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rungh



the journeys issue

A South Asian Quarterly

art culture music film



\$5
Vol 4 #4

Featuring

Catching a ride to freedom:
BEE'S LINE

Facts & Fictions:
ASIAN DUB FOUNDATION

Step inside the GLASSY JUNCTION

Plus:

Artist, Paul Pahal
Sturla Gunnarsson
Vijay Iyer Quartet
Kerri Sakamoto





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editorial.

When Mrs. Gill, the patron Mom of **rungh** magazine, sneezed the other day, the entire **rungh** crew got delayed. 'Aw shucks, Mrs. Gill!' cried the gang, 'We'll be late!' But it was no use. We were handed candies and told we couldn't leave for the big show until we had waited a few minutes. Its considered bad luck afterall, to begin a journey after someone sneezes. So the crew chilled, sucking back on the sweets, wondering meanwhile-how long is long enough?

One, of course, should always begin a journey under auspicious circumstances. But that begs a crucial question. Do we actually make our own journeys, or do they by some weird logic 'make us?' In this issue, **rungh** presents works that explore what it is 'to journey', what such an act means to our lives.

But the idea behind journeying is not so easily captured. The word 'journey' is itself one of those elusive animals that language has deemed to be neither here nor there. It can refer to everything from spiritual enlightenment to the sound of late 70's rock and roll. It's there when you listen to John Coltrane and feel the senses rise. It's also there, however, when you slog through more mundane tasks, like doing load after painful load of laundry and learning that brights should never be mixed with whites.

Ultimately, journeys are pieced together from our everyday experiences. They shape who we become, and from there, who we will be. Journeys can be adventures full of vitality or they can be excruciating exercises in tedium and despair. But whatever they are, they are the salt of our existence, worth walking a thousand miles to the sea to have. As long as you find something new to contemplate from the pages of this issue, then we too can happily go back to our sandbox. There we can begin laying tracks for our next journey, knowing that this one has come to an end for now.

Editors

coming next issue...

FAITH

rungh is...

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May 16, 1999 8:15 PM
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4124 Main St. (& King Edward Ave)

For Rohit Dev Goswami, Six Days Old Today

Fertility rates in many places are dropping rapidly, especially in the richest countries, where, to put it simply, any two people are not producing two more people. New York Times, November 2, 1997

I cheer for you,
one so little,
for taking on the New York Times
so early on in your
career. This should make the news in your own
grandfather's paper in Assam,
Janambhumi, *The Birthplace*.

In Texas, you arrived around sunset
while in India
it was already dawn
the Brahmaputra red like your name.

The whole nation that night
did celebrate Diwali, the festival of light.

According to *The Hindu*,
which I read on the world wide web,
Indian schoolchildren
on the day of your birth

took an oath to not use fire-
crackers during Diwali
as a protest against child labor.

Also that day, if you're interested
in matters of the weather,
a full 28 mm
of rain fell
in Thiruvananthapuram, but Calcutta for some reason
remained completely dry.
Oh, was I boring you—don't cry...

Your arrival was announced
in the homes of your family in Assam
by the ringing

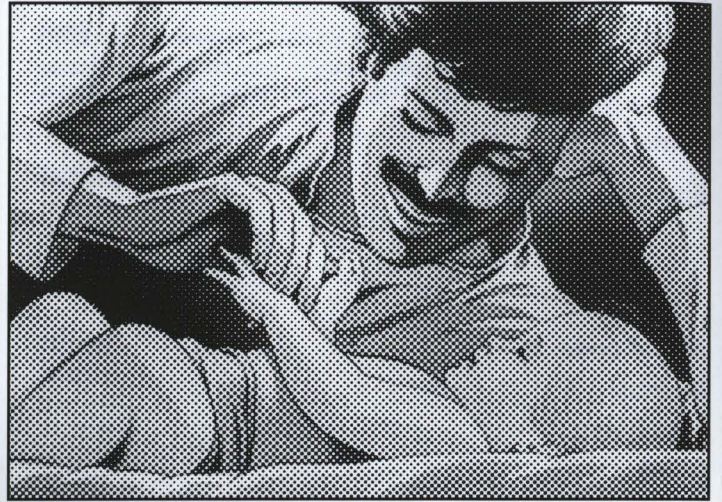
of the telephone. From Corpus Christi, the good news was e-
mailed to me post-post-haste
<akumar@english.ufl.edu>.

I don't want to mess
with Texas, but even India,
sometimes, is only a bit of electronic data on my computer.

The photograph of your face
will forever be
for your grandparents
their only passport.

The land of your parents' birth
you will receive
in the bright shapes
of postage stamps.

When I see you at play
I hope the faraway fairyland in the stories they tell you will always have
mangoes in it.



Later I'll tell you
that even in this TV global-nation
that joins Boston with Bombay, only twenty miles
from your home, more and more people try to cross the border, doing
what only the bull from Merrill Lynch is allowed to do.

Today your mother
placed outside the door
an oil-lamp, a coin,
grains of rice, a bowl of water

and a pen.
For that's how Destiny
comes and writes one's future in Assam.

I can only add
to those invitations:
a toy car, an Olajuwon jersey,
a Tickle-me-Elmo,

a can of Coke, a computer disk.
When you can rent a video

from a desi grocery store.
Promise me, you'll find
Nargis beautiful

and Dev Anand
dashing. In doing this
humor your parents'
past

and remember
they actually like Batman and Demi Moore too.

Make of your parts
what you will.
Visit us often
in ours.

Amitava Kumar, currently a Fellow at Yale University, teaches in the English Department at University of Florida. His books include: *No Tears for the N.R.I.* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta) and *Passport Photos* (University of California Press, forthcoming, 1999). He is the editor of *Class Issues* (NYU Press, 1997) and *Poetics/Politics* (St Martin's Press, forthcoming, 1999).

Sakina's Restaurant

by Jasmyrn Singh

stage

"The minute you steal one of their good ol' boys," he warns, "you will be Indian again."

Sakina's Restaurant, a monologue written by and starring Aasif Mandvi, is rightfully commanding attention and acclaim. Originally an off-Broadway production, where it received substantial praise and favor during its extended run at the American Place Theatre, it recently finished a two-week Toronto run in February. *Sakina's Restaurant* is scheduled for further runs in Chicago, Los Angeles and London.

The ninety-minute work is fashioned around a series of vignettes starring members of a South Asian restaurateur's family. The play opens with the eager Azgi departing India for New York City where his uncle, Hakim will employ him in his restaurant. Hakim is the hard-working immigrant businessman with a wife who sees her life in America as a sacrifice for her children - a teenage daughter, Sakina, and a younger spoilt son. These and other characters are all played by Mandvi with Azgi as the central narrator.

Semi-autobiographical, *Sakina's Restaurant* draws upon Mandvi's experiences of resettlement abroad during the 1980's. Born in Bombay, Mandvi and his family moved to northern England when he was young, and then to the U.S. during his adolescence.

Sakina's Restaurant explores the complicated experience of immigration from an Indo-American perspective. One theatre critic's review began with the confession that she dreaded seeing "another eager to please immigrant with a story." However, Mandvi's effort actually challenges such one-dimensional portrayals of immigrants. Although Azgi is initially portrayed as the obsequious colonial servant, Mandvi explains that over the course of the play "he sheds this conventional naiveté and optimism."

The play closes with a poignant, Rushdie-esque allegory about throwing a perfect stone in a river and not being able to retrieve the stone downstream because one had never really known what it looked like. The stone symbolizes the cherished "American dream" immigrants intend to chase upon arrival. However, as Azgi realizes, the dream is nebulous and escapes him in a torrent of disenchantment.

Sakina's Restaurant incorporates other stereotypes assigned to South Asian culture: the dutiful wife, proud father, and the ambitious pre-med university student. Mandvi plays each with remarkable fidelity. The characters similarly serve as starting points to explore complex experiences and themes encompassing immigration and disembedding. Mandvi uses each vignette to consider, develop, and

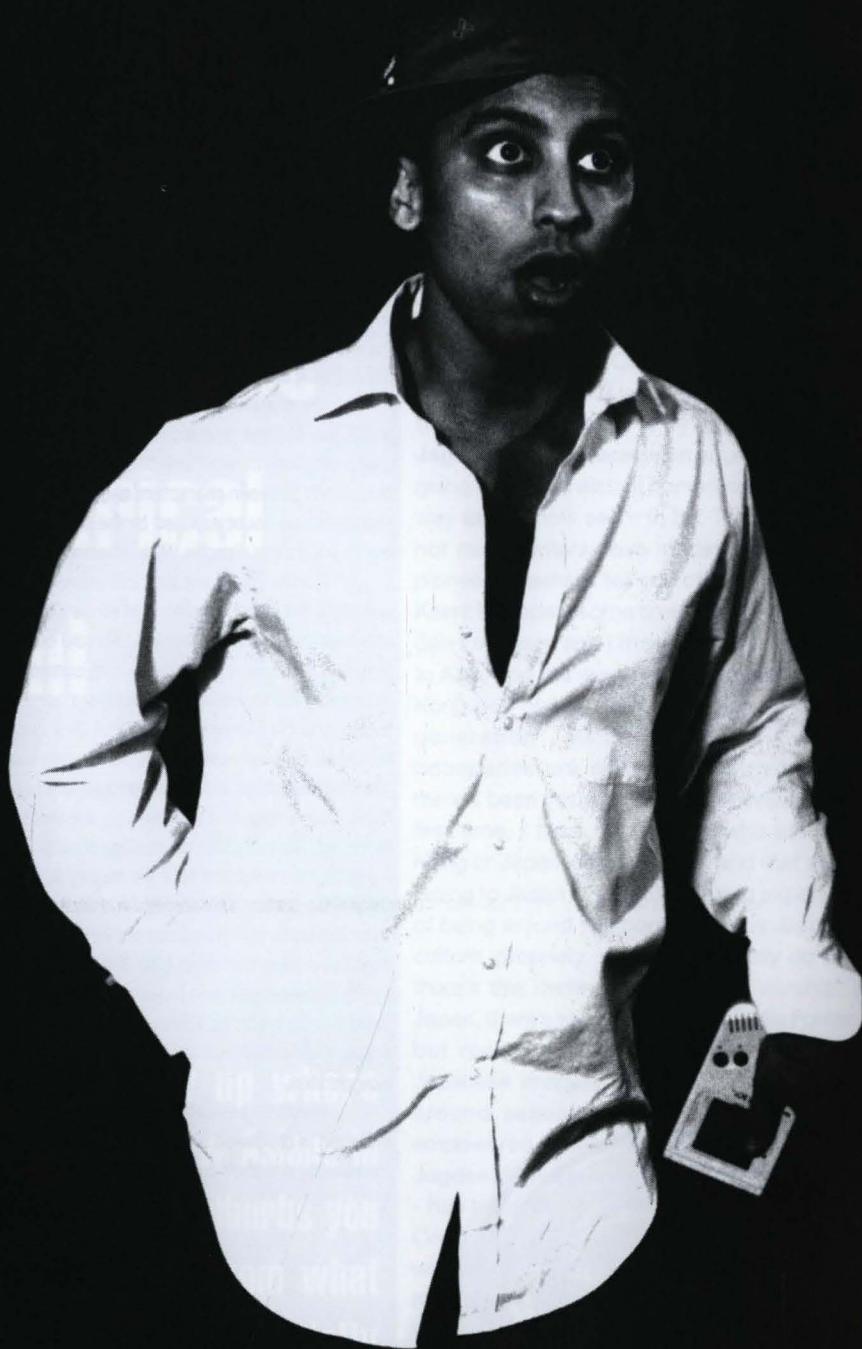


photo credit: Aasif Mandri

Sakina tries to convince her dimwitted white boyfriend Tom that "I'm not like them." Her plea is more than a girl trying to win male approval. She is seeking acceptance from the dominant culture.

interweave a theme of struggle - struggle for faith and for acceptance. In a powerful scene, Hakim, while taking dinner reservations over the phone in a pleasing and suave manner, confronts his adolescent child about her "American ways." In a telling tone, he predicts that, despite all her efforts to disassociate herself from her Indian background, she will not receive unqualified acceptance. "The minute you steal one of their good ol' boys," he warns, "you will be Indian again."

In her scene, Sakina tries to convince her dimwitted white boyfriend Tom that "I'm not like them." Her plea is more than a girl trying to win male approval. She is seeking acceptance from the dominant culture. Her scene symbolically closes with her inability to tear up the photo of her arranged fiancée to prove to Tom her complete allegiance to him, and more so to mainstream culture.

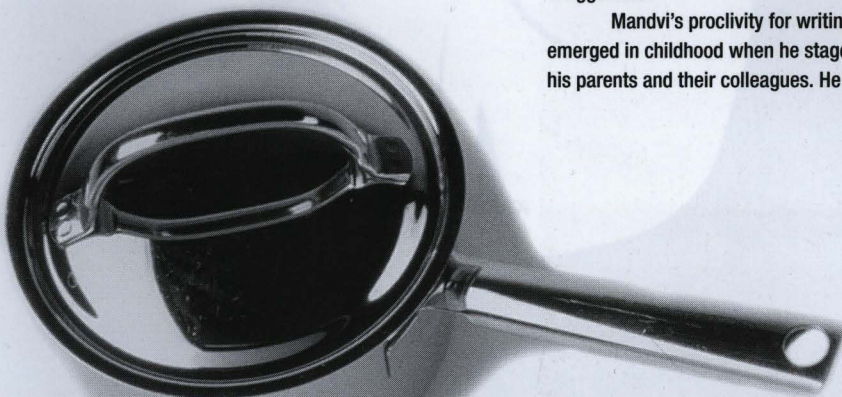
The work is technically and physically ambitious. Mandvi challenges himself to switch characters with minimal use of props and stage. Transitions between characters and scenes are seamless - no doubt assisted by the skilled hand of the play's artistic director, Wynn Handman.

Mandvi points out that it is also difficult to articulate the subject matter and scope of the piece. Although marketed as a comedy, Mandvi clarifies that *Sakina's Restaurant* is "a drama with comedic moments." His characters originally surfaced in his stand-up act but were removed after they received little response. He laughingly recalls how one of the best pieces of advice he ever received was from Woody Allan, "Remember that at least they are there and are listening." Recently Mandvi has had to deal with mainstream media who lack the insight to comprehend the piece's scope. *Now Magazine*, acclaimed as Toronto's leading arts and culture weekly, printed a negative review that described *Sakina's Restaurant* as overly melodramatic and lacking humour. A staff theatre critic regarded Sakina's confrontation with the notion of arranged marriage as confusing and exaggerated.

Mandvi's proclivity for writing and drama emerged in childhood when he staged solo pieces for his parents and their colleagues. He attended the

University of South Florida on a theatre scholarship. After graduation, his endeavors mirrored the stereotypical North American actor: moving to New York; waitering; attending acting workshops; and eventually winning minor commercial work in ads, television, and film. Currently, he appears in two major Hollywood productions. He plays Dr. Shulman in Ivan Reitman's *Analyze This* and 'Khali' opposite Denzel Washington in *Against All Enemies*.

Mandvi remarks that *Sakina's Restaurant* serves as a catharsis. He has explored and deepened his understanding of his family's experience and also has been able to deconstruct the stereotypical South Asian roles he has played professionally. "I refuse to play the cab driver again unless they are paying me an extremely obnoxious amount of money." He soundly predicts that such depictions will change as more South Asians emerge to write. Mandvi won the coveted Best Monologue award from the *New York Press* for *Sakina's Restaurant*. The writer and thespian is currently negotiating a film adaptation of this stage piece.



Jasmy Singh is a regular rungh contributor who splits her time between Vancouver and Toronto.

Her journey to becoming a writer has invariably pulled Kerri Sakamoto to the East, to the place her grandparents left. *rung* caught up with Kerri as she stood on the brim of the Pacific, looking westward to the leap she was about to make.

Jagdeesh: As a writer when did that moment of self-actualisation come, that moment when you knew you wanted to be a writer?

Kerri: It's been a rambling journey that sometimes doesn't feel like a journey at all because it was interrupted at various times. In one interview that I did in New York, this journalist bluntly asked me, 'What took you so long to write this book?' I just thought, 'I don't know.' I guess I'm a slowpoke. I've only really felt comfortable enough to call myself a writer now that I've finished this book. Not so much that it was published, but I think when I finished this book and I had the manuscripts in my hands, and had the sense that I'd written this critical mass and that was the best that I could do.

Jagdeesh: The characters in your first novel are constructed from the experiences of Japanese-Canadians. In what specific way have these experiences influenced your life and your own narrative?

