our right. But we got away before some more mischief was done. From the moving shot we enlarged frames and re-photographed them from crazy angles, which revealed the motivations.

Then we "kidnapped" a cooperative prostitute and carried her to the garage-office of our home where she was shown worshipping a portrait of a god, and then retiring for the night on a bed arranged on the floor. Before sleeping, she has a vision of leaving her home for Bombay, sleeping on the foot-paths from which she is kidnapped and forced into the oldest profession. She has also fleeting impressions of what she might have been—a nurse in a hospital, a school teacher, or a seamstress—quite decent and respectable jobs instead of selling her body in a brothel !

This was the film which, under the title of "A Tale of Four Cities" (Char Shehar Ek Kahani) presented to the Censors and was at once rejected. When I asked for reasons, it was referred to a REVISING COMMITTEE. Of course, they had to have some reasons for rejecting it. They talked and talked for complete three hours. Once I opened the door to look in, as if by mistake, and heard a voice saying, "If this picture is allowed to be shown, our (Congress) Party is sure to lose the next election which is only two months hence !" Then I knew that the 16-minute picture won't be passed. Then, some days later, I was given three reasons why the Universal Certificate could not be given to it. It was not eligible to be shown to children. For a documentary, an ADULT certificate was as BAD as no certification. So I refused to accept an ADULT certificate and protested. They gave me three CUTS measuring 11 feet in all, knowing I would not accept them. I was fighting for a principle. I was not in a hurry for any kind of certificate like a commercial producer is invariably, and, therefore, he is obliged to accept any CUTS which are proposed. But I was not in a hurry, I had to establish that the Censor Board was biased in favour of the Government !

The next day the **UNIVERSAL CERTIFICATE** was handed to me in the same corridor of Supreme Court, and again Mr. **HARISH KHANNA** asked me if I would agree to withdraw the case. I said a polite **NO**. It is too late. The judgment had taken 17 months since the Board saw the picture, now it was only a few days left.

So I disappointed the young Deputy Secretary, even as he was to disappoint me later on when he would be Director-General of Door Darshan when he would not acknowledge the receipt of the script sent for his approval. Was there some cosmic connection between the two disappointments ?

I both won and lost the Supreme Court case. Actually I had already won the point of the case when, under pressure, the Ministry gave me the **UNIVERSAL CERTIFICATE** which I needed. But the ploy of my lawyer in challenging the Censorship itself did not work. And for a Very Good Reason.

The Court quoted a good Certificate in favour of Censorship. It said that our film-makers were ever on the lookout for loop-holes for Vulgarity, and Violence, double-meaning dialogue, and indecent allusions and, therefore, a vigilant but liberal Censorship was needed in the interests of clean and healthy cinema. It was signed by a journalist named—**Khwaja Ahmad Abbas** !

But while photographing and attaching the Censor Certificate, I had the last laugh. I began with a shot of darkness which had very suspenseful music. At last the **CLIMAX** of the suspense is revealed by a bang and the sudden appearance of the **CENSOR CERTIFICATE**. The suspense music was to indicate the 17 months of waiting suspensefully for the **CERTIFICATE**.

WHY EDMONTON

On the way to Wingdale which is about hundred miles from New York, all four occupants of Zafar's spacious car were tongue-tied. The only sound was the screeching of the tyres and the rassel of the autumn wind.

I had been discharged from hospital in Bombay by my neurologist, Dr. Singhal, who wanted to make sure of the exact location of the clot of blood which had travelled some distance from an artery which supplies blood to the brain—the dangerous residue of the cerebral attack I had some months ago. He tried brain-scanning in his own hospital and some sort of screening in the atomic-scanner of Tata Memorial Hospital. They probed the brain and cleared it of any doubts. But 75% of my body was still un-scanned.

At this time, a Cat's Scan, can be done half a mile from my home in Juhu, at the Nanavati Hospital. Almost all first-rate hospitals have similar scanners of their own. But at that time there was none—not even in England, only in affluent and technologically advanced America where Heart and Brain surgery was well-equipped with all sorts of gadgets and gimmicks, could the 'scanning' be done.

But I had no money to undertake such an expensive trip—It was then that a group of friends led by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah and Rajni Patel came with their offers of "Loans of Honour" to finance my air-force to U.S.A. and back. Of course, the loans were paid back, but the friendly offer of help at a moment of crisis cannot be paid back. The Air India also lent a helping hand by upgrading my ticket from Economy Class to First Class to provide me more leg room.

