

OUTSIDER

WINTER

*With Best Compliments
From*

Adi B. SAGAR & Co.

Electrical Engineers & Contractors

Editorial

Who is the Outsider? How does one judge certain people as 'not belonging to'? What are the factors that lead to some people being 'outside' and others being 'inside'?

In attempting to argue our way to a rationale, we realised that we were also attempting to define the concept of a highly nebulous inside. And in doing so, we discovered that there is really none, because at one stage or other in our lives, for various reasons, we have all been implicated.

Thus the personal pieces are an extension of this editorial. Each of us has had an experience of being on the Outside. These pieces are an attempt to explain what the undefinable outside has meant to us.

The articles range from the light to the serious, but all of them talk of the Outside as defined by our perceptual framework- a middle-class, educated, urban one. To us, the Outsiders are the ones who we may see, but do not usually hear. Or hearing, choose to ignore. ✍

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION MEDIA

SOPHIA POLYTECHNIC

CLASS OF 1997-98

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people of the North-East to voice their opinions. To familiarise herself with the region and its culture, Chinai travelled extensively over Assam, Nagaland and Manipur in the '80s. "That was when the whole of Assam was ablaze with the anti-infiltration students' movement. I was young and impressionable. I had never witnessed such an uprising before. An entire community was awakening. But later when I travelled throughout the region, I discovered that the interests of the tribal population were being overlooked. It was a movement with a narrow, myopic vision. That is why perhaps it could not stand for the long-term, more fundamental issues of the region. The Centre continues to be relatively indifferent to fundamental issues like the abysmal state of health and education in the North-East."

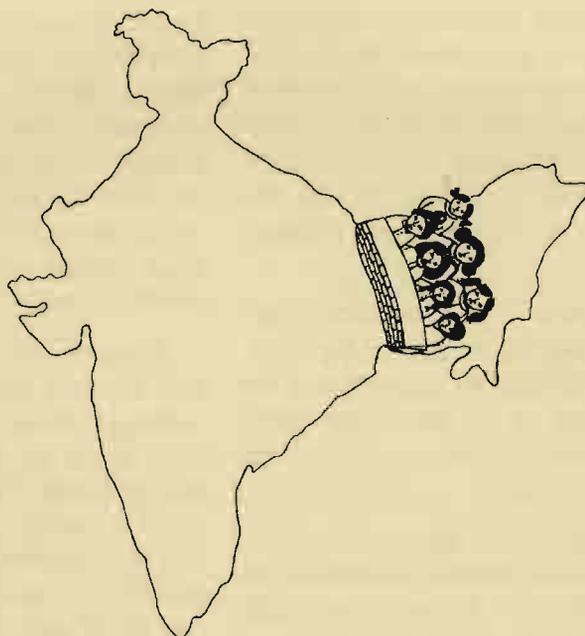
Chinai, however adds, "As of now, the people of the North-East, like the Nagas, are gradually coming out of their obsession with their separate history and culture, and focusing on problems of education and employment. More and more local journalists in the North-East are writing about the region. That's encouraging."

That apart, the region continues to exist on the fringes of the national media which consistently projects it as an exotic hell-hole rife with insurgency, secessionism and the occasional floods for a change.

The North-East as an outsider is a contentious issue. To some, the North-East represents a separate geographical block with a majority of its populace fundamentally hostile to mainlanders. In effect then, the entire region becomes an 'inside' to which the rest of the country has no access. The hostility and insularity of the region may in part be attributed to historical reasons. Colonel Arnab Bora,

a retired defence service officer from Assam avers, "The North-East has a history of isolation from the rest of the country. When India was under the Mauryas, the Sultans or the Moghals, the North-East i.e. undivided Assam remained free. Prior to British rule in 1835, Assam was under the Ahom Kings, a race which came from South-East Asia — which consequently had nothing in common with the culture of the rest of the country. There had been no process of assimilation."

Bora adds, "Geographical segregation has also played a part in this process of alienation. The North-East is the only part of the country separated from the rest by another complete country [Bangladesh]. The only link between the mainland and the North-East is the North Bengal corridor."



It is simpler to define the North-East as an outsider in cut-and-dried economic terms. It is a stranger to the economic processes taking place in the country. Token gestures like the tax holiday declared in

1991 by the Centre cannot undo a history of economic exploitation. Editor of Guwahati-based daily, The Sentinel, D. N. Bezbaruah asserts, "Gas from our oil-fields has been flared ceaselessly since 1961 or 1962. The value of the gas being flared now is of the order of Rs. 30 to 32 lakh per day! When the proposal for setting up a refinery in Assam in the early '60s was approved by the expert committee, the Centre decided to locate it in Barauni instead, and built a pipeline so that Assam's crude oil could be refined in Bihar!"

The North-East has been deliberately excluded from economic development due to residual colonial thinking which dictates that it is 'militarily unwise' to develop a border province. This established an

unwarranted and arbitrary correlation between development and security, ignoring the fundamental premise that problems of insurgency and counter-insurgency would fade on their own if all border provinces are developed to their potential. Bezbaruah affirms, "The transport and communication infrastructure in the North-East is far below what pertains in the rest of the country. The greatest resource of the North-East — water, remains untapped because the Centre is reluctant to make major investments in this region, even though the rest of the country stands to gain from the hydroelectric potential of around 40,000 MW we have here."

When the North-Eastern Council (NEC) was launched it was supposed to bring about extensive regional development. Today, it is nothing more than a body that allocates funds. The rather amorphous concept of 'regional development' on which economic planning for the North-East hinges is not viable primarily because it ignores individual states and their problems. In fact, this constant and artificial homogenisation of seven disparate states into the word 'North-East' rankles with most of the intelligentsia.

Bora avers, "It seeks to impose an artificial sense of homogeneity over a region which houses not one, but seven different slates." Not everyone would agree though. When the Gowda government sought to do away with the usage of the coinage 'North-East', the Assam Gana Parishad was quick to sign a communique which said, "The move is aimed at creating rifts among

the sister states and it is now certain that the Centre is afraid of the united strength of the North-Eastern states."

The Centre's knee-jerk response to insurgency problems of the region has been to dispatch additional regiments of army and paramilitary forces to quell such movements. Rupa Chinnai says, "Insurgency in Punjab and the North-East are separate issues. In Punjab, at least you have a minimal adherence to basic codes of human rights. In the North-East there is a blatant violation of all such codes."

U. G. Brahma, the late president of the All Assam Bodo Students' Union had a valid point when he had said in an interview "They (the Centre) never listened to us and now they send in the army to sort out the problem." Excessive militarisation is not the solution, but has been used extensively since Angami Zaprei Phizo, founder member of the National Socialist Councils of Nagaland declared independence and armed insurrection in the early '50s in Nagaland. Repressive acts like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act and Disturbed Area Acts, which give the army complete arbitrary freedom to kill are applied only in the North-East. The rest of the country doesn't even murmur in protest.

The North-East is distanced emotionally, geographically and perhaps historically from the mainland. There are no easy solutions to end this deep-seated alienation. While the Centre grapples with it purely on a platitudinous level, the North-East slips away further. Ω

IN THE SHADOW OF A DARK SKIN

KULSUM MERCHANT, VAISHNAVI SHEKHAR and SOWJANYA KASHYAP meet African students who have found themselves estranged by the people of this city.

When I came here
it was an intention of mine
to stay, to live and linger.
When I stayed here,
and when my mind
accustomed itself to your sight,
I was asked to leave.

– Parvin Syal

Matik Gideon is from Sudan. He came to Bombay in June last year to study law at Bombay University. He never leaves the International Students Hostel at Churchgate except when he goes to classes in the morning, or has to buy groceries. When he walks down the road, people call him “kalia bhoot.” He knows it means “black devil.”

“What can I say? People in India are like that. I don’t want to say anything. I have been harassed by the police and by people on the street,” he shrugs.

Matik’s experience is not unique. Scores of African students who come to India from different parts of the continent for further studies have been discriminated against at some point during their stay in India. Although few have experienced racism that involves physical violence, most have been subjected to verbal abuse and isolation. Jeers and insults from passers-by are part of their daily lives;

for many, their hostel is a safe space, the only place where they may feel at home in an environment rife with undercurrents of hostility.

Some Indians, however, do not think racism exists in this city. Dr. V.S. Sheth, head of Centre for African Studies at Bombay University, Kalina, dismisses the problem of racism towards black students in Mumbai. He says that a communication problem might occur if “some black people are shy, inhibited, or remain in the background.” He adds that name-calling and bigoted remarks are not only directed towards black people, but also towards women, “So why is it unique? It cannot really be called discrimination.”

The fact that a discriminatory attitude even exists, whether it is between sexes or amongst races, is damning in itself, but Dr Sheth discounts the experiences that African students have had: “When you look at this issue from their perspective, keep

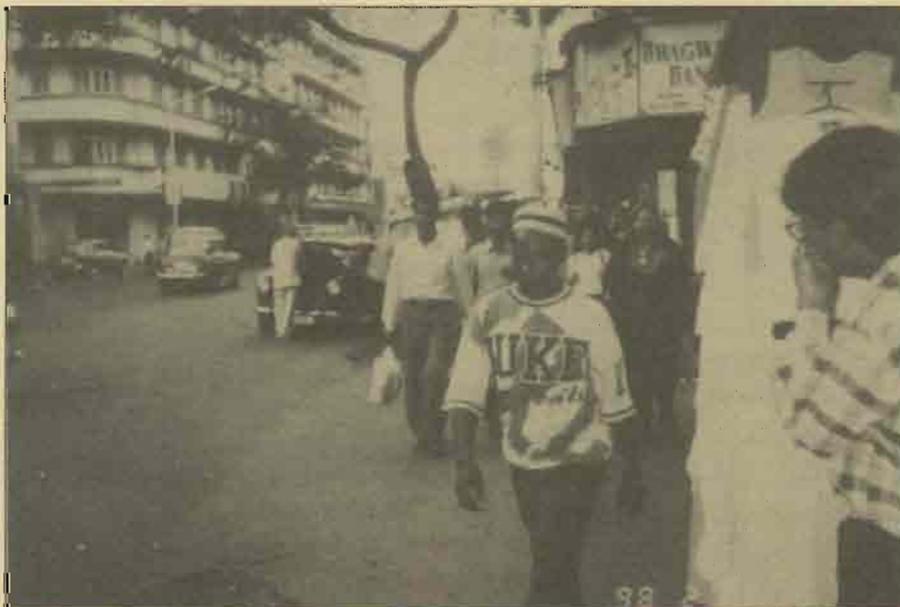
in mind the Indian perspective as well ... they can mislead you.” Denying a problem, worsens it.

With the knowledge that little can or will be done about their situation, many African students find it pointless to talk about their problems. Thomas Wani feels that there is no sense in stirring up trouble, because he is a minority. Wani, a Sudanese student doing his B Sc at St Xavier’s College, is reluctant to talk about his problems at first. He says, “It is not racism, it’s that we’re different. People insult us, but innocently.”

After a while, however, he recalls incidents where he has faced bigotry and hostility. He once overheard a female student, canvassing for blood donors, tell her colleague that she should not ask him because “his blood is black, and it has HIV in it.”

On another occasion, he found that a pharmacy gave him double the dose of prescribed medication. On asking his Indian friends, he learned that many people harbour the belief that black men have “powers” and are stronger than ordinary men.

According to Denzil Saldanha, a professor of Sociology at the Tata Institute of



Social Sciences (TISS), any type of discrimination is a product of various psychological, historical, and economic factors. He states that one of the most common causes of discrimination towards those outside one's own socio-cultural framework is the human tendency to stereotype; because of their dark skins, curly hair, and large builds, black men are associated with magical powers and virility.

Saldanha says these stereotypes are aggravated by the Indian notion of physical aesthetics, which centres around fair skin. "This notion is internal to the Indian race and was further reinforced by colonialism. But all the conquering races have been fair skinned," explains Saldanha, referring the Indian ideal of fair skin back to the Aryan -Dravidian rift. "In this context the appearance of the Africans is a far cry from the aesthetic standards of Indians."

Saldanha also attributes discrimination to the class, ethnicity, and power divide in India. "The lower classes experience deprivation and take it out on groups whom they consider the same or inferior to themselves." When this factor combines itself with ethnocentrism, it results in a psychological bias.

Ethnic identities or identities taken from race, caste and region are often the strongest, lending themselves easily to hierarchy, prejudice, and

discrimination. "Discrimination is often based on ethnic identity and the immediate reference point is colour," says Saldanha. The lower classes, economically oppressed and seeking strength in their ethnic identities, are often the ones who tend to discriminate more actively.

Pinpointing the lower classes on the street as the more openly intolerant, does not mean that the middle class are squeaky clean. In fact, their closeted bigotry can be more harmful to the black students who come to this city, hoping to find friendship and acceptance. These students meet Indians who greet them politely and smile, but refuse to shake their hand. "Perhaps they think we are infected," says an amused Wanjiru Kijabe, a student from Kenya. She is not far from the truth; many of us are conditioned from childhood to believe that the Arabs, blacks, and so-called 'hippies' are dirty, oversexed, and best kept at arm's length.