Kerri: I felt that life long struggle with trying to get a sense of who I was - including my racial and cultural identity, and the history that goes with it. Becoming involved with the [Japanese] Redress Lobby gave me a sense of a real concrete political focus for that uncertainty and discomfort with the questions about who I was, and what kind of place I could find for myself in the world. I had these concrete tasks to do and I truly believed in the cause - so that definitely contributed to my writing.

Jagdeesh: In your interview in *Shift Magazine*, you spoke about not going to Japanese language school when younger as your greatest regret in life. How does that fit into who you are as a writer?

Kerri: That whole rebellion as a child of not wanting to go to Japanese school is a symptom of ambivalence about my own identity as a Japanese-Canadian. I was more interested in French, and Italian and going to Europe. When you grow up where there are very few Asians

The Electrical Field Kerri Sakamoto

"A haunting, harrowing tale that illustrates ... more powerfully than polemics, the ravages of history on hearts and lives."
Joy Kogawa

Beyond the Electrical Field

When you grow up where there are very few Asians in the mainly white suburbs you try to run away from what singles you out, especially when you're singled out in a really negative and hurtful way.

in the mainly white suburbs you try to run away from what singles you out, especially when you're singled out in a really negative and hurtful way. That's where that came from. I wish that I had been stronger and realised how that would be important to me later in life. I love Tokyo. I just spent a month there researching my next book.

Jagdeesh: Any hint about what that next book will be?

Kerri: It's going to be about two sisters who are separated at birth. One has been raised in Canada, in Toronto, and one has been raised in Japan. On their thirtieth birthday the Canadian woman discovers the existence of the other sister. The Canadian sister learns that her sister in Japan is very troubled and suicidal so she goes to Japan to try to help her.

Jagdeesh: The character in your next novel is going back to a distant homeland in the same way as you now seem to be. That's a journey not many writers have made. What do your pioneering senses tell you of this passage?

Kerri: I've spent some time in Seattle, L.A. and San Francisco and I'm so amazed by the links to Asia, and the way that contemporary Hong Kong pop culture has been taken up by third generation Asian-Americans. Those boundaries are all broken down because there's been this whole global access. For the first time, I have movie idols who are Hong Kong or Japanese film stars... and that's neat. Going to Japan, I had this amazing experience of being around this homogeneous Japanese culture, propriety, and milieu. I really do think there's this decline in white icon worship. In Japan, there's still Brad Pitt and Jodie Foster... but really there's more and more mainly Japanese images. So there's empowerment around sexuality. Seeing people in that empowered context - that was really exciting.

Jagdeesh: The process of writing - this journey - has brought Kerri Sakamoto to the Georgia Court in Vancouver this morning. From here where does Kerri Sakamoto go?

Kerri: I'm going back to Japan. I've applied for some grants to stay there for a while. It's fascinating - Tokyo is really an incredible place. People who live there say it's a sci-fi city. The things you see there are really beyond *Blade Runner*. So that's where I'm headed.



photo: Jagdeesh Mann

Sturla vs. the Censors

While in town to promote the Canadian release of *Such a Long Journey*, director Sturla Gunnarsson took time out to talk to *rungh's* Sharan Gill about the epic journey he undertook in adapting Rohinton Mistry's award winning novel to the screen.

by Sharan Gill

Sharan Gill: Knowing that there were two others who attempted to direct *Such A Long Journey*, prior to your involvement, how intimidating was it to step in and salvage the film?

Sturla Gunnarsson: It occurs a lot with films like this — the sun, the moon and the stars all have to line up for it to happen. For them it just didn't happen. The timing didn't work out and the financing fell apart. I wasn't involved in the project at the time so I don't know what the circumstances surrounding their departure were. I didn't feel any pressure at all regarding the fact that there were two other directors involved. It was the novel that I loved. When I got involved I said, "Okay, I don't want to see their drafts." We went right back to the beginning. What did intimidate me was the novel.

Sharan: What was the greatest journey and challenge you endured in the production of this film?

Sturla: The biggest journey was that this film came at just the right time for me in my life. Working in India and making this film saved me from cynicism. I was at a point where, when you're a film producer long enough, you start to have a cynical view of things. For me the real journey in this film was going to this place and being lifted up by it.

To begin with I had to reinvent myself. Nothing that I did in Canada worked in Bombay. I was forced to completely go back to square one and re-learn how to live, and that was the great journey. In India you're forced to be earnest and honest, say what you really think and not take the easy way out. You're forced to come out and articulate what you mean and therefore think about what you mean. That was the journey surrounding the making of the film.

The challenge was filming in Bombay. It's the other side of the planet. Nothing works the same way. The difficulties were so many. There's not an hour in the day when the banks in Canada are open at the same time as the banks in India. So transferring funds was a nightmare. Getting across town took 3 1/2 hours in traffic. Sound... Bombay is the loudest city in the universe — everybody has their horn on all the time... that's how they drive. But, you have to have your eyes open for the miracles that occur around you all the time. If you're so fixated on what you're trying to do, you miss everything.

The toughest thing was trying to distill 380 pages into 110 minutes while keeping the integrity of the novel on screen.

Sharan: What role did Rohinton Mistry play in the production of this film?

Sturla: Rohinton had heard all of the stories about the film business before he optioned to sell us the novel, and I think he sold us the book and carried on with his life. He didn't want his heart broken, and he really had very little to do with the adaptation until near the end. Once he started participating he was helping Roshan (Seth) and I work with the actors. He helped us shape the material. He was very Zen like about it. I never felt like "Oh God, now we have to deal with Rohinton."

Sharan: Knowing Rohinton do you get a feel that a lot of his own personal experiences have been captured in the novel?

Sturla: He's Sorab, the son. Rohinton was this banker who broke free and became a writer. People called Rohinton the 'Bob Dylan of Bombay.' He was a folkie. He was part of this whole folk movement. Sorab is the character he most strongly relates to.

The character that wants to pursue an arts education rather than a technical career as his father would prefer him to do.

Sharan: In the production of this film did you utilize any resources from the Bollywood film industry?

Sturla: We tried to keep a very low profile when we were in Bombay. The bigger and more visible you are, the more of a target you are for all kinds of people that you don't necessarily want to deal with. Naseerudin (Shah) and Om (Puri) are Bollywood stars, but both of them came out of the Delhi Theatre School. They both have their roots in the parallel cinema, and laterally came to Bollywood. We built our interiors out of Film City, which is where a lot of the Bollywood stuff is made.

They're an acquired taste, but I actually kind of like some of the Masala movies. But it's so different from what we do. What we do is naturalistic, what they do is theatrical.

The sets they build are meant to look like sets, if you didn't see the make-up artists' work they'd feel they hadn't done their job. The core of our Indian crew was from the *Bandit Queen*, and they all had experience doing foreign films.

Sharan: In the last issue of *rungh* we interviewed Naseerudin Shah. He talked about how today's expatriate filmmakers lack an intimacy with India and consequently fail to effectively depict the background history in the films they make. He said that in *Such A Long Journey* he felt there was a lack of connection with the Bangladeshi war. Being of non-Indian descent, let alone expatriate, do you think at some level this is a valid criticism?

They've been trying to get *Midnight's Children* up and running but they can't get it through the censors. That's the problem with India... that words matter. Here you can say anything you want and nothing matters.



Rohinton Mistry[left] & Sturla Gunnarsson

I find Indians to be very practical people (laugh) - they have to be to survive

Sturla: No, I think that's nonsense. The geopolitical context in the novel was something that we did have to sacrifice for two reasons. One, because we had to distill the novel and make it 110 minutes long. Second, because it never would have got through the censors, not in a million years. I don't know what Naseer's talking about. What was the last Indian movie he saw that dealt with politics in any realistic way? Filmmaking is the humanist art form, and Rohinton's novels are humanistic. By that I mean what they talk about is the human condition and the things that connect us, not those things that set us apart. I think that's the triumph of the novel - that you can read that book and connect with Gustad Noble. You don't have to be an Indian, or a Parsi to connect with him. Furthermore this is a Canadian Film. Rohinton is a Canadian writer — he could never have written that novel had he stayed in Bombay. He said he needed to step back from it to be able to observe the place where he came from, and that is the point of view of the film. As a Canadian director, I probably noticed a lot of things that my friends in India take for granted, that they no longer notice because they're so familiar. So, if Naseer wants to make a political film, go for it. That's not what we set out to do.

Another thing, why is he talking about Indians anyway? It's about Parsis. There are 130,000 of them in the world, and I don't think the Muslims or the Hindus in India know anything more about Parsis than I do — certainly not if you look at their cinema where Parsis are portrayed as caricatures in every single film I've ever seen.

Sharan: I've never experienced the transformation of a film that was so close to what I experienced while reading the novel. How did you achieve this?

Sturla: The novel is closely observed. It's about the rituals of everyday life. I tried to do that on film — to stay true to the little details that allow it to have its own pace and its own rhythm. We also wanted to do a very faithful adaptation. *English Patient* was a reinvention — I liked the novel and I liked the movie but they were two different things, and you needed to do that with *English Patient*. With *Such A Long Journey* we didn't need to do that because it's written from a character's point of view. You understand who these people are, what their actions are, why they do what they do. It's all there on the page, so that was the goal — to try to create on the screen the same experience I had, emotionally, when I read the book.

Sharan: In the film *Bombay Boys*, the character played by Roshan Seth asks, "Why is India a cheap shrink for the worlds lunatics?" While you were in India did you

see or experience this whole mystical playground that India is made out to be in the West?

Sturla: No, but I know it's there. I suppose there's a stream of the hippie thing, but I never experienced it. I find Indians to be very practical people (laugh) — they have to be to survive.

Sharan: Describe your first and last day in India. What was your first impression of the country and what taste did it leave in your mouth upon departure?

Sturla: I landed in Bombay in the middle of the night, and I remember riding in the back of the cold, air conditioned Ambassador. There are not a lot of streetlights so everything had a slightly kind of "other" intimidating feel.

There were all these dark shapes, and I eventually realized they were people sleeping on the sidewalks. The next day I got up and it was a beautiful day. I stepped out of the hotel and this rich pageant was there and it didn't feel threatening to me. Apart from that first drive in from the airport, it didn't feel the least bit threatening. I found myself connecting almost immediately with the people. Everybody was curious about me because I'm this blonde guy. Everybody would stare at me, I would stare back, and they'd smile, and I'd smile and we'd start talking. That never happens in Toronto.

But it's funny, on that first day I remember seeing these bodies and being intimidated. A few months later - Judy, my wife, and the kids had dinner at *Only Fish* down at the AC Market, and we were walking out and everybody was getting ready to go to bed on the street. When we were walking in and around the people I remember feeling like I was intruding on people's living rooms. It felt comfortable though, it felt benign and safe. I was there with my family for five months. My kids went to school in Bombay for the first two and a half months. On the last day, when we left, it was pretty sad. Coming home, my kids were depressed for months and months.

Sharan: So the trip, aside from the movie, has definitely impacted your life?

Sturla: Oh yeah. It all sound so "hairy fairy," like what Roshan says in *Bombay Boys*, but it just... I don't know. Somebody said that in India you learn not to sweat the small stuff, and really there's not that much big stuff. There are so many things that you can do nothing about so you develop faith that things will work out. Basically people are okay, basically it's good to be alive. I'm not such a cynic anymore.

Sharan: What project are you working on right now? What is the ideal project that you would like to work on in the future?

Sturla: I'm working on a film that I set in motion before I did *Such A Long Journey*.

It's a good project, but I don't think I would've chosen to do something so dark as what I'm doing now. It's called *Scorn*, and it's about a boy who ends up murdering his mother and grandmother. The ideal project? I'd like to work on something a little bit bigger. Great material, that's all I'm looking for - where I can recognize in the writing the world that I live in.

Sharan: Would you consider Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* as a future project?

Sturla: It's challenging on so many different levels. Getting it through the censors would be a nightmare. And Rohinton isn't fond of Mrs. Ghandi and they're coming back on the political front. On the financing level, it's a big bill and you can't cheap out on it. There is a movie there, and it will be made some day by a great filmmaker. *Fine Balance* would be somebody's absolute masterwork. I think it probably should be done by an Indian. It should be done by the great Indian director of this generation.

Sharan: Do you see yourself working with more Indian cinema and writers in the future?

Sturla: I would love to make another film in India but it would depend on the material. I would like to work with Salman Rushdie. They've been trying to get *Midnight's Children* up and running but they can't get it through the censors. That's the problem with India... that words matter. Here you can say anything you want and nothing matters. In India there are so many communal and political issues. I'm not in favour of censorship, but I understand why they're nervous about this kind of stuff. In India words matter.

Fine Balance would be somebody's absolute masterwork. I think it probably should be done by an Indian. It should be done by the great Indian director of this generation.

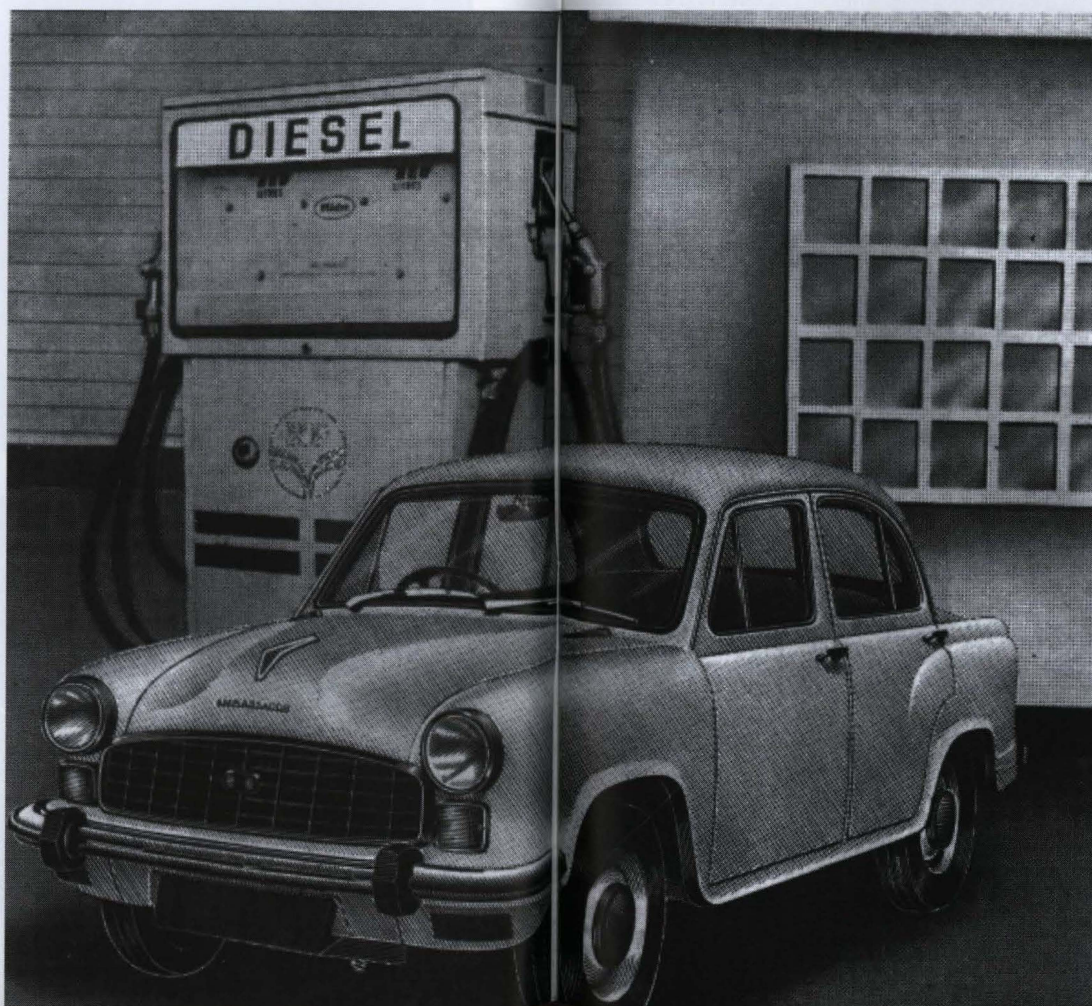




photo: Harpreet Gill

Like a poodle in a tight sweater. The Glassy Junction at first seems at odds with its décor. Jagdeesh Mann spends an evening in the English pub - eventually, the feeling of things being amiss went away.