Thus accompanied by my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Inder Raj Anand, who were going with me, I set off for New York where I was received by Zafar and Tahira, Shehla Hasnain,

and her husband Nazar (CHUNNO) my Pakistani nephews and nieces. Zafar was a regular and registered medical practitioner with wide contacts in the profession, while Shehla was a Child Specialist. Zafar was already in New York City Hospital while Nazar and his cousin-wife, Shehla (my sister's younger daughter) was living in New York. So they decided that, for the time being, I was to stay in Brooklyn, New York, with Nazar (Chunnoo) and Shehla, and after getting myself scanned in a New York hospital, would then move on to the suburb of Wingdale, to live with Zafar, his literary wife Tahira, when he would check my heart and also show me to a near-by Neuro-physician.

I was nervous, while being scanned for the first time, and hence I pretended not to understand English and thus got my doctor-niece to accompany me. The scanning was not different from what it was in Bombay, in a coffin-like contraption with a hole to accommodate the Head. It went on clicking away and thus took hundreds of X-ray photographs of my body and brain, and delivered them after a few days. The over-all report was NEGATIVE—there in no cause for alarm.

But Zafar was adamant at showing me to Dr. Excondie, an eminent Neuro-physician, who turned out to be an affable middle-aged man who lived and practised in Phillipino whose clinic was not far from Zafar's home in Wingdale.

We arrived at his CLINIC at about 10 a.m. He read through the Report given to me by Doctor G.S. Singhal—he read it thorough and declared that, obviously, I was in SAFE hands in India. No doctor in America would have written a better report—in fact American doctors don't go into such details. He asked me what medicines he was giving me and when I mentioned "ARKAMIN" and "PERSANTIN", he said no one in America could improve on his prescription. The just for formality's sake, he said he would also examine me. He took me into an inner room where he asked me to strip to my under-wear, then probed me just with a stethoscope which, when applied to my neck, seemed to worry the brown doctor Excondie. "I seem to hear the clot here," he said to me, and then brought me out, and told my friends, "I seem to hear something in his neck—may be, it is the clot. So, I can

Therefore, when all other doors were closed, I decided to knock on the doors of the Supreme Court. I met my friend, R.K. GARG, a brilliant Supreme Court lawyer, and he told me that there was no way he could challenge the procedure they had followed because, as laws stood, they were justified in their actions. So he had to challenge the very concept of CENSORSHIP !

I said I am in favour of intelligent and meaningful censorship. He reported that this is what you would get ! Allow me to challenge the concept of CENSORSHIP—that is the only way I can bring your picture before the Supreme Court.

I half-heartedly agreed, and the suit was filed. "ABBAS CHALLENGES CENSORSHIP" I was the big headline in the Film Press.

But the Supreme Court is a slow-moving legal giant, it takes time to file the case, it takes time for the case to be admitted, it takes time for the hearing, it takes time for the whole legal machinery to get going. The soon achieved was to persuade the Supreme Court to view the film for which the Films Division projection room was "technically" regarded as a part of Supreme Court. So the five judges and lawyers came to the Projection Room and sat there for exactly sixteen minutes to view the short film. I was allowed to be present, to supply any relevant information. But the "Court" saw the film in silence, there were no question ! When the film ended and the lights came on, the Chief Justice, speaking on behalf of the other Judges, said that, while he could not reveal what the ultimate judgment would be, he wanted to shake my hand for daring to make this picture. Then, starting with the Chief Justice, each Judge shook my hand and congratulated me.

The representatives of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting took the hint. Next day I met HARISH KHANNA, then Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of I & B, in the corridor of the Supreme Court, and he met me affably and asked me if I would withdraw the case if the Ministry offered me a UNIVERSAL certificate. I said, "Why don't you give me the Certificate and see the consequences ?" I would make no promise about withdrawal of the case.

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be sure if he submits to an Angiogram in a New York Hospital——”

“What is Angiogram ?” I innocently asked.

“It is a kind of small operation, but it can be quite dangerous, too. One in a hundred cases, the needle loses its way and punctures some vital spot in the heart or the brain. In any case, it is necessary to determine the course of further treatment and that will determine whether a bigger operation would be necessary. Tomorrow is Saturday and day after is Sunday. So the earliest he can be admitted is Monday. So, if you agree, I will “phone to the Hospital to be ready for the operation.”

Then he said something very strange. “If I had my own father, I would twist his arm and put him on the operation table.”

So I had to say, “All right, as you say, Doc. Then the date is Monday.”

That was the situation under the cloud of which we were driving in silence.

“Would you trust the word of Dr. Excondie, Zafar, if your own wife was involved ?” I broke the pall of silence.

“Absolutely, I would. He is the best man in these parts, I have referred many of my patients to him during the last few years.”

There is another doctor I would like to consult,” said Inder, “It is ‘Doctor’ Muktanand.”

“Who is he ?”

Inder told him who Swami Muktanand was and why he was in America at the moment. And it was our good luck that he was holding a spiritual camp, a hundred miles away from New York.

“O.K., I will phone my younger brother to come from New York and drive you there tomorrow.”

So the next day, Nazar was driving us in his brother’s car, to Hotel De Ville in South Fallsburg.

