

Editor : NISSIM EZEKIEL

Founder : M. R. MASANI

29th Year of Publication

freedom first

FEBRUARY 1981 Price : Rs 1

338

A JOURNAL OF LIBERAL IDEAS

The Two Super-Powers

NISSIM EZEKIEL

With Reagan as President, America is certain to confront the Soviet Union more strongly than she did under Carter. Is this a desirable or an undesirable prospect from the viewpoint of democracy and freedom? Is world peace likely to be in greater danger than it is now? Is the independence of the 92 nations, including India, claiming to be non-aligned, threatened by the possible assertion of American military might on a global scale?

Obviously, there are no simple answers to these questions unless one is ideologically biased in favour of the Soviet Union, and welcomes her expansionist role in creating a communist world. It is less easy to support an American policy of defeating that aim even if the aim itself is supported. Much depends on how America proposes to carry it out. Whatever the strategy, the risks are enormous. They are known to both sides. The **Bulletin** of the Atomic Scientists has put its clock at three minutes to midnight — the nuclear end of life on earth.

It is some time since the slogan Better Red Than Dead was used in recommending appeasement of the Soviet Union. Today, it is more widely recognised than ever before that Red Means Dead for millions, anyway, including those who are willing to pay any price for peace. They should know that they cannot hope to live as normal human beings at all under a totalist world government dominated by the Soviet Union. What they expect is every conceivable move for postponing the evil day, and they think it can be postponed by avoiding a confrontation.

The evidence suggests that failure to take a stand by those who know very well the nature of communism only encourages it to enlarge its ambitions. A stand may result in a more sober assessment by the Soviet Union of its chances in the deadly game it wants to play, and therefore persuade it to modify its aggressive plans. The problem is whe-

ther Reagan's America can wisely restrict its own tactics to bring about that result.

America has the faults and weaknesses of an open society. The most radical criticism of it is by Americans, published in America and freely debated. Its domestic and foreign policies, its institutions and ideas, the typical character and personality of its citizens, are subject to endless questioning, and change in accordance with changing public opinion. Venality and corruption exist, as in every country, but they are never beyond exposure, as Watergate proved.

In horrifying contrast, the Soviet Union is as completely closed a society as a society can be. Criticism of it appears only outside the country. Inside, a "dissenter" is treated as a criminal or a madman. Its domestic and foreign policies are made by people who hold and exercise absolute power. Its institutions and ideas are claimed to be creations of an inevitable, historically determined process destined to be duplicated in the near future all over the world.

None of the non-aligned countries is completely non-aligned, and perhaps cannot be. Still, there is a limit to how far in one or other direction a country may go and still claim to be an independent moral and political force. The movement as a whole tends to be suspicious of America and the developed countries, with which it wants economic equity. On the other hand, it is spiritually blind to Soviet intentions in international relations, and to its totalist character at home.

It is certain that America and the Soviet Union are not merely super-powers to be equated in our political arguments for finding a suitable stance in our national interest. One represents democracy and freedom in all their human imperfections, the other totalist dictatorship in all its inhuman perfection. No differences or agreements between India and America or India and the Soviet Union can obscure that fact.

2

CRUELTY IN INDIAN SOCIETY

R. V. SEN

The blindings of under-trial prisoners, and other atrocities by the police, have been widely commented on. It is well known that conditions in our prisons are atrocious. As more and more reports appear on cruelty to the helpless, the nation is "shocked". There are demands that the guilty should be punished, and for suitable action against their accomplices. Suggestions are offered for changing the "system" so that law and order may be maintained without violating the natural principles of justice.

One aspect of the general malaise is often overlooked. That is, the extent to which harshness prevails in all institutions, and tyranny is practised by those with authority not only when there is a crisis but from day to day. School-children, for example, are beaten in schools by teachers and beaten at home by parents in the alleged interests of "discipline". For millions of the economically dependent in India, a "home" is virtually a prison. There is no appeal against its brutality. The strong dominate and the weak are crushed.

Sadistic behaviour is not the monopoly of our police, just as authoritarian practices are not confined to politicians in power and bureaucrats in "responsible" positions. God-fearing women drive their daughters-in-law to suicide and brides are burnt to death for failing to bring in a dowry. It is not only the police who make school-children kneel down *en masse*; this is a regular practice in our "best" schools, run by "religious" organisations. Mild-looking shop-owner bosses who may claim to believe in non-violence, use the stick on the child labour they employ. Trade-union leaders and journalists who stand up for the rights of the exploited, exploit their servants mercilessly.

It is said that the cruel events reported in our newspapers have aroused the conscience of thinking and concerned citizens. We should think and be concerned not only about those events but also about others nearer home, so to speak, in which we are directly and immediately involved. No conscience is worth much which functions only at the sight of evil in the distance. It is the same evil, in different forms, around and within our daily routine.

Willingness to respect norms of civilised conduct is desperately needed in every area of Indian

life. It is right and proper that we should protest against the most glaring instances of inhumanity in our public life, when they come to light. It would be more useful, from a long-term point of view if we became aware of their deep-rooted causes in the Indian psyche, and try to eradicate them there or at least to decrease their virulence.

If this larger responsibility is evaded, the same distressing things are likely to be indefinitely repeated, changing only in the time, place and details of circumstance.

The Bhagalpur blindings and the Samastipur killings have led one editorialist to call Bihar an area of darkness. Perhaps we have forgotten that the phrase was used by Naipaul to describe conditions in the whole of India, and not confined to the law and order situation either. The connections between that situation and "normal" social life ought to be stressed, besides those between the happenings in Bihar and what goes on in every Indian state. Third-degree methods, for example, are used at police stations in the neighbourhood of the editorialist referred to earlier, and of this writer. Is it not darkness which permits and sanctions torture, in rooms generally set aside for the purpose?

There is no salvation in commissions of inquiry and long-delayed reports assigning blame or making recommendations. The pressure of public opinion has to be intensified a hundred-fold for preventing the recurrence of a now familiar pattern. Jail reform need not wait for comprehensive high-level suggestions. The first humane step can be taken now, which will bring about an improvement in the living conditions of all prisoners, positive steps regarding food and other amenities that would serve as gestures of earnestness. Why can't such steps be taken without recourse to lengthy judicial processes and administrative changes?