Whether falling against the terrain or rolling casually over its low-lying areas, water has been known to wash away all that is improperly secured to its surrounding landscape. Monsoons in 1993, for example, carried away seventeen thousand cows in India, sending them on the journey to their next lives. Hurricane Mitch recently did the same in Honduras, casting three thousand pigs to swine purgatory. The US National Weather Service estimated that flooding in 1997 alone caused eight billions dollars in damage in that country. Whether it be bridges, railroad beds, houses, farm animals... all have been, at one time or another, too weak to prevent being pushed like squatters off the land.

That's why, when the rain begins streaming into the Glassy Junction pub, I wonder if it isn't the end for London's only Panjabi-English pub. A combination Panjabi *dhaba* and English pub, The Junction is the newest arrival on the English pub scene. It is also the newest arrival on a wider English landscape where consistent scrutiny in the name of tradition and authenticity either ensures any phenomena's embrace or its fade into memory. In more recent years, this sanction of tradition has led to the halt of modern skyscrapers encroaching on London's centre. This narrowing glare of authenticity has also led to the public rejection of foreign-raised sports heroes arriving wrapped in Union Jacks. In an England built upon images from the past, The Junction and its Panjabi motifs are too far removed from Turner-esque landscapes and idle banter about the weather to find roots in the local history. The establishment's brick exterior may blend into the surroundings but its aroma of food and babble of tongues betrays the difference lurking within. Like hot pants in the nineties, The Junction appears destined to be a short-lived event — it seems a futile experiment in variety where the formula for success has already been developed. The pub will likely be cleared from the landscape. The rain has come to do its bidding.

But despite the best efforts of the water, only the poolroom needs evacuation on this evening. The rest of the walls of the establishment are left dry. The wooden ox-plough remains safely pinned against the far barroom wall. The lively full-colour portraits of squat

and of fat men bathing with their livestock remain untouched. In Surrey's sister city, Southall, on this early Friday evening, nobody save the bartender seems all too concerned about the seeping water in the poolroom. The attentions of patrons remain engaged in the filmy routines grinding along on TV's hanging in the corners or in the dishes brought out to them from the tandoori oven. They stay seated, undisturbed by the rain rattling against the pub's grimy windows — eyes glazed to the cheesy music videos, their lips gleaming with chicken fat. The pub hums in diversion.

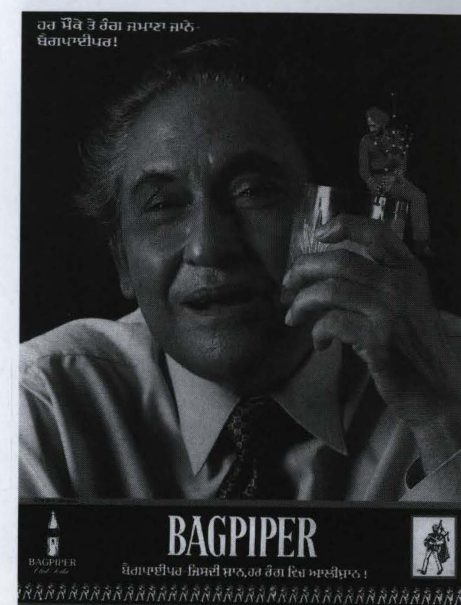
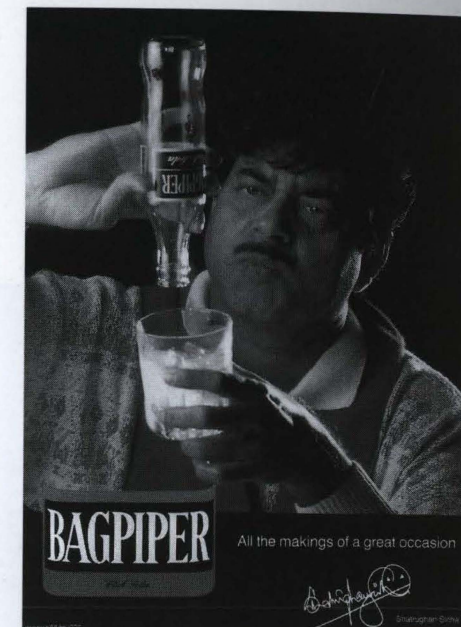
In 'post-colonial' England, racial lines are the new class divide. They have slowly taken precedence over the old class boundaries as the primary marks of difference in English society. In the midst of this transition, The Junction has made its inevitable debut. Five years on since its founding, The Glassy Junction is in every way representative of present day Southall, a Panjabi Sikh neighbourhood that has been completely gutted of its working class English past. Its patrons are predominately neighbourhood Sikhs, as is the ownership — the pub is even located across the street from a Sikh *gurudwara*. But if the patronage, in any way, defies the makeup of the neighbourhood, the aesthetic cakes itself in it. Beyond its standard boutonniere of ugly carpeting, miserable print wallpaper, and dim lighting — ubiquitous to every English pub — The Junction is proudly accessorised with all the necessary features to make it look as round-the-way as possible. On the exterior, the presence of four larger than life posters of 'men-doing-bhangra' tag The Junction's walls the way action-hero stickers would a child's lunchbox. Inside, the heavy-handed scent of Indian spices vigilantly patrols a barroom mapped out with signs named after Panjabi towns such as Hoshiarpur, and Jullandhar. Even the condom dispenser in the *mard* (men's) washroom yields prophylactics labelled with an adequate degree of cultural innuendo, 'Milan ki Raat' (The Night of Meeting).

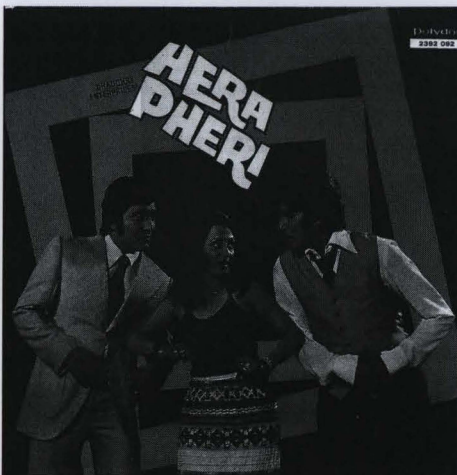
The agitated bartender who cleared out the poolroom talks about the reason for the Junction's existence, "There was a demand in the neighbourhood for this kind of place," he says, "a place where locals could go." In the five years since The Junction's formation (the current owners bought out a previous pub in the area), it has become that place of local flavour

where accents melt into the background instead of sticking up like a stubborn cowlick. The clientele is mainly immigrant, and more notably it is overwhelmingly male — save two blonde escorts at the bar there are no women in the pub. Overseeing the joint, a large Sikh bouncer-slash-waiter stands by the door, one hand curling his handlebar moustache and the other helping his belt support his belly. At the bar and on the tables, groups of men hold each other close and shower drinks upon one another.

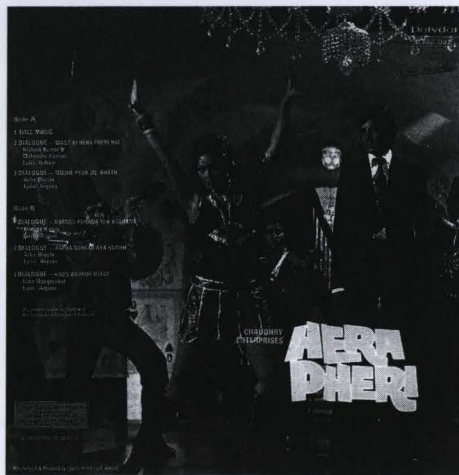
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A Night's Journey to the G Junction





But as much as The Junction is about drinking, so is it about dancing.



It is Friday night, and the mood in the pub is festive. But as much as The Junction is about drinking, so is it about dancing. In a separate room linked by hallway to the main section of the pub, a local troupe named for its singer, Balbir Jagat Puri, is performing for the evening. He leads the audiences through the chorus of the classic, *'Dancing my hair came loose, oh sister-in-law will you braid it?'* Hearing it, the men that were previously holding hands drinking by the bar, rush to the front, drinks, pound notes, and dancing partners in hand.

One of the dancers stays up in front of the makeshift stage and grabs the mike from a helpless Balbir Jagat Puri. It is a group session, his heart has been broken, and he has something to say. The recital begins in Panjabi, *'People will torment you.'* And again, this time with greater intensity, *'People will torment you!'* the short man in track pants continues. *'You who picked up my love and threw it [all over].'*

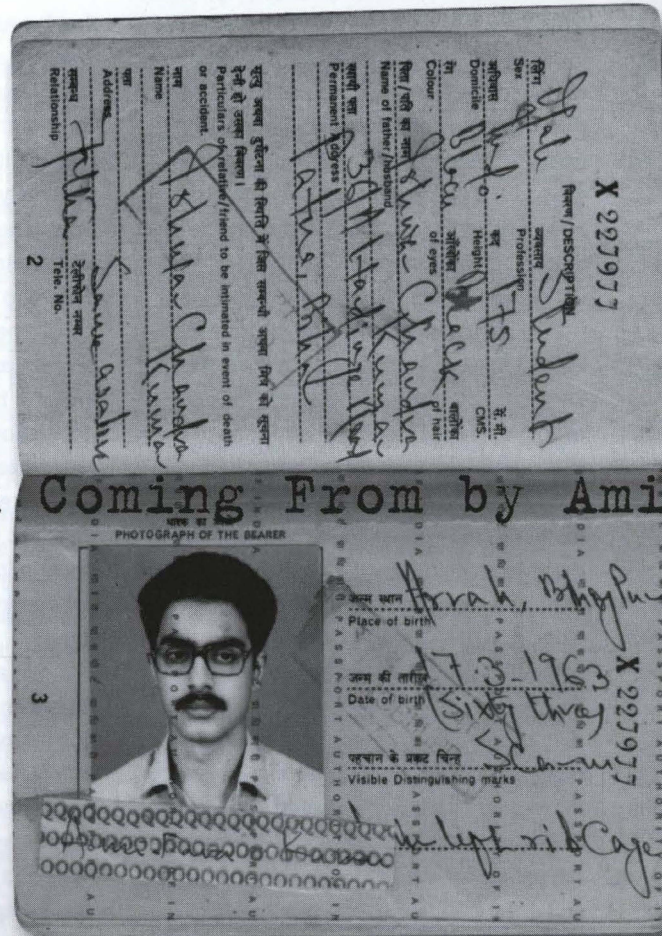
*You! who shoved my love in its back,
You! who spat my love into the dirt,
You! who tore my love into chunks
and threw it into a well,
You! who punched my love and made
its fat eyes black,
You, who will not release my heart.'*

After a round of acknowledgement from the audience, the mike eventually makes its way back to Balbir who launches into his next number, *'Oh you dance so beautifully, who has taught you?'* The men who dropped off to the side for the poetry recital return to the front, a sea of floundering arms lap against the shores of a retreating island.

The Glassy Junction is an establishment, like all other English pubs. It is a muse on distant horizons — whether incited by ploughs pinned to walls or poetic compositions recited from tattered hearts. That is what brings The Junction into the fold of English pubs. It is a place where patrons come to renew ties to their past, to strengthen ties to the present, and to chase away any thoughts of the future. For

outsiders, The Junction is a pilgrimage sight — one that invites them to commemorate the kitsch that forms the living memories of the men who come here to drink. But for the regulars who have built this shrine, theirs is not such a distant sojourn. For them, as for all others who frequent their favourite locals night after night, their journey is a routine passage to a place not so different from home. It is a journey, that for all its erosion of surprise or new-ness, is made again and again. From transience arises permanence as patrons transform a journey into a short jaunt, a skip over to the neighbourhood pub. The Junction settles into the landscape. It becomes another lantern turning out the darkness back into the night — an inn amongst many others, where locals find a warm well-lighted place and their neighbours listening blithely to the ceaseless patter of English rain.

Had I changed? Only in two years? Was this no longer my country, my home?



Where I'm Coming From by Amitava Kumar

photo by: Amitava Kumar

In late August of 1986, I left India for the U.S. to get a graduate degree. It was not my first trip to the airport in my hometown, Patna. I had been there several times when my father, a government official, had to travel. But, this was the first time I had stepped on a plane.

Through the small window, I watched the rest of my family standing far back from the tarmac. They were all there for the event: aunts and uncles, my mother in a new sari, my father's mother who had been brought from the ancestral village in which she lived, several cousins and their spouses, my brother-in-law, and a young nephew. I was a little nervous. Getting the American visa hadn't been easy, and a fear remained that I

would be turned back at any point. At the same time I was also tremendously excited and happy.

It was hot outside and my grandmother, alongside a few other relatives stood in the shadow of a small plane parked about fifty meters away. Although they were unable to see me, one or two of my relatives would raise their hand and wave. When the plane started moving, a cousin took off her long, scarf-like *dupatta* and held it with both hands so that an elegant span of bright orange unfurled in the strong breeze.

We were in the air. I removed from my hair the marigold leaves and grains of rice that my mother had sprinkled on me for good luck. Using the tip of her ring finger, my

mother had put a spot of curd and red sindoor in the center of my forehead. I scrubbed it off as I watched the airhostess making her way slowly down the aisle toward me.

Two years later, after getting my degree, I was on my way back to India for a holiday. This time however, there was no one to see me off from New York City. But, when I landed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi, I found my father waiting for me. He had made the sixteen-hour train journey from Patna to meet me in the early hours of the morning

That morning we were to catch another train back to Patna. Before leaving Delhi however, I needed to go to the

Lufthansa office to confirm my flight back to the States. This didn't take long. We came out on the street, my father and I, and began to look for post-cards. I had promised two friends that I'd drop them a line from India.

In the store, I found a few cards that I liked. I asked the middle-aged shopkeeper what I could pay him.

"Three rupees."

"That much?" I exclaimed in surprise. In 1986, when I had left, I was certain they were going for half that price. Last year, I found out that prices have increased five-fold since then.

"This is quite expensive," I said to the shopkeeper.

"Not as expensive as where you are coming from," the man responded matter-of-factly. He didn't even bother to look at me while replying.

I was suddenly angry. "And where am I coming from?" I asked him. But, the shopkeeper didn't think he needed to answer me. I looked at my father and he said, "Prices have gone up."

When we had paid and were out on the street again, I saw my father smiling. He said, "*Woh jaanta tha tum bahar se aaye ho.*" (He knew you had come from outside.)

Had I changed? Only in two years? Was this no longer my country, my home? It wasn't as if I hadn't contemplated questions of this nature before. Now however, they seemed unexpectedly out of my control. Perhaps, it had just struck me that even the answer to such questions lay not with me, but with the shopkeeper who hardly knew me and had the power to dispense judgement. This irked me more than the fact that he was right.

For his part, my father was interested in neither questions nor answers. They were not as important as the central fact, his son had managed to go and live abroad — in the West — and was now recognized as such by an unknown shopkeeper.

And I? I was entering into the drama that was becoming the reality of thousands,

no, more than a million Indians. In America, I would be asked if I was from India. In India, I would be recognized as being from America.

On my first day in America, I ate beef and drank beer.

A friend of mine from Patna, who had also gone to college in Delhi, had been admitted to the same university in Syracuse, New York. We went to a restaurant a few blocks from our apartment. In the restaurant, I ordered beef because I wanted to know how it tasted. I had also decided I wasn't going to pretend I was still in India. I then asked for a Heineken beer because I had seen it advertised in *TIME* and other magazines sold in India.

I realize that these are trivial and almost adolescent pleasures. When I think of that first day in the USA, I am forced to think of my earlier travels. For example, I recall the time I left Patna to come join a secondary school in Delhi. I had recently won a scholarship. I took one of my mother's small trunks to the market and got it painted a shiny black. In bold letters on the right, in white, I had the painter carefully write: A. KUMAR, NEW DELHI. To this day, some of my relatives call me by that whole "name."

I was sixteen then. The move had been made, I felt. I had left the provinces for the capital. Suddenly, I wanted to be better at English and would write in a notebook all the unfamiliar words that I encountered. The first entry in my notebook was the word "lambent." I had come across it, if memory serves me correctly, in Hardy's *Tess*.

Now, in America, I wanted to drink Heineken. That too, was a debt to my past. From Delhi, when I returned home to Patna, I took my parents used copies of *TIME* and *Newsweek* that I had bought for fifty paise in the *chor bazaar*, a thrift market, behind Delhi's Red Fort. Those magazines, as well as the school uniform, which I wore as I traveled back in the train to Patna, were for me, my own distinctive signs of modernity.

Two more years passed in Delhi, and I

cannot say exactly how, but those markers of modernity changed. I got interested in poetry, Marxism, Indian New Wave films, street plays and theater at the National School of Drama, the paintings of ordinary Indian people that I saw coming out of Baroda, and the authors whose books I found in the Sahitya Akademi Library. Books that I would later recognize among the imports under the PL 480 program.