Vegetation was thick and dust in the hills of New England and we were passing picturesque villages, picture-post-card churches with red spires and belfrieges and could see milch cattle grazing in the green lawns of the downs. Every now

and then we would pass an Eats store, blazoned with advertisements of Kentucky Chicken, and when our curiosity could not restrain our hunger, we stopped at a way-side store where truck-drivers were sampling Kentucky Chicken. We also ordered four dishes of chicken, with French Fry or potatoe chips and salad to accompany. The Kentucky Chicken was like our Tandoori Murgh . . . fancy dressing and our long drive had boosted our appetites.

Soon we were in De Ville where a big hotel was commandeered and temporarily turned into an Ashram for the devotees who were taking a Meditation class at about 4 p.m.

A huge hall was reserved for the Meditation class, and Inder found some favourite *chelas* of the Baba from India, who were known to him and through them he sent Baba a message that he, Abbas and some friends had driven a hundred miles just to have his *darshan*.

The discipline of the class was exemplary, as the *chelas* squatted on the *farsh*. Their sitting was a model of a discipline. All were white-clad and squatted in Yogic poses. They are not only spiritually-inclined, but most of them have adopted Hindu way of life. Tens of thousands are duly-registered as Hindus in America, while the many blacks, because of Islamic equality, are attracted to Islam. Mohamed Ali, the boxer, is not the only convert to the Muslim faith. A spiritual revolution is on its way in America.

Baba Muktanand, who greeted us, has met me in Inder's house, as an equal, and when Inder and his wife, told him that I was due to have a probing operation he reassured me, "Nothing will be found. Everything will be all right."

Thus "divinely" re-assured, we returned to Zafar's house on Saturday evening and drove another hundred miles to see "ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN" ? the movie about the two Journalists, with their raving exposurers, threw out the President from the White House. It was past midnight when we hit our respective beds.

On Monday morning, we were all up early in the morning to move to Damburg Hospital where I was accomodated in a four-beds room; along with three other patients who were also surgical cases, but spent their times telephoning their

momes on an instrument that would be plugged to the socket next to their beds. I was told my Angiogram was scheduled for the next day.

On Tuesday morning I was taken on a trolley stretcher to the Operation Theatre where I was given an injection of Twilight Sleep which rendered me semi-conscious. An elderly and kind nurse was deputed to keep talking to me all the time. I had a vague feeling that an incision was painlessly made in my thigh and some catheter was inserted. After that I knew nothing except explaining the intricacies of Indian politics to the elder nurse who was deputed to keep talking. In any case I could not see the progress of the needle which was eventually to reach into my throat. By the time I was fully conscious three hours had passed and I was being wheeled back to my room, fully alive but sleepy. I slept for more than an hour and when I woke, I found a bottle of Glucose, hanging over my head and inserted into my arm, and a tray of hospital food on a stool beside my bed. I never felt so hungry, because I had no dinner and breakfast, fasting for the operation.

The Negative report came in the evening. There was no clot in the neck or anywhere else.

That worry being over, I decided to make my (last) U.S. visit as memorable as ever. I saw the best plays, films (specially of a German woman director) and made plane with my Pakistani niece to visit Canada to meet my cousin's daughters who, after their beloved father's* death, had all (but one) migrated to Canada. The youngest (married to a Professor) had got employment as the Education Minister's assistant, the eldest was doing research on some subject of Race Relations in the University, still the middle one was a Medical Social worker and were staying together in a separate flat. She and her daughter and brother-in-law had formed as Urdu Drama Circle which was putting on a play

* The late Mr. K.G. Saiyedain, Secretary in the Ministry of Education, and Educational Adviser to the Government of India.

there. They were all settled in Edmonton, Alberta, in the extreme North-east of Canada where nothing grows except grass.

One could drive miles and miles out of the city and not come across a single tree.

Finding this desolate scene, I often teased my nieces why they had chosen this place of all places in Canada. "WHY ALBERTA?" And they had no answer to this question, except the middle one who had a morbid sense of humour, said, "It's a good place to be buried."*

As ill luck would have it she who was the healthiest of all her sisters, got infected with Cancer, and after prolonged chemotherapy treatment during which she made a flying visit to India, she succumbed to her disease and her grave in Alberta answer my question—WHY ALBERTA? Exasperated by my repeated questioning, she had once replied in just "Because it is a good place to die!"

* As it happened, she died of Cancer in 1984.

DOCTORS' DILEMMA !

I have always liked to be treated by friendly doctors. Doctor Ansari, patriot and humanist, was the first one. Doctor Gupta was the one who circumcised me and, later, performed the first operation for TONSILS, on me. After the operation he kept me in his residence. I was fully cured and able to return home. These were friends of my father. So were eminent HAKIMS of Unani system of medicine—Hakim Ajmal Khan and his younger brother Hakim *Naabeena*, the blind Hakim, whose “blind” diagnosis was one of the miracles of Unani medicine.