A middle-class mentality affects many aspects of people's attitudes towards those of another colour. Many Indians believe that what we are born with is more important than what we achieve. According to Saldanha, "In our society the achieved status is less important than the ascribed status." Ranu Jain, a reader of Ethnic Studies at TISS, concurs with Saldanha. She says that both personally and globally,

"We place others and are placed ourselves in hierarchies of power. We always try to make ourselves closer to those with a higher status."

In the global power structure, Indians consider Africa as economically, and therefore, politically less powerful than India; meanwhile, America and many western European countries are viewed as the leaders of the global economy. Black is Underdevelopment, and White is Ideal.

Kijabe, who has spent three years studying in Mumbai and a lifetime living with Indians in Kenya, wasn't able to understand why some Indians who had adopted her motherland, treated her like a second-class citizen. "I realised only after staying here that the Indian's racist attitude back home in Kenya is rooted here."

She has grown accustomed to the stares of passers-by, and the loud comments they make about her face and figure in their own tongue. It isn't any different from what she hears on the streets of her Indian dominated home town of Voi in Kenya.

"I'm so used to it. I think it doesn't matter any more, but every time I hear someone call me 'kali', it upsets me. I wouldn't want to work here or live here. I tried to meet people and make friends, but no one wants to really know me." Ω

FROM PUSH TO SHOVE

Once the mainstay of Mumbai's industrial life, the textile mill worker is being displaced from both work and home. **GAURI KAMATH** and **PREETI DESHPANDE** investigate.

High walls, towering chimneys, bustling by lanes. The wailing siren announcing lunch-hour, workers pouring out of factories, walking the few yards that separate home and work. Until a decade ago, the textile mill areas of Mumbai were vibrant centres of activity. The mills dotted the skyline of the city and these images were a tangible part of the city's identity. Not any more.

The bustling mill-compounds of Worli, Lower Parel, Girgaum have been replaced by swank high-rise office blocks. And so the textile mill worker has been pushed to the city's periphery. Over the years, more and more textile mills have shut down and workers laid off. In a city where land has always been at a premium, mill owners find it more profitable to sell the land or use it for some other, more lucrative, purpose. Says Rajni Bakshi, author of *The Long Haul*, a book on the Bombay textile workers' strike of 1982, "Workers are being physically pushed out of Mumbai. It's almost as if certain sections of the city are being forgotten."

The textile industry was once the mainstay of Mumbai's industrial life. Industrialisation came to Mumbai with these mills. The mill workers

were very much part of the landscape of the city at the time. They were part of the mainstream, and constructed their identity around the mills for which they worked. As Pravin Ghag, Secretary of the Swan Mills Kamgar Committee (SMKC) says, "Earlier, entire chawls in the mill areas would come out on the streets if any anti-worker decision was taken by the management. Eighty percent of the workers would live in these chawls and be known by the jobs they had in the mills. A 'jobber' in the mill was a jobber to everyone, including the people in the chawls." The strongest unions in the city were located in this industry.

The textile strike of 1982 was indicative of the shape of things to come. The longest lasting textile strike in the world (it was never officially called off) weakened the position of the textile unions considerably. Says Bakshi, "The outcome of the strike was

going to determine who the winner would be for the next 20 years." While neither side openly acknowledged it, the strike resulted in the tacit defeat of Datta Samant, the militant labour leader who was at its forefront. As days stretched into weeks and weeks into months, the families of the over 2 lakh workers who participated in the strike, were brought to the brink of starvation. In desperation, workers resorted to menial jobs like washing cars, their wives to working as domestic servants. Many of them, just went back to their villages. For them, at least, Mumbai had ceased to be the mecca of jobs.

The strike altered many fundamental presumptions about the textile mills. The mills had begun to make losses even before the strike. But mill owners could not have shut mills down without antagonising the workers' unions. As a result of the strike, in the eyes of the world, unions lost their credibility as their adamant stance had only resulted in the beggaring of the worker. This suited the mill owner who could now safely question the validity of running mills that were making losses.

Thus began the process of shutting down mills and using



the mill land for other purposes like commercial complexes. The workers who were willing to come back to work, were no longer wanted. Since then, it has been one struggle after another for the textile mill worker. Says Pravin Ghag, "when unions fought back and asked for mills to reemploy workers, mill owners took in far less number of workers than they had initially promised to do."

Faced with no other choice, the textile worker has resigned himself to working in the unorganised sector. Here, all the benefits that he enjoyed in the organised sector like good working conditions and at least a minimum wage are denied to him. Says Meena Menon, activist in the Girni Kamgar Sangharsha Samiti, "Workers in the unorganised sector are protected by nothing. Not by the Minimum Wage Act, the Maternity Benefits Act, the Factories Act. Not by any act. Whatever rights have been won by the workers so far, have been lost because the prevailing legislation offers no protection to the unorganised sector." As there are now many workers willing to work in abysmal conditions for a daily wage, the practise of subcontracting is on the rise. Mills are farming out different parts of the manufacturing process to contractors in the unorganised sector and getting their work done for a pittance. The need for full-time textile workers is therefore not felt as strongly as before.

Denied the protection of the law, the mill worker has now also been denied the place he lived. The mill lands are being sold to property developers in a series of shady deals. Says Vidyadhar Date, senior correspondent with *The Times of India*, who has spent years covering labour issues, "People should question the sale of mill land in the first place. There are very few people in the

city who know that a lot of property was leased to mill-owners almost a hundred years ago. What passes off as private property now was leased then (from the government) for an annual rent of Rs. 100."

There also seems to be an attempt to create conditions that will make it difficult for mill workers to continue living in their chawls. This is one of the reasons why unions are opposed to the Model Rent Act. If this Act comes through, rents which have been frozen at 1970 levels will be hiked to market rates. The impoverished worker families will quite obviously not be in a position to pay these. Traditionally labour was considered the active factor of production who worked on land and capital to make them productive. In Mumbai's textile industry a tussle for primacy has begun between land and labour, with land winning.

The situation facing workers today is ironical given their prolific role in Mumbai's economy. Says Vidyadhar Date, "Mill workers have generated much of the wealth of Mumbai city. It is from this wealth that the prosperity of the city stems." The condition of workers today belies this heritage. The workers of Khatau Mills are a case in point. They have been reduced to penury as wages for several months were paid only recently. Says Vithal Ghag, convenor of the SMKC, "Textile mill-workers used to educate their children in good schools. Their bank pass books showed savings amounting to thousands. Now they are forced to stop educating them.. Women have been forced to do menial jobs as their husbands don't have work. The worker also has to deal with the social stigma of being unemployed."

Furthermore, the worker's unions themselves are facing a dilemma. "Textile unions have for years been

trained to deal only with the question of wages. They are unable to deal with new questions of unemployment, decentralisation, the shift from the organised to the unorganised sector and the question of voluntary retirement," says Menon.

Mill owners have specious arguments. Says Date, "They often complain that the rise of the power loom sector has crippled the textile industry, that they have taken away business. The fact is that it works the other way round, the decline in the mills caused the power loom sector to expand."

Even as the marginalisation of the workers grows, the coverage they receive in the media seems to be decreasing. Says Menon, "There is a general disinterest among the people in issues like poverty, unemployment and other boring kind of issues... there is a culture of escapism. Earlier there was a sensitivity that the city is ours...now there is a 'temporariness' of money in the corporate culture. Fun is becoming desperate. Each looks after his own interest." Adds Date, "Coverage also depends on the journalist's background. It is very much a matter of class. Most journalists come from the middle class background and are not interested in labour issues. But these days, a lot of younger journalists do write about Khatau mills and other cases."

There is a general feeling among city dwellers that the textile trade is dying and the fate of the textile worker sealed. As Pravin Ghag says, "Today you have people telling us that the textile trade is not working, why are we fighting for the mills? Society's support is missing." Date gives another explanation for the declining interest in the industry from all quarters. He says, "there is a process of gentrification

going on in the city. Increasingly, many neighbourhoods which were once working class are turning white collar."

In the 40s and 50s textile mill owners maintained akharas, where pehelwans were trained and used to break up any attempt of workers at

getting organised. The pehelwans have long since disappeared. Textile workers have long since organised themselves. But the change hasn't stopped there. Gradually, the mill worker has seen his strength reduce from 3 lakh to 70,000. He is being forced to the margins,

trying to deal with questions he's never had to face before. But he won't give up without a fight. As Menon puts it, "People come to Mumbai for jobs.

If they're going to take away their jobs, they'd better give reasons for it." ॐ



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NTA 1771/98

WE COME FROM YOUR Wombs

Mumbai prides itself on its *laissez-faire* attitude towards matters sexual. **CHARU GOUNIYAL** and **ARTI SHARMA** find that the world of those with alternative sexual orientations is almost as claustrophobic as ever.

The music — throbbing, if unremarkable; the air — saturated with smoke and well-honed bodies; the visibility— severely stresses the retina. So, is it just another Saturday night at a pub where the wannabes come and chill? Not quite. The clientele at Voodoo, a South Bombay pub, on Wednesdays and Saturdays “are not normal.” They “are not like us.” They are “homos.” Or maybe, “gays, perverts.”

The clientele dances on heedless. Voodoo is as much of a protected space as they will find anywhere in Mumbai. And Mumbai is supposed to be the city where it doesn't matter, the cosmopolitan city that can take alternative sexual orientations in its stride.

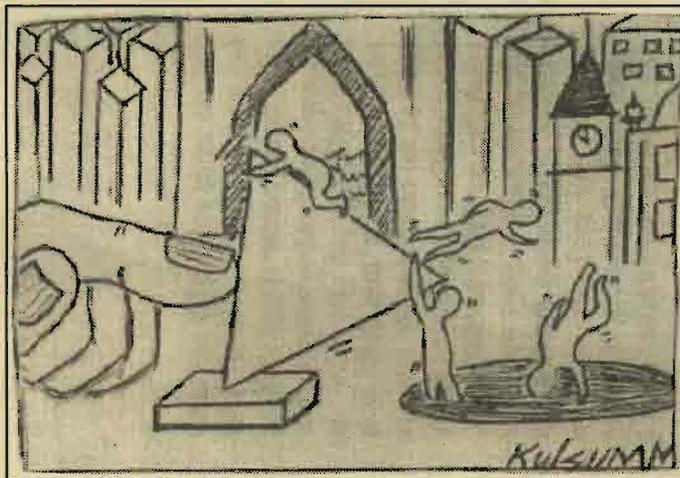
“Is Mumbai really such a free space?” asks Ashok Row Kavi, the country's best-known advocate for gay rights. “On the basis of the letters we get at Bombay Dost, the magazine we put out, homosexuals in smaller towns find it difficult to find a support system to tap into. It may be better for those who live in Mumbai but only marginally.”

Words like ‘homo’ and ‘lezzie’ are still common linguistic currency in Mumbai. They are often used as insults, to define people who do not conform to dated ideas of traditional sex roles. Many people think that all homosexuals are ‘pansies’ — men who walk with a delicate step, talk with a lisp, and paint their lips in private. Just as they believe

that all feminists are lesbians (or the reverse), manly creatures who have been either turned down by men or have simply not had the chance to meet ‘a real man’.

The magnitude of the prevalence of homosexuality can only be matched by the level of ignorance about it. Zina, a free-lance photographer, says, “Most

whom are married, be abnormal? If one were to include the number of men who have predominantly homosexual orientation, the figures would, according to some estimates, touch 50 million. That's a lot of abnormality. For women, the statistics are unclear, mainly because the gay movement seems to have been cornered by male homosexuals and run by them.



When the law dictates that any act against the order of nature is criminal, it is natural that society would also treat the homosexual as an outsider. The feeling of being alone or an outsider often begins at an early age. “I didn't wake up one day and say, ‘Hey, I'm gay!’ It was a gradual awareness which began when I was around five years old,” says Ramesh Menon, a counsellor at the Humsafar Centre

people can't accept the fact that some of the most feminine women I know are lesbians. It is a pre-conceived notion.”

In the attitudinal framework of this ignorance, no differences are made. There are no distinctions between gays, hijras, eunuchs, transvestites or bisexuals. There is just one word that people have for all of them — ‘freaks’.

That is one way of ghettoising the other. People would like to believe that homosexuality is confined to a small minority of outlandish deviants. But can the 12.5 million permanently practising homosexual men in India, many of

(a counselling centre for homosexuals). Anita, a 23 year old student, knew she was ‘different’ by the time she was nine. This awareness is a gradual realisation of being different in ways that are apparently not usual to others but may seem natural to oneself. “To me, I'm normal. Heterosexuality seems abnormal. It's how you see it,” argues Menon. Such calm acceptance is hard won. Says Akshay, a 24-year-old sales officer, “I could not accept myself. I used to think only I was like this. I tried to kill myself. Now my family knows. Things are better.”

The realisation that one's sexuality is different from what the majority considers normal is most often accompanied by feelings of guilt and self-loathing. In a letter to his mother that was printed in *Bombay Dost*, a young gay man writes: "Mom, when I was in your womb, I was a girl. You prayed to God for a son. He answered your prayer and turned me into a boy and it was then that everything was messed up. Mom, you have done so much for me. I think you should know the truth. Mom, I am gay."