That was nearly twenty years ago. Most of those interests have stayed with me, and as I think back, they give my life some continuity. One thing has changed however. Now, when I walk on Delhi's streets, men walk up to me and ask me if I have any dollars to sell.

There are more and more Indians living abroad, and many of them travel back to India for business and vacations. The Indian population in the U.S., Canada, Britain, and other areas that Indians have settled has undoubtedly begun to reflect broad class diversity. From the perspective of Indians living in India however, Indians living abroad are continually perceived as a privileged group.

In any case, in Indian writing, Indian-American travelers have begun making their appearance. In Pankaj Mishra's *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana*, an account of his travels through small-town India, he describes meeting an Indian-American family "that had arrived some time back, filling the silent empty courtyard behind us with their twangy American accents and voluminous suitcases."

Halfway through his spiel, Mr Tomar was interrupted. It was the teenaged boy from the India-American family that had arrived some time ago 'Excuse me,' he said, 'may I have a boddle of Bissleri wadder?'

A nonplussed Mr Tomar looked at us first, and then, at him. 'Sorry,' he said, shaking his head in apology, 'I didn't hear you.'

The boy repeated, 'May I have a boddle of Bissleri wadder?'

On my first day in America, I ate beef and drank beer

Now, When I walk on Delhi's Streets, men walk up to me and ask me if I have any dollars to sell.

Mr Tomar heard him attentively, then lunged at the only word he could guess at. 'Oh, Bisleri!' he cried, 'Yes, of course! How many bottles?'

In the writing that is being done or the art that is being produced by Indians, we will need to think of the children who are being born abroad, in the U.S., England, and Canada, or France, Africa and the Caribbean, as the inheritors of our new modernity.

This reality hasn't entered the popular or dominant fiction, which in the West has been given the name "Indian writing." Thus, in the work of someone like Salman Rushdie, perhaps because he is drawing upon his own autobiographical details, childhoods are located in cities like Bombay rather than London. The changed perception that I am calling for, of Indian lives in the West, and of the protean mixings that result from this presence, will mean a break from the purist fictions of the guardians of more antiquarian, classic representations.

Consider the unexamined and simplistic assumptions behind this account by a British writer Andrew Robinson, a biographer of the film-maker Satyajit Ray:

Ray was in London again for a few days to see friends and answer questions at the National Film Theatre, following a session of nearly all his films. He spoke well but this time he seemed a bit tense. I watched how his normally mobile face would sometimes glaze over at a question that did not engage him. 'Would you ever make a film about Indians in London who are fifty-fifty?' a London Indian in the audience asked him. There was a pause. 'Fifty-fifty...?' queried Ray in a heavy voice almost a drawl, and then lapsed into silence; he obviously wished to avoid giving offence, but clearly people without roots — whether in London or in Calcutta — did not much interest him as an artist.

The idea that relocation disintegrates roots, and that impurity is an enemy of history, is both arrogant and ignorant. Robinson, in his attempt to read Ray's mind,

does the film-maker acute disservice. Ray's films are artistic because they graph numerous displacements and subtly negotiate the tension of origins. In his famous *Apu* trilogy for example, the country and the city define a charged space in which Ray's male and female characters, some young and some old, dramatically confront contradictions.

What was true of the Indians in Ray's films, is also true of Indians in the diaspora. This is a fact that escapes the imagination of older writers like Narayan, and those younger ones who want to stake exclusive claims to authenticity. In these writings, it is only the white (okay, "red-faced") American who is the traveler - never the Indians.

More disappointingly, the Indians in these narratives are mostly India-born adults, who are imagined as some sort of Americans on parole in India. Adults born in the West who locate their origins in the subcontinent, or for that matter, the children of Indian immigrants, are only beginning to find their space in the work of writers like Hanif Kureishi. There they emerge as the creative, volatile, bearers of difference.

Their questions, even their confusions, fascinate me. When I talk to my students who share that history, I can sense the freedom they find in being different from their parents. They are not only modern, they are liberators of a narrowly Western modernity. When they bind themselves to a careful consideration of what it also means to be non-Western, they become more modern, negotiating history and change.

Even if they have never been to India, I am confident that they would be amused, but also very understanding if I told them the story of carrying a trunk to Delhi from Patna with the freshly painted sign "A. KUMAR,

NEW DELHI." We have something to learn from each other.

Amitava Kumar, currently a Fellow at Yale University, teaches in the English Department at University of Florida. His books include: *No Tears for the N.R.I.* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta) and *Passport Photos* (University of California Press, forthcoming, 1999). He is the editor of *Class Issues* (NYU Press, 1997) and *Poetics/Politics* (St Martin's Press, forthcoming, 1999).

Shabnam



by Sharan Gill

Shabnam examined her appearance in the mirror. Flowing curly black hair, a sharp slightly under-pronounced nose, thick pink lips, large hazel eyes — she was pleased. Smiling to herself — big white teeth, with a slight overbite, which made her even more attractive — she beamed with pride. She knew she would win.

She was aware of how beautiful she was, how much she was desired in that way. She perceived the power her face held. Crowds of people would stop and stare when she entered a room, and she luxuriated in every minute of it. She would win the pageant, hands down, and finally be openly declared the most beautiful girl in La La Land....

Beep! Beep! Beep! — SMACK! "What the... 6:20am... God, not another day. Anything but another day. Nine more minutes. Shabnam why do you torture yourself this way? Get up and finish this day."

As she threw off the covers and headed for the bathroom she stopped to check herself in the mirror - they were still there, all 32 pock-mark scars covering her two cheeks and forehead. It's funny, even after 20 years of carrying around the marks of her childhood, she checked every morning to see if magically, at least one had

18 • *rung*

She was
aware of
how
beautiful
she was,
how much
she was
desired in
that way.

disappeared. And then she counted..."Yup all accounted for."

Tonight, she decided, she would get laid. As has happened before, approximately 35 1/2 times, some average Karim off the street will tell her how beautiful she is, bed her, whisper lovely charms in her ears, and leave her lying in a bed of blissful tears. The tears were always worth it for Shabnam... anything to feel desired, if only momentarily.

There was the time when that light haired, short, heavy fellow threw a blanket over her face so he wouldn't have to look at her ugliness - her large protruding nose, deep inset eyes, lips barely existent - "disgusting and gross" were the chaps words. He rode her for at least 10 minutes, but Shabnam didn't cry. She bit her quivering lower lip and pretended to enjoy it. "Oh, pish posh, one guy, one time. Big deal."

Tonight he would be handsome — tonight he would take her away from the world that she disgusted...for good.

As Shabnam brushed her teeth and stared through her own image in the mirror, she recalled how she was taunted as a child, and how her neighbor would touch her. But that's not why she is the way she is, at least that's what she tells herself. It's her face. Shabnam knows that being 'ugly' has made her an easy target all of her life... that somehow she deserves the jokes made at her expense. Nonetheless, she will never understand why the world despises her so, why her own mother wants nothing to do with her.

Slipping off her robe and entering the steaming shower she reflects on her lifetime mission to prove her relatives and 'friends' wrong: spending lust-filled nights with men who no one would think she would have a chance with. Shabnam was aware that, in a world that revolves around screws and blow-jobs, she reigned queen... the thought of being a 'queen' of any sort made her smile to herself.

Love? She's never known it, never shown it. Oh yeah, getting ready for work...at least she enjoys her job. It's a place to go - nice desk, own computer, big money in the bank - blah blah blah.

Shower... exit. Make-up... not worth it. Blow dry short short hair — dry dry. Clothes - wear best red power suit... shortest skirt, highest heels, sheerest nylons. Eat, drink... coffee, bagel. Finest jewellery today... gold, diamond, gold. What the hell maybe just a touch of lipstick... definitely blood red. Okay, ready.

She remembers how much she loves the world when she sleeps and dreams... how she is always the one who wins.

Time to go... wait, wait... wash dishes... scrub scrub, rinse rinse — everything in order... okay. Proceed. Open closet, pick up brief case. Open. Pistol. Insert mouth. Fire. Sleep.

Paul Pahal - Untitled

My work reflects my interest in the isolation of colour and how colour sets images within the subconscious in motion. My pieces develop spontaneously and are intended to reflect my life's journey.



Paul Pahal is a visual artist, DJ and musician.
To contact Paul Pahal, call 604.325.4206

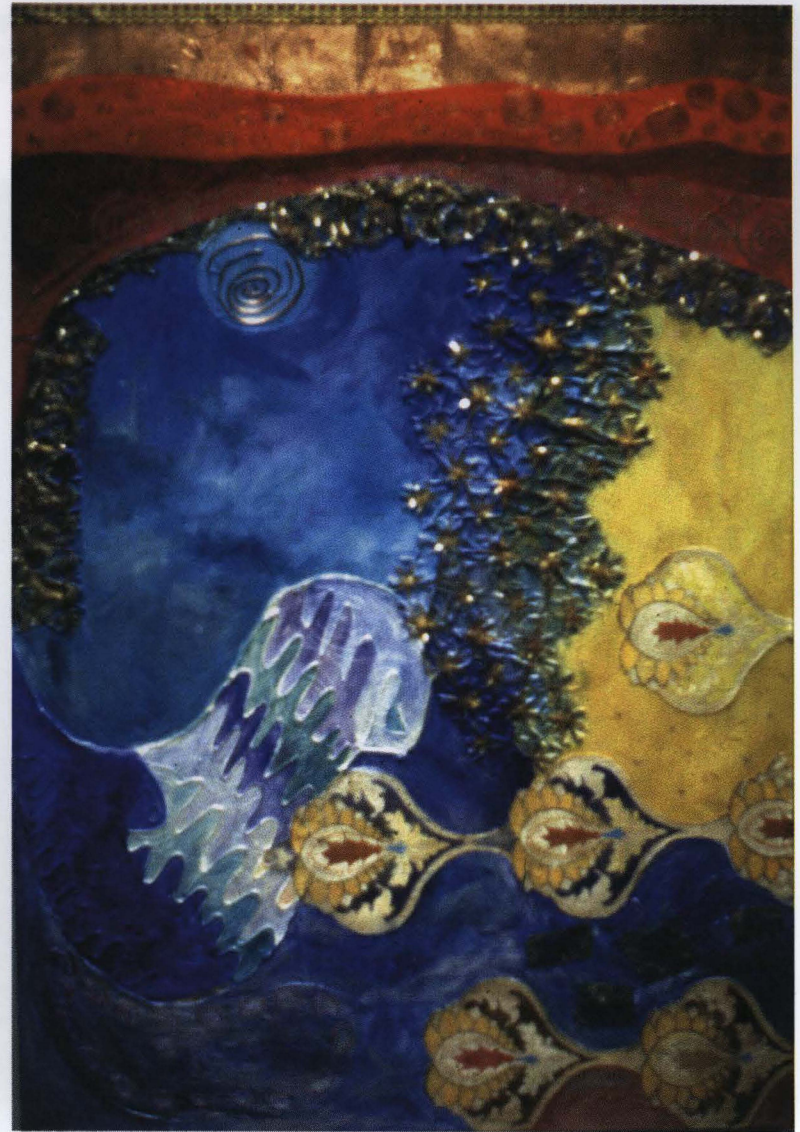
My paintings are my narrative, yet I do not wish to tell a story. I merely wish to evoke an emotional response in which the viewer receives a unique, personal experience.



In order to elicit a truly personal reaction, I have discarded titles. I feel that titles would only sway the viewers into believing that they should be seeing something that may not be there for them. This is not my desire.

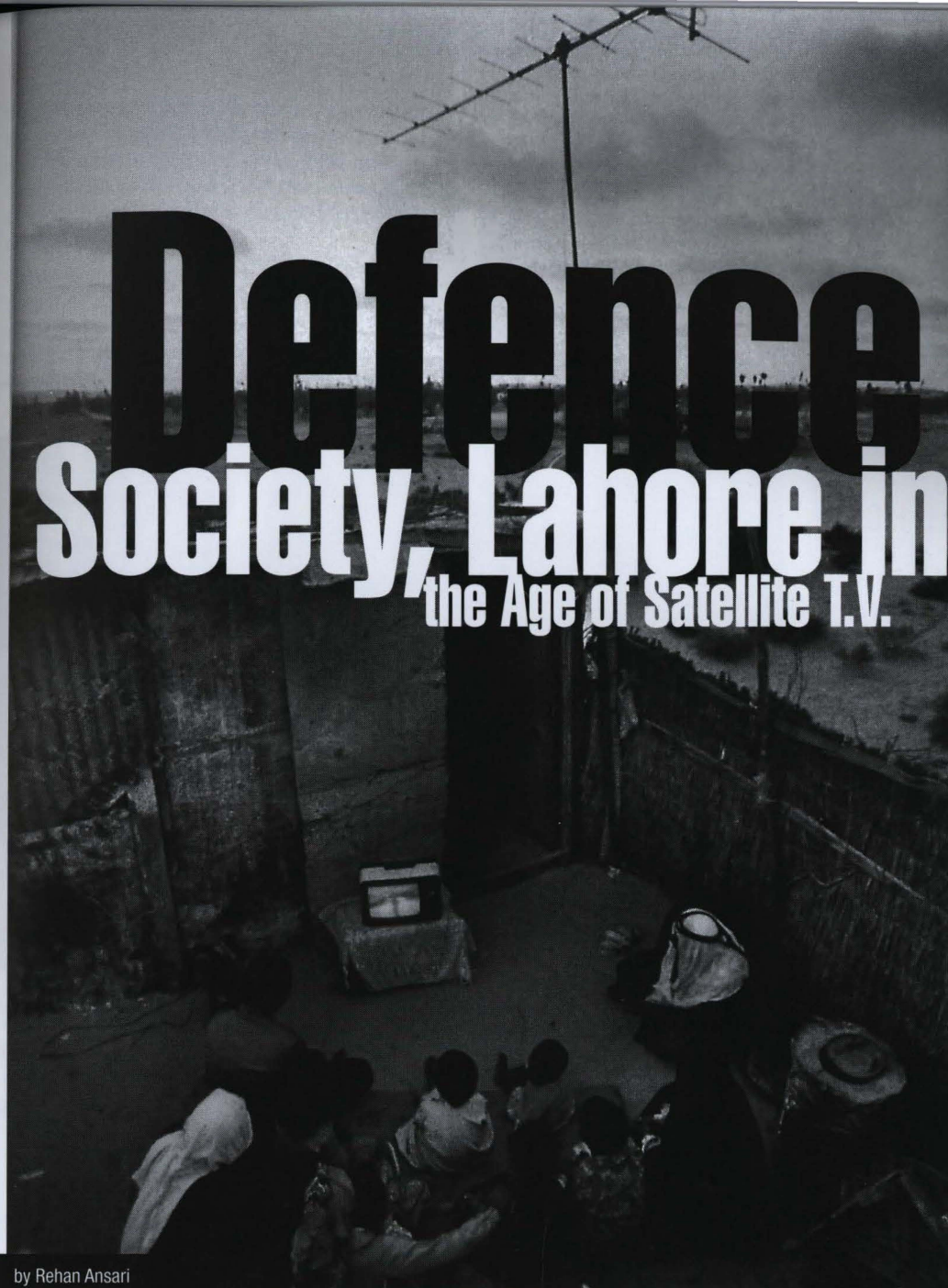


I have been influenced by three schools of art emphasizing the modernist perspective. These influences have been fused with both the cultural influences of my present surroundings, as well as the traditions of my Indian ancestors. These juxtaposed influences provide the unique perspective of my work.



I do not wish my work to become the only thing that describes me. My works are more than just an expression of my heritage. They are threads between my journey and yours.

Defence Society, Lahore in the Age of Satellite T.V.



by Rehan Ansari

Rehan Ansari reports from Lahore on the transformations and fractures of post-modernity in South Asian space.

Lahore is a frontier of this space: a space that is a kind of regional hyper-culture that is post-national, crass, vibrant and full of promise, but which coexists with a national elite that is still defending its narrow chauvinistic and class interests and an older rural culture that is being slowly eroded.

I am back in Lahore. I am living, as I did 5 years ago, with Ifti and Munni (my uncle and aunt). They have moved on in the Lahori world, thanks to Munni's boutique, and now live in Defence (yes, there is also an

upper upper middle class enclave by the same name in Karachi). The place is littered with flat roofed, distended, ugly pillared monster houses. That's not new. What is new are the monsters sitting on the backs of those monsters. "Dishes" upon dish antennae on every rooftop. Star, Zee, EL, BBC - some kind of Bombay production is in every Lahori living room, bedroom and restaurant (these three types of rooms account for every Lahori indoor space).