When I came to Bombay I found a kindred soul in Doctor A.M. BALIGA. He recommended the late Dr. Sen for my wife's heart operation and, when my wife insisted on Dr. Baliga's presence at the operation, he agreed to becoming formally Dr. Sen's assistant, though he was much Senior to him and had, indeed, taught him as a Professor of Surgery, when Sen was a student at King Edward Medical College.

So it happened during my life's most serious disease—PARALYSIS—which lasted in its serious and complete form for one night only. The doctor we called first was Doctor Gandotra, my family doctor and colleague of the SAVE JUHU COMMITTEE. The next day when I was able to move about, he recommended me to show myself to Dr. SINGHAL, the famous Neurologist of Bombay Hospital. He turned out to be an affable man, and a LAST PAGE reader, and after the first meeting, never accepted a single fee from me, though many a time I insisted on paying him. He sent me to America for *Scanning*, and there, too, Doctor Excondie, the Neurologist not only sung praises of Dr. Singhal's report but told me that if I was his own father, he would arm-twist me and drag me to the operation table for an angiogram. So I said he was

welcome to regard me as his father, and got admitted to Danbury Hospital for the angiogram, which proved negative, and I was set free from any worry on that score. So I came back to India with a hundred COLOUR photographs of my brain, which I duly submitted to Dr. Singhal. He said it was nothing to worry, and prescribed some medicines for the weakness of my foot.

I had, meanwhile, completed my film, NAXALITES, and was invited to International Festival of Neo-realistic films in the village of Avellino in Italy, for which Dr. Singhal gave me immediate permission and good wishes. So I started for Italy, along with Sumit Mukherjee the hero of my NAXALITES whom I had brought from Calcutta but who stubbornly refused to learn Hindi, and so he could not get any other good role except playing the Bengali character in NAXALITES.

Since there are any number of my Indian and Pakistani friends and relations in London, I got my ticket routed via London from where I proceeded by train to Brussels to meet my friend, Mrs. Marie Jose Berguin, her husband Jackues and their "child" Razia, whom they had adopted from a Christian "home" in India several years ago and who has developed into a dusky but beautiful young French-speaking girl on whom both her foster parents simply doted. After a brief stop in Brussels, we returned to London and after attending several literacy gatherings of URDU writers, *mushalras* and story-readings, we were ready to return to Italy.

At London's Heathrow airport happened the incident which (according to my amateurish knowledge) has led to my being crippled in my left foot for six long years. This is how it happened. Some German tourists had got down from a Lufthansa plane, and a German woman was piloting an electric trolley loaded with seven suit-cases, saying something in her guttural German, which I later on, came to know was, "Nimaniya, Nimaniya" (Beware, Beware I). But by the time I knew it, the electric trolley's front wheel had climbed my left foot and stopped. I requested the German woman who, in her nervousness, had forgotten which lever to press to put

the trolley into reverse gear, and the trolley was eventually off my feet.

I went to the Airport Doctor, he examined the foot, even screened it, and declared that, luckily, there was no fracture, but I did not know that it will cripple me for the rest of my life. I was in a hurry to catch my Air India plane, and I got it just in time.

In Rome, we had a "home away from home" in the flat of the India's First Secretary, where we were made perfectly at home. We saw the immense Coliseum, including the lions' cages and the Gladiators' rooms where SPARTACUS enacted the life and death drama of his life, refusing to kill his friend and being beheaded in reprisal by the Caesar. Next day we went to see the Sixteenth Chapel, the masterpiece of which itself was worth a visit to Rome. Since I had missed it on my first visit to Rome in 1938 when I had to leave in a hurry, because there was a premature rumour of war having started or about to start that day, and so we piled into a train which was full to capacity and we had to stand in the narrow corridor, all the way to France.

The next day we started for Avellino, the village where the Festival of Neo-Realistic Films was to be held. The bus off-loaded us in the village square, there were no taxis, so we had to carry our baggage on our own shoulders to the Main Hotel which accommodated the office of the Festival Committee. After taking a cup of coffee, we were told there was no room left in the little hotel and we were given room in a hotel at the other end of the village (or town). A friendly festival official volunteered to take us there in his car, and we found our friend, Devendra Kumar, Editor of Delhi's TIME AND TIDE, already there, waiting for us.

From that onwards, it became my schedule twice a day to walk (or hobble) two miles to the Festival Cinema, in the morning and evening, there were some good, neo-realistic films from many countries, from USSR, USA, France, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Holland and Belgium, etc. etc.