Although the mother-child bond is so strong that the parent or sibling may discuss the truth intuitively, an open discussion remains safely in the closet. Zina, for instance, has confided in her parents, but they never discuss the issue. Not being able to share one's thoughts and fears, even with family members, heightens the alienation. The situation worsens when parents use emotional blackmail to 'change' or 'cure' their gay children. Even after Avinash confided in his mother, she comforted him with, "When you get married it'll be okay!" Just as one cannot change one's heterosexual orientation, it is next to impossible for homosexuals to change theirs. Choice of sexuality is not a conscious decision. Says film-maker Riyadh Wadia, "I did not choose to be a homosexual. I am."

Wadia's calm is the result of a long journey towards self-acceptance. Consider the odds against that journey. Homosexuals find themselves isolated even when attempting to be 'one of the crowd'. In school they find themselves the butt of puerile jokes; in college they dread revelation because they fear it will shatter fragile friendships; and at work, colleagues crack lewd jokes to test their reactions.

That's not all; there's active discrimination as well. According to

Menon, a 'progressive' company transferred an employee after receiving an anonymous call about his 'unnatural sexual orientation.' When he refused the transfer, he was fired. Ritesh, a 22-year-old genetic engineer has come out to his family, but cannot dream of jeopardising his career, "I'm scared. I know my colleagues' attitudes will change once they come to know. I don't want my boss to have a negative attitude towards me."

Sheena, a manager with a multinational bank, is comfortable with her sexuality, but the fear of walking into her office and having her boss confront her with the truth is something she has to live with. "I handle huge amounts of money. There is a lot of trust and confidentiality involved. When I'm out partying with my girl-friend, there is always the fear: what if a client is seated on the opposite table?" It really hurts at corporate functions: my colleagues bring their partners. But I can't ever take my girl-friend along. That is when I really feel the distance."

Strangely enough, even though homosexuals are outsiders in most professions, homosexuality is considered acceptable, even desirable, in professions associated with creativity and the arts. While it is a status symbol to flaunt a gay hair-stylist or a gay designer, it is not yet 'in' to have a banker who is gay. Wadia feels this might be because the more 'arty' professions have no structured hierarchy; people are independent, and free to be themselves in professions that are associated with a 'bohemian' life-style.

For lesbians, the situation can be even more tortuous than it is for men. Their existence in India was acknowledged only when two women constables got married under the

Special Marriages Act in 1988. They were subsequently dismissed from service. Anita says, "In some ways it's easier— our society accepts two women holding hands, but not men who are expected to constantly reinforce their masculinity." Yet for most lesbians who find it next to impossible to evade the noose of marriage, their sexuality must lie buried. Sheena is used to 'well-meaning' people trying to marry her off. She jokes with her boss, "What to do, no man is marrying me."

Beneath her amiable public face is pain, carefully hidden. "I have been born a woman. I want to bear children. That's partly the reason why I have had relationships with men. But it doesn't work. I know what it feels like to not have a father. Society will not accept two mothers or even a single parent."

The 'new generation' of homosexuals appears more comfortable with their sexual identity compared to the earlier generation. Films like *Philadelphia*, *BomGay* and *Fire* contribute to their confidence and make them feel, "I'm not alone or I'm not abnormal". Wadia says, "An outsider is one who chooses to see himself as an outsider. The day I came out I was an insider. I was empowered. No one could play against my fear anymore. I felt liberated — all my cynicism and fear evaporated. Suddenly there was a new self-respect, a dignity lacking earlier."

Cities like Mumbai have a strong gay network. Support groups like the Humsafar Trust encourage gay men to reach out and help each other. When any culture develops, it invents its own vocabulary. In the West, most of the terms used to describe homosexuals have had biblical, legal or clinical origins, none very positive: invert, pervert, deviate, sodomite, homosexual. Even the word 'lesbian' developed negative connotations over

the years. "For years we needed an ordinary, everyday word that would express the concept of homosexuality without condemnation, or glorification." Such a word was 'gay'.

Its secret and code-like character has, however, diminished over the years. In Bombay, words like 'koti', or 'rani' have usurped the place of western counterparts like 'queen'; 'panti' is used for the heterosexual man who 'dabbles' with homosexuality; 'khauri' is the goonda who extorts money from unsuspecting gays. A space is then created where none exists. A space like Voodoo which can be a ghetto or an asylum depending on how you look at it.

Though most 'straight' people espouse tolerance, if not acceptance, of homosexuals, they are far from being as liberal as they would like to have believed. Kavi snorts at the hypocrisy: "Tell me, would you like it if you came to know your son was a homo?" With an increasing number of gays choosing to be up front about their sexual identity, homophobia is on the rise as mainstream society sees them as a threat to 'the order of nature' (see box to test your "homophobic" rating scale). When Zina confided in her best friend, she comforted her, "Don't worry. Your sexuality is something that will sort itself out. But don't ever touch me again." Says Zina ruefully, "I lost my best friend the day I told her I was a lesbian. That I was never attracted to her didn't make a difference."

The toughest part about being a homosexual is constantly being judged on the basis of one's sexuality. Menon says, the hurt clearly visible, "You don't go to town about your being straight. Then why do you define me only by my sexuality?" Anita echoes this hurt, "When they see me they go, oh there's Anita the gay. When I so much as look at a woman they assume I have sex on my mind. I have my preferences too. Moreover, my sexuality is only part of my personality. There's so much more to me."

The media helps by reinforcing the stereotype of the masculine 'butch' lesbian or the effeminate 'fairy' homosexual in gaudy plumage. Such distortion is used to enhance the machismo of the 'hero.' It's easier to see them that way. The object of revulsion is truly someone else, not like 'us'. And certainly not one's colleague, sister, sweeper or taxi driver, not 'ordinary people leading ordinary lives'.

Wadia feels, "Every homosexual is an outsider and an insider. If a gay is open about his sexuality, he is an outsider to straights. If he remains in the closet, he still feels like an outsider amongst both the straights and the gays." Kavi goes a step further by asserting that homosexuals are the 'original outsiders'. "We come from your wombs. We have been there in every century, in every culture." ☺

Homophobia is defined as " an unreasonable fear of homosexuals.

Check George Weinberg's homophobic rating scale to find out how homophobic you really are :

- | No. | The Test |
|-----|--|
| 1. | Homos' should be locked up to protect society |
| 2. | It would be upsetting for me to find out that I was alone with a homo' |
| 3. | Homos' should be allowed to hold government positions |
| 4. | I would not want to be a member of an organisation which had any homo' in it's membership. |
| 5. | I find the thought of homosexual acts disgusting |
| 6. | If laws against homos' were eliminated, the population of homos' would remain about the same |
| 7. | A homo' would be a good president |
| 8. | I would be afraid for a child of mine to have a teacher who was a homo' |
| 9. | If a homo' sat next to me on a bus, I would get nervous. |

If you've said "no" to 3,6,& 7 and yes to others, you could be homophobic.

OF MASSACRES AND MIGRATION

SHAILEY MOTIAL and **RASHMI NIHALANI** recount narratives of Kashmiri Pandit refugees who have had to build new lives in homes they have been forced to adopt.

They were a marriage party from Anantnag, a town in south Kashmir. Laughing and singing all the way to Jammu, where a relative was to tie the knot. A month later, when Manju Raina and her family wanted to return, they were advised not to.

Fundamentalists had drawn up lists of people who they wanted to kill. The second name on that list was that of Raina's uncle, who was a professor at Kashmir University. Raina and her family did not take the threat seriously, until they received a note which asked them to leave, failing which they would face dire consequences. Raina's uncle left with his family for Jammu. Raina and her family followed them 15 days later, never to return to Anantnag again.

Destruction and burning of property. Molestation and gang rapes of women. Kidnappings, attacks and murders of innocent people. All in an attempt to engineer a mass exodus of the Hindu inhabitants of the Kashmir valley. In 1989, Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of the then Union Home minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, was kidnapped by a group of Islamic militants to ensure the safe release of five of their members held in prison. Ever since, there has been no looking back for these militants. Their reign of

terror has been successful for the last eight years.

Raina was 15 years old when her family left Anantnag. She had completed her 12th standard, but it was difficult for her to get admission in Jammu. Students from Kashmir University were not transferred to other universities, so she studied in Jammu as a student of Kashmir University. Exams were irregular because of the growing violence, and Raina lost out on two years because of these delays.

Today, Raina is a management student at the SNTD University in Mumbai. She still recalls those days with horror: "I remember the first day a Kashmiri Pandit was shot dead. His name was Tikal Tiploo. My *mamaji* (maternal uncle) saw his body being kicked by the people there. We could not do anything about it."

"When we moved to Jammu, accommodation was a problem for most

Kashmiris. Rents had doubled and most people had to live in refugee camps. These camps are in a miserable condition. They are small and do not even have proper toilets. I have also seen many people die because of the heat. It especially hurt to see the old people suffer. It still hurts."

Raina feels a great sense of betrayal. "I miss my friends. In fact, one friend writes regularly, but I don't bother to reply. In spite of knowing a lot (about who was being targeted), she didn't tell me anything. Many Muslims in the valley knew who was being targeted, but they did nothing about it. I will never go back to live there, probably just to visit." (It is strange how these sentiments echo the ones uttered by Mumbai's Muslim population who felt equally betrayed by their Hindu friends and neighbours who stood by, silent, during the riots of 1992-'93)

This sense of betrayal is also felt strongly by Sanjay Suri, whose father was killed by the neighbourhood youth. In August 1990, 20-year old Suri, a resident of Srinagar, was forced to move out of his birthplace - his home and city. Suddenly an outsider amongst his friends and in his own city, Suri moved to Delhi with his family.

"You lose your



identity . What you had was in the past. You have to prove yourself. Life in a big city seemed strange. I was used to the laid back life-style of a small town," says Suri, who was a second year B.Com student when he left Srinagar. The government had made arrangements for the education of students who had to leave Kashmir, so Suri was able to complete his graduation. He wanted to study management after his graduation, but as there was no income, his life shifted focus, and a job became more important than education.

"I couldn't pursue my own plans, so I tried my hand at different things. At times like these, when you are dealing with the trauma of the tragedy, and taking care of basic things like setting up a liveable unit, it is very difficult to make the right decisions," says Suri, who started working in his third year. He tried doing different things, even setting up his own business, but a shortage of funds forced him to shut down. "People told me about various two-year courses, but if I did those then who would earn for two years? The two or three years after graduation are crucial but I lost them."

Suri is now working in Mumbai, where he feels more welcomed than he was in Delhi. "I am happy with my work, because it has given me an identity which I had lost. Friends and family will always be by your side, but there are

other people whose attitudes have changed and they look at you differently because now you have an identity. Today I say that I wouldn't want to return to Srinagar but I think one knows in one's heart of hearts that one wants to return."

Moti Kaul, vice-president of the Panun Kashmir Organisation (an organisation making demands for a separate Kashmir for Kashmiri Pandits), has settled in Mumbai for the last twenty-eight years. For twenty-one years, he visited his family in Kashmir. His regular vacations to Srinagar came to an abrupt halt in February, 1990, when his family was forced to flee because of the growing militancy.

According to Kaul, on the midnight of 19th January, 1990, mosques all over Kashmir simultaneously played a cassette which threatened all Hindus with dire consequences if they did not leave. As a result, Kaul's family along with three and a half lakh other people were displaced from their homes in different parts of Kashmir. "They hoped to return in a month's time. They thought that was as long as it would take for the situation to return to normal," Kaul recalls.

Anuradha Kaul is a management student in Mumbai. She was forced to leave Kashmir in 1991, when her father was shot by militants. "After the 1989

call of the militants, a lot Pandits had already left Kashmir. The militants regularly threatened all those who were left behind. My father, who had his own business, received constant threats from the militants. But he was stubborn and refused to leave. He didn't listen to our pleas. One night, as he was returning from the nearby town, he was shot down by militants.

"My brother was studying engineering and I was in my 11th standard when we had to leave. We first moved to Delhi and then to Bombay. People were very helpful; they helped us move on with life. We didn't have such a bad time, but a lot of other pandits had it tough.

"I often question myself. Why did this have to happen? My childhood, my friends—it all seems like a dream now. We had many Muslim friends but none of them came to help us. I hope some day, the condition will return to normal. Some day I'll get to go back. But I'm not so sure whether things will ever be the same again. I like Bombay. The people here are friendly, but it takes time. The people I grew up with are suddenly nowhere around me. They're gone. I'm not sure whether I can call myself an Outsider, but I definitely don't have the feeling of belonging." ☺

*Despite all that India has done to liberalise its economy and to globalise, it continues to be sidelined in international forums. **JYOTSNA NATARAJAN** and **SHRADHA SUKUMARAN** find out why.*

US ANNOUNCES CHINA AS MOST FAVOURED PARTNER FOR TRADE

Some things are beyond question today. Like the above headline. It would hardly seem incongruous that, in today's world, some countries are given greater priority merely on the strength of their economies. Others will be consigned to the outside — those with the tag, 'under-developed' or the even more misleading 'developing' countries.

On the inside lie those on whose square shoulders rest the bulk of crucial decisions, ones that involve and concern the world, but which are taken by a chosen few. India has the dubious distinction of being labelled 'developing'. One is reminded of a boy pressing his nose to a candy store window.

"India has no input in making rules," says Dr Rajesh Basrur, a professor at Mumbai University and a PhD in international relations, referring to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The very fact that one nation would be given the MFN status by the world's leading economy is proof enough.