Even if corruption is the great obstacle, there are surely a few individuals in government and the administration who have the strength to resist it, to give some signs to the public that they will not lie low and expect the storm to blow over them. It is for the public to ensure that the storm is not allowed to subside but to keep up its fury till the necessary response is in evidence.

PEOPLE'S ACTION

A day-long discussion meeting and brain-storming session was held in Bombay at Joothica, 22 Naushir Bharucha Road, Bombay-400 007 on Wednesday, December 31, 1980 to consider the national situation. This was in response to an invitation sent out by Mr. Govindrao Deshpande with a view to facilitate concerned citizen's or People's Action groups to meet the multiple crises we face to-day. The meeting had the benefit of the presence and guidance of Acharya Dada Dharmadhikari.

Those who participated in the discussion included Smt. Vimla Thakar, Prof. Thakurdas Bang, Mr. Siddharaj Daddha, Mr. Manmohan Choudhry, Mr. Chunibhai Vaidya, Mr. Govindrao Deshpande, Mr. Amarnath, Mr. Narayan Desai and Mr. Arvind Deshpande.

The discussion was initiated by Mr. Manmohan Choudhry who gave a report of earlier consultations and submitted that **people's action** was necessary to provide an appropriate and viable response to our intractable problems. It was essential to check the growing demand for a return to authoritarian and repressive measures. Political parties alone could not cope with this situation. Concerned citizens and voluntary organisations must co-operate and take the initiative, in the absence of JP, to remove the feeling of despair and despondency.

The meeting decided that a national convention on the present situation should be organised for this purpose.

The operative details for holding such a convention would be:

- (a) Dates : March 27, 28, and 29, 1981.
- (b) Venue : Patti Kalyan near Delhi.
- (c) Number of invitees : around 150 non-party and concerned citizens and representatives of voluntary organisations.
- (d) Sponsors :
 - i) Sarva Seva Sangh
 - ii) National People's Committee
 - iii) Gandhi Smarak Nidhi
 - iv) Gandhi Peace Foundation
 - v) Citizens for Democracy
 - iv) People's Union for Civil Liberties
 - vii) Lok Seva Sangh

It was decided that a background paper viewing our situation in perspective should be prepared, touching upon the following national concern :

- a. Preservation and strengthening of democratic norms and institutions;

- b. Protection of Civil Liberties;
- c. Combating and resisting totalitarian (authoritarian) and repressive tendencies;
- d. Electoral reforms;
- e. Situation in the North-East and Assam;
- f. Decentralization of political power (in the context of national unity and integrity);
- g. Growing pauperisation and degradation of the rural and urban poor;
- h. Continuing injustice and raw deal to the rural sector;
- i. Demographic explosion;
- j. Decentralisation of economic power.

It was agreed that Mr. Manmohan Choudhry in consultation with Mr. L. C. Jain, Prof. Rajni Kothari and Mr. Arun Shouri should prepare such a paper. It was also agreed that Prof. Thakurdas Bang in collaboration with other sponsoring organisation would make Rs. 10,000/- available for convention expenses.

In conclusion, the meeting decided to set up a Steering Committee for organising the convention consisting of Smt. Vimla Thakar, Mr. Siddharaj Daddha, Mr. Radhakrishna, Mr. Arunachalam, Mr. Manmohan Choudhry and Mr. Govindrao Deshpande.

ARVIND DESHPANDE

VEDANTA PRINTERS

Specialised in Memorandum and Articles, Agreements, Balance Sheets, Annual Reports, Books, Journals and all types of printing jobs.

28, ALI CHAMBERS, 2nd FLOOR,
TAMARIND LANE, FORT,
BOMBAY-400 023.

Office : 273430

Resi : 677705

NACHIKETA PUBLICATIONS LIMITED

5 Kasturi Buildings, J. Tata Road,
Bombay 400 020.

A STATESMAN ENTERPRISE

Books for all bookshelves and budgets:

	Rs.
Aesthetics and Literary Criticism by R. B. Patankar	10/-
Bihar Shows The Way by S. K. Datta-Ray	75/-
D. M. K. In Power by P. Spratt	10/-
Education In The Fourth Plan by J. P. Naik	6/-
Freedom Of The Press In India by A. G. Noorani	6/-
From The Jhelum To The Volga by S. Nihal Singh	15/-
Gandhi And The American Scene by C. Seshachari	8/-
Glimpses of Old Calcutta by R. R. Chowdhury	55/-
German Scholars On India — Vol. II	75/-
Hindu-Muslim Relations in Bengal 1905-1947 by H. Rahman	15/-
Indira's India : A Political Notebook by S. Nihal Singh	35/-
Indian Polity: A Plea For Reform by R. A. Gopalswami	10/-
India In Transition by M. N. Roy	12/-
India's Carribean Adventure by K. Bhimani	8/-
Kerala: Yenan of India by Victor M. Fic	25/-
The Career Of The Secondary School Teacher in Poona by P. Kale	9/-
The Phases Of Indian Nationalism And Other Essays by Dietmar Rothermund	12/-
Traditional Recipes Of India by Mrs. B. J. Maneckshaw	22/-
Under The Indian Sky by A. Chanda	10/-
Writings And Speeches Of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan by S. Mohammad	16/-
What Price A Free Press Edited by V. V. John & A. B. Shah	9/-

Also Available From:

THE STATESMAN LIMITED

Statesman House,
Connaught Circus,
New Delhi 110 001

Statesman House,
Chowringhee Square
Calcutta 700 001

Fagun Mansion
26 Commander-In-Chief Rd.
Madras 600 105

International Year of the Disabled

The decision to make 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons is heartening. It is a realization of the fact that the deaf, dumb, blind or otherwise handicapped are not to be regarded as the damned of the earth, but as ordinary human beings with similar needs and aspirations. 1981 promises all these a fair deal — among other things, suitable medical facilities, education, the maintenance of mental health and a decent environment. It is to be hoped that this will prove no dream, and that 1981 will not be written off as a year of shibboleths, rhetoric and statistical fallacy.