Our NAXALITES was certainly among the top contenders for a big award. This, I gathered from the packed house that

turned up for the screening and stayed on to question me elaborately. Then I knew that urban guerillas known as "Red Guards" were active in Italy, too. Comparisons between "Naxalites" and "Red Guards" were obviously made, and I was asked which party had financed my picture. I replied, "None." Which surprised the audience, because in their country "Red Guards" would naturally finance such a picture. They are known to have amassed millions of lire from Banks and capitalists. Naxalites are generally rural-based—therefore, they are not rich with so much money. "But we doubt if any Italian producer would take up the case of the 'Red Guards' for filming," one of the audience said, "But, Mr. Abbas, you have made a nice picture which deserves a big award," he concluded.

Thus it was not surprising for me to hear the announcement that I had won the Gold Prize for direction and was to share it along with a Russian director, who had made a neo-realistic film with ten times the financial resources that I had.

I returned from Italy with the Gold Award and a game foot.

"Do Physiotherapy as soon as you reach India," the London doctor had advised me. And this I did in Juhu-located Arogyanidhi Hospital which has a Psychotherapeutic department attached to it! I had my foot X-rayed and examined by hand and fingers. Wax-baths were prescribed and also electric treatment. Nothing happened and my big toe was turned-up as before. When this did not help, I went to my Neurologist at the Bombay Hospital. Doctor Singhal examined me from head to toe, gave me a letter to Dr. A.K. Mukherjee, Director of All India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (popularly known as "*Langday Loolon Ka Haspital*")."

Dr. Mukherjee was surrounded by a crowd of the lame and the handless, and I was wondering what he was doing among them. Dr. Mukherjee turned out to be a friendly and affable person, and examined me again "from head to toe." He heard my story of the Baggage Trolley at London airport with an inscrutable smile. He did not say that I was a liar, but his smile said that he did not believe my story. He asked

me a lot of questions about my paralytic attack, and seemed to suggest that was at the root of the trouble.

Doctor Mukherjee suggested a long course of Physiotherapy, which would necessitate my residence on hospital premises. He allotted me a single room which I turned into a journalist's work-room, with pens and pencils, books, a typewriter, a typist, radio, ink-bottle. I would spend about three hours doing Physio-therapy and electric feed-back ! The rest of the time was mine, which I spent in different wards, talking to patients, for getting their case-histories, observing new techniques applied to them, for shortening or lengthening their legs and arms. I wrote stories based on my observations of the patients and what were the human interest behind the accidents or injuries which they had suffered. As I came to know them better, I had discussions with them, about Religion and Metaphysics, Psychology and Medicine.

Some of them were children, and I wrote a story about the friendship of two boys, one of whom a Muslim, who had lost his left leg, trying to save his Hindu friend's life who was caught by the live telephone wires. The other was a Harijan boy from Bihar, who had lost his right leg in a Belchhi-like pogrom. The story was called, "The Miracle of Haji Ali", the mausoleum near which the hospital is located. The week it appeared it was the talk of the hospital ! But I saw that other patients and even amputees improving, my own trouble seemed permanent. I was slowly coming to the conclusion that an operation was the only solution.

Meanwhile I had tried the following medical systems :

- (1) Allopathy,
- (2) Ayurveda Drugs and Massage,
- (3) Unani system of medicine,
- (4) Homeopathy,
- (5) Physiotherapy,
- (6) Massages of different kinds,
- (7) Mineral Water Treatment,
- (8) Braces and "Medical" Boots,
- (9) Physiotherapy and electric feed-back.

In short, I had tried everything but surgery. So, I kept on

needing Dr. Mukherjee about an operation. The roles were reversed. Normally the Doctor recommends an operation and the patient resists the operation. The reasons why the Surgeon was not so keen on surgical treatment, I came to know, were two of his colleagues—the Anesthetist and the Cardiologist. They were both afraid of my age—above 70—that I might not survive an operation.

But the long time that it was taking agitating me mentally. I offered to give it in writing that I was personally responsible for any mishap that occurred or might occur.

The Orthopaedic Surgeon relented at least but not before he had demonstrated the time it will take to operate on me, very safely.

The operation which was completed was quite complicated. This is how it is written in technical terms :

“In July, 1985 he was operated for sub-cutaneous TA lengthening+lateralisation of T. b. Ant.+EHL & T.b. Posterior lengthening. He underwent post-operative Physiotherapy & biofeedback training. Following surgery, his equinovarus is reduced and he is able to dorsiflex his ankle in neutral position. However the recurvatum in midstance persists.”

When I came out of anesthesia I was still on the operation table. My foot and leg were being put in plaster. So I went to sleep again. The second time I awoke out of anesthetic sleep, I was *alive* and lying on my back in my room. Not bad at all!

I took time to hearl—much longer than, optimistically, reassuringly Dr. Mukherjee had told (or foretold) me before the operation.

It took me four weeks to come out of the hospital after the operation. “When you are without shoes, think of those who have no legs,” says the old saying! So I thought of the pretty seventeen-year old starlet in the next room who was paralysed from head to foot because of an automobile accident.