Channel flicks move me between Dilip Kumar, Raj & Shammi Kapoor making the sweetest doe eyes to the likes of Madhubhala and Nargis, and Oprah interviewing Whitney Houston, to the NBA and

The songs from present day Bombay films are done in an MTV format - an MTV visual 'beat' that consists of a three minute song, very expensive costumes, and choreography.

Michael Jordan, and cricket and cricket - inglorious IndoPak cricket - to Bombay video jockeys who speak an American stilted Hinglish, or a born-in-Britain English, who are gorgeous like the music videos they introduce. And the music videos: you see songs from *Barsaat*, *Chaudhvein ka Chand*, *Howrah Bridge* and *Mr. and Mrs. 55* introduced by some video jockey who gives you nuggets on Sahir Ludhianvi and Guru Dutt, and can impersonate all of them, and ad lib the songs, and break out into a public school joke that is half English and half Urdu/Hindi and perfectly contemporary.

The songs from present day Bombay films are done in an MTV format - an MTV visual 'beat' that consists of a three minute song, very expensive costumes, and choreography. A fantastic melange of Bollywood funhouse images (like Delhi havelis and Jaipur palaces) form the backdrops. And the talk shows: I move between the game and talk shows that have guests like Naseeruddin Shah and Anupam Kher and Shabana Azmi, cinema icons I have never seen appear on screen as 'themselves', to Zee T.V news, and Newstrack (Madhu Treihani's hard-hitting expose style camera-and-question-in-your-face-journalism).

These highs of pop gratification have Lahoris breathless these days.

Lahore is still Lahore. In Defence there is sparse public transportation. Everybody 'from' Defence has a car, and everybody who they know has a car, and nobody else lives or visits Defence. But what these monster homes are squatting on were formerly farmers' fields, and Defence is expanding into more of them. If you sit on the lawns of one of these houses, or on the verandahs at the back, where the clothes lines are strung between faux Greco-Roman pillars, and you close your eyes, you can hear the birds in the trees - you won't in Karachi - and a carpenter's hammering next door will sound like the ubiquitous pump at the well of a Punjabi village. You may even hear a rooster crowing, and you will smell the rich, lusty smell of Punjabi soil. Lahore is Lahore.

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Bee's Line

BY K. MANALI

BEHIND PRISON'S CONCRETE WALLS, RELIGIOUS FAITH CAN BECOME A DOORWAY TO PERSONAL FREEDOM. WHAT HAPPENS TO THAT FAITH WHEN THOSE WALLS DISSIPATE?

Years later, I find people outside are also trying to escape. They live for the Friday night and dread the Monday morning.

To understand life you have to understand the ironies of a prisoner who wants to escape. I was in charge of the prison laundry. One day, I saw a guy peeping through a laundry bag. I thought, fair enough, he was only in for robbery. I did nothing, so the guy escaped. He got to London. I thought this guy was desperate to escape so he deserved the freedom, but do you know what he did? He was found in his favourite pub after committing another crime. He had to serve a sentence twice as long. It did him no good.

Outside, we do the same thing. As soon as we get our escape we don't know how to deal with it.

K.: *This is how Bee had viewed the seven years he spent in the North of England, away from his family and friends. At the time in their lives when youths his age were getting in and out of their designer gear, he started a journey that led him through the deep crevices of his mind. He found that if you kept your mind on a leash you could control and train it.*

Despite Bee's protests that he was not ready to tell his story, we met at my flat to transcribe Bee's tale. "We are never ready to recall our journey, not until our journey is completed," Bee objected. To that I replied, "But every stage of the journey is still the journey." And so over the warmth of tea began the recital....

Bee: I think I'm 30 odd something. I don't think about marking off the calendar. It's irrelevant. Does it make me better if I'm 45 or 25? Some



people see things in time span. I see things as now — what I see around me now. In my journey, time is not of essence. Time doesn't really mean anything. It's not about how long it takes, I measure things by getting on and doing things.

I walk everywhere. I could get there faster if I take the tube, but I walk home two miles from work everyday. I enjoy the walk. You could see anything on the way. Nothing is ever the same... you sense different things. Walking is above ground. Even when it's raining I like the sense of moving. When I can't sleep, I put on my coat and walk about 5-6 miles in any direction. It dates back to the prison courtyard. In the depth of winter, I'd be the only one out there. The courtyard was the size of two rugby fields. It was green with high walls and wardens at every corner. They had to be out there because I was out there. Initially I did it to tease them. Then I went out to toughen myself, to keep my mind active. Imagining my dreams, relationships and politics, in prison and beyond. In a cell you do things, but it gives a different feeling when you're walking. Rain hitting your beard, the snow biting at your feet.... The blowing wind brings feelings and new images. Before prison I had spent my life capturing images. I was a photographer.

I used to have this dream in prison — I'm in Alaska with a rucksack and I'm walking. It was a persistent dream, for a while I didn't think about it. Maybe it was inspired by my prison yard walks. That was a nice image, it was comforting. I don't think it was about escapism, it was about walking.

K.: *Bee sits by the window, and looks outward, as he talks. He wants to be able to look outside. "This tea is really nice," Bee says to me of the hibiscus tea he has brought. Jazz FM on the radio adds to the flavour.*

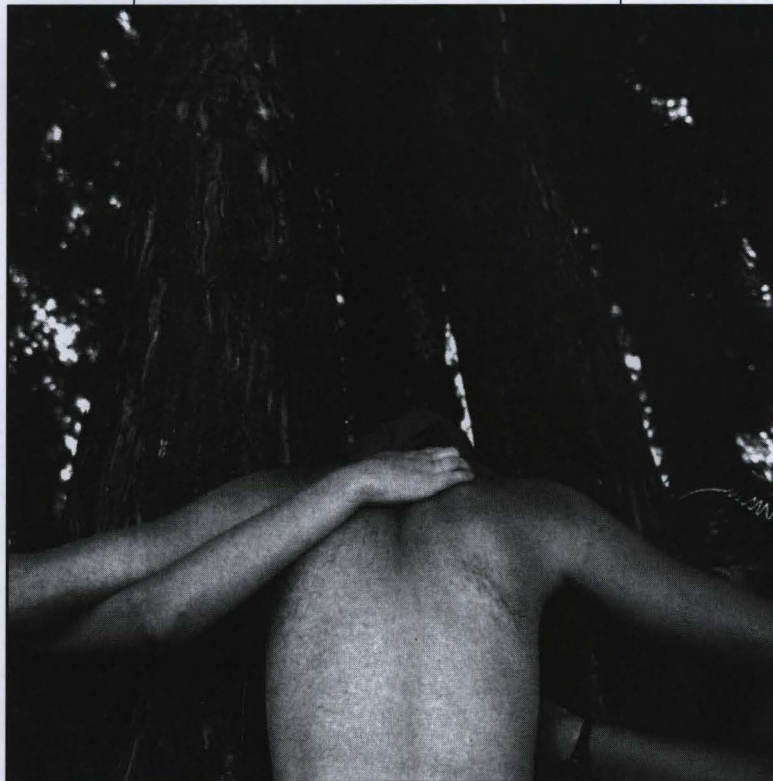
Bee: Walking is something special to me. I feel the physical movement from one place to another. It gives a different dimension to the thought process.

My first walk out of prison was when they let me out of the gates in the morning with a free bus ticket to the train station. I saw two Special Branch officers who were hired to make sure I boarded the train to London. I looked at the bus ticket. I could take the bus. I had a choice. I didn't have a map. I didn't know the way to the train station, not yet. I chose to walk,

hugging the first tree on my way — a moment of insanity. Remember, I hadn't been near a tree for seven years. You could only see the tops of trees when you were being moved from one prison to another. There are no trees in strip cells or special secure units.

Before I went to prison, I wouldn't take a walk anywhere without a map. Then I was always looking over my shoulders, in case I had a tail on me. I'll probably speak about it later on.

K.: *Bee is on a journey to tell his story but he has not yet decided what he is going to say. His earlier protests against speaking on his experiences, however, have receded beneath the flow of his narration. Words now pour openly from a deep reservoir. They form a river seeking a direction.*



I DIDN'T KNOW THE WAY TO THE TRAIN STATION, NOT YET. I CHOSE TO WALK, HUGGING THE FIRST TREE ON MY WAY - A MOMENT OF INSANITY. REMEMBER, I HADN'T BEEN NEAR A TREE FOR SEVEN YEARS. YOU COULD ONLY SEE THE TOP OF TREES WHEN YOU WERE BEING MOVED FROM ONE PRISON TO ANOTHER.

Bee: I came to a Catholic Church. If you can picture it, there I was along with this timid old guy. I had on a white long coat I had made in prison and a black turban. It was the "bee's knee's" — it was the best. My beard was long and I had a saffron scarf around my neck. I asked him where his collection box was. He was terrified at seeing me, I think. I wanted to do what I would have done at a Sikh *Gurdwara*. Maybe he thought I wanted to steal a candlestick, or the box. He showed me the box and his faith, if shaken, was restored.

I then took the train to London. The train was crowded at 9.00 am. It was a long time since I had seen so many people in a train... children so small. You look at peoples' faces and think, 'This is just another commuter day for these people.' For me it was the start of reality.

In prison they say, "You've got to 'hit the street running.'"

K.: *What do you mean?*

Bee: When you go out you have to be very careful because the police are going to try to get you back inside.

When I was at the platform, after a few hours of being out, I was still dazed. On the train I realised, with the Special Branch gone, I was on my own. They had made sure I was on the train, on my journey. I realised that I had to "hit and run" because I still had my friend, Kay, inside. She needed me to be outside. I went to jail for a reason — I was caught, basically. I don't regret being caught; it was an occupational hazard from day one. I understand the *Khalsa* (the Sikh Brotherhood) was at war.

Just because I was released the war had not stopped. On the train I was taking a deep breath and saying "The war is still on. I have no resources. I can't trust anyone and the one person I can trust is still inside."

I felt like I had left someone behind, it was an ugly feeling, it brought me down.

I got off at King's Cross in London. There was a jazz shop nearby. I went in to get a Nina Simone record.

K.: *Bee reverts to his life in prison. He remembers listening to music inside.*

Bee: In my cell there was a rug, a CD radio system worth £500.00 and a makeshift soldering iron to repair radios. I sometimes also 'forgot' to return the prison iron that I would

use to heat my food when we were locked in during a security alert. These weren't privileges. This was when I was on the main block. I was a category A (high security) prisoner still.

K.: How could you afford these things?

Bee: I would work for other prisoners, e.g. on their appeals, or case reviews or I would make them a jacket or two. So I would charge them by phone-cards — that was legitimate currency. I would then trade with phone-cards. I taught myself how to do these things in prison.

I once made our art teacher's father a silk tie. In the art department there were rags. For dye, we would use beetroot and tea. The needle and thread was no problem. Once, when I was raided, they took away "Matilda" from my cell. She was a mannequin made of a mop that I had used to fit my hats while I stitched them. There was a petition out to let 'Matilda' back into my cell because people were using my hats. I was the only person in prison who wore dress trousers. I tailored them. The authorities found my trousers to be a security risk. Jeans were part of prison attire, but not trousers because you could disguise yourself and escape. Me, escape with my black turban? They couldn't take the turban off me. I was allowed half a turban's length. I couldn't hang with it. But I still wore a full-length turban — I just stitched together two short lengths. They never knew that. In my seven years I had three turbans. I still have them. I got them from a sympathiser whilst on remand — not while I was a serving prisoner as I had no visitors. The priests were too scared to visit me.

K.: Going back to King's Cross Station... I still cannot figure out how you got the stereo system.

Bee: Stereo systems were farewell presents from prisoners. After seven years I had made enough braces, belts, hats and jackets for people who had left before me. So, they had left me their belongings on their way out of prison. Sometimes they would come back and I'd return their things.

I'll tell you a funny story. We had a smackey who was hooked on drugs. He was a Kashmiri who was in for a political crime. He was innocent, because we knew the confession was beaten out of him. He was an intellectual, but timid. There was no way he could have committed the crime. I am able to tell after a half-hour chat with someone if he could have committed the crime. The Kashmiri couldn't have done it. We used to talk to each other. One day, he bangs on my cell door asking to borrow my radio. I tell myself don't lend him it, he'll probably sell it for his smack. He says he needs it to listen to a late football match. It's a small transistor radio where I picked up

the world service. I lent it to him and forgot about it. Two days later someone else asks me for my radio. I say, "Go over to the Kashmiri for the radio." He doesn't see the Kashmiri or my radio."

K.: Bee has shifted his story into the present tense. It is visible from his face that he is picturing himself in the prison again.

Bee: I go up to the Kashmiri who says he'll get it for me. In the meantime, someone else has seen my radio in another cell. The new keeper bought it from the Kashmiri. I confront the Kashmiri who says he sold it to buy two phone-cards to call his dying mother. His thirst for drugs was so great that he was prepared to have his mother ill. So it became a joke in prison — borrowing my radio became a euphemism for buying drugs. How do you deal with that? You know he's innocent, but he'll die in prison because of his drugs. The Kashmiri had just given up. I saw a lot of that.

EVERYTHING WAS IN CD'S.

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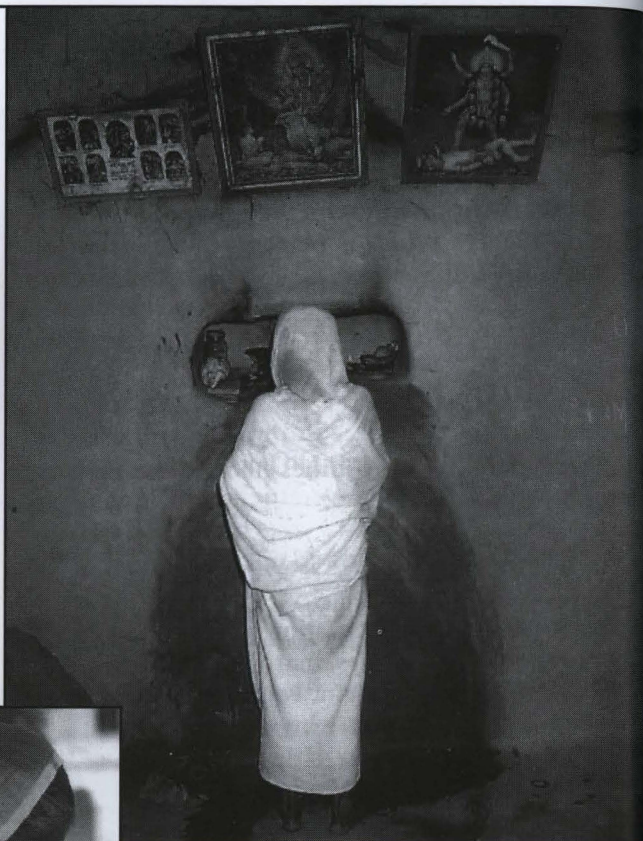
AGO. HE SAID, "WE

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SAID, 'IN PRISON.'"



HE ASKED ME WHAT I WAS DOING THIS FOR. I SAID, 'IT WAS FOR PUNJAB.' HE DIDN'T QUITE UNDERSTAND THE WORD EXPLOSIVES. I SAID, 'BOMB.' HE SAID, 'BOOM?' HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MY PUNJABI MUCH, WHICH WAS POOR, HAVING SPOKEN NOTHING BUT ENGLISH AND A LITTLE GAELIC IN PRISON.

K.: *Bee looks out of the window in silence, then turns back to me to continue.*

Bee: Going back to King's Cross Station... I am without an I.D. in my pocket. I realise I am in a new world. Where was I going to spend the night? I had less than £100, which was two weeks unemployment benefit.

From my right, I heard a loud continuous sighing sound getting louder. By now I was getting used to the street sounds. I see a black guy, stark naked, running across my path, followed by security men and a policeman. This was the last thing I was expecting to happen. I was supposed to be thinking serious thoughts about my life. I found the scene humorous. It wasn't funny, "hee hee hee". It was funny, "Welcome to the City".

I knew of the jazz shop from before. There was a song of Nina Simone I wanted to hear, *Brown New Day*. It's about waking up and seeing a whole new world in front of you. The shop assistant said, 'Yes, we have Nina Simone,' and so I looked around. Everything was in CD'S. I lied and said I had bought a vinyl not long ago. He said, 'We haven't sold

I was amongst other strangers for my first night. My contact had told me not to tell my host about my background. Whilst I wanted to forget I had been in prison, I didn't want to hide or runaway from it. You're just out, you're really keen about being with your people, but here I couldn't even say where I was from. Why should I lie? I had not done anything I was ashamed of. My hosts were nice people, but I was not able to know them because I couldn't tell them about me. In prison you know whom you're dealing with. The room I was given at the hosts' home had one bed, one table, one chair and one wardrobe. In prison it was ditto. I would have preferred a mattress on the floor, and nowhere to hang my clothes, if I was with people I could relate to.