In India, some 30-odd million persons can be termed disabled — a staggering figure, made all the more awesome when one considers that this is nearly equal to the combined population of Australia and Canada. These two countries have thrice the land area we have. Such figures make the task of the socio-economic planner more stupendous than ever. In India, we have not been able to ensure employment to all able-bodied men, let alone the disabled.

Even so, India has taken cognizance of the objectives laid down by the United Nations for the International Year of Disabled Persons. However, our rehabilitation programmes have not met with commensurate success. Inadequate consultation, co-ordination and feedback mechanism between various rehabilitation agencies, lack of official standardization in programmes for specific training of professional personnel, inadequately trained personnel, inadequate review and co-ordination facilities — these are some of the problems which continue to bedevil all our efforts.

Recent seminars have emphasized the need for a comprehensive national policy on the problems and treatment of the disabled — one which would eschew Western norms and standards of achievement, and which would be attuned to the ethos of developing nations, an inter-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and co-ordinated approach. We also need greater co-ordination between public and private agencies in order to avoid duplication of effort. Rehabilitation services, it has been suggested, must be related to the general welfare programmes of our country.

Some propose that all voluntary rehabilitation organizations should be affiliated to a National Association, so as to ensure conformity in policy. Most are unanimous on the need for rehabilitation servi-

ces in the rural areas, where the plight of the disabled is miserable, and in order to prevent flights to the cities, which only serve to swell the ranks of the urban masses.

A propos the enumeration of the disabled in the 1981 census, it has been suggested that these surveys must be time-bound, geographically limited and aimed at identifying and qualifying a number of disabled in target groups. Above all, there is widespread agreement on the need for the creation of community awareness of the disabled and their particular needs, by means of public education, and widespread dissemination of information, advice and research on the subject through radio, t.v., and the newspapers.

MOHINI D'PENHA

Workers and Democracy

There was something immensely invigorating and exciting about the strikes by workers in Poland. Although the strikes occurred in a faraway country whose people live under a dictatorial regime, every American, black and white, could identify with the drama that daily unfolded on our television screens and in our newspapers.

What began ostensibly as a strike for higher wages, and against the Communist equivalent of inflation, was transformed into a struggle for democratizing an authoritarian society. When finally the strike was settled and the workers went back on their jobs, they had succeeded in extracting wide-ranging concessions from the Polish government involving the right to trade unions independent of governmental control. If the Polish government lives up to the terms of this agreement, Poland will have taken a significant step in the direction of democracy.

However, there is a distinct danger that the Polish leadership, pressured by the Soviet Union, may revoke the terms of the strike settlement and plunge Poland into a period of social unrest and harsh government repression. This is why newly-formed Polish free trade unions need the support they are getting from American organized labor now more than ever.

Blacks who remember the days of the freedom rides and of the murders of black civil rights activists in the fifties and sixties understand the true heroism of the Polish strikers. They literally were risking their lives for a better, more democratic, and more humane society.

BAYARD RUSTIN

Free Trade Union News, Washington. Vol. 35, No. 9, extract.

A CHARM FOR THE CHARMER

Lakshmi's
BALLERINA voile sarees
Enchanting. Wear for work
Wear for fun. Around the town.
Around the picnic spots.
Any where and BELLERINA
will please you every wear
Made from 90s & 100s
pure imported cotton.



VOICES 1

Succeeding By Degrees

Intelligence, I have found, is only a matter of degree — a University degree. Everybody condemns this piece of paper as being useless, but try getting a job without one!

Recently, while doing an evening course, I had the opportunity to work in a certain organisation as a part of the practical training programme. On merit, I was offered a job there, though I had not asked for one. Then they realised I did not have a degree attached to my name. The post, I am told, is still lying vacant.

Even as recently as five years ago, a young person went straight to the Inter after I.S.C. (11th std.) This meant that by the age of 19 or 20, the person was a graduate. Today with the introduction of the 10+2+3, 21 is the minimum age for graduation. If by any remote chance, you aspire for a Master's (for all it is worth), you will be at least 23 or 24 before you are considered "educated", therefore "intelligent".

The new system was introduced with much fanfare. As everybody knows, it was meant to diversify education. However, it has not only failed to do so, it has also succeeded in increasing frustration in today's youth. Has the addition of a year really served any purpose?

It may be argued that the extra year spent in college allows the youngster to "mature" before getting out to face the "big, bad world". But today's 18-yr-old is different from yesterday's 18-yr-old. The media explosion has led to much greater awareness, and though awareness is not necessarily synonymous with maturity, surely it does play an important role in the process of growing up.

Until 1979, a student could, if he was lucky enough to get a job, earn and learn simultaneously. Then, for some inexplicable reason, morning classes were stopped. As if this was not enough, this year the University has made 75% attendance compulsory. This, let us face it, is hardly justified when what is taught can, and usually is, crammed by the student one month before the exam. In any case, compulsory attendance can offer no solutions so long as the education system itself is a farce. "I attend classes only for the roll call" is a familiar refrain.

Take English. For some strange reason believing that college has higher standards than school,

you enter, looking forward to learning something. But you come down with a bang, the first time your English text greets you. You look at the name — **Yuvakbharati**. With disbelief, you open it. After doing Shakespeare in school, this!

As if the insult is not enough, the authorities have devised a brilliant way to bring the lower-level (vernacular) students on par with the higher. All the lessons (?) which show some signs of being of a slightly higher standard, are quietly omitted. Voila! Everyone is at the same level. Instead of upgrading standards, downgrade them. It's safer that way.

The lecture system, more than anything else, reduces education to a farce. Too many students — does compulsory attendance act as a negative force? — lead to a rowdy atmosphere in which the professor's voice can barely be heard.

Come exam time and guides are brought in. Certainly they come in handy. With most textbooks "out-of-stock" since the beginning of the year, what else can you do?