Today the operation is exactly one year old. But I can't walk normally. Is my foot not strong enough to lift when I

TUSSLE WITH T.V.

T.V. had begun in India with modest aspirations. It was, not wrongly, called the "Idiot Box". The American style, we could not afford. We gave some insipid NEWS, mostly oral photographing our male and female news-readers as they read out the news. There was hardly any live coverage.

So, the news coverage was most uninspiring and dull, if not partial and "playing safe", even to the extent of blacking out Charles Shobraj's escape from Delhi's TIHAR jail, which is still being enquired into.

But, for as long as one can remember, the films and their songs and interviews of film personalities have been the mainstay of the T.V. programmes. Tabassam's weekly interviews used to be one of the T.V. highlights and Chhayageet was the second most popular programme. For some years all kinds of films—good, bad and indifferent—were regularly shown on T.V. screens and many a producer averted bankruptcy and made millions by selling their old junk to the T.V.—with or without commission !

When T.V. was commercialized and programmes were *sold* to Commercial sponsors for fat fees per minute of advertising, film prices also soared from a few thousand to a few lakhs, it was boom-time for Sponsors agents and producers of *Serials*, which were given *prime time* or not, ostensibly, according to their merit. Meanwhile, film scandal sheets were full of alleged T.V. scandals—of favouritism, bribery and corruption, which could not be completely confirmed or denied !

Meanwhile, I sent off a script for a T.V. film to my old friend (of "*A Tale of Four Cities*" fame !), Harish Khanna who had now risen to be the Director-General of Doordarshan. I asked him to see the script as a friend, and advise me how to go about it ! I thought a week or ten days was enough to

receive (as I expected) a polite reply which, of course, I expected from a polite person like Harish Khanna. But when a whole month passed without even a formal acknowledgement, I sent off a reminder—then another and another ! Three months passed and I had to go to Delhi to interview the Prime Minister. So I enquired if Harish Khanna was available, but he had gone to South Korea on official business. I decided to meet Mr. Gill, the then Secretary of the Ministry of I. & B. Mr. Gill turned out to be a most polite man. Indeed he promised me that he would, there and then, look through my script and give it an O.K. But, when I took out the Hindi script from my briefcase, he apologised for not being able to read through a script which was not written in URDU—he mentioned his old associations with Lahore Urdu literary circles and mentioned *Halqua-i-Arbab-e-Zauq* among whom he counted his closest friends and colleagues. I was duly impressed with Mr. Gill's Urdu patronage, one expects the reverse from a bureaucratic authority. So I assured him that I would send him the Urdu script from my residence. Mr. Gill, bending backward with politeness and courtesy and seeing how difficult it was for me to walk the long corridor of the Ministry on my operated foot, suggested that I need not take the trouble to come again, and I should send the script with one of my assistants.

So the next day I sent the URDU script to Mr. Gill not with an assistant but with my nephew, Anwar Abbas, who had a senior position in my unit, being Associate Producer. This is what Anwar Abbas has to say about his meeting with Mr. Gill :

“Mr. Gill was very pleasant. I handed over a copy of the *Urdu* script to him. He took the copy and asked me to see him a week later. Since Mr. Abbas had returned to Bombay, I contacted Mr. Gill the second time, when he asked me to see Mr. S.C. Garg of Doordarshan. There was certain rigidity and formality in the second meeting, in contrast to the first one.

“Even though a prior appointment was fixed with Mr. Garg, I had to wait about 90 minutes. before I was ushered

into his room. On my advising him that I was seeing him on behalf of Mr. K.A. Abbas and at the instance of Mr. S.S. Gill, he said, 'Is it about a serial?' I said, 'No, it is about a feature film we would like to produce for Doordarshan.'

"In that case, see Mr. Grewal," Mr. Garg told me.

"When I met Mr. Grewal two days later after fixing an appointment he asked me to leave behind another Hindi copy of the script which will be put up to the Committee. About 10 days later, when I met Mr. Grewal again, he told me that the Committee had not approved the script, but that need not discourage us as Doordarshan can accept the film after production, provided it is found acceptable.

"Meanwhile, Shakti Sidhu (Mr. Abbas's Assistant) and I continued with our efforts to meet Mr. V.N. Gadgil, Minister for Information in an endeavour to get some positive and sympathetic decision from Doordarshan. While the first meeting, fixed at breakfast time, could not be gone through, the Minister was so charming and disarming at the second one that both Shakti and I forgot the experience of the earlier day. He took the script and promised to have the issue examined. At the second fruitful meeting, the Minister told us that the script was approved and it was only a matter of formality that we should await the written consent of Doordarshan. But at the third meeting, our hopes and aspirations came crashing down, when the Minister, in typical bureaucratic fashion, told us that the Committee had again rejected the script. On our asking him as to why the script is being sent repeatedly to the same Committee members, he pointed out that such is the case in judiciary also. (This mistaken analogy did not really deserve any comments from us.)