An article in a leading newspaper states that "appointments to meet top officials are hard to get." It goes on to say that not only was an Indian diplomat kept waiting to meet a top official in the US, others were even denied visas! Though it seemed as if relations between the two thawed after the end of the Cold War, India continues to be treated shoddily. The World Trade Organisation may have a membership that comprises several member nations, it forms rules of international trade based on decisions of only the G7 countries. "Therefore new standards in import policies are set, such as labour standards, minimum wages and the like which struggling economies find hard to get around," explains Basrur. Of late, the fixed environment regulation (green goods) ensures that products made outside of these cannot be exported. Few Indian goods have access to the technology required to enter the foreign markets and India has, more

often than not, been sent to the crowded back seat of the bus where it is coldly ignored.

Maheshwar Rao, former top level diplomat at the UK embassy, explains, "It's a given that the leading countries will dominate. But, it is true that more important issues like poverty, unemployment and economic development of the Third World countries take a back-seat." However, Tony Mango, consul-general of Greece contends that the fault may not lie with our economic stars but within ourselves.

"India has made an island of itself," he states categorically. "It's not just the fault of the rest of the world." Mango elaborates that it is necessary to open up to other countries, and to realise that "we are no longer Indian or Greek, but citizens of the world."

At one point there seemed to be unity in strength. The Non-Aligned Movement started by Yugoslavia, India and Egypt, began to provide an alternative platform from which developing nations, India included, could make their voices heard in international debates. The end of the Cold War left NAM without an agenda. A unipolar world dominated by the Almighty Dollar made it a redundant organisation whose opinions no longer mattered.

Now it would seem that it is only when India defies the leading countries (for which read: America) that it is given any attention. Take, for example, India's 'infamous' refusal to sign the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty). The treaty in itself is discriminatory. It disallows nations from conducting nuclear tests, but empowers others to do so. In theory, the treaty seems well-intended. But the other perspective is : look at the exclusivity of the agreement!

When India refused to give in, the leading nations sat up in their chairs. That India did this seems surprising as, almost two-thirds of the planet is expected to fall neatly in with someone else's plans. "India was isolated at the discussions at the conference in Geneva and its consistent demand for

global disarmament was ignored," says Basrur. But Mango, who has spent the last twenty years in India says, "India has done its bit in isolating itself as far as international decisions are concerned. Now the country has to be financially cautious and get over petty restrictions."

One is not talking of strong-arm tactics here. It's almost as if there were signs screaming 'No Trespassing' in certain issues. And these subjects are barricaded from countries like India. Another rare instance where India has attracted much attention is with regard to the Intellectual Property Rights discussion where capitalist countries allow patenting of products but India allows only patenting of processes. Basrur predicts, "India will be under greater pressure to fall in line with the West because our stand is not in accord with that of the greater powers."

India has also been told to open up her markets. The euphemism for this is "liberalisation". Yet how many Indian made products find their way into foreign markets. Tony Mango provides his version of a solution, "India has to leave the past behind. It was understandable when Independence had just been got, that the swadeshi movement would be the cry. But today, 50 years later, India is fighting a shadow. Indian markets need to open up."

International relations may be based on a pretence of democracy but when it comes down to it, he who pays the piper calls the tune. The developing nations and the underdeveloped ones need a new forum, a new voice, a new unity of intent and attitude. And then perhaps as Maheshwar Rao says, "The developing nations are raising their voices, and once they get loud enough, the tables will turn." ☞

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MOSAIC OR MELTING POT?

Mumbai conjures up metaphors of amalgamation. **PRIYA NAIR** argues that many of those who have called it home, even for decades, find it difficult to identify with the city.

"I came to Mumbai with many dreams and the city has helped me to fulfil my dream," says P. Unnikrishnan, an officer with a nationalised bank. He has been a resident of Mumbai for the past 31 years. His children are studying here and cannot dream of living anywhere else. But Unnikrishnan plans to settle down in Kerala after retirement. "Mumbai has given me a job, a house, everything I could hope for," he says. "But my roots are in Kerala and one day, I want to go back. I want to get away from the mechanical life of this city."

Unnikrishnan voices the sentiment of many other Mumbaiites. Most of the residents in Mumbai are migrants or descendants of migrants. Studies show that about 63 per cent of the city's population were born outside the city. From the 17th century, the city has been and continues to be, the destination for scores of migrants, both from within and outside the country. As a result, different languages, religions and cultures coexist in close proximity giving rise to the idea of the city as a melting pot. The idea of a melting pot however, implies that there are no outsiders. Part of the idea is that the curious alchemy of the city works on everyone, transforming every newcomer into a Mumbaiite. Obviously then, this much-vaunted process has not worked.

Dr. Shiv Raju of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) says, "Generally

migrants are young men. When they come in search of work they leave their families behind. So they have this constant desire to return to their place of origin."

This seems to hold true in case of



Arumugham, a flower seller from Tirunelveli, in Tamil Nadu. Arumugham came to Mumbai 20 years ago in search of employment. Today he is married and has four children. He feels a sense of alienation from the city that he explores in a pragmatic manner. He says, "I do not have relatives in Mumbai.

If my wife or any of my children fall ill, there is nobody to help me. As soon as I make Rs 50,000 I will go back." Arumugham has some land in Tirunelveli and he hopes to continue his flower business there. But he needs money to bore a well. He says, "Even if my children want to settle here, I will go back. I am here only for money."

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams emphasises the contrast between country and city as fundamental ways of life. By 'country', Williams means the village or the countryside. He writes that the city stands for an achieved centre, learning and communication; but also for noise, worldliness and ambition. The country, on the other hand, embodies innocence, peace and virtue; but also backwardness, ignorance and limitation. The city-dweller often generates a nostalgic longing for more 'natural' ways of living and seeks refuge in the countryside. Often, this need not be a countryside in the real sense of a rural world. It is a space that has been created largely out of memory and nostalgia.

For Debjani Rai, wife of a former government official, home is Calcutta, almost as industrialised a city as Mumbai. She says, "We have been living in Mumbai since 1974. After my husband's retirement we shifted from Malabar Hill to Andheri. I found it

difficult to adjust to the small flat and the long commute from Andheri to Malabar Hill where all our friends are. But in a few years we will go back to Calcutta. I have even spent more time and money in decorating the house there than the one here."

It would be easy to imagine Arumugham sticking to his own community, staying within its confines, seeking them out actively for his social needs. However, almost all Mumbaiites seem to reach back into their own little communities, seeking out people who belong to their social groups.

The Rais, for instance, have an active social life. But most of their friends are Bengalis whom they have met through the religious and cultural associations of which they are members. And when the inevitable happens – the groups splinter because of those who return – those who stay behind may feel a sense of isolation that may hasten their departure. Debjani Rai says, "Quite a few of our Bengali friends have returned to Calcutta. So now I find myself alone."

K.S. Nair, professor of sociology at Pune University, points out that immigrants coming from different cultural regions tend to simulate their regional and social environment in the metropolitan environs. In his book *Ethnicity and Urbanisation*, Nair writes, "The process of simulation of the regional culture in the urban area is

facilitated by the residential segregation of the migrants who tend to cluster around relatives and other migrants belonging to their own religion, caste, language, class and region." For instance, the mention of Malabar Hill brings to one's mind, skyscrapers and swanky cars. On the other hand, the suburbs like Borivali and Mulund belong to middle income groups. While Dadar is a predominantly Maharashtrian locality, Matunga is known as the 'little Madras of Mumbai' because of the majority of the South Indian population, particularly Tamil Brahmins.

Among the migrants there is a marked attempt to recreate the patterns of housing and living as they existed in their villages. Praveen Nangia, lecturer in the Migration Department at the International Institute for Population Sciences, points out that they find it difficult to adjust to the urban environment because of the strong pull of urban life. It leads them to act as villagers in the city. Nangia says, "Most of the slums in the city are self-sufficient communities with schools, grocery shops and so on. This is similar to the traditional Indian village. In fact many of the slum-dwellers sell the low-cost flats that the government provides and continue to live in the slums, even if it is unhygienic or crowded."

Specialisation in occupation is another significant feature of the migrant population in Mumbai. It has

been observed that the lower-class migrants from Uttar Pradesh usually work in dairy-farms or sweet shops, while migrants from South India are mostly employed as fruit or vegetable vendors. Whereas education may provide a way out, the uneducated find themselves drawn in by the simple fact that the networks are available and make entry into certain occupations easier.

The constant flow of people into Mumbai over the past few centuries has relegated the original natives to the margins. Today we see that it is the migrant population that defines Mumbai and not the natives. As Jyoti Vora, professor of sociology at S.N.D.T. University, rightly points out, "Mumbai was originally an island where fishing was the main business. But now, nobody thinks of the Kolis, who are the 'real' Mumbaiites, as being part of Mumbai."

Unnikrishnan perhaps speaks for many of Mumbai's residents when he says, "The city has a sort of magnetic attraction." The city draws into itself a large number of people and develops into a complex. It offers a degree of anonymity contrasting with the village, where everyone's social and family status is known to everyone else. In the city, the people you cross in the streets do not know who you are. In cities, people are aliens to one another. They are 'in' it, but not 'of' it. Ω

This kholi pulsates with life. Another Sunday and another meeting of the Dharavi Saksharta Samiti is on the way. Amongst the myriad of NGOs working here, this group stands apart. **SREELA SARKAR** profiles a group that is an outsider because it is composed of insiders.

The Indo-Pak match blares on a transistor outside the office of the Dharavi Saksharta Samitee in Dharavi, Asia's largest slum. Crackers burst and loud cheering echoes through the lanes. India has won. Inside the *kholi*, several young people pause in the midst of discussing the impending examinations and exchange warm, amused grins. Another Sunday and another meeting of the DSS is on the way.

For Gangadhar Shinde, a teacher at Natan Udyan Mandir who lives in this settlement, it is a day off from work to relax and devote himself wholeheartedly to the movement he has helped build since 1991. That was when four young people got together and resolved to spread literacy through the 'each one teach one' method.

But it was only in 1993, during the riots, that the organisation's work really accelerated. When the riots struck, Dharavi was in chaos. Children were orphaned and had to move in with their relatives. "Education was the last thing on anyone's mind," says Shinde. "The government did nothing to help."

Advertisements were placed in local and national newspapers and magazines asking for sponsorship for riot-affected children. Those who stopped getting free education after class seven according to government dictates, were top priority. A meagre sum of Rs. 12,000 was all that was asked. Only 10 per cent was kept for administrative purposes. Since then, 25 children each year have not only got funds to study but have also found an anchor.

Each evening, children and young people troop inside the kholi carrying books. Samiti rules make this compulsory. "We want to be responsible for the entire well-being of the child," says a volunteer. Most volunteers come here after work and help out. Audio visuals borrowed from Nirmala Niketan are screened and trips to museums, zoos are made. "The problem with these children is that they have never been outside Dharavi," says Gangadhar.

For Kamal Baban, a student at MMP Shah college, who lost her father in the riots, the Samiti has been her life. "Whatever I am today is only because of the Samiti," she says. "My father was murdered in the riots. He was mistaken for a Shiv Sena worker. The Hindus and the Muslims had always lived here in peace. They came from outside. Someone told them the Masjid had been broken." Her education sets her apart. "The girls who I grew up with are all married with children. I am the only odd one out." "The average age of marriage for girls is fourteen," assert all volunteers. The Samiti often deliberately counsels women against marriage.

Started by those who had a vision that they dared put in action, the group has come a long way even amongst the myriad of NGOs working here. "Only the insiders can know what's wrong with their people. They (NGOs) live outside. They help, but the heart is missing," says Sumedh Bansode, a welder by occupation and the secretary of DSS.

"There are over 200 NGOs working in Dharavi," says Gopal Shinde, a social worker at the Community Outreach Project (CORP) of the Methodist Church. CORP manages creches for children, runs coaching classes for school drop-outs, a night shelter for children and sponsorship programmes in Dharavi. "Over half of our funding comes from abroad. It is very difficult to get funds from the government," says Gopal Shinde. "They (NGOs) are the ones with all the foreign funding," asserts Gangadhar.

Both CORP and All India Women's Council (AIWC) recruit people from the grass root level for a salary. But Tara Shah, a member of the education committee of the AIWC voices a complaint. "There has been a setback for the last three or four years. People want higher paying jobs. Workers are not motivated, there is no sense of serving their own community. The mass media has shown people how to live in a certain way. It has inculcated values of sex and violence."

There are shadow lines between the DSS and the NGO circle. DSS volunteers cite Mr. Bhim Raskar of the Committee of Resource Organisations (CORO) as a mobilising force. However, instead of a hierarchical structure, today the organisation truly belongs to the people.

There are advantages to being part of the NGO circle. Each group can simultaneously run a series of services, like the AIWC and CORP, do, spread over the region. "We are very slow", says Gangadhar ruefully. "But we want to make sure that at least those 25 children are educated thoroughly", adds Jitendra Patil, a volunteer.

"Life in Dharavi is a constant cycle. The educated move out. The poor move in", says Sumedh Bansode. For Yamuna Manchagar the only woman

pioneer behind DSS, the movement has meant coming a long way. "My mother brought up a family of seven children by herself. She hasn't studied. But she struggled to send me to school."