The goings-on in the exam hall are also interesting. One exam I gave a couple of years ago was supervised by two housewives, engaged at a few rupees a day. These respectable ladies sat down together, loudly commenting on one girl's dress and another's hairdo — the girls in question trying hard to concentrate on the exam paper.

The only alternative left for an undergraduate, if he wishes to work and get a degree, is to leave regular college and do a correspondence course. But when one considers that the University offers only a few subjects in this course, one realises it is not always possible.

What it all boils down to is that a student cannot study and work simultaneously, unless he takes up a part-time job, and few companies are willing to give these. ("If we employ you, we must also get some returns", was what one employer told me.) What makes it worse is that this period of study (?) has been extended by a year — and for what?

Perhaps this whole business of spending five years acquiring a degree would be worth it if, in the first place, the degree was worth acquiring. All you end up with is a piece of paper that will not get you a job unless you know so-and-so who knows so-and-so who is the brother-in-law of a friend of the general manager. (You know what I mean). Or worse still, "So you've done your B.A.? But we need someone with an M.A. degree for this post."

What is it that makes me so angry about getting an education? After all, education is something to be proud of. But the whole point is that our "education" — the kind that is stuffed down a person's throat — is nothing to be proud of, especially since the process takes five years.

Perhaps the University could provide part-time courses for those who wish to make real use of these precious five years. Or is it an intelligent way to keep the rush for employment down?

MENKA SHIVDASANI

VOICES 2

A Magazine For Children

I pick up what is described on the cover as an "ideal children's Monthly". It is published by a well-known mission. A message from the Swamiji who heads the mission, leads the table of contents and I turn to it. "Dear Children", it reads, "when the mind is agitated, sorrow is experienced... Man the root and crown of creation has the unique capacity of quieting his mind without helplessly depending upon the objects around him. But this capacity now lies dormant in him and he, unaware of it, foolishly tries to get a glitter of joy from sense objects."

I cannot believe that a man who is as wise as the Swamiji is reputed to be, has addressed such a message to children. My disbelief increases as I leaf through the other pages. A poem by a 15-year-old entitled "The Rejuvenating Cascades of Life", refers to "our eternal stagnations" and the "bubbles of power". An article on the Avatara and the four Varnas, by a 14-year-old, tells me that the caste system was conceived with good intentions, but in modern times deteriorated because men of a "lower species are suppressed", and "people have not remained very sattvik".

But what attracts my attention most is a piece which discusses the existence of God. God, I'm informed, is a formless force which is present everywhere. We worship him in the form of idols because it is difficult to "pray fervently to an obscure and omnipresent force". Oh God!

I now begin to protest audibly. How many children enjoy reading stuff like this? It's a very sensible approach, I'm told. If religion and morality are to mean anything to today's whiz-kids, they should be rationally explained. Nobody should be encouraged to swallow mythological mumbo-jumbo in its undiluted form anymore.

"And anyway the magazines are interesting. There is a healthy mix of serious and light reading. The fables are entertaining and didn't you notice the jokes and riddles and the pen-pals' corner? So very educative." That's how they defend such magazines.

I do not want to elaborate on the general state of children's literature in India, but to make a couple of observations on the kind which aims at teaching The Way. Let's look at the Swamiji's message. He talks about the falseness of a certain kind of joy. What is he trying to advocate? Every time a child is happy, is he expected to sit down and analyse the source of his happiness?

The Swami warns his young readers about the danger posed by sense objects. At an age when they have not fully awakened to the nature and potential of these objects? To put it another way: I'm 10 and eating an ice-cream is only illusory and therefore the joy it provides cannot compare with the joy I feel when I surrender to the Formless One.

An oversimplification of concepts does not hold much appeal for children, but do we have to rob them of all their sap and juice, through a whole lot of unnecessary and rather abstract rationalizations? As a child, for example, I preferred my rakshashas and devils unadulterated, and very very wicked. They had to look quite lurid too, and I would have felt an almost personal sense of betrayal if some book or magazine had explained them away as mere personifications of evil.

raymond's suitings

A Guide To The Well-Dressed Male



The Raymond Woollen Mills Ltd.

J. K. Building, N. Morarji Marg,
Ballard Estate, Bombay-400038.

A child does not believe in the physical existence of these characters but they are very real to the imagination. An explanation of the sort offered by the monthly, too early, destroys a source of excitement for ever.

One more point. Most of the articles in these "sensible" magazines give the impression that they have been written not by children but by parents anxious to show off their wards' polysyllabic vocabulary. Or else, how would our Swamis and gurus ever realize that a pretentious and long-winded style is not necessarily the style best suited to philosophy. For children and adults.

PRATIMA ASHER

VOICES 3

Role of Women

Dr. Mrs. Suma Chitnis addressed a group of about 20 women on **Women as Pupils and Teachers** at a Women's Camp, Bangalore, organised by the Leslie Sawhny Programme for Training in Democracy. She began by speaking about the concept of leadership in educated women. Here the idea of a leader and her followers was not the correct one. A woman should be able to lead **herself** into new areas of awareness, new roles and into a deeper and wider understanding of her traditional roles. This is what a good education should enable a woman to do.

Mrs. Chitnis then gave a summary of the history of women's education, beginning with Raja Ram Mohan Roy's movement in 1833. She pointed out that in the early years a woman was educated not for her own good, but in order to please, or to be useful to her husband. To support this she gave case histories of some famous women of great educational achievements. The later emphasis on the education of widows had the strange effect of linking higher education for women with widowhood. Mrs. Chitnis stressed the role of Christian missionaries in women's education in India.

By the 1940's, men wanted educated wives, but were wary of over-educated girls. World War II acted as a catalyst in that it offered many suitable desk jobs to girls in rationing, and other Government Offices. In the 50's, women's education took another leap forward, when the Constitution guaranteed free compulsory schooling, with special provisions for Scheduled Castes, tribals and **women**, on the ground that "educated women will be better mothers".

By now it was beginning to be realized that professional education for women was often wasted, as

a large proportion of women doctors and other professionals did not practice after marriage. The new pragmatic approach was to train women to be dais, social workers etc, a useful breakthrough.