In prison you always knew everything about everyone. It was only the sex offenders who hid their background. They were considered pariahs. I felt that if I stayed in this accommodation I would be in the same mindset as them. I didn't care if it was raining. I thanked my host who was very concerned. I made my excuses and left in the pouring rain.

worried about me. There is one thing I love about my friend Kay; if there's no option, she'll create an option. If there's no way out, she'll find one.

Kay rang around from prison, and got hold of a Sikh Gurdwara official to say there's someone who needs accommodation in the Gurdwara. I got to the Gurdwara and paid my respects. The priest eventually came round to talk to me. He didn't know my background, but the Gurdwara official did. The priest asked me personal questions. He asked me routinely where I came from – I said, "Prison." He nodded. No judgement. He wanted to know more, "Why were you in prison?"

"Conspiracy to murder and conspiracy to possess explosives."

He asked me what I was doing this for. I said, "It was for Punjab." He didn't quite understand the word explosives. I said, "Bomb." He said, "Boom?" He didn't understand my Punjabi much, which was poor, having spoken nothing but English and a little Gaelic in prison.

He welcomed me. Nothing less. Next day, as I was looking out of my room



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a vinyl for years.' He asked, where I had been. I almost said, 'In prison.' We had a conversation about jazz. I thought the less I thought about prison the better.

I had some contacts that were supposed to have arranged a place for me to stay. I rang a couple of them. I knew they didn't want me around. They suddenly became ultra-busy. I was prepared for this. I was taken by another contact to someone else's place. It was unsuitable. I had been lied to. I was told there was a flat for me. On arriving, I found it was a house where the owner wasn't expecting me.

I rang my sister to tell her what was happening. It's one thing knowing you're alone, but to actually feel there's no one out there you can trust.... That night, knowing I couldn't roam the streets with only a letter in my pocket saying I've just been released from prison, I went to sleep under a tree close to a British Rail line. I put my bags down and slept under a March sky. I felt really good. My coat kept me comfortable — first day out and you sleep under a tree.

Next morning it was dead cold. By this time, my sister and my friend in prison, Kay, are

whilst tying my turban after a shower, I saw someone working in the garden with kids playing around him. It was Cee, someone who I would later become friends with. I thought, "That's very nice"... here was someone not looking like a Sikh, no beard, nor turban but he's wearing a steel bangle. I went down. Cee said, "Hello." He was hesitant and didn't ask many questions. He said he worked there. I thought he was employed by the Gurdwara. I saw a pile of junk that Cee had cleared from the garden. I asked the priest if Cee needed a hand to clear the rubbish near the garden.

Within the space of an hour I had cleared the junk and it felt as if I had cleared the cobwebs in my mind. To me it was a normal thing to do. A job gets done because it needs doing. Another priest came up to me and offered me tea. He was shocked that the rubbish that had been lying there for a few years had been cleared. I knew he liked me straightaway. He started advising me about how to cope outside prison. He asked me about my religious views. I explained to him how confusing things were. About the past. How I felt about how I stood. He said something very nice.... He said he was proud of me that I had kept my faith this long, in the *Khalsa* and God. He wanted to know how I did it. I said, "I just didn't give up." It's not the buildings or the place I believe in, I meant the *Gurdwara* and Punjab. It's something more than that. I didn't say this to him. All the people who were martyred for the faith, they had ended their journey on earth believing there was something better. Our forefathers had made Punjab the breadbasket of India. It was for that spirit. That's what I believe in. All the visits I didn't get from the priests, whilst in prison, were being made up for by this priest. I had friends in this place. Cee turned out to be an artist. The garden was being transferred from Cee's tip to his canvas. He said he was working for God. It was a *Gurdwara garden*.

Prison is very destructive. The creativity of the garden brought me to the ground so I began to think clearly, no longer as a prisoner. I felt good. In the morning I could work in the garden with someone who was genuinely interested in the garden. He wasn't interested in my past. The only advice he gave me was not to trust anyone. Was I still 'inside'? I was taking in everything. I was learning all the time. My worst fear inside was that I couldn't cope outside. Being in the *Gurdwara* was different. If I hadn't gone to the *Gurdwara* I may have done something stupid and gone back inside.

There was another person I met at the *Gurdwara*. He used to turn up to read the Holy Book. I would make him some *paraunthay* — a Punjabi bread griddled with butter. I told him my political views. One day he turned around and said something bizarre, "I wished there was no religion." That knocked me out. I found a religious guy regretting it.

He said, "Religion is a way of life. When people take it on, they don't appreciate the values of the religion. They see another thing they have to deal with — to take or reject. Religion becomes a chain instead of a tool. Religion is a manual, be it for Christians, Sikhs or Muslims. Being a Sikh isn't wearing a turban only. It's how you think."

K.: As Bee pauses, a news-voice on Jazz FM announces King Hussein's death, referring to it as his final journey. Bee dismisses it.

THE SUNDAY TIMES HEADLINES
TODAY SAID 'HOW THE FUTURE
WILL SHAPE YOU?' THAT'S WHAT I
RESIST. I WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE
- NOT THE OTHER WAY ROUND.

Bee: How can the dead make a journey? Our journeys are made whilst the soul is within us. On dying, the soul leaves behind mere matter. The soul then continues with its journey, if it hasn't reached its destination.

K.: Bee is eager to continue about his encounter with the Sikh at the *Gurdwara*.

Bee: After speaking to this Sikh, I asked myself, "Why are you a Sikh? So what, if you spent years in prison to preserve Sikhi?" In the *Gurdwara*, what struck me was that *Sikhi* could be preserved not by becoming martyrs, but by living for it. That meant cutting out all the rubbish and pretension but keeping the values of the *Gurbani* (Sikh Scriptures). Yes, we're still at war but it needs a new strategy. Teaching one-self what it means to be a Sikh, that's something very important. I no longer felt a need to take The Form (beard and turban) just because I was born a Sikh. I had to start from scratch and learn what it is to be a Sikh. This Sikh who had travelled around the world felt this way. I could relate to him. He was a signpost in my life. I told you time is now. This is why I think so. My thinking was shared by the 'now' this Sikh presented to me, not the past in what I believed. So that's when I started a new journey. I enjoyed being with him. This is partly why I don't wear a turban anymore. I'm still finding myself. I now want to treat my religion as an opportunity, not an obligation. If I don't drink or smoke it is because I want to take the opportunity to have a healthy body and soul, one that is awake, not because I have an obligation. I do not want to treat the 'don'ts' in religion as something I must resist. What you resist persists. I want to learn how to turn away by making different choices. That's the path I am on now. For example, if you believe you should stop drinking tea because tannin and caffeine is bad, you can't do that by resisting tea. What do you do at teatime? You choose to have herbal tea. All you do is change your choice. There are no good or bad actions, only good or bad outcomes. If the outcome hurts you then the action was bad for you. If you, however, had expected the outcome then,



whilst the pain is there, it may not be painful and the action may not be bad.

The reason I'm doing this interview is not because an editor wants a story, but because I feel the need to give to others around me. Imagine someone picks up this interview in a train in Canada. They've had a bad day at the office. They read this interview and in it they find something to smile about. For a brief moment they can relax. Remember what I said about acting for the now? That's why I keep doing what I do, so others around me get something. Like this priest who appears from nowhere and changes my life.

Talking to the priest, I started asking myself if I was being constructive. I didn't see what I was doing as being praised anywhere in the *Gurbani*. It was no different from a Catholic's Sunday confession, if only to commit sins every other day of the week.

How is it that so-called devout Muslims and Catholics sell drugs and end up in prison and then continue to sell more drugs? You begin to compare yourself with them. You find that you too may be doing something for the wrong reason.

In prison, I was no more or less religious. But

I kept a turban. Firstly, to keep a promise to someone, and secondly because I wanted to keep The Form. I felt it was the right thing to do. I felt that in a closed environment, I was learning more about *Sikhi*. I felt prepared to keep my beard and turban.

Later on, coming out of prison, I thought, 'Have I learnt anything from that?' You think something is not right. You get to a stage when you think you've learnt everything. I felt I hadn't. I felt I could not learn and keep The Form at the same time. The Form is one way of making a statement to God that one is a Sikh.

I felt I was wearing a school uniform, but I didn't belong to the school. A friend's mother who had been reading *Gurbani* since she was a young girl, had told me she had never understood the *Gurbani* as much until she started teaching it to others recently.

Wearing The Form was like saying to God, 'I look the part so let me in.' It was not the true thing to do. *Sikhi* is more than The Form. I'm looking for this 'more thing'. That's the journey I'm on.

I really want to become a good Sikh. In that direction, I'm learning more about it. It's not good just reacting. I'm trying to understand the daily prayer. I try to associate a good feeling, the sunshine, a good sky and the rain on my head with the prayers. *The Sunday Times* headlines today said 'How the future will shape you?' That's what I resist. I will shape the future — not the other way round.

K.: *The interview meanders naturally. No maps, no paths. Bee's a natural storyteller.*

Bee: On the tube to work, I often see a person buried in his office papers. It's a packed train. He looks up, sees a woman with child but continues sitting. This is a person on a journey he has taken reluctantly. He doesn't enjoy his journey anymore. He's travelling through a terrain travelled before.

I see my work as something I do until it stops becoming a challenge. I don't call it work. Work is doing something you don't enjoy. I need the money to pay my rent. I could've stayed on the unemployed list and no one would have grumbled. After all, prison doesn't prepare you for work. In fact prison militates against work.

When I got out I had skills at desktop publishing which I had acquired in prison. I couldn't go back to photography — too much passion. At job interviews they would ask for references. I would ask them to ring my tutor at the prison art department. They wouldn't have me as soon as they found out I had been in prison.

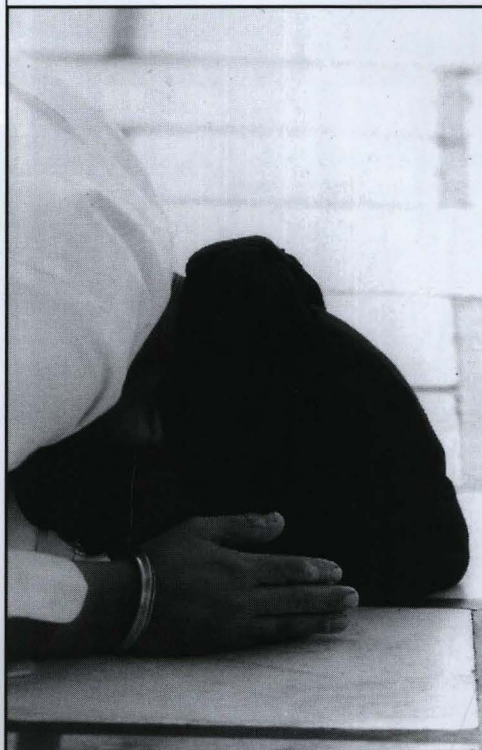
So I didn't work for four months and decided to go back to college to study computer networking, which got me my present job.

Even there I was asked if I had previous convictions. The course co-ordinator wanted to know what the offences were, but she got me on the course notwithstanding. She later told me that she got me on the course because of my blatant honesty.

K.: *Our interview had taken a good part of the morning. I still had not got him to talk much about prison. I try. "What was it like in prison? How did you pass the time of day? Did your mind travel whilst the body remained in a cell?"*

Bee: I did not hang personal photos in my cell. The only photo I now have on the wall is of me, with a cup in my hand at the edge of a rock looking over a valley, taking a rest from my walks.

In prison when they saw my steel bangle I was told I had to take it off. I refused. The tension escalated. The end result was a warden with a broken nose, and I had a cracked jaw. No questions followed... I was sent to the punishment block for two hours. In the normal run, a prisoner goes through



I ENJOY BREATHING,
BECAUSE I CAN GET ON
AND DO WHAT I WANT TO DO.

adjudication following an incident like that. I was sent straight to the main block. I thought, "These people don't even follow their own rules." I continued to wear my steel bangle as if they couldn't take it off me.

K.: *What were you like as a child?*

Bee: I remember running away from home when I was six. I went out of the backyard and liked the freedom of walking down the road without having to hold another's hand. I remember walking into a milk bar and asking for a strawberry milkshake. I was given one. The woman sat me down. Before I could finish it, a policewoman walked in and asked me what I was doing. I kept talking to her until she let me go. I said I would go home, but that I would want to come out here again.

K.: *What are the small things you enjoy in life?*

Bee: I enjoy breathing, because I can get on and do what I want to do.

K.: *What kept you positive while inside? What kept you going?*

Bee: My faith in what I believed in. I was not there with guilt. Now when I go to prison to see my friend, Kay, the idea of prison doesn't scare me.

K.: *Did the prison teach you?*

Bee: The prison didn't teach me anything. My mates taught me everything, so the prison cannot be credited.

K.: *Is it easier on the outside?*

Bee: We used to say 'when you're out everyday will be great.' I don't think it is. In jail, you're focused. You want to get out. But once you are out, there are more things to worry about.

The idea is not to worry about the journey. It's to just get up and go. The right path may not be found in this life. I may have to leave this journey to start another. The beauty is that we don't know. I can only talk this way because I've lived my life. In a few years I may become a chronic alcoholic and destroy myself, but then again I may not — if only because of my journey where I had placed my spirit first.

The interview was interrupted by a phone-call. A friend rang to say he was in the neighbourhood and could he come over for tea. It was cold outside. Bee and I were unanimous. Hibiscus tea all round. We decided to take a break from our journey. We promised to return to it one day.

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DUB MENTALITY

Mainstream media has cast Asian Dub Foundation (ADF) as a lead player in the high profiled "Asian Underground" music scene, which supplied several of 1998's must-have discs (Talvin Singh's *OK*, the *Untouchable Outcaste Beats* compilation, Badmarsh & Shri's *Dancing Drums*). Founded and based in London UK, ADF are frustrated with their classification as an "Asian Underground" band. The term, first coined by the white British press, links ethnicity with a niche musical style. It suggests that "world music" is defined in a Western frame of reference. ADF's guitarist, Chandrasonic, prefers a classification less laden with ethnic overtones. "Our music is simply underground in terms of style, arrangement, and sound." 'Asian,' he says, is sometimes linked to misleading images. "We are not into new ageism and metaphysical realities. We detest the association of Indian musicians to greater spiritual enlightenment." The recent film *Bombay Boys*, asks why Indians have to be "shrinks to the world's lunatics." Sonic laughs in response to the quote and enthusiastically

adds, "We can't tolerate the thinking that escapism leads to enlightenment." The five members of Asian Dub Foundation would rather demonstrate that individual growth emerges from committed involvement in one's community.

Neither their politics nor their sound has emerged from a mythical and unvisited territory. "I have never even been to India," says Sonic. Rather, their music is the soundtrack of urban London, a setting transformed over the past three decades by non-white immigration. The Dub vibe embraces reggae, ska, punk, jungle, ragas, ambient, classical Indian, and Bollywood film music. Explains Chandra, "our music reflects our history. We have lived in an environment rich with diverse sounds and vibes." ADF member Dr. Das for example, has studied classical Indian music and has been in all types of bands from Bhangra to experimental jazz. "People do not

live in a vacuum, unaffected by their surroundings." Chandra continues, "The differences between our last and latest cuts, for example, have emerged from extensive touring."

Before ADF was founded, its members were involved in community music, experimental improvisation, and pursuing new technologies. Chandra recalls that his musical education commenced in his childhood while experimenting with tape recorders and reworking television show themes (particularly his favorite, *Starsky and Hutch*). Other ADF members, Pandit G and Master D, were also pioneering early in their lives. "Pandit G started the Transonic (sound system) while Master D was in the original sound system from which

"Are others so disconnected to their own experiences and those of others? We are commenting on issues that mainstream music largely ignores... perhaps if we added a ballad in there we would not be so easily tagged."

State of Bengal and Fundamental came from." ADF continues to experiment. During their most recent North American tour they utilized "classical Indian instruments" custom designed for them by Sony.

ADF uses dub to counter apathy and inspire action in regards to local and international struggle. "This is the content of people's everyday existences," urges Chandra. In response to being described as "ranters" and "overtly political," he poses the question, "Are others so disconnected to their own experiences and those of others? We are commenting on issues that mainstream music largely ignores... perhaps if we added a ballad in there we would not be so easily tagged."