More volunteers join each year. Jitendra Patil, a chemical engineering student whom this Samiti has educated, forms the pulse of this organisation. Sumedh Bansode gave up his sponsorship for another child and has returned to help. Kamal is sure to come back.

As the meeting draws to an end with dance and music, this kholi pulsates with plans for the coming week. Integrated with the people and yet apart; an organisation doing community work but with a difference, the DSS builds on the very bed-rock of Dharavi. Ω

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90 PER CENT TO GET INTO POTTERY

Twenty-five years ago a science graduate found it difficult to find a job. Today fewer people take arts because they fear unemployment. What happened?

PREETI DESHPANDE and **LEENA JAYARAJ** find out.

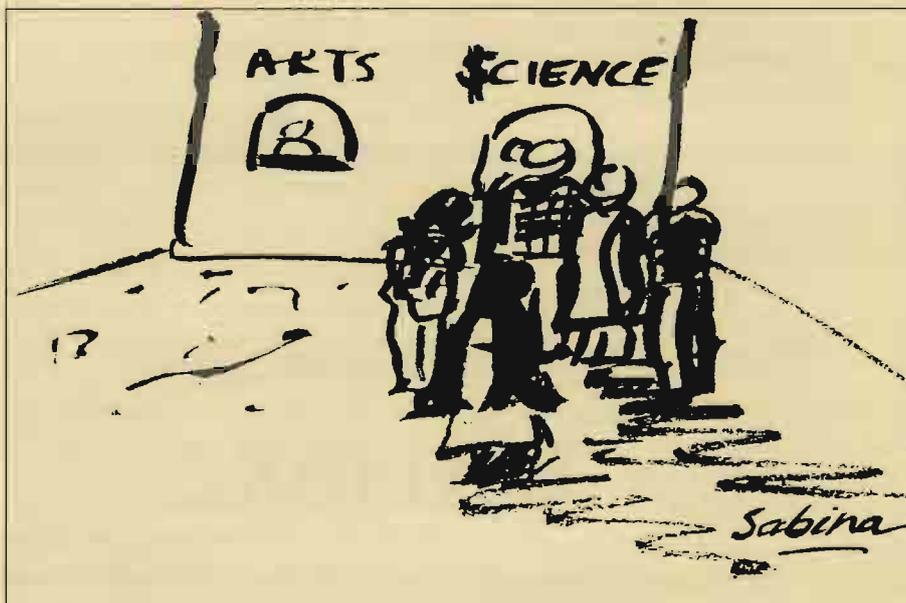
Seventy-five to 80 companies turned me down because I had a degree in science, not Arts," says Nasir Ali Khan, 70, who graduated in 1950. "I decided to study for a BSc against my father's wishes. In those days, economics and history got one a good job in the civil services, not science. Naturally, my father was upset enough to ask his friend to talk me out of it," Ali Khan recalls. "Companies would turn my applications down because they considered arts graduates to have a broader outlook to life, something they thought science graduates did not have. Actually, it was because arts graduates are supposed to have a facility with the English language."

On the other hand, Rajeshwari Ramini, a student of M.A. Economics at the Mumbai university, studied science in junior college. Poor performance forced her to think of the arts as an option. "When my dad suggested I take an arts degree after class 12, I was stunned. I thought, 'Arts! How am I going to get a job?' Like most science students, I thought arts was for the duds while the cream went to science."

In a span of 50 years, the two streams of arts and science have grown more and more estranged. For the average 15-year-old student, who has just finished high school, the dilemma of making a choice between the two holds no meaning. For her or him, it's not as simple a choice as it's made out to be. By forsaking science one gives

the country (38 per cent). But for most of them, studying arts is a matter of chance, not choice. Studying the arts means having to live with the stereotype of someone who is easy going, not studious and only passes exams by reading 'guide books' and mugging. Like most stereotypes, this one has its measure of truth. Says Prabodh Parikh,

professor of Philosophy in Mithibai college, "We lack creativity in our teaching of the humanities. By the time the child completes school he's thoroughly disgusted with the subjects." In the classrooms the humanities are reduced to dull, dry four page answers that the teacher indifferently



dictates and the students mindlessly mug. The teaching of the humanities discourages even those who are truly interested.

up claim to almost all highly paid vocations in the country. As a consequence, one falls short of the most crucial middle class barometer of success — the money you make.

As Kriti Mehra, a 11th standard science student at Sathaye college, Mumbai, says, "After all, science is more interesting and has job opportunities which pay better. Science is where it's all happening!"

Ironically, arts graduates form the largest group of the total graduates in

Higher education in India has increasingly become an instrument of upward mobility. It is the only path available to the middle class to make good their dreams. Arts becomes detached from practical application, thus losing its value.

The West with its high degree of scientific advancement and material

prosperity provides, by default, the criteria for a modern society. A developed society is considered to be one which is technologically advanced. Importance is given to science which provides this technology and to the marketing of it. In his essay *Crisis of Modern Education, Need for Positive Intervention*, Avijit Pathak states, "Modernity — in its gigantic techno-economic structure — needs the development of certain skills in order to reproduce itself." These skills are valued more than the others. The arts then take on an elitist character which restricts them to people who can afford to live in an ivory tower.

The intelligentsia has supported this estrangement from society. "The social scientist now has nothing to say to the society he lives in", says Parikh. Leena Abraham, a researcher in the department of Sociology of Education Department at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) reaffirms, "The intelligentsia has failed to perform its role of critiquing society and development, and offering alternatives. Arts has been confined to the classrooms and universities." Government policy gives tacit approval to this bifurcation of the arts and sciences. S. R. Bommai, Minister for Human Resource Development, at the 66th convocation of the Andhra Pradesh University admitted that, "In the past, the goal of education was to impart knowledge, skills, and values. However, in the present stages of development of humankind, education must reach out beyond these limited objectives and

be geared to meet the imperatives of growth, elimination of economic imbalance, technological upgradation and the demands of globalisation and international competitiveness."

Science is looked upon as a tool for development. Any critique of technology, therefore, is treated as regressive. But this critique is crucial. Technology has repercussions on society which science — with its focus on results — does not always consider. An objective and meaningful assessment of the impact of technology upon society, upon the individual constituent of society and upon the economic framework on which it rests can be achieved only if the humanities are re-prioritised.

Thus, paradoxically, the field of humanities in India has unique opportunities for research and study. However, the discipline has failed to evolve into a viable instrument of research and analysis. This is partly because of the lack of government funding which is available to premier institutions of science. Says an embittered arts graduate, "Just take a look at the average campus of a premier science institute and then look at one that specialises in the humanities. You will see that the latter has developed in spite of itself, in defiance of budget limitations and governmental neglect."

In the '70s, mass movements and student activism helped the arts to maintain an importance and legitimacy that has since been eroded. The '70s was the time of Jaiprakash Narayan

and the Naxalite movement. Says Abraham, "Such movements attracted large-scale student mobilisation which translated to a general increase in the study of the humanities on campus. Subjects like sociology, political science and history equipped the students to give direction to their protest."

The '80s saw a decline in student activism. Social interests came to be viewed as Leftist in a climate that gave new meaning to market policy. Industrialisation became vital to the growth of the economy. The interest in science rose proportionately to the need for skilled technical and management professionals. The introduction of liberalisation gave a boost to the commerce faculty. Arts slipped further down the scale. Cut off percentages for both science and commerce in colleges shot up as more students clamoured for seats in these faculties.

There are those who still say that the arts allows them to explore their creativity, in an otherwise rigid system of education. Rajeshwari Ramini is glad that she took arts. "I'm really glad I took up economics. Arts helps one build one's personality. I think I'm a much better person now." Students like Rajeshwari are in a minority. They are looked upon as misfits in an educational system that has decided that the market rules. As Gangdhar Gadgil, writer and economist says, "Tomorrow if pottery becomes profitable, courses in pottery will be in demand and will require at least 90 per cent marks to get in!" ☞

"AN OVERPOWERING DESIRE TO BREAK OUT"

That's how one stutterer describes his condition. **VAIDEHI CHITRE** finds that in a society run by the hegemony of the word, the hesitant speaker can find himself left out.

"Why the hell doesn't he get on with it?" is a refrain that all those who stutter have learnt to grow up with. In a society in which the Word is sovereign, those who do not speak 'well' are an embarrassment to the myth of human perfection. Stuttering irritates and amuses listeners. In popular films, such as *Satte pe Satta* or the more recent *Uf yeh Mohabbat*, which are a reflection of the more reactionary ideals of social perfection, stutterers are often thrown in as foils to prove the machismo of the hero or the femininity of the heroine, and to create paradigms of what is in and what is out. To stutter obviously is 'unattractive', a sign of 'under confidence', an acknowledgment of 'inferiority', and so most definitely 'out'!

According to Riper and Emerick, writers of *Speech Correction: An Introduction to Speech Pathology and Audiology*. "Stuttering occurs when the forward flow of speech is interrupted abnormally by repetitions or prolongations of a sound, syllable, or articulatory posture, or by avoidance and struggle behaviour". 21-year-old Salim who stutters describes it as an "over-powering desire to break out."

Many therapists believe that stuttering is acquired during childhood, when parents try to "shame" the child out of the slightest hint of a stutter. Some therapists believe that stuttering has its origins in early fumbling; the hesitations and interruptions which are a part of the speech-learning process. According to Wendell Johnson, writer on speech, stuttering begins in the parent's ear, aggravated when they become anxious or punitive about

normal hesitations. The child reflecting their attitudes, will begin to avoid, fear or struggle with these words.

Sanjeevani Kotwal, a pre-school teacher recalls a student who was very comfortable with his stutter. "When another child in class began to stutter," she says, "his mother insisted that he had picked it up from his classmate". It is not possible to 'catch' stuttering



from others, though therapists have found that some stutterers do have either a parent, uncle or aunt who stutter. They do not however, believe that arguments in favour of this theory are conclusive.

Therapists say that there are more men stutterers, stating the ratio as 4 men to 1 woman. They feel that this is so because in society men are always expected to perform better.

Reena Menon, whose 13-year-old son, Rohit, stutters traces his problem to his third standard school teacher who was very autocratic. "He was very scared of her and didn't like to speak in class too much," she says. "His classmates, too are often cruel about his handicap." Recounting an incident

in his school, she says, "I'd gone to see his teachers on Open Day. While I was waiting for my turn I heard a group of children mocking Rohit's speech patterns. Obviously, they didn't know I was his mother."

Consequently, Rohit has very little confidence and doesn't like to spend time with people his age. He says, "I don't feel like it. I have one or two good friends. I don't like girls, they scare me." He prefers to sit at home and read rather than play with his friends. "He has major speech blocks, and though his is a mild case as he grows more aware of the blocks, he avoids speaking", says his therapist Sharvari Rele.

Not all problems rise out of actual rejection. Often a stuttering child, perceiving the difference in speech, may position himself on the outside in fear of potential rejection. Thus he in turn is perceived as being indifferent by his peers, resulting in further isolation. Siddharth Mhatre's tenth standard school teacher is very encouraging. In her attempt to 'bring Siddharth out of his shell' she often asks him to read in class. But for Siddharth, it is a signal for panic time and a worse stutter. "I don't like to read," he says, "I bet my classmates make fun of me." He too is wary of the opposite sex.

While children may inadvertently be cruel, Fr. Terence Quadros, counselor at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, feels that adults may be more sympathetic. However, he feels that this may also backfire. He says, "The 'sympathetic' listener might put in words that do not fit in with what is intended to be said

and make the speaker feel more self-conscious about his handicap." Equally damning is the effect when well meaning people look away in embarrassment for the stutterer.

Out of a need to be less conspicuous, many people disguise their stutter. Stutterers often find synonyms for feared words. Veena D, a 29 year old executive has a vocabulary that would make Roger proud. She has substitutes for all her feared words. "If I can't substitute," she says, "I just stop talking and pretend I'm thinking." A lot of people interject "ah" or "um" or "well" to postpone speaking

as long as possible., "It is such a strain, I have to be on guard all the time, in case I slip up." says Veena.

Can stuttering be cured? According to Rele, "Statistics indicate that very few stutterers can be cured entirely." She says, "Even if a person responds favourably during sessions, when confronted with other people outside, they invariably revert to a stutter."

Frederick Pemberton Murray, speech writer, who also stutters, writes in his book, *A Stutterer's Story*, believes that whatever therapy a stutterer

adopts, it should result in a relatively normal speech pattern flow. He personally believes in the technique of stuttering fluently.

Therapists believe that stutterers can act without stuttering at all, as this involves role playing. Finally, there is nothing to prove that stuttering is an impediment to success. Perhaps fluent speech is not necessarily such a prerequisite for success, after all. The novelist, Somerset Maugham, King George VI of England, and Charles Darwin were all stutterers. So was Moses. ☩



BEYOND RETIREMENT

Retired people find that when they give up their jobs, they lose their identities because they are regarded as 'useless'. **RADHIKA PRADHAN** and **SAFIA SIRCAR** examine society's alienation of old age pensioners.

His was an ordered life. He awoke in the morning, and knew what he had to do. The army provided him with structure, with meaning, and it was his entire existence. He didn't realise it until it was too late.