"He pointed out that he is announcing a new policy whereby the Committee will also include a retired Judge, a Social Worker, a Politician besides Doordarshan officials. Should we so desire, we can re-submit the script to the new Committee for review. We were crestfallen and frankly quite doubted the sincerity of the assurance, the

change in the stand of the Hon'ble Minister being too fresh in our minds."

Meanwhile, once again I had to be in Delhi, and this time I made up my mind to see Mr. Harish Khanna. I telephoned for an appointment and next day appeared at his office. I started by complaining of non-receipt of a reply to or even an acknowledgment of my letter to him. Polite as always, Harish apologised for the failure to acknowledge my letter. I said it was all right, but what about my script? "I have not read it," said Harish, "I sent it off to our Committee and they had rejected the script."

"What reason did they give you?" I asked.

He replied in Hindi, "*Oon ko kuchh maza nahin aaya.*"

"Will you give it to me in writing?" I asked.

He said, "No, that was, perhaps, a joke. What will you do with such a remark?"

"Perhaps, I will quote it in the Supreme Court, and ask them what they mean by *maza*!"

"Now you are joking," said Mr. Khanna and there the matter ended.

But Mr. Khanna offered to have the Committee confront me, where the matter could be thrashed out!

The appointment was for three days later, and when I turned up, along with my aides, there was only one member of the Committee, the two others were both supposed to be indisposed. I refused to discuss with only one member of the Committee and came away after a cup of coffee and some polite small talk. Meanwhile, more than six months had passed and there was no reply or acknowledgement of my original letter to Mr. Khanna.

So I mentioned the situation to several friends, including some Members of Parliament.

One of them asked a question in the Lok Sabha, enquiring the names of the Committee members who had rejected my script. When the Honourable Minister gave the Committee members, names, the M.P. Suggested that *only* Satyajit Ray was competent enough to pass or reject a script by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas. Which was unfortunate, specially because

some members hinted at bribery and corruption in the I.V. organisation ! Which may be true or false. Nobody had come to ask me for a bribe. But then none of my scripts has been passed—including two scripts of T.V. Serials which I wrote, against my better judgment, for other producers. I told them repeatedly that, as things stood, they were not likely to be accepted by T.V. (True enough the two producers are sharing the fate of my script !).

Meanwhile, I was advised to send my script to National Film Development Corporation's Script Committee which, in contrast with the T.V., took no more than 15 days and the Corporation took only two months more to sanction a loan of Rs. 8 lakhs.

So at the moment, I am producing and directing my own script—It is the same script which did not give any *maza* to the T.V. Committee !

But the T.V. has not heard the last of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas. I propose to haunt them with the film based on the same script, which will be sent to them for selection (or rejection !) as a T.V. film, when it is completed which will by the end of the year—1986 !

A MAD CITY

The Monsoon drops from heaven. It is a heavenly delight !
But its reception on earth is earthy, earthly. It is collected in pot-holes, which are created, especially for the Monsoon Season, by digging by four departments of the Corporation—Gas, Telephones, Road repairs, and Electricity. One might also add Pedestrian Comfort ! The poor Pedestrian does not know where to step in and what to avoid. The rain-washed pavement might cover a pot-hole or a sew-hole. It might be cover for a rock submerged in water or it might be someone's *chappal*. It is one's luck what submerged treasures one finds under water. It might be the grisly carcas of a frog—or even a snake !

On the beach the sea-waves might have thrown-up a condom, or a cast-off pantie or brassiere—or even a derelict cast-off baby, while the Condom was used to prevent the birth of, but Nature (or God !) is all-powerful, and brooks no interference by man-made contraceptives !

In the Monsoon Season Bombay is at its best—and worst. The hundred lakhs population has provided itself a mansion, a flat, a room or part of a room—may be one twenty-second part of a room, a *jhonpadic* (also called *jhuggi* in Delhi) still there are plenty who make pavements their homes.

The pavements-dwellers resort to their own style of architecture. No roof, no walls, no doors, free-flowing sea-air, the sky is the ceiling, ragged rain-coat or tarpulin provides safety from rain, four-bricks making a *chulha*—modern-style kitchenette, crockery *a la mode*, public latrines were made for them, while the walls are theirs to be used as urinals.

Repeated attempts have been made to dislodge them from their dwellings, still they continue living in their own style, unruffled by bulldozers, or pick-axes. A few hours are

needed to de-house them, a few more hours find them re-housed. The game has been played *ad nauseum*, neither side has given it up. "Bombay, we love you—till death do us part" the footpath sleepers seem to be swearing during the last watches of the night, inter-mingled with their snores, coughs, and obscene remarks about those who are determined to dishouse them—though they have no houses !