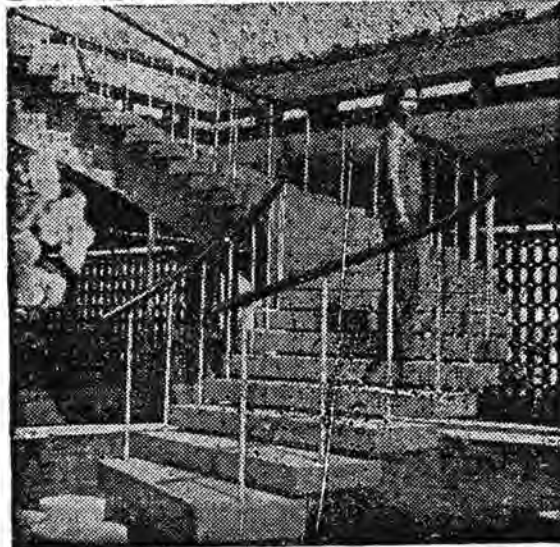
Even where educational opportunities are equal, there is much difference between the performance of boys and girls. Girls do better in schools, but their dropout rate is high; boys do better at the post-graduate level. The upbringing of girls conditions them to compromise, and this makes them unsuitable for any study or occupation which entails strong decisions and choices.

Our present education is geared to more and more theoretical and abstract knowledge. One degree leads to another. We must have an educational system which heightens awareness and the power to think and reason. Women must acquire the ability to think and decide about their own roles — to find constructive work for themselves, to be aware of and adjust to environment problems like population and the fight against social customs like dowry.

So far, our women have not been good agents for change, they are accustomed to passivity, and to believing that security is an end in itself. The real aim of our education must be to give women the ability and confidence to think for themselves.

A CORRESPONDENT

Silvicrete white cement



not just exclusive...marvel-lous!

product of The Associated Cement Companies Ltd

ACC

FREEDOM FIRST

TERRIFIC TOGETHER



CINTHOL SOAP AND TALC

The perfect partners for deodorant
protection—a bath with Cinthol Soap
and a sprinkling of Cinthol Talc—
to take you to great heights of freshness.

CINTHOL by *Godrej*



Interpub/CTS/1/80/F

THE WORLD OF BOOKS

DAWOODI BOHRAS

by Noman Contractor. New Quest Publications. Rs. 8/-

Born into bondage, seems to be the fate of Dawoodi Bohras, who are held in thrall by their priesthood. This tiny booklet brought out by New Quest publications, is dynamic. That such a sect of Muslims, who are better educated and better off than other sects, can yet be so subjugated by their religious head is unbelievable.

Dawoodi Bohras, who number just one million, are followers of the Shia Ismaili Tyebia faith. Most reside in India, about 40% are scattered in Pakistan, East Africa, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Great Britain and the U.S.A. They are governed, so to speak, by the Dai, the representative of the 21st Iman Maulana Tyeh, who went into seclusion 800 years ago. Bohras are made to believe that when the Iman comes out of seclusion, the Dai will hand over to him all authority, as well as the accumulated wealth collected from the Bohras in the form of Raza or tax.

The business empire of the Dai or Syedna, extends beyond India. Though initially he was chosen from among the most learned men of the community, since the 47th Dai whose family seized control, this title and office became hereditary. Wealth and power were institutionalised in the name of religion, in the Syedna. Today he is regarded almost as a demi-god.

Until the Syedna gives permission, or *raza* — a convenient device for extracting money from the community — no Bohra, can “exercise the right of expression and association, stand as a candidate in a political election, vote for any one who does not have the blessings of the Dai, create a trust, publish a newspaper, or write an article, bury the dead, get engaged to marry, or call a public meeting to discuss social disabilities of the community.”

In this day and age, of democracy and fundamental rights, in speech religion, and property, the Dai's kingdom of the Dawoodi Bohras is outrageously feudalistic. Most surprising, however, is how this enterprising highly cultured class of people, willingly pay obeisance to the so-called divine right of the Dai.

The oath of allegiance that every Bohra male has to take on reaching puberty sounds incredibly medieval. For example:

“And if the Iman of the time or his Dae, calls upon you to war against the enemy then you should make war. You should help with your life and property .. Say Yes.” Or.

“And you shall be pleased by the orders of the Dae of the Iman. The Dae shall raise among you or degrade among you persons as he likes. He shall gift to and deprive persons as he pleases. The Dae shall reward persons and shall punish them in his discretion. The Dae shall smile upon or shall break his wrath on whomsoever he thinks. You shall be pleased in that which the Dae is pleased. Say Yes.”

Bohras who dared to refuse obedience were excommunicated, until Morarji Desai, Home Minister in 1947, introduced the Prevention of Excommunication Act. The majority of the Supreme Court ruled that it (excommunication) was *ultra vires* as it “negativated the rights of one million Bohras”. To circumvent the Court order that legal procedure must be followed for excommunication, the hierarchy of the Dai started applying social boycott or “barat” on errant Bohras. More dreaded than any thing else, social ostracism is a whipping tool in the Syedna's hands, used unrestrainedly to keep Bohras in line.

Recently, defiant reformist Bohras who formed a Bohra Youth Association with their headquarters in Udaipur, close to Gallakit, sacred pilgrimage place of all Bohras, proclaimed that they are “not fighting the fundamental tenets of the faith, nor do they question powers of the Syedna. All that they question is the use or misuse of Bohra funds for the personal benefit of Syedna's family.” They insist that equality, fraternity and justice, basic tenets of Islam, be followed by those in power.

Shady dealings in foreign exchange and black money, international transactions that make one wonder how a government condones extra-territorial interests, are exposed in the pithy essays of this booklet.

It is evident, that the Dawoodi Bohras have not the courage or strength to protest *en masse* against

questionable behaviour of their religious head and hierarchy. Perhaps religious and other considerations are so deep rooted as to make lifelong obedience preferable to unpious freedom.