"I put my life on the line for my country in the 1971 war. At that time, it was simply what one had to do and I did it. Then I retired and looking back, I wonder whether it was worth it. The country for which I was willing to risk my life had no place for me." says Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Moinuddin.

Retirement is no man's land, an amorphous ill-defined territory. Once a certain age has been crossed, retirement happens and the retired person seems to lose his foothold in the mainstream. The mainstream of course, here is that unhappy band of people who complain about their jobs, the hours they have to keep, the low pay for which they slog, the travelling they do.. all of which looks great from the outside.

Are feelings of alienation, of not being wanted then a natural by-product of

retirement? After the industrial revolution, Man redefined himself as homo faber, Man the artificer, the maker of tools, and later, of money.

It was not always so. In the past, a retired person was regarded as experienced and knowledgeable. Even in agricultural areas, the old person is no longer an integral part of the landscape. "The elderly in agricultural areas were once considered storehouses of knowledge and lore. But with the introduction of new technology like tractors and hybrid seeds, even that position has been undermined," says Rosamma Veedon, academician at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

It is changing technology then, that is implicated. It brings with it a kind of modernisation that sidelines the status

of the elderly. It creates a gulf between people who earn and people who used to earn. Veedon says, "Modernisation makes it difficult for old people to adapt to a new environment or live without support from their families."

Greater modernisation and urbanisation has led to the breaking up of familial patterns of living as more and more people prefer nuclear families over joint families. As the whole pattern of living changes, with burgeoning authority in the hands of the young, the retired elderly find themselves unable to stamp their individuality on the family. Nor is there any room for them when they fall ill— or worse.

The elderly suddenly face an identity crisis after having had a position of power and perks. Colonel Sunder, a retired officer of the Artillery Brigade says, "While I was in active service, I had no problems. But retirement is a different story. I lose my rank, my office, my power, my identity."

Sreelu Srinivasan, editor of Dignity Dialogue, a magazine for the elderly agrees, "Society evaluates people



on the basis of position and money. Retiring from a job means an end to a productive phase of life for the aged. Or so people think."

Comments like 'Now that he's retired, he can relax' and 'She doesn't have to worry about office timings now' don't help. They may be well-intentioned but they simply emphasise the obvious.

Retirement comes at a time of life when a person comfortably established suddenly finds his familiarity and routine disrupted. "I felt as if there was nothing left. You get so used to the daily routine of going to work that I used to wake up and get ready even before I realised there was no work to go to," says Mr. Gupte, who retired from Gujarat Fertiliser Ltd. five years ago.

Dr. Atul Rege, a consultant psychiatrist explains, "As people retire, families also find themselves unprepared for the change. A wife who would hardly see her husband, finds him around the house all the time. These small but definite changes are what the families are unprepared for."

Mr. Ashok Shinde, former marketing manager at Voltas Ltd., clearly expresses the retirement dilemma: "I had thought I would have so much time on my hands. I also thought that I was prepared for retirement - but I wasn't. I felt that I was not needed because my wife went on with her daily chores and the children continued their school and college. But I didn't have anything to do."

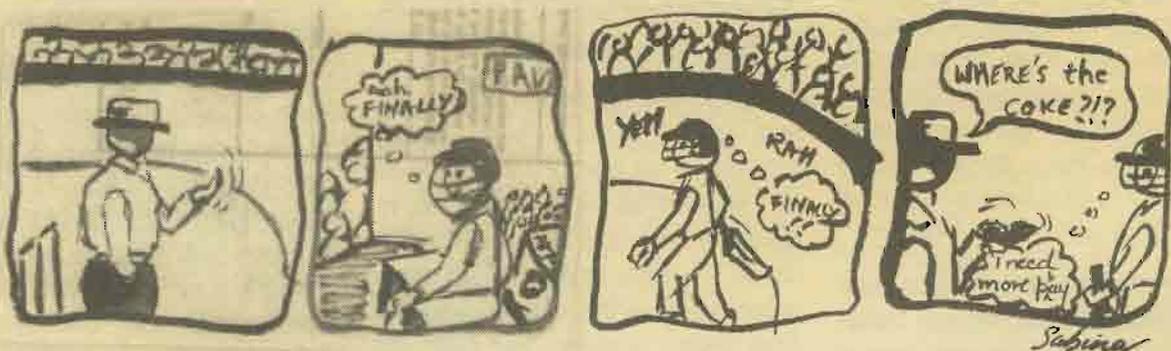
What the retired need is a sense of being wanted and of being useful. Dr. Rege says, "Having worked in an office with so many people for so long, a retired person finds it difficult to adjust to a sudden lack of company."

Ms. Anagha Atre, a retired employee of the State Bank of India, is one such person. She chose independence over marriage. After thirty years of service at the bank, she was unable to cope with her loneliness. "I used to meet so many people at the bank. Now I miss even the most irritating customer." But she's coped; she now runs a nursery for children of working women, from her home.

"Social values which pressurise us to take care of the elderly have weakened. It then becomes prerequisite for the elderly to earn. But no one wants to employ them. There are not many retirement training programs in the companies," complains Srinivasan. One of the few such retirement training programs is at Hindustan Lever Ltd. It consists essentially of discussing investment planning, and psycho-social aspects of retirement, such as health and age related topics.

Srinivasan says, "Despite all these aspects, emotions are something which are not delved into. These cannot be channelled or controlled."

But as our population ages, we need to find ways to incorporate the retired into the mainstream, without hindering the process by which the young inherit the jobs that the old leave. Because tomorrow, this could mean you. ☺



TWELVE GOOD MEN AND TRUE

Part of the team, but not quite; relegated to the fringes of the action, the proverbial 12th man in a cricket team is the outsider who belongs, say **NAOMI DATTA, NILANJANA SENGUPTA** and **SOWJANYA KASHYAP**.

The drinks break is his moment of glory. The cameras swing towards him as he saunters on to the field, armed with bottles and towels.

He may never figure in any Pepsi or Coke commercial, even though he faithfully carries their bottles to and from the field.

He is part of the team, but not quite. Always relegated to the fringes of the main action, he is the 12th man in a cricket team.

So what precisely does a 12th man do?... besides carrying bottles, of course!

Vinod Kambli, the flamboyant cricketer, now consigned to the wilderness, has often been the 12th man in many cricket matches. He assures us that the 12th man plays an important role. "He gives drinks to his playing team-mates and helps them to regain their energy while on the field." Ah, now we get it — he is the 'official energiser' of the team.

Kambli glowers, "No, he does much more than that — he also relays messages to the batsmen from the captain. He tells them to accelerate play, or get on the defensive." Oh, right. Now, we arrive at a job description of the 12th man. He is the drinks and messenger boy all rolled into one — the general 'dogs body'!

There are 12th men, and then there are 12th men.. Saurav Ganguly, Indian cricket's latest demi-god was once a 12th man. And if we go by the rumours, he was one with loads of attitude. Informed sources say that he

consistently refused to carry bottles for his team-mates.

But when a man doesn't do what a man has to do, specially the 12th man, the selectors are not likely to take kindly to it. (If you don't play well, they don't mind. Don't carry the bottles with as much elan as is called for and you'll have to wait for your benefit matches) Not unnaturally then, Ganguly was out of the team for three years till Lords and England happened. The rest, as the cliché goes, is history and needs no repetition. Suffice to say that the days of being 12th man are definitely over for Saurav Ganguly! (If you are from Calcutta, touch wood).

A philosophical 12th man attitude does wonders for a cricketer's morale. Venkatapathy Raju, the wily spinner from Hyderabad, has been the 12th man so often that there is no other position left for him in the team (or that's what the selectors seem to think.) He says, "See, it's like you are in the squad, and then you go through this phase — why am I not playing? Am I not good enough? But you have to get out of it and tell yourself, that you will eventually play someday."

But it isn't as though being 12th man is a sinecure. There's tough competition out there. Raju often finds his position as chief bottle-bearer threatened by Anil Kumble. Kumble seems to have made a big leap, unfortunately in the reverse direction. From being 'arguably the best leg spinner in the world' (a phrase our commentators use so often), he is now the occasional 12th man. But Anil 'Cool'

Kumble is not losing heart. He will not let this get him down. Or so he says. He has gone on record to say, "I take everything in my stride — whether I am dropped or I am picked for the team and have not been asked to bowl or whether I am the man of the match. I never look back but try to do better all the time."

There are 12th men who tire of being 12th men. So what do they do? They discover new talents, seek out alternative careers. Saíl Ankola and Sanjay Manjrekar, for instance. The former is busy displaying his histrionic talents on the idiot box and the latter wants to give Kumar Sanu a run for his money. At least you get to do something marginally more interesting than carrying bottles, messages and energy.

The most unfortunate 12th man is he who is too good to be a 12th man. So what do the selectors do? They take the logical next step: they throw the player out of the team. As one of the selectors said when trying to justify Rahul Dravid's shocking omission from the team, "He is a very good player, but he slows the rate. So we can't fit him in the team because he is too good to be a reserve."

But there is one bright spot in a 12th man's playing (or non-playing?) day. If his team wins he gets an equal share in the prize money. After all, he did all the running around, didn't he? He is no longer the 'sub' when he takes a catch or effects a run-out. In fact, his record improves with every dismissal. That's something to cheer about. This reminds one of what Nayan Mongia once said, "It's better to be a 12th man than to be out of the team!" Ω

QU'EST-CE QUE C'EST?

The letters Q and X are outsiders in the alphabet. **MAHIN ALI KHAN** and **VAISHNAVI SHEKHAR** on a curious quest.

Quiet please, this is a xylophone recital. Queue up and don't act queer. This is quite quixotic, is it not? Ever cross your mind how language is full of bias and prejudice? For example why have a great divide between vowels and consonants? And why are some letters favoured over others? E is the most commonly used letter of the alphabet - Y? What's so great about 'e'? As tireless crusaders of letter justice, it is imperative to take some time out and make these grievances known to the general public.

The poor X's and Q's have always led a slightly sub-normal, low profile existence. How many people do you know whose names begin with Q or X? You're going to run out of the Qutubuddins and the Xerxes soon enough. A stock of Q and X names is conspicuous by its absence in any baby name book. In the game of Scrabble, these two letters carry 10 points each — the highest value of any letter. Now don't go about looking so chuffed; there's only one each of them in the bag. So there.

In an effort to make more Q words, inane concoctions like 'queue' are invented when the letter alone would have sufficed. Note the feeble attempts at compensating for the lack of Q's. This is proof enough that the English language acknowledges the embarrassing lack of Q and X words. They've been exxed out.

Relatively, X seems to have a greater wealth of vocabulary than its poor country cousin, eXcept, many X words have been unscrupulously usurped by the capitalist gluttony of the letter E — eXceptional, eXaggerate, eXtempore. See? C?

The letter X has had quite a stage career. The glamour and fame which has adhered itself to this letter, has come about mainly due to the eXotic qualities of its outsider status. There comes a point in every arena of life where the grotesque, (watch that e with its cohort u) the horrendous, the ugly, and the bizarre become the icons of an era. Look at bell-bottoms and butterfly collars. Similarly, see the advent of Generation X, which has come to symbolise a veritable Diaspora of the X clan of words, products, images, characters and symbols. X marks the spot. (What about the almost forgotten X-Man, the super hero who could see your undies with his X-ray vision.) Rekha put a face to the mystique of Madam X. Noughts and Crosses must be everyone's favourite doodle. Despite the fact that it is inane, boring and predictable, it's still one of those things that kids fifty years ago and kids today have in common. Who would have attributed the long, frail bridge between generations to the humble letter X?

Now hold your breath — no pun intended — but where have you lived if you don't know that X is the

international symbol for a kiss? Letters are ended with it, bonds are sealed with it, promises are made by it ... but, as the song went and don't ask where it went, you must remember this: an X is just an X...it works.

The letter X has, unfortunately been prostituted by the English language, for every conceivable cause. Christmas has taken on a new look. Xmas is shorter, crisper and all the more delightful. Goody. Christmas is to Xmas what Christ is to ...what? Jesus X? And remember Malcolm X? X out the latter half of his name but why would you want to do that? You wouldn't want to take away from the name which has become quite an institution on its own. For that matter, Mr. Son-of-God would probably not appreciate it too much either. X is just two steps away from divinity status.

This exercise is proof enough of society's penchant for appropriating and glorifying the misfit. If James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Jesus Christ had to die to be remembered, the letter X may well face a similar fate.

Meanwhile the letter Q lies quietly quiescent, perhaps in wait, perhaps already dying. With few qualms we can anticipate in fair complacency that Q too, will have its 15 minutes of fame before it is extinguished once and for all.

ZZZZZZ...but that's another story for some other time. ☹



When we are young, we think that our pain is unique to us, that our sense of 'not belonging' will not be understood by anyone else. I grew up at a time when divorce was still an anomaly — a child from a broken home was considered with a sympathetic glance. When my parents remarried, my sense of being an outsider amplified. Visits between my father's home and living with my mother and her husband left me in a state of limbo; I was always careful to maintain harmony — never doing anything to upset my step parents in fear that they would reject me, a stranger in my own home.

When my parents decided to separate from their respective spouses, it meant going through the same process — for the second time. The same glances thrown with even more sympathy. Now having decided to quit their marital 'musical chairs' and settle down together, my parents have left me wondering at all those years spent feeling like an outsider among those with 'normal' families.