The Dub's vibe and lyrical content is marked by intense and invigorating energy drawn from their heightened consciousness of injustice, intolerance, and oppression. "R.A.F.I", in the title of their latest release, *Rafi's Revenge*, is an acronym for "Real Areas Foreign Investigation," a questionable policy implemented by France's Immigration Department. "I was a history teacher," laughs Chandrasonic. "I suppose our discs incorporate an element of revisiting history," as reflected on the *Rafi* track *Assassin*. *Assassin* elaborates on the actions of anti-colonial assassin Udam Singh, a forgotten footnote in India's story of independence.

The Dub operates as a collective brags Chandra, "We all share input and work by consensus." Collective, self-directed action is also what they promote and support in terms of community development and change. The Dub makes efforts to network with grassroots organizations wherever they perform and offer their shows as a forum for these groups to promote themselves and their work. Furthermore, a portion of ticket receipts is allocated to such groups. The members themselves are involved in a variety of strategic projects to address issues of inequity within their own industry. "Currently we are part of creating a program to increase access to technology for women in the scene... to increase the number of female producers and engineers."

Yet in regards to addressing specific issues pertaining to the South Asian community, Chandra hesitatingly remarks, "Just because we are South Asian does not mean we should be tackling specific cultural issues. We choose to discuss issues in a manner that is more



universally applicable. Singling out specific communities, particularly minorities, can be counterproductive. It can unintentionally provide legitimacy to stereotypes used by the mainstream. For example, patriarchy is a problem in Indian households but it is also present throughout society. It is something that the community itself has to reflect on. We opt to address it through the lens of the wider societal context."

Asian Dub Foundation is currently recording a new album to be released in Fall 1999.

Selected Discography:

- Facts and Fictions* (Nation) 1995
- Rafi's Revenge* (London/Polygram) 1998

Jasmyn Singh is a regular rungh contributor who splits her time between Toronto and Vancouver.



A-1: Realize (Main Mix)
 B-1: Culture Move (Silver Mine Mix)
 A-2: Culture Move (Urban Decay Remix)
 B-2: From Radical Rasta (Russell Stranix's Best)

The Life And Times Of Permveer Bains

by Permveer Bains

On Saturday July 26, 1986, I was born. My parent's, Mohinder S. Bains and Manjit K. Bains, had their 4th child and their first boy. Me. Permveer Bains. On July 31, 1986, I was moved from the hospital into a small house on 14th Avenue in Burnaby, B.C. That is where my many adventures took place. That is where I learned how to crawl, walk and is where I potty trained. Those were some of the adventures that took place there but this one is the most significant and groovy one...

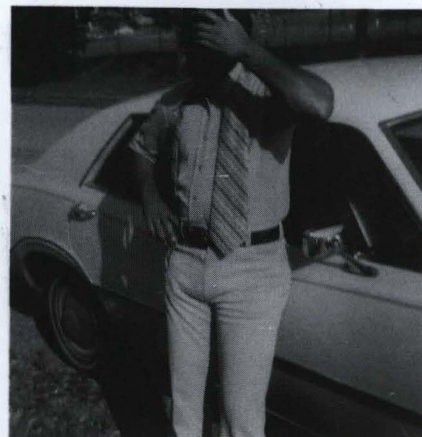
When I was 3 years old, I loved cars. I had my own little *Fisher Price* truck that I used to ride around, just like my dad drove his. I had these small little cars that I used to roll around on the carpet and I used to always make cars with my blocks.

So one day I decided to see what it was like to ride in a "big kid" car as I used to call it. My nephew and I, who, suprisingly enough, was the same age as me, decided to jump into my dad's old 1986 Pontiac Acadian and pretend I was a big kid. I played around with all of the little knobs and switches until I came to the gear. It was a standard car and I decided to be like my dad, the "big kid", and change the gear. I yanked it from park to neutral and started pretending I was driving. Suddenly the car started rolling down the steep driveway. My nephew and me jumped out and stared, astonished at the moving automobile. In an impulse I told my nephew to go get my sisters who were playing house in the back with my other nephew, who is 5 years older than I, while in my moment of bravery I tried to keep the car from going down the small hill. It was no use. So I decided to jump in. I turned every knob and switch I could.

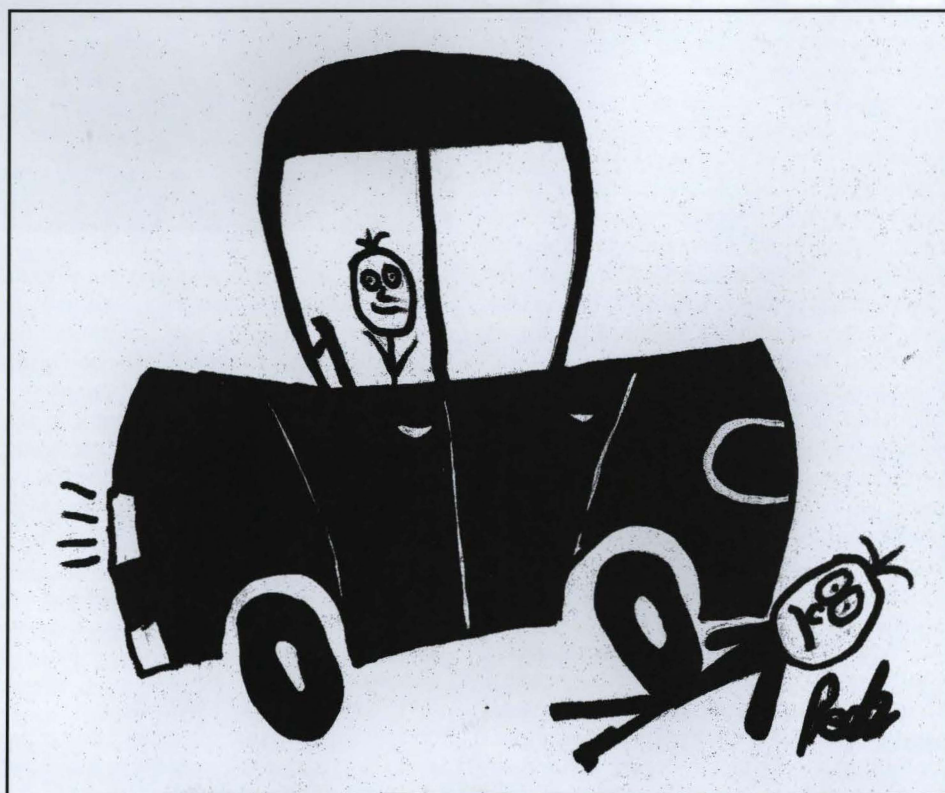
None helped. Just as the car rolled onto the street my sisters bounded onto the scene. Miraculously the car turned and rolled onto the middle of the street. Missing all of the cars parked on the side of the street and blocking all of the incoming traffic. Leaving me stranded, not knowing what to do. My dad, the only one who knew how to drive a standard car, was in the shower when this happened and was practically yanked out of the shower to move the car back onto the driveway.

I still remember the paperboy yelling at me, my ears cringing with fear. From that day on, I never had as much of a fondness for my dad's "big kid" cars.

Permveer Bains is a twelve-year-old elementary school student residing in Burnaby, BC.

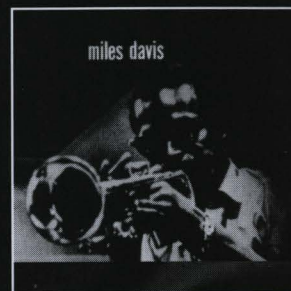
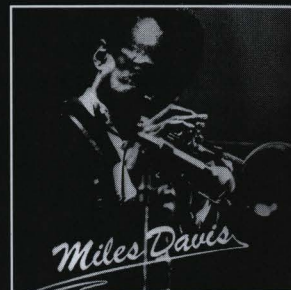


I played around with all of the little knobs and switches until I came to the gear. It was a standard car and I decided to be like my dad, the "big kid", and change the gear.



bring the pleasure

Jazz is transportive. It's in its history. It has brought memories of the slave experience to every era of the postbellum union. The echoes of European concert halls to gritty American juke joints. Stories of the rural South to the urban industrialised North.



Do you get enjoyment from touring the world with your band?

No - because I'm bringing the pleasure and whenever I go someplace, I'm going there to please somebody else. So I don't get any kick out of a foreign country unless I go there not to play, but on a vacation. - Miles Davis, New York, January 22, 1968.

Jazz is transportive. It's in its history. It has brought memories of the slave experience to every era of the postbellum union. The echoes of European concert halls to gritty American juke joints. Stories of the rural South to the urban industrialised North. It has cast the spotlight of the stage upon virtuosic black artists performing before darkened white audiences. Regardless of when I listen to Miles Davis' streaming trumpet, cool as an eddy of leaves on a concrete sidewalk, it takes me back to fall in Chicago, no matter what season it is, no matter what city I'm in.

What about contemporary jazz — does it still cross borders, real and imagined? Does it still transport meanings and stories and people? Under a rickety chandelier in a Brooklyn walk-up I talked

by E.M. Chakkappan

to a couple of young South Asian-American jazz musicians, Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahantappa, in order to find out. The question seemed particularly fitting since the two of them, as part of the *Vijay Iyer Quartet*, had been in India in November to play at *Jazz Yatra*, an international jazz festival in Mumbai.

Rudy and Vijay look very similar on paper. Both are second generation Indians who compose their own music, have released CDs, play internationally to critical acclaim and aspire to "portray the culture of their ancestry through their music." But in person they're entirely different quantities.

Vijay, with his large, earnest eyes that belie a measured manner, a scientist's reserve, explains how, inspired by the sounds of his older sister practising her scales in their upstate New York home, he taught himself how to play the piano. Though passionate about this extra curricular pleasure, he received a bachelor's degree in physics from Yale and pursued a doctorate in the same subject before switching whole-heartedly to music.

Rudy, on the other hand, conveys a lazy ambivalence with his loose ponytail and textured drawl (he grew up in Colorado, has spent time in Texas). But, when you touch upon a subject that interests him, he fires up and speaks from the gut, not afraid to let his sentences unravel into honest confusion or laughter. He has studied the saxophone since he was in the 4th grade, attending, since that time, both the Berklee College of Music in Boston and DePaul University's Jazz Composition program.

Vijay's album, *Architectures* 1995, (Asian Improv Records) and Rudy's, *Yatra* 1996 (AEMMP Records), were both inspired by an earlier journey to India, (prior to this last November's *Jazz Yatra* trip.) As a first journey back to the subcontinent, Vijay's trip was undertaken as an adult. It was an introduction to India that was not one of those childhood vacations when parents negotiated the hard realities: a grandparent's lack of English, boiled water, food without ketchup, the absence of toilet paper. It was an introduction, however, to an India that hits you without an intermediary: the poverty, the pollution, the crowding, the inequality.

So how do two American boys, from secure families that enjoy a certain amount of privilege here in the States (Vijay's father is a pharmaceutical chemist, Rudy's a physics professor) make sense of India, its fierce social realities? Sense enough, on Vijay's part, to criticise a western hankering for "baubles and bindi culture," instead of a true Indian experience. Sense enough, on Rudy's part, to name his first album *Yatra* - a Sanskrit word meaning spiritual journey. Didn't the other side of India

— not the cultural heritage enacted in carpeted homes across America, which forever trap a masala odour, and produce doctors, accountants and other similarly scented type — but the country itself, with its disenfranchised millions, ever make these young musicians... doubt? Ever made them question the words on the quartet's bio, 'the portrayal of the culture of their ancestry through their music'?

Vijay's first adult journey to India happened when he was 24, with his family. He says, "That trip rocked my world in so many ways. When I came back, I was disoriented, but I couldn't really figure out why. It made everything that I was dealing with petty. All this made me very conscious of how I represented the country in my music." How could he still see himself as a representative when his life had nothing to do with that country? He replied, "I don't think 'I have nothing to do with that country.' I actually feel that I am a part of it. Thinking about those people makes me feel some sort of connection, like I could have been one of them, and I don't know how far fetched that is. But I feel more connected to those people than I do to the poor people here."

When I ask Rudy what he thinks, he says, "I don't know. I'll have to think about that."

Vijay explains how he related that trip to his music: "I decided not to make too much of an effort musically, to let things happen sub-consciously. I didn't make too much of an effort to portray or integrate Indian techniques. I think I just decided, 'I am a part of that,' and that somehow was coming through me. It became an almost spiritual decision. My music is Indian because I am Indian. I could have been among those people, walking around."

Rudy, on the other hand, doesn't think he could ever explain how the experience of India translated musically, but he admits the influence is there, "definitely." The title song of his album was inspired by driving along the coast of India to a gig outside of Madras while listening to Bismillah Kahn, the great master of the shenai. That was four years ago, during Rudy's first adult experience of India, he was 23, but he went to perform with *Jazz Yatra*, and that year the festival included performances outside Mumbai.

"When I went there that time I wasn't really dealing with anything Indian in my music. I probably started dealing with it after I got back. Most of the stuff on the CD was recorded over the course of the few months when I got back. I think that's why I started thinking about the importance of being Indian."

Yatra is Rudy's first CD. Vijay's first, *Memorophilia*, was made with the same label, AsianImprov, in 1995. According to Rudy his

most recent trip in November made him feel more of a connection, "But there's always this displaced feeling. Especially since I hadn't been there in ten years and India is this kind of exotic place that all these Westerners want to go to and fantasise about. Being Indian by descent and not having been there a lot - it's a strange thing to deal with. You meet so many people who say 'Oh god, I would love to go to India,' but it's always this kind of mystical fantasy they have. And there's the other side that go, 'God isn't the poverty just terrible there?' It's one or the other, and it was good to go there and just see it, because now when I hear either of those things my gut reaction is, 'Fuck you. You don't know what you're talking about,' you know? It's like you kind of put this massive, ancient country into this box of either being this mystical haven or this place of homeless people you could never ever deal with."

Vijay seems to agree with this, he urges Rudy on with a firm, "Right!" How does Rudy understand the country if he's not putting it in either box?

"I just saw it as something richer than either of those things could ever do it justice, you know. I guess the biggest and most moving experience I had was when I went to this concert in Bangalore. I had never seen any Indian classical music in India before and it was amazing. This concert went all night, it started at 8 o'clock and went till sunrise, and there were thousands of people there. It was in this village where this dance troupe runs a school. There was this big open area where the performance was and everyone just sat on the side of this hill. It was amazing. And that really got me thinking, not only watching the music but watching all these other people watching the music, it was really something special."

Rudy's memory makes Vijay remember how his trip made him feel more and less Indian. "I felt I understood that India was this vast place with so many different ways of life. I saw my way of life as part of it, so I felt like whatever I did was valid as some sort of statement, some outcome of the Indian Diaspora. Beyond that I didn't see that I had anything else to prove."

During the trip in November how were they received by their family and the public as musicians, as South Asian-American jazz musicians?

Rudy shrugs and says, "I didn't get anymore respect from my family. I showed them an article in the paper and they were just like 'mmmm'," he makes a distracted turn away with his face, "I was like 'There's this photograph of me in the newspaper, you're never fucking going to be in the newspaper!' I actually had this one uncle who heckled me. I

wanted to pop that guy. I think everybody hates him. I think even his kids hate him. He'd ask me, 'You went to college for music didn't you?' and I said, 'Yeah,' and he like shook his head and kind of looked at all the other relatives in the room to see if they shared his thoughts."

"Your family seemed really into it," Rudy prompts Vijay before I can.

"Well they were just into seeing me. It became this big family event because my mother was there. I think my mother was definitely an instigator of respect or enthusiasm, and my whole family was glad that I was coming. They were impressed that I had my own means," Vijay doesn't seem to want to elaborate on the difference between his family and Rudy's.

But he goes on about the enthusiasm of the Indian audiences when they performed, "I thought they were really into it, probably much more so than anything else on the bill." Other than a Sri Lankan pianist, who did straight out jazz, and a few others who backed up an Indian vocalist, they were the only performers of Indian descent. Vijay surmises, "I think the audience was interested in seeing what we were up to. What we were doing was decidedly different from what anyone else was doing. I think our stuff was the most organic expression of some aspect of Indian culture. We were also definitely playing jazz, that was not in question. It wasn't like we weren't trying to stick one thing on top of the other."

Both Rudy and Vijay agree that the tastes of the audience was pretty refined. Rudy says, "Some of the fans blew us away," but the quality of the other musicians in the festival "was pretty mediocre."