Serving as an 'eye opener' about the rigid dominating attitudes that still hold sway over 20th century Bohras, and which make nonsense of the Indian Constitution, the booklet succeeds in rousing reader's pique and disenchantment about the quality of life in this affluent community.

PREETH I. BIDDAPA

INDIAN-ENGLISH PROSE : An Anthology

Edited by D. Ramakrishna. Arnold Heineman, New Delhi, pp 332. Rs. 60

The editor of this volume has pointed out in the Introduction that while English poetry by Indians has been anthologized over and over again, prose "is as yet an untilled domain." The only other prose anthology one can remember (Statements, ed. Adil Jussawalla and Eunice de Souza, 1976) had a totally different purpose. Instead of giving a historical perspective of how "English prose in India has evolved" — which is Dr. Ramakrishna's aim — Jussawalla and de Souza chose work which had "interesting and important things to say to Indian students whether it is written by a professional writer like Aubrey Menon, a painter like N. Souza or a mathematician and historian like D. D. Kosambi."

The editors included Romilla Thapar, Prakash Tandon, Kusum Nair and others from totally different disciplines. The result was a lively collection of contemporary views which stimulated and challenged not only the undergraduate student for whom the volume was meant, but also the general reader.

The present volume is far more conventional in scope and solemn in tone. It includes all the standard names one associates with Indian writing in English — Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Gandhi, Nehru, et al. It contains pieces by orators and public figures like Ranade, Gokhale and Tilak, by custodians of our culture like Rajagopalachari, Radhakrishnan, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.

The intended audience of the volume seems to be outside India rather than inside — hence the heavy emphasis on Indianness in the choice of the

pieces. Unless the target audience is non-Indian one can't explain why there should be a glossary of about a hundred items explaining common words like karma, ashram, guru and Ramayana. One must add however, that even for a non-Indian reader the glossary may not be necessary because words like the above are how found in a standard dictionary of the English language.

The book is divided into six sections: Creative Prose, (which includes extracts from novels), Cultural Perspective (an amorphous section including among others a very sanctimonious rhetorical piece called "Immortal Ramayana", Gandhi's essay on socialism and Nissim Ezekiel's "Naipaul's India and Mine" which has already been anthologized in the excellent Penguin New Writing in India, Nationalistic Writing (from Ram Mohan Roy to Lajpat Rai), Philosophy and Aesthetics, Journalism, and Personal Style. The diachronic range is from 1823 to the present day, the earliest writer being Rammohan Roy and the youngest Dom Moraes and Ved Mehta.

It is difficult to comment on the choice of pieces in any anthology because no two persons would agree on what ought to have been included, but as a teacher who might one day use the anthology in class I have a few pedagogical doubts to raise. Since the editor does profess to give us a historical coverage, a few more pieces from the nineteenth century would have been useful. Such pieces are more difficult to locate today than the modern novels, extracts from which take up nearly a third of the volume, and which are easily available in paperbacks.

Out of the thirty pieces in this book only two are from the nineteenth century (Rammohan Roy, 1823, and Vivekananda, 1894), hence the editor's statement that "this anthology traces the growth of Indian English prose writing... since the first quarter of the nineteenth century" is not substantiated. Arranging the pieces chronologically would have helped in seeing the evolution, but the editor has his own reasons for not doing so:—

"Chronological ordering of the selections has been avoided lest the busy modern reader should find himself plunging headlong into the eddying waters of the nationalistic writings. Instead, he can embark on his voyage in the placid waters of the subliminal experience rendered by the contemporary creative writer."

Whatever the above passage might mean one is thankful that it is not given to us as an illustration of Indian English prose but is only a part of the Introduction.

A teacher would also have welcomed a consistency and precision about dates. The pieces are not accompanied by the dates of composition, although in most cases it is possible to find out the date by carefully scanning the note on the author. But at least in a dozen cases (including the pieces by Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan, Chalapati Rao, Dom Moraes, Gandhi) even that does not help. The years of birth of the authors are mentioned in some cases but not in all. Knowing the date of a piece and placing the author in time seem to me far more important than knowing who was awarded a Padma Bhushan or who received a Sahitya Akademi Award.

MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE

THE CROW EATERS

By Bapsy Sidhwa

Published by Sangam Books, 1980. Rs. 15. pp 283.

Fareedoon Junglewalla, a pioneering Parsi, leaves his ancestral village to seek his fortune in the Punjab. He takes along with him all his worldly goods, which include a doting wife and a shrewish mother-in-law. Once he reaches Lahore, he gradually establishes a prosperous business, and earns the love and respect of the entire Parsi community.

Stated in these terms, *The Crow Eaters* (so called because anyone who talks too much is said to have eaten crows!) sounds very tame and dull. But the novel doesn't depend on the plot or even the story; it is the lively, lusty characters who bring the novel to life. Chief among these is Fareedoon, or Freddy to his friends; he quite unashamedly "listens to the dictates of his needs," believes that the British are "our sovereigns" and goes to any lengths to flatter them. He is rascally and shrewd, but manages to present a benign image. He is extremely successful in his business. The only dark cloud on his horizon is his mother-in-law Jerbanoo.

Jerbanoo is a shrew; in fact, she and Freddy recognise the fake in each other and hate

each other with consistent intensity. The two of them together cause many farcical incidents. Freddy plans to kill Jerbanoo in a house fire, but she escapes in a large basket, very coy, dressed in a sari petticoat, and pulled down by despairing firemen; Freddy, advised by a sadhu, tries to cut off a lock of Jerbanoo's hair while she's asleep; Jerbanoo cooks Parsi cutlets in England, complaining to her English hosts about Freddy's greed: "All in all he ate my cutlace..."

Along with these are the minor characters, who add to the general bedlam. Freddy's son Billy provides, with his father, some of the comically sexy bits in the novel; Yezdi is the dreamer and the non-conformist son; Putli, the willing wife; types from the Parsi and British communities come together in a mad tangle. The novel speeds from one incident to another, pulling along its characters in many comic gestures.