Over the years I have learnt to be amused at their 'indecisiveness', I have tried to understand them not as parents but as *persons* without judging them as a daughter would. Today they are my best friends and I am happier this way. Over the years I have discovered that my feelings of alienation can be shared and understood, even by those I least expect it from. ✕

— RESHMA GHOSH

"Hum do, hamare do" has been the Indian government's *mantra* for family planning for years. Until recently, the 'normal' happy Indian family was one which had a father, a mother, a son, and a daughter. But I am the only child of my parents. When my friends talked about their fights with their siblings, I felt like an outsider. I wanted to be part of the discussion but I had no siblings.

Once I had a fight with my cousin and he scratched my arm. For days I went around proudly showing the bruise to all my friends. I wanted to be accepted as 'normal'. At family gatherings, relatives used to ask my mother, "Only one?". At such times I used to feel ashamed of myself and my parents. I could not understand why they had done this to me.

Over the years I have realised that being an only child is not too bad after all. Yet, there are times when I feel that I would rather have a brother or a sister than all the 'privileges' that an only child has. ✕

— PRIYA NAIR

Everyone in school called me 'weird'. Not in a bad way, though. They'd smile at my latest fashion atrocity and say, "God, you're WEIRD!" I'd be wearing paper clips in my ears, and golden 'punk spray' in my hair. And this was just to my snob private school where the dress code was prison grey stripes.

Rebellion was the name of my game. I'd mismatch my clothes so that the black t-shirt with the pink flamingos would be worn over the green shorts made of duster cloths from our kitchen. I had an armoury of bangles on my right hand that travelled all the way up to my elbow. People would joke, hey, do you need an extra arm, ha ha.

Well, try being me when I was fifteen years old, almost a foot taller and twenty pounds heavier than all the other girls in class. I felt like a freak. For a long time, I was the butt of seemingly harmless 'fat' jokes. It wasn't that I was the fattest girl in class. It's just that fat jokes were fun to make. For those

who made them. Everybody could have a laugh at my expense because they thought I didn't mind it. But I did.

At the time, I'd have done anything to be thin and 'fit in'. I'd go on crash diets of boiled vegetables, I'd do aerobic exercise for three hours a day, I'd starve myself, throw up. I'd pray, coax, cajole my own personal god to make me thin. I'd hope against hope that my prayers would be answered and that I'd wake up in the morning and be small and skinny like all my friends. But all I saw in the mirror every morning was an Amazon.

When I realised that wasn't working, I launched the 'Look Different' strategy. I figured no one would notice 'all that' if they had other things to talk about. Hence, the 'Rebel Without a Pause' image was born. For a while it worked, or so I thought. I was 'in' because I was different. I thought, hey, they aren't noticing me any more. They're noticing *me*. Whatever.

A few years later, I went abroad to study. People called me 'exotic', 'foreigner', 'mysterious'. But they didn't call me fat. And to me, that meant everything. I stopped dieting, I stopped worrying about my body. I dropped my persona, I became myself (?) again. And it sure felt good to wear clothes that matched. ✨

— ANONYMOUS

Being convent educated, reading Enid Blyton, and watching Mickey and Donald cartoons meant being an insider as a kid. I was one of them. But somewhere in the process of being an insider I have become an outsider to the culture and history of my country. As a child, I felt that reading Hindi books and comics was old fashioned. Even though my parents bought me Hindi books I ignored them because I was too busy trying to conform.

I am an outsider to my religion because I do not know enough about it, what it means and what the Hindu pantheon represents. I do not know enough about the festivals that we celebrate in our country and their origins. The feeling of being an outsider is intensified when I am with a foreigner who sometimes knows more than I do.

I'm lucky because I know that I can turn to my parents to dispel my ignorance, but I ask myself, "What will future generations do?" By trying to conform to a western tradition which is alien to us, the Indian in us has become the outsider. ✨

— SHAILEY MOTIAL

All the 'IAS houses' follow a strict order. The drawing room is luxuriously carpeted, the shelves display the number of foreign trips made, cordless phones and exotic chocolates lie carelessly strewn around the houses. But our lifestyle was different.

As a child, I felt quite alienated from our neighbours when I could not whisk out dry fruits at Diwali. My father unfailingly returned gifts, believing firmly in the rules that his profession had laid down, and which he personally enforced despite being considered as rather eccentric. Asking him for the office car was committing a sin. My mother travelled to work by bus and raised several eyebrows. We always had small dinner gatherings and rarely hosted official parties.

Being on the outside is not always a negative experience. This one taught me a lot. Although I felt out of place in an 'IAS wedding', I realised I had made friends outside the closed circle of the IAS. As we had shifted cities and houses, I had formed lifelong bonds that were truly my own. Getting through my college interview without any contacts felt good while a colleague of my father's sent whisky crates to get his son admitted.

Being on the outside of a lifestyle I had increasingly come to see as feudal, is one of the best gifts I have received. ✕

— SREELA SARKAR

It was like one of those dreams where you dash off to work and find out you've just walked in *stark naked*. Hardly the way in which one would reminisce sweetly about a wedding! My relative, (a South Indian, like me) was getting married across the 'Great Divide'; into the unfamiliar realms of Northern India.

My sister and I prepared for what was described to us as 'a party' before the wedding. It was only on that fateful day that we were told that it had a name - THE SANGHEET. Sadly, HAHK hadn't yet materialised to educate us on the intricacies of the function. We committed cardinal mistakes. We walked into the room wearing English flower print blouses and long skirts.

I felt like I was stepping into the movies. Beautiful people, glittering jewellery and scintillating conversation hummed around us. Then, a terrible dawning realisation! All the men wore *sherwanis*, and *pathan suits*. The women were draped in *shararas*, *ghararas*, shimmering sarees and even the odd *churidar*.

I immediately felt as if a spotlight had been turned on us. We inconspicuously sidled towards the chairs and saw foreigners in sarees with jasmine in their hair. We watched enviously as youngsters danced in the centre of the room and almost wept in relief when we saw another girl dressed like us. Too bad, she was attending to the guests!

All through that interminable evening, both of us felt like pariahs- all due to a commandment we had unconsciously broken. II

— SHRADHA SUKUMARAN

I was born and brought up in a small place called Dhanbad in Bihar. People there rarely study beyond graduation. There are hardly any libraries or documentation centres. The conversations centre around caste, class, dresses, cars or just gossip about neighbours. Their idea of entertainment is a *mela* once a year or a winter carnival. Most of the time colleges are closed because of strikes. Decisions are weighed against moral standards set by society.

After finishing my twelfth standard, I decided to do my graduation at Hyderabad. The ambience was new, a socially vibrant one with a blend of ethnicity and modernity. It gives you your space. A socially aware society with organisations like *Blue Cross* and *Hyderabad Green*. One had to accept lesbianism in the hostel and your friend's pre-marital sex life.

When I went back for first time to Dhanbad, during my holidays, I could no longer share my ideas on feminism, literary issues or electoral campaigns and the dominance of the patriarchal society. I felt nobody questioned anything. My parents and my sisters are all so much a part of it and even accept it. For my post-graduation I came to Mumbai. All these ideas became embedded even more deeply.

When I went home again, I could not relate to the narrow outlook towards religion, food practices and dress. My mother said, "You have changed a lot but I don't know in what way." I knew then that a gap had been created which could not be bridged. For the seven days I was there, I did whatever they wanted me to do - went to the temple on Tuesday, wore only salwars - even when I didn't connect with these things. But this was what I had grown up with and I felt like outsider in my own family. II

— MOHUA GUHA THAKURTA

"One not belonging to a particular party, set, circle, etc." is how the old faithful Webster defines the word outsider. I turn to the backup Reverse Dictionary for more specific terms. "Unorthodox thinker or group member: Maverick." Would certainly like to believe that this is applicable to the self, but in all modesty must confess that the need to conform dominates. Move on to the next.

'Sense or state of being and outsider, isolated from one's society: alienation'. Another attractive specification. After all, some of the greatest in the world were virtual hermits — Jonathan Swift and Greta Garbo, for example. But once more modesty- and honesty- prevail. The dictionary supplies me with 'transcendent', 'quoin/coign', 'extraneous', 'exogenous', 'extrinsic'. Nope. None of them are applicable. I do not qualify as 'independent of the created universe, as God is, according to some views', 'outside angle of a wall', or 'coming from outside, of foreign or external origin'.

So am I not an outsider? Possibly, yes. Certainly I am not really an 'outsider looking in'. It is only on an extremely rare occasions that I am displaced from the sequestered environments of my home/ academic life/ social life. But on the other hand, the curious paradoxical predicament of being an outsider while in, is not just common, but intrinsic in my everyday life. Something that would in extreme cases be termed as a 'split personality/ schizophrenia' has manifested itself in my being: only it is euphemistically termed as a 'a perceptive, insightful mind' and other things of the sort.

So it is often that I find a part of myself the onlooker, while another is the participant: be it involvement in a discussion on the 'influence of psychoanalysis on Virginia Woolf' or the one on 'the amount of salt in the pav bhaji!' ✕

— NILOUFER SAGAR

My memory plays tricks on me as I try to recall the times, when I felt like an outsider and at the same time, felt a part of another sphere which let me be an insider. I remember, I was quite happy to be one of the boys!

"Devika, tu 'backchi' ban ja!" (Devika, you become the 'backchi') instructed my brother and I dutifully ran to the end of the park, next to the goal keeper. I loved playing football and saw nothing wrong with it. "All the boys in the colony play, so why shouldn't I?" was my constant refrain.

I was the outsider, the tomboy, as far as the girls in my neighbourhood were concerned. But the boys accepted me as an insider and that made me happy.

I felt a part of the tight group of football crazy boys in Hauz Khas and then, some things started troubling me. "Don't sit like that", "Speak softly", were sentences fed to me about five times a day. And slowly I wanted to fit in with the other side. I did not want to be told such things continuously. There seemed to be too many grey areas around the whole situation, as I couldn't just give up romping around.

I wonder why I steered away from what I loved to do and be, toward a role I didn't want to accept? Why are there clear demarcations, for interests and behaviour?

Of course, it is another matter altogether that I did not conform to the 'other side', much to my mother's chagrin! ✕

— DEVIKA AHLUVALIA

Virgo women are supposed to be uncomfortable in crowds and I am no exception, especially when the crowd alienates me in an effort to make me feel special.

A bunch of friends decided to gather at a friend's house for lunch. I soon realised that my hostess's relatives dominated the gathering. I started to feel uncomfortable, but soon got over it by lunch time. I rushed off to the kitchen to help my hostess with the food when I realised that I was the only one who hadn't been served. I was looking around for a plate, when one of the women asked me a question that put me off balance—"Would you mind eating in a non-Brahmin household?"

I was shocked that in this day and age an 'officer's wife' (that's what she proudly called herself) thought the way she did. She prodded me with a few more questions about my parents' behaviour with their non-Brahmin friends. She looked impressed when I said that they behaved the way I did.

I knew I was a complete outsider in the gathering. I kept this little experience to myself. It troubles me to this day. ✕

— SOWJANYA KASHYAP

I've never been to a circus, never felt the need to. Family weddings form such an excellent substitute. It's the same principle. People perform while an amused spectator watches. The best part about this circus is the high level of audience participation — the audience is the largest part of the performance. The problem is, they can't but involve you too!

So, while you're sitting there, unsuspecting little old ladies ogle you, hoping (by the look on their faces) that you'll stand up so they can compute whether you're tall enough for their darling sons, or grandsons or grand nephews or grand nothings, so long as "it" is marriageable.

If you do stand up you've lost your only defence because then the wheels begin to turn furiously in her head - 5'2", may be 5'3", 5'3" and 5'8", good, good. Then, she'll sidle up to you and ask "Tu konachi?", (all the while looking you up and down to ascertain vital statistics), which means "to whom do you belong?" You appropriately identify your parents, while feeling like a piece of furniture. She smiles at you approvingly, only, to you it seems like the smile Dracula gives an appetising neck at midnight!

If you don't like old ladies, there's always the old childhood friends. A typical meeting goes like this. "Hi", you go. "Salaamalaikum", she goes. "How are you's" are exchanged. Then, you smile, and smile, and smile. Eureka! Found something to say. "Hey, remember the time when...", you say excitedly. "No", she says blankly. "Oh", you say politely. Then she says, "Do you remember...". "No", you say blankly. "Oh", she says politely. Then both remember something very urgent, and split...quickly.

There are always cousins, right? They'll come up to you and talk about the latest on STAR TV, ZEE TV and Sony, and "Oh my God, that new flick on Home TV!"...Just one problem. You only receive that strange pre-historic channel - Doordarshan.

What was that about the washer-man's dog?... ✕

— SUFIYA PATHAN

A few days back, I met an old relative of mine who happened to be in Bombay to visit her son. With a look full of sympathy (perhaps fondness) the old lady said to me - "You should be proud of your grandmother. She brought you up like any other girl is brought up in a normal family. It's because of her that you are what you are today." Well, I couldn't agree more!

My grandmother, the woman I feel closest to (despite a few grudges that I secretly hold against her), drilled it into my mind early that my "family" was my father, who I would have to go back to once I was grown up. I spent the first sixteen years of my life in a joint family, feeling more loved by my grandmother than her other grandchildren. For the same reason, I was a misfit among my friends in school.