Vijay explains, "There were some people there who were record collectors, who'd listened to jazz 'longer than we'd been alive', as they told us. But there were also people who were sitting in the cheapy seats in the back who were totally down with it," Rudy remembers. "Yeah, who booed off this guy who came on after us," Vijay smiles.

Do I hear these experiences in their music? At home I put in Vijay's album, which has songs with titles like, *Microchips* and *Bullock Carts*, *Meeting of Three Rivers*, *Sadhu* and *Paradise Lost*. His tunes can be sparse, relying as much on silence as on music, which builds tensions that are almost narrative. Vijay seems to be trying to tell stories with his compositions, especially the piano solos, and sometimes his characters affect Indian accents. Sometimes I look up at the box emanating these sounds in surprise, because I hear a phrase I haven't heard in a while, the kind my cousin struck when she played her sitar at home in Kerala.

When I listen to Rudy's CD, I don't feel

inclined toward similes and metaphors. It is music that is about music. *Yatra* is the only title that links him to India; the others are along the lines of *Good Hair* or *Jerry's Basement*. All of the tracks are fast, furious, and fervent. I am less aware of compositional elements. I feel like I'm listening to somebody playing their heart out. Somebody blowing everything they know out of a saxophone, or shaking everything a saxophone can handle out of themselves — whether it's the limits of a particular scale, or wanting to pop a heckler in the audience (who happens to be your uncle), or sitting on a hill outside Bangalore with a thousand other people, at a classical music concert that goes on all night....

[left] Vijay Iyer & Rudy Mahantappa



"I actually had this one uncle who heckled me. I wanted to pop that guy. He'd ask me, 'You went to college for music didn't you?' and I said, 'Yeah,' and he like shook his head and kind of looked at all the other relatives in the room to see if they shared his thoughts."

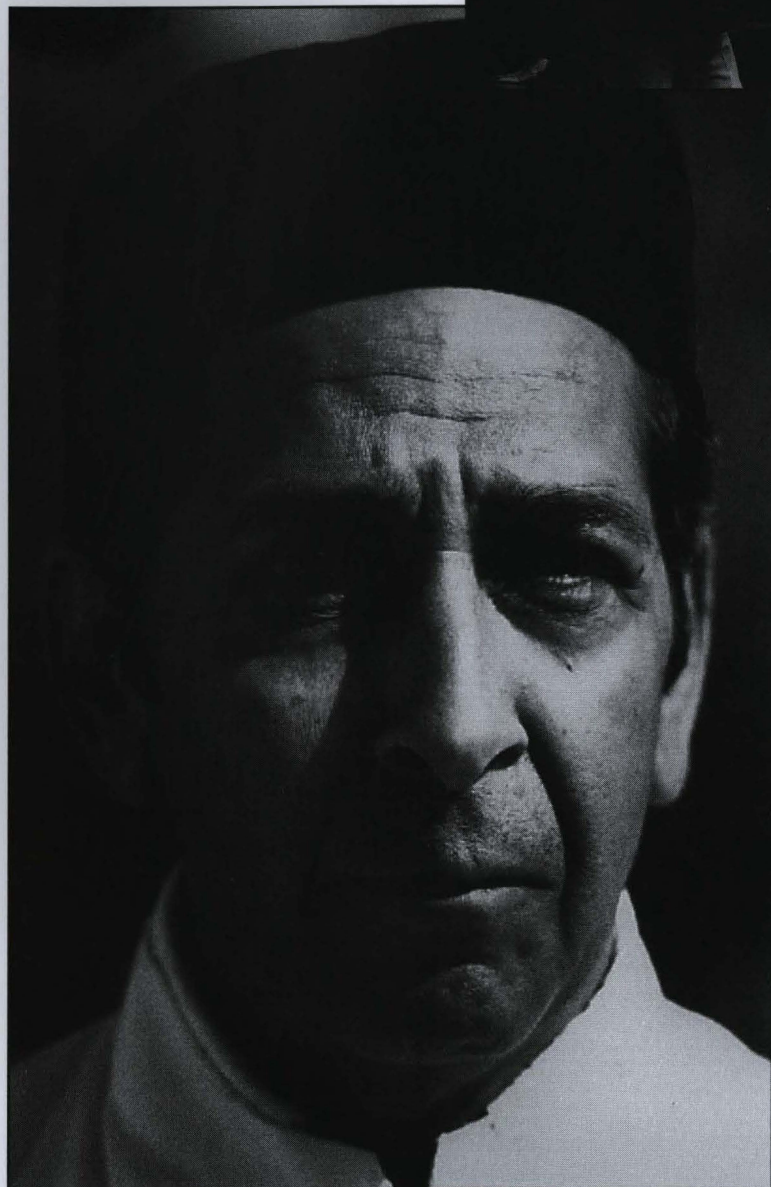
Elizabeth Mary Chakkapan is currently completing her MGA in creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College in New York.

Such an Uncertain Voyage, Such a Long Journey

by Blair Davis

Left: (left to right) Naseereuddin Shah, Roshan Seth, Om Puri, Soni Razdan.

Right, The Gustad Family: (left to right) Kurush Dastur, Roshan Seth, Shazneen Damania, Soni Razdan, Vrajesh Hirjee.



Such a Long Journey tells a complex story simply. This adaptation of Rohinton Mistry's award-winning novel is concerned with nothing less than finding the inner strength and peace to navigate through an increasingly complicated and chaotic world. The film simultaneously tells three stories concerning the roles we play as individuals in public, in private, and as part of society as a whole.

On the surface, the film depicts a routine morality play about an honest man (with the Dickensian name of Gustad Noble, one which he finds he must earn by the film's end) who finds himself in over his head with an embezzlement-type scheme. Yet beneath this veneer lies a story of personal turmoil,

Roshan Seth(left), Sturla Gunnarsson



Roshan Seth(left), Vrajesh Hirjee



The film's climax results in more than one breakdown - yet, while certain things of importance are demolished, others are restored at the same time.

about a family's crisis as it struggles with the threat of loss. In the face of events over which he has varying degrees of control, Noble is at risk of losing his children, both literally and figuratively. This tension is further underscored by the film's chronological setting. The story is set in a Parsi community in Bombay in 1971, as India and Pakistan are at the brink of war and the threat of political upheaval is ever looming. The film is densely layered, as the choices that Noble must make in his public, private, and societal roles all reflect back upon one another. Throughout the film we watch the threads of his life start to fray and unravel.

The film's sense of humour is decidedly wry and mischievous from the very beginning. We are introduced to Noble and his family, who lovingly bicker and joke with one another. The opening sets the audience up for a family comedy, but the humour's purpose is deceptive. The more we learn about the film's political context, the more the character's humorous jabs at each other seem born out of the need for an emotional defense against the uncontrollable elements in their society.

Noble's moral position is defined early in the film, as he tries to instruct his son that suffering and sacrifice are

necessary paths to success and fulfillment. He does not, however, always follow this philosophy himself. Just as he is unable to accept that his son does not wish to follow the intended path that he has steered him towards, Noble himself feels the need to resist the city's bureaucratic intentions of removing a now religious monument (but once unattractive and unsanitary wall) from in front of his home. He extends the same rebellious energies as his son, but is unable to see the parallel between their mutual resistance against societal institutions.

Despite his belief in the choices that he has made, Noble privately confesses an underlying sense of doubt, stating: "I don't understand this world anymore... What a world of

wickedness it has become." The response to these ideas comes later in the film from Noble's bumptious co-worker and friend, Dinshawji, played by Sam Dastor (Made, Jinnah), who offers the quotation:

*Ours is not to reason why,
Ours is but to do, or die.*

The journey that Gustad Noble undergoes concerns how he comes to terms with these sentiments, in understanding that there are some things that he will not have the power to change in his life. The fact the film is set against a society in which political change seems imminent demonstrates just how richly layered it is, much like the layers of religious chalk drawings that are eventually portrayed on the wall that he tries to save. The film's climax results in more than one breakdown — yet, while certain things of importance are demolished, others are restored at the same time.

Canadian director Sturla Gunnarsson (Gerrie & Louise, Diplomatic Immunity, The Diary of Evelyn Lau) is to be commended for not turning the film's emotional moments into melodrama, and allowing the actors to create sympathetic characters whose actions do not always inspire our compassion. Renowned actor Roshan Seth is nearly flawless as Gustad Noble, and praise is also due to Kurush Deboo (Percy) who plays an overly hyperactive mentally challenged man named Tehmul, not-so-affectionately labeled "Scrambled Eggs" by his neighbors. His performance could have been taken over the top in the hands of a lesser actor, or manipulated for unnecessary comic relief, yet he succeeds in presenting us with a character that is fully realized rather than one-note. As such, he turns what could easily have been a highly annoying

performance into a very watchable one.

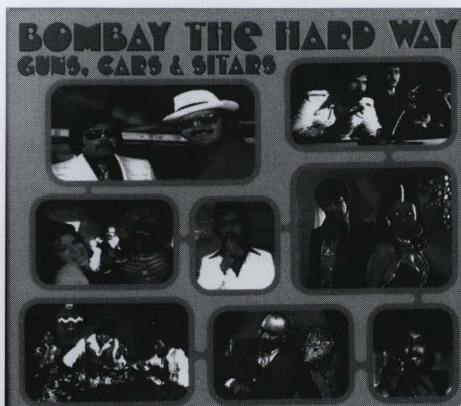
My only complaints about the film are minor ones dealing with a few surface details. The use of flashbacks in the film are not handled well, and make certain moments at the beginning of the film structurally awkward, as we learn about some key events in Noble's past. These flashbacks often complicate rather than simplify, and would have been better left out of the adaptation, or else their content handled differently.

Related to these flashbacks is the overuse of a yellow tinge by cinematographer Jan Kiesser when lighting certain scenes of emotional importance, in both past and present sequences in the film, blanketing his subjects in an overly warm glow. This effect creates a forced, hyper-naturalistic feeling, and I would rather have seen the actors bring such a mood to the screen on their own, instead of having it filtered down upon them from above. Aside from this small point, however, the cinematography is commendable, as Kiesser repeatedly uses light to create a contrast of textures; flashes of colour are often abruptly contrasted against neutral tones; beads of dripping sweat against dry or dirty skin; warm flesh against cold plastic.

Such a Long Journey is a film not to be overlooked. It can be viewed on many levels, because of the many layers that it contains, and as such it should please a variety of different crowds. In closing, I offer the following quote from Shakespeare (which is only fitting, since the Bard's works serve as a plot device in the film, literally), from the lesser known play Timon of Athens - Act. V, Sc. 1:

*And tell them that, to ease them of
their griefs,
Their fears of hostile strokes, their
aches, losses,
Their pangs of love, with other
incident throes
That nature's fragile vessel doth
sustain
In life's uncertain voyage...*

Blair Davis is a freelance writer who lives in Vancouver. He plans to begin his Masters degree in Media Studies later this year.



Soundtrack - Bombay the Hard Way: Guns, Cars, and Sitar (Motel Records, 210 E. 49th St., NYC 10017)

With the recent revival of soundtrack music from the 60's and 70's – from Ennio Morricone and the Peter-Thompson-Sound-Orchestra, to the proliferation of porn flick soundtrack compilations – it was inevitable that listeners were going to catch onto the wealth of soundtrack music generated by Bollywood during the same period. The people at Motel Records, responsible for the *Vampiros Lesbos* soundtrack album, have licensed the work of legendary Indian music directors Anandji V. Shah and Kalyanji V. Shah, the duo who were responsible for scoring up to 100 films a year at their peak. They've charged Dan Nakamura (The Automator of Dr. Octagon fame) with the task of producing the album.

The corny titles aside (like "The Good, the Bad and the Chutney", "Ganges A Go-Go" and "Fists of Curry"), Nakamura has done an admirable job. The music is, for the most part, left to stand on its own. Some "enhancements" have been made – like the addition of drum loops courtesy of Josh Davis (DJ Shadow) and some electronic instrumentation and samples to punch up the sound – but they're rarely obvious.

The tracks Nakamura has chosen to feature borrow heavily from spy themes, funk, and surf music highlighting the fact the Shah brothers were masters at co-opting western sounds. The bass line from "Fear of a Brown Planet" is lifted directly from *The Saint* theme. "Kundans Hideout" and "Punjabis, Pimps and Players" would not be out of place on a *Shaft* soundtrack. "Swami Safari" is essentially "Wipeout" with strings. "Ganges A Go-Go" is just plain kitsch – it sounds like upscale garage rock with insipid English lyrics like "I got no time to think, because I need somebody to love, baby I love you so, but you can't love me more".

The tracks that work best are the ones that feature Nakamura and Shadow's signature beats along with classic Indian accompaniment. "My Guru" counters the melancholy feel of the sitar and flute riffs with a heavy hip hop beat. Similarly, "Inspector Jay from Delhi" and

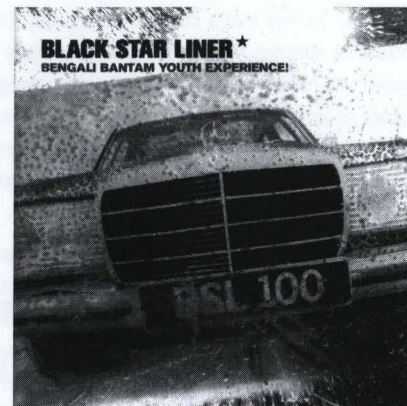
The New Spin

"Satchidanada" feature lush orchestras crossed with half speed breakbeats.

Bombay the Hard Way relies heavily on cheese factor and works best on that level. Some tracks manage to transcend this but let's face it, this is not meant to be a serious look at Bollywood soundtrack music. It's a fun listen and if it leads a few urban hipsters to explore Bollywood's rich history then all the better.

Soundtrack Bombay the Hard Way: Guns, Cars, and Sitar

Black Star Liner – Bengali Bantam Youth Experience!



Black Star Liner – Bengali Bantam Youth Experience! (Warner Music UK)

Although they'll likely be lumped in with the likes of Talvin Singh and the Outcaste crew, the latest effort by Black Star Liner actually shares more in common with veterans Transglobal Underground and Suns of Arqa. Like these groups, Black Star Liner take a more laid back approach – you won't hear any spastic jungle beats on *Bengali Bantam Youth Experience!* – and tend to rely on an orchestra of synths and live instruments to carry their tracks.

While making heavy use of electronics and studio manipulation, Black Star Liner make an attempt to "humanize" their sound by including a wealth of organic sounds as well as a smattering of vocals. Most every track revolves around tabla's and sitars but Black Star Liner also utilize a healthy dose of synth strings and found sounds, with a hint of dub and electro influences in the production. The result is an album that is cinematic, sounding like a soundtrack for an unrealized film.

Although the individual components that make up the tracks on *Bengali Bantam Youth Experience!* are interesting in themselves, the mixture of sounds Black Star Liner have created don't come across as terribly interesting. The tracks are adequate, but rarely induce any superlatives beyond that (with the notable exception of "Low BMW" with its wacked-out distorted-vocals and "Gurdeeps Yellow Funk" featuring vocoder enhanced speech). Most of the tracks are lazy in that Sunday afternoon in August way and easy to digest.

There is nothing earth shattering going on with Black Star Liner. They offer up a fairly straightforward and competent take on this whole business of fusing western and eastern sounds. The problem is there is very little that is new or innovative here. I'm sure fans of so called "global music" will jump all over this record, but, with a few notable exceptions, this album left me feeling cold and uninspired.

by Jarnail Gill



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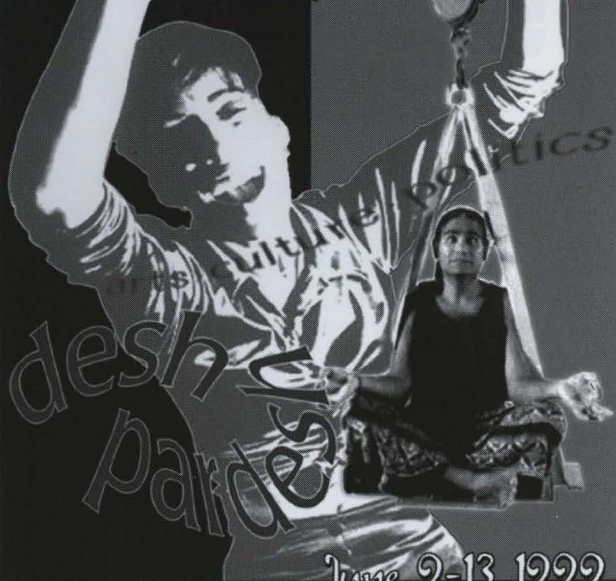
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