So if you'd like to laugh your way through a novel, get hold of *The Crow Eaters*. After all, it claims to be a "hilarious saga of a Parsi family." Hilarious it is to a point. But of a Parsi family? Where are the distinctive Parsi characteristics? Jerbanoo and Freddy, stripped of their sadra and kusti, could be from any community. In fact, it's a shame that they degenerate into caricatures. The only Parsiness of the novel lies in the mention of certain Parsi customs, beliefs and superstitions. Problems that face the community are lightly touched upon, and hastily discarded, as for instance, the problem of inter-marriage, as seen in Yezdi's affair with an Anglo-Indian girl. But this seems to be superimposed upon the "best-seller" aspect of the novel: plenty of laughs, sex, and riotous living.

Some years ago, Perin Bharucha had written *The Fire Worshippers*, a supposedly serious novel about the Parsis, but which read like Mills and Boon. And now there's *The Crow Eaters*... I wonder when someone is going to write a searching, well-considered novel about the community?

SHIREEN VAKIL

A Secular Humanist Declaration

Secular humanism is a vital force in the contemporary world. It is now under unwarranted and intemperate attack from various quarters. This declaration defends only that form of secular humanism which is explicitly committed to democracy. It is opposed to all varieties of belief that seek supernatural sanction for their values or espouse rule by dictatorship.

Democratic secular humanism has been a powerful force in world culture. Its ideals can be traced to the philosophers, scientists, and poets of classical Greece and Rome, to ancient Chinese Confucian society, to the Carvaka movement of India, and to other distinguished intellectual and moral traditions.

Secularism and humanism were eclipsed in Europe during the Dark Ages, when religious piety eroded humankind's confidence in its own powers to solve human problems. They reappeared in force during the Renaissance with the reassertion of secular and humanist values in literature and the arts, again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the development of modern science and a naturalistic view of the universe, and their influence can be found in the eighteenth century in the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment. Democratic secular humanism has creatively flowered in modern times with the growth of freedom and democracy.

Countless millions of thoughtful persons have espoused secular humanist ideals, have lived significant lives, and have contributed to the building of a more humane and democratic world. The modern secular humanist outlook has led to the application of science and technology to the improvement on reducing poverty, suffering, and disease in various parts of the world, in extending longevity, on improving transportation and communication, and in making the good life possible for more and more people. It has led to the emancipation of hundreds of millions of people from the exercise of blind faith and fears of superstition and has contributed to their education and the enrichment of their lives.

Secular humanism has provided an impetus for humans to solve their problems with intelligence and perseverance, to conquer geographic and social frontiers and to extend the range of human exploration and adventure.

Regretably, we are today faced with a variety of anti-secularist trends: the reappearance of dog-

matic authoritarian religions; fundamentalist, literalist, and doctrinaire Christianity; rapidly growing and uncompromising Moslem clericalism in the Middle East and Asia; the reassertion of orthodox authority by the Roman Catholic papal hierarchy; nationalistic religious Judaism; and the reversion to obscurantist religions in Asia. New cults of unreason as well as bizarre paranormal and occult beliefs, such as belief in astrology, reincarnation, and the mysterious power of alleged psychics, are growing in many Western societies.

These disturbing developments follow in the wake of the emergence in the earlier part of the twentieth century of intolerant messianic and totalitarian quasi-religious movements, such as fascism and communism. These religious activists not only are responsible for much of the terror and violence in the world today but stand in the way of solutions to the world's most serious problems.

Paradoxically, some of the critics of secular humanism maintain that it is a dangerous philosophy. Some assert that it is "morally corrupting" because it is committed to individual freedom, others that it condones "injustice" because it defends democratic due process.

We who support democratic secular humanism deny such charges, which are based upon misunderstanding and misinterpretation, and we seek to outline a set of principles that most of us share. Secular humanism is not a dogma or a creed. There are wide differences of opinion among secular humanists on many issues. Nevertheless, there is a loose consensus with respect to several propositions.

We are apprehensive that modern civilization is threatened by forces antithetical to reason, democracy, and freedom. Many religious believers will no doubt share with us a belief in many secular humanist and democratic values, and we welcome their joining with us in the defense of these ideals.

1. **Free Inquiry:** The first principle of democratic secular humanism is its commitment to free inquiry. We oppose any tyranny over the mind of man, any efforts by ecclesiastical, political, ideological, or social institutions to shackle free thought. In the past, such tyrannies have been directed by churches and states attempting to enforce the edicts of religious bigots.

In the long struggle in the history of ideas, established institutions, both public and private, have attempted to censor inquiry, to impose orthodoxy on beliefs and values, and to excommunicate heretics and extirpate unbelievers.

To-day, the struggle for free inquiry has assumed new forms. Sectarian ideologies have become the new theologies that use political parties and governments in their mission to crush dissident opinion.

2. **Separation of Church and State.** Because of their commitment to freedom, secular humanists believe in the principle of the separation of church and state. The lessons of history are clear: wherever one religion or ideology is established and given a dominant position in the state, minority opinions are in jeopardy.

A pluralistic, open democratic society allows all points of view to be heard. Any effort to impose an exclusive conception of Truth, Piety, Virtue, or Justice upon the whole of society is a violation of free inquiry. Clerical authorities should not be permitted to legislate their own parochial views—whether moral, philosophical, political, educational, or social—for the rest of society.

3. **The Ideal of Freedom.** There are many forms of totalitarianism in the modern world—secular and nonsecular—all of which we vigorously oppose. As democratic secularists, we consistently defend the ideal of freedom, not only freedom of conscience and belief from those ecclesiastical, political, and economic interests that seek to repress them, but genuine political liberty, democratic decision-making based upon majority rule, and respect for minority rights and the rule of law.

We stand not only for freedom from religious control but for freedom from jingoistic government control as well. We are for liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In our view, a free society should also encourage some measure of economic freedom, subject only to such restrictions as are necessary in the public interest.

4. **Ethics Based on Critical Intelligence.** The moral views of secular humanism have been subjected to criticism by religious fundamentalist theists. The secular humanist recognizes the central role of morality in human life. Indeed, ethics was developed as a branch of human knowledge long before religionists proclaimed their moral systems based upon divine authority.