Later when I came to stay with my "family", I had difficulty adjusting to the erratic ways of a middle-aged widower/bachelor.

Thanks to my dad, I'm more "at home" now, but I wonder if I have actually connected with my "family." ✕

— SANJUKTA SHARMA

While dealing out 'Happy Families' with my friends, my 12-year-old self would always feel separated from the rest of the group. Even the kids in the cards had both their Mummy and Daddy. But my family was incomplete. Only me, my mother and my two brothers. My father had been unable to survive a fatal cardiac arrest.

Since then, whenever the word 'father' crops into a conversation I feel a sense of loss, a sense of separation. Of course, as one grows up, innocence is replaced by cynicism. There have been times I have realised that few so-called friends regard the loss of a father as loss of 'contacts'. The exclusion is very subtle. But the feeling gets heightened when friends and acquaintances chatter non-stop about their father's company; his behaviour, his antics, his jokes. I laugh loudly at the jokes and grin at the episodes but inside me I feel alienated.

For me this feeling of alienation will crop in time and again. It's a feeling which will never get completely extinguished. ✕

— SAFIA SIRCAR

In the G.S.B (Gowd Saraswat Brahman) community to which I belong by an accident of birth, 'good' girls or alternatively 'lucky' girls are married by the age of 23 or 24. While in the past it sufficed if the girl was 'fair, of average height and homely', today she must be all this and 'educated'. In other words she should be able to 'teach the children'. If she's raking in the moolah simultaneously, so much the better. Which of course means a bank-job, teaching or a professional degree (doctor, engineer, pharmacist). The latter also implies that marriage at a 'late' age (25 or 26) is excusable: "the course lasts for four years. And it does take time to set up a clinic."

If you are a 'plain' graduate and that too an Arts graduate, it's obvious you're going to marry early - "what will she do anyway? Might as well get her married."

I am an Arts graduate. I am also short, dark-skinned and definitely not homely. I am not even an MBA with a 9 to 5 job (which is a respectable alternative these days). And I want to be a journalist. But naturally, in an extended family of 3 doctors, 2 engineers, 2 MBAs, 2 pharmacists and one science graduate, I stick out like a sore thumb. My parents would never admit it, though. "She'll become famous. Look at so-and-so, he's made so much money writing", or "she'll be on television soon." But the very fact that they need to justify my choice tells me something. And then if I do choose television, it will have to be a reputed, popular channel. If I choose print, a 'respectable', national broadsheet.

But what if I choose to work for a small, insignificant paper or channel. Will they still think I've made the right choice?

For a while now, I've been living on the fringes: not quite out, but not quite in either. ✕

— GAURI KAMATH

All these years, I haven't really thought of being on the outside or seen myself as the outsider. I experienced it for the first time when I joined college. All my classmates were Bengali speaking, some came from Bengali medium schools. Two of my friends and I were the only three who were from an English medium school, and that too convent educated. It became an 'us and them' situation.

Between the three of us, I was an outsider too. They spoke Bengali at home, I spoke Bengali only when I had to. It wasn't very difficult for them to get along with the class. They could converse. I don't like speaking in Bengali because it is heavily accented and I'm just not comfortable. There were times when some of my classmates did try and make an effort to come and talk to me. But they spoke to me in English. I knew they weren't comfortable and that made me feel even more self-conscious.

I would have never given this any thought, until now. I guess everyone feels like an outsider, somewhere, sometime, at some point of their lives. ✕

— SREEYA SEN

If 'outsider' means not quite being within the mainstream, then technically I do not qualify. Yet there have been enough instances when I have felt as though I were standing outside my skin and watching a situation as an outsider.

The first time I stepped out of the secure environs of Navy Nagar was when I travelled to college by bus and unescorted at that! St Xavier's seemed another world where kids spoke, dressed, and behaved strangely. As looking 'right' was crucial to being accepted by the 'happening' crowd my wardrobe (mostly dresses recycled using mummy's old saris, disguised cleverly - or so she fondly thought - with colourful piping) had to go. But I adapted soon enough — my father's shirts and my brother's jeans were the first casualty as I ripped them so that I too looked loaded with 'attitude' The first hurdle crossed, the rest of the facade was easy. Not always though: my ears still burn with embarrassment when I recall how my naval officer father would land up religiously to pick me up after every prom night.

I was high on life, having picked up my first job at 19 and studying Advertising & Marketing at

St. Xavier's. Then marriage happened. Amidst the seemingly never ending rituals, I felt I didn't belong - they seemed to be happening to someone else. I smiled and did 'sewa' (touching the feet of elders) till my jaws and back hurt. I coped then just as I did when I became a mother at 22. While my colleagues' friends lingered after office or released the day's tension over drink and gossip at a local bar, I rushed home to nurse my baby. While I was preoccupied with nappy rash, most friends were 'into men.' The only men in my life apart from the conductor and my husband were the 'correct' (read boring) officers I met at routine official parties. They occupied one half of the ship's deck, the women firmly herded onto the other side. When I rebelliously crossed to the other side, my husband gently steered me back with a hissed 'Chaks please, they (the seniors) are looking.'

I have felt like an outsider in all these situations just as I sometimes do at SCM, especially as marriage is an outsider and being married without too many complaints seems almost a blasphemy at least to my fanciful mind.

Yet I've perfected the skill of adopting a blank expression and what I hope passes for an innocent smile while zealously guarding my most private thoughts. ✕

— CHARU GOUNIYAL

I don't know exactly who I am. I don't know where I come from or where I belong. The only place I recognise is the inside of a suitcase. I am a urban nomad, and have been an outsider all my life.

I am a descendant of the 'wild and noble' race of the Persians, but I look Indian, which is just as well because that is what my passport says: NATIONALITY: INDIAN. 'But doesn't that mean...'. Mean what, that I shouldn't have large, brown eyes?

I speak, read and write only in English. And a little French, for which I feel guilty; I am by no means fluent in Hindi or Farsi — I am also illiterate in those languages.

I have lived in seven countries since I was born. I know a lot about a lot of things, but I don't really know anything at all. People think I have a storehouse of knowledge and experience from my travels, but I'm not Marco Polo. I only feel more lost and disoriented than most already do at my age.

I am twenty-three years old. I have intermittently lost two years of schooling. As a result I'm older than my peers. Then most people assume its because I've failed a couple of years. I'm sure my careless attitude perpetrates many myths — each more weird and wonderful than the last.

I went to college in Ahmedabad, a town relatively conservative to cosmopolitan, pseudo-bohemian Mumbai. I grew tired very quickly of having to justify why I wore what I did, smoked when I had asthma, drank when I was supposed to be Muslim. If people in Mumbai would like to know, they don't usually ask why. And if they do I say, "Because".

In a city crawling with twelve million, where you could spend years and never see the same face twice, I find a little space. One that is my own and no one else's. This is a city festering with those like me - those who have no place in a structure of organised chaos.

Passports, countries, languages won't speak for me. Only I can - if I could find the voice. ✕

— MAHIN ALI KHAN

The feeling of being an outsider comes in sharp bursts, particularly at times when I am about to sit back and think that I am finally an insider and that I belong. Ironically, the more I try to belong and to be accepted the starker is the sense of being an outsider. The saddest thing about it is when one adjusts, compromises and tries not to stand out in any way, and still can't escape this dreadful feeling of being an outsider.

Eventually, I was almost convinced that it's not what you wear and say and do. It's not even when you think differently, because sometimes you are accepted precisely because you think differently. I guess there is no escaping your 'outsider' status. Maybe perhaps an easier way out is to choose to be an outsider whatever that means. ✧

— PREETI DESHPANDE

I think I felt most like an outsider when I was a child. I remember not being attached to anything or anyone. There was a sense of enduring - school (which was slightly better than being taught by Ma for she would beat me in the process), games I didn't like playing; friends who didn't matter. So, when I was sent to a hostel at five, I was very excited. I was happy away from home but unfortunately I had to come back home a year later after my dad passed away.

Later I wanted to run away from home, but the thought of getting raped on the way deterred me. Those were the times I resented not being a boy. A boy could run away and not get raped (or so I thought, then).

I started living in two worlds - one of thoughts I was fascinated with, the other of people I couldn't get close to. I read books, I grew depressed, I tried committing suicide.

I decided then to become 'normal' - gossiping, giggling, friends and boyfriends. I think my first step towards the inside was when I first told someone that I loved him. I never believed in love, I never will. I stopped writing poetry.

Now the boundaries have been blurred. I am outside the world I nurtured for myself as a child and inside this world of people - friendship, love and caring - a world which I can never belong to .

So who am I now

an insider or an outsider

an insider who likes to be an

Outsider

Or an outsider who pretends

to be an insider ✧

— MONICA WAHI

"It will only take 2 minutes," said my aunt. We had stopped by on the way to put in an appearance at a silk carpets exhibition.

Wooden floors and panels, wall-to-wall plush carpeting and central air-conditioning seemed to blend with the muted music and quiet conversation floating across the room.

Our host welcomed us and made a few introductions. Her nail enamel glittered in the afternoon light as I checked my own barren hands - devoid of all else but a watch. One look around and I knew the clothes they wore were designer wear. I hoped the hole in the armpit of my outsized Fashion Street shirt wasn't showing. The heels of their shoes sank softly into the beige carpet. I looked to hide my feet under some table. My 40-buck street side flats were now more than used.

Hair was styled, hands and necks decorated and conversations drifted from the arts to the beauty of the sea beyond and the lovely sandwiches.

It took just two minutes for me to feel the outsider I was. ✕

— JYOTSNA NATARAJAN

A note to my diary when I felt like an outsider - on a borrowed piece of paper.

Dearest Adhoc Darling,

I'm feeling quite out of it. I'm bloody blown i.e. I'm depressed dopey. My batteries ran out on me, I sat in a big group the whole day (Group 4). People didn't appreciate ——— (an unnamed group member)'s hospitality (read - they appreciated it in their own screwed up way:-> read I don't like the way people appreciate things -> read - appreciation is bloody 'ESOTERIC'). I am crying. No, my cheeks aren't wet. My eyes aren't wet. My mind is flooded. I like being arbitrary. I feel doped when I'm arbitrary. When you're doped you're numb. When you're numb you can afford to be cynical. When you're cynical, you're CYNICAL (and you forget the spelling of cynical and you find it arbitrarily funny and you feel like you're thinking, writing and consequently creating great literature).

I already feel nicely superior. It's good to dope on cynicism occasionally. Then it's easier to smile.

A nice tragic, poignantly superior smile. At the moment, I'm slipping back into the world. It's a terrible fall when cynicism deserts you. Now I am one of 'them'. It's strange how you suddenly become conscious of your surroundings.

Feel common and comfortable.

Love Himali ✕

—HIMALI KAPIL

It's funny being an introvert. You like some, you hate some. My capacity for small talk is minimal. I run out of topics after mentioning the weather and the traffic at rush hour. The silence is embarrassing. And stressful. I wish that I was in some place other than here. I look in envy at those who can talk a thousand words a second. Too many people around and I want to run. If there are too many eyes on me, my knees buckle.

At the same time, I like being an introvert. I like my company. Being alone is very comforting. The only time I can be myself, totally. Fewer friends also means more time to spend with them.

But people can't seem to let me be. Being an introvert is somehow not right. So they try to keep pulling me out of my shell. Invariably it's when I don't want to. I protest. But the only response I get is "Don't be shy."

Sometimes I resent it. Sometimes I am amused. Mostly just uncomfortable. But I don't want to change. Not really. Most of the times at least. ✧

— LEENA JAYARAJ

Having spent most of my childhood and adolescence 'abroad', it doesn't really seem surprising that I feel like a stranger in my own country.

As part of an 'expat' community in Hong Kong, my friends and I were all outsiders but we were also privileged. Taking our identity from the international schools we went to, from our youth and music, we were neither bound to the conventions of the Chinese majority or constrained by the codes of Indian society. We were free to move in and out of different worlds, to participate where and how we pleased. At that time we thought we were free spirits. We were also confused.

The sense of being an outsider culminated two years after we returned. There was an incident, at the end of which my mother turned and said, in something like horror and exasperation: "You're like a brown sahib!"

To the conservative, traditional part of my family and community I am a double outsider. Differentiated by speech and accent, by my refusal to wear the appropriate clothes and jewellery, to talk the appropriate talk, I remain something of an oddity. My brothers find it easier to blend in.

The sense of alienation arises from living long enough in a 'Western' culture to become comfortable in it but not secure. It comes from having a hybrid mindset that is alien enough to feel a little isolated from an Indian ethos, yet by now 'Indianised' enough to feel a little detached from Western culture. It's to pick up shallow tricks of speech and gesture that give temporary, superficial identity. To live in an inner cultural limbo — to be able to live anywhere but truly belong nowhere. ✧

— VAISHNAVI SHEKHAR

There was a time when I felt like an outsider everywhere. But over the years the outside has been converted. There is hardly an outside anymore. Achieving this has been quite simple. I have learnt to play various roles. I just modify myself to suit each situation. I find myself quite comfortable in most places, with most people. Either I am numb and deadened or I am confident enough. Or maybe being hypocritical is simple after all. ✧

— KIRTI CHOPRA

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