What will it be like in the 21st century ? The overhead privacy would be gone, thanks to regular Airport-Nariman Point air taxis, and other space shuttles. Will there be ferry-boats between Versova and Nariman Point via Worli intermediate stop to ease the North-South traffic—or to accommodate the increased traffic, with the expected arrival of tens of thousands of Marutis, Fiats, Ambassadors and other such cars ?

The island has reached bursting point. What is the alternative ? A ferry to Ali Bagh and Panvel ? Further colonization of New Bombay ? The transfer of the textile mills to New Bombay ? Their replacement in the city of Public Parks instead of slum colonies ? The re-planning of Juhu and Versova by garden cities, instead of the Concrete Jungle that it is fast growing into ? Either way, the possibilities are enormous !

Will Bombay be another New York or Chicago ? Or will it be modelled after Moscow or Leningrad ? Stockholm or Helsinki ? Or will it be a greater Kanpur ? The future of Bombay is uncertain, it might be good or bad.

But, whatever it is, Bombay will always be full of vitality of numbers. Calcutta has more numbers than Bombay—its population is over a crore now. Bombay is slightly less. But vitality Bombay has more—It is like New York or Moscow, tens of thousands come here to make their future. Some make it, others don't. But the struggle goes on. That struggle is called Bombay ! The struggle, the vitality, the hope, the aspiration to be something, anything, is called Bombay.

Towards the north of the Bombay lies Juhu. SAVE BOMBAY came first, SAVE JUHU, a Committee, came later. I was one of its members—till some friends made me its

Chairman. We were pledged to "save" Juhu from committing suicide. Somebody was choking Juhu. That "somebody" was Man's Creed I Every yard in Juhu was built upon—fancy prices be get fancy buildings, apartment houses, clubs, five-star hotels, four-star hotels, eating houses, for fast food, *dhabas* in shacks and huts, Chinese food catered from *rerhles*, Mughlai food served in so-called "Mahals". Bombay food is found no-where ! The old Irani Restaurants are gone, the vegetarian restaurants are gone, the Rice Plate for six Annas is gone, now the fast food—Chicken in plastic *thaili* for Rs. 25/- with Ice Cream for kids at Rs. 5/- each. You eat from card-board plates and plastic spoons, because there is no time to eat and relish your food. Fast—fast—faster—fastest—goes the rhythm of eating. What you get is peptic ulcers, in the bargain.

What goes for 'fast food' is equally true of 'Fast dressing'! When I came to Bombay, you could get a Custom-made suit made to order for Rs. 14/-. Now you can get a tie for that price. The slacks cost you Rs. 301/-, jeans are cheaper. They are like "Fast Food", in fact they are designed to eat 'fast food'.

"Fast food".

"Fast drink".

"Fast life".

"Fast cars".

"Fast accidents".

"Fast death".

"Fast Funerals".

"Fast food,"

and so on, all over again !

The only thing left is fast speed of your T.V. Cassette where you can run it at fast speed and see "The Dynasty" (all 80 reels) in one hour at extra-fast speed, whether you understand it or not. There is no time to stand and stare !

Bombay, whether good or bad, is always Bombay !

It was Bombay in the seventeenth century.

It will be Bombay in the 21st century !

It is Bombay where the Brown Sugar sells through street urchins hooked on it, the way ants congregate on a lump of

White Sugar I

That way, the new-comers flock to Bombay by and buses and trans via G.I.P. and B.B.C.I.

I came by G.I.P. early in the morning and got down at Byculla railway station, and hired a Victoria to take us to J.J. Hospital.

The Victorias which could be hired for a four anna piece, are no longer there. Nor can you buy a seer of milk for one *paoli*. The milk is weighed in Kilograms which cost 1 k.g. per two rupees. Eight Tenth times the original price of milk. A tram ticket from Fort to Dadar cost an anna.

(now there are no trams) but quality is no longer guaranteed.

Today nothing is guaranteed !

Except that it is Bombay !

And it is raining !

The Monsoons is Bombay's own weather !

There never was, never will be a season like Bombay's Monson ! Umbrellas upturned by the force of the wind.

It rains from eight sides.

One day, I decided to size up the size of Bombay. I travelled by suburban train.

When it crossed the Mahim Creek, I asked a co-passenger, "Is this the end of Bombay ?"

"No. We have just passed the Mahim Station."

Then when we crossed the Santa Cruz station, I repeated the question.

"No," he replied, "We have only crossed Santa Cruz !"

I repeated the question when we reached the Virar Station.

"No," replied another passenger, "We have come upto Virar."

We had come twenty-eight miles from Churchgate Station. Still the end of Bombay was not in sight !

Bombay is an island of illimitable length, slim-waisted, and the sky is the limit of its height.

Christopher Mosley has said of each modern city including Bombay :

"All cities are mad, but their madness is gallant.

All cities are beautiful, but the beauty is grim."