For secular humanists, ethical conduct is, or should be judged by critical reason, and their goal is to develop autonomous and responsible individuals, capable of making their own choices in life based upon an understanding of human behaviour. Morality that is not God-based need not be anti-social, subjective, or promiscuous, nor need it lead to the breakdown of moral standards.

Although we believe in tolerating diverse lifestyles and social manners, we do not think they are immune to criticism. Nor do we believe that any one church should impose its views of moral virtue and sin, sexual conduct, marriage, divorce, birth control, or abortion, or legislate them for the rest of society.

5. **Moral Education.** We believe that moral development should be cultivated in children and young adults. We do not believe that any particular sect can claim important values as their exclusive property; hence it is the duty of public education to deal with these values. Accordingly, we support moral education in the schools that are designed to develop an appreciation for moral virtues, intelligence, and the building of character.

We wish to encourage wherever possible the growth of moral awareness and the capacity for free choice and an understanding of the consequences thereof.

6. **Religious Skepticism.** As secular humanists, we are generally skeptical about supernatural claims. We recognize the importance of religious experiences. That experience redirects and gives meaning to the lives of human beings; we deny however that such experiences have anything to do with the supernatural. We are doubtful of traditional views of God and divinity.

Symbolic and mythological interpretations of religion often serve as rationalizations for a sophisticated minority, leaving the bulk of mankind to flounder in theological confusion. We consider the universe to be a dynamic scene of natural forces that are most effectively understood by scientific inquiry.

7. **Reason.** We view with concern the current attack by non-secularists on reason and science. We are committed to the use of the rational methods of inquiry, logic and evidence in developing knowledge and testing claims to truth. Since human beings are prone to err, we are open to the modification of all principles, including those governing inquiry, believing that they may be in need of constant correction.

Although not so naive as to believe that reason and science can easily solve all human problems, we nonetheless contend that they can make a major contribution to human knowledge and can be of benefit to humankind. We know of no better substitute for the cultivation of human intelligence.

8. **Science and Technology.** We believe the scientific method, though imperfect, is still the most reliable way of understanding the world. Hence, we look to the natural, biological, social, and behavior-

ral sciences for knowledge of the universe and man's place within it.

While we are aware of, and oppose, the abuses of misapplied technology and its possible harmful consequences for the natural ecology of the human environment, we urge resistance to unthinking efforts to limit technological or scientific advances.

We appreciate the great benefits that science and technology (especially basic and applied research) can bring to humankind, but we also recognize the need to balance scientific and technological advances with cultural explorations in art, music, and literature.

9. **Evolution.** Today the theory of evolution is again under heavy attack by religious fundamentalists. Although the theory of evolution cannot be said to have reached its final formulation, or to be an infallible principle of science, it is nonetheless supported impressively by the findings of many sciences. There may be some significant differences among scientists concerning the mechanics of evolution; yet the evolution of the species is supported so strongly by the weight of evidence that it is difficult to reject it.

10. **Education.** In our view, education should be the essential method of building humane, free, and democratic societies. The aims of education are

many; the transmission of knowledge; training for occupations, careers, and democratic citizenship; and the encouragement of moral growth. Among its vital purposes should also be an attempt to develop the capacity for critical intelligence in both the individual and the community.

Democratic secular humanism is too important for human civilization to abandon. Reasonable persons will surely recognize its profound contributions to human welfare. We are nevertheless surrounded by doomsday prophets of disaster, always wishing to turn the clock back—they are anti-science, anti-freedom, anti-human.

In contrast, the secular humanistic outlook is basically melioristic, looking forward with hope rather than backward with despair. We are committed to extending the ideals of reason, freedom, individual and collective opportunity, and democracy throughout the world community.

Secular humanism places trust in human intelligence rather than in divine guidance. Skeptical of theories of redemption, damnation, and reincarnation, secular humanists attempt to approach the human situation in realistic terms: human beings are responsible for their own destinies.

Drafted by Paul Kurtz, Editor, **Free Inquiry**.

Imagine a world with black and white rainbows



to enrich India's
life with colour!

AMAR DYE-CHEM LTD.

Rang Udyan, Silladevi Temple Road,
Mahim, Bombay-400 016.

Branches: Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Calcutta, Delhi,
Jaipur, Madras, Madurai.

Imagine a world without Amar Dye-Chem

Amar Dye-Chem supplies vital dyes & pigments to a variety of Textiles, Paints, Coir, Leather, Printing Inks and Plastics Industries. ADC pigments are noted for their colour fastness, economy and convenience.

The Company also exports its sophisticated colour know-how and has helped set up plants abroad.

ADC-5073A

Beautiful
ways
to beat
the heat

Whatever your need, whatever your taste or your budget, Orient can offer more of what you want. More of quality, more of beauty, more of value, and more of choice—the widest selection ever!

Why sweat this summer?
Beat the heat, with Orient breeze at your fingertips!

Guaranteed for two years

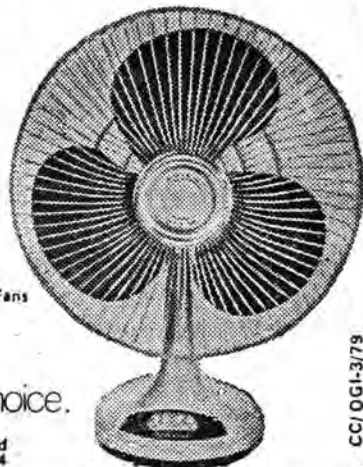
**ORIENT
FANS**

4 Ceiling Fans • 6 Table Fans • 2 Pedestal Fans



More of beauty. More of choice.

Orient General Industries Limited
6, Ghore Bibi Lane, Calcutta 700 054



CC/OGI-3/79

**We are behind
every stop**



**Make your safety a certainty with
BI Girling spares**



For your copy of a Free information booklet in English on Brake Care write to us clearly indicating your name and address in block letters.

Brakes India Limited
Padi, Madras 600 050

SAA/BI/01