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Paper Tigers

The paper is money

By Chaitanya Kalbag

IT could have been a coincidence, but on 18 October Dr Basanti Dulal Nag Chaudhuri, ex-vice-chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, was in Geneva; Dr Vidya Prakash Dutt, former pro-vice-chancellor of Delhi University and presently a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha and head of the department of Chinese and Japanese studies at Delhi University, was in east Asia; Professor Moonis Raza, former rector of Jawaharlal Nehru University, was packing his bags for Moscow; Dr Sarvepalli Gopal, head of the centre for historical studies at JNU and author of a Nehru biography, was in England; Romesh Thapar, editor of *Seminar* and political columnist, was in Tokyo; and Dr Rajni Kothari, senior fellow of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and chairman of the Indian Council for Social Science Research, had just returned from Bangkok.

Going abroad frequently is no strange experience for each of these men. Neither are they strangers to positions and posts, committees and conferences, seminars and scholarships. They have all jetted from country to country and they have all broadened their vision and carried on intellectual intercourse with

their brothers abroad. They are not ordinary men. They have carved out for themselves cosy alcoves in the corridors of power. They forever seem to be on the move, in spite of the fact that most of them are past their physical prime. And they have many other such colleagues in our universities and laboratories and government departments and institutes of research. They are all paper tigers.

The paper tigers all wear impeccable coats. They have long ago mastered the intricate geography of the jungles they inhabit. From time to time they stop pacing their little stretches of forest and let out menacing roars. If one paper tiger happens to intrude onto another's domain, the trespasser is pounced upon. One of them naturally emerges victorious. If the intruder does, it is usually with the approval of the lords of the jungle. For in reality the paper tigers have had their claws drawn in long back and their fangs blunted. Their roars never worry the jungle-lords. And yet they stalk their territories, believing that they are the ones the creatures of the jungle tread in awe of.

We are unfortunate in having many of these intellectuals and academics and scientists in our midst. If you can liken our political system to a Hindu

dynasty of yore, then these paper tigers constitute the Brahmins of the court. The morality and the principles of the dynasty never change. Only the rulers do, one scheming king being replaced by another. The Brahmins are kept in good humour, pampered with position and pelf, afforded opportunities to travel frequently beyond the borders of the kingdom. Some of the Brahmins, more fortunate than the rest, are favourites of the current king. A new king may come along and cultivate his own favourites. But the courtiers rarely change: once installed in the durbar, they eventually fossilise there.

Impressive? Yes, of course, and very much in keeping with the vague picture of the intellectual or the academic in the minds of the public. Ordinary people cannot reach the stratospheric world these privileged men inhabit. And yet what real power do they wield? Can they move the minds of the masses? Have they swayed the government in its policies? Have their grey cells charted out glorious paths for the nation? Has anybody, apart from another paper tiger, ever lent an attentive ear to their perorations?

These "intellectual keeps", as one politician contemptuously referred to them, have time and again been treated with a whiphand by their keepers. The government's intellectual harem (said the politician who naively thinks he personally is a 'genuine' intellectual-academician) is full of concubines who are loaded with "jewellery" according to their status, "jewellery" being the material frills the intellectuals enjoy. "Men of the masses, hah!" said another person. "If Rajni Kothari flies the Concorde from Washington to London, and then flies a Jumbo from London to Delhi, and then comes home and lectures us on the advantages of the bullock-cart, do you call that intellectual honesty?"

It's an "institutionalised sub-culture", said another man who likes his words long. On the pretext of "enriching their knowledge and broadening their horizons," he said, the paper tigers flit from continent to continent. Australia, Canada and the USA are favourite haunts. There has recently been a lot of travelling to Scandinavian countries. Unfortunately, in the Soviet Union and the east European countries, the state decides who will be the visitors and unless you are known to be sympathetic to the communists, and unless you are a dyed-in-the-wool Marxist or Guevarist or Leninist, you are persona non grata there. But in the west private institutions finance trips. And what do these trips yield? Have they helped fill the empty begging bowls back home? If V. P. Dutt knows what Hua Kuo-feng slurped up with his chopsticks, says Dr Rajni Kothari, does it make any difference to the scavenger in the rubbish-heap?

Dr Subramaniam Swami who believes in his own integrity feels that India has two untapped assets: the poor, who would make excellent raw material for a revolution, and the intellectuals, who would provide good cannon-fodder.

The trouble lies in possessing theories and doing something else altogether. In their actions, the paper tigers lean heavily on the government, the establishment. They need the government, just as the government needs them. The keepers and the kept draw their legitimacy from each other.

What kind of positions do these men hanker after? The most coveted institutions are the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), the University Grants Commission (UGC), the National Council for Educational Research and Training

(NCERT), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University and their various schools. Get to head one of these and you will experience the thrill of distributing grants and fellowships, of aspirants fawning on you, and you will rub shoulders with powerful politicians and important bureaucrats. Many of these institutions receive funds from abroad and their directors have the power to control their individual funds of foreign exchange. Therefore each of these heads, dubbed "arch-chamcha" by a gentleman who failed to obtain a grant himself, soon collects a horde of subsidiary chamchas. It's all a nice little system, and young and clever men who watch all this carefully will soon grow up to step into the shoes of their manipulative gurus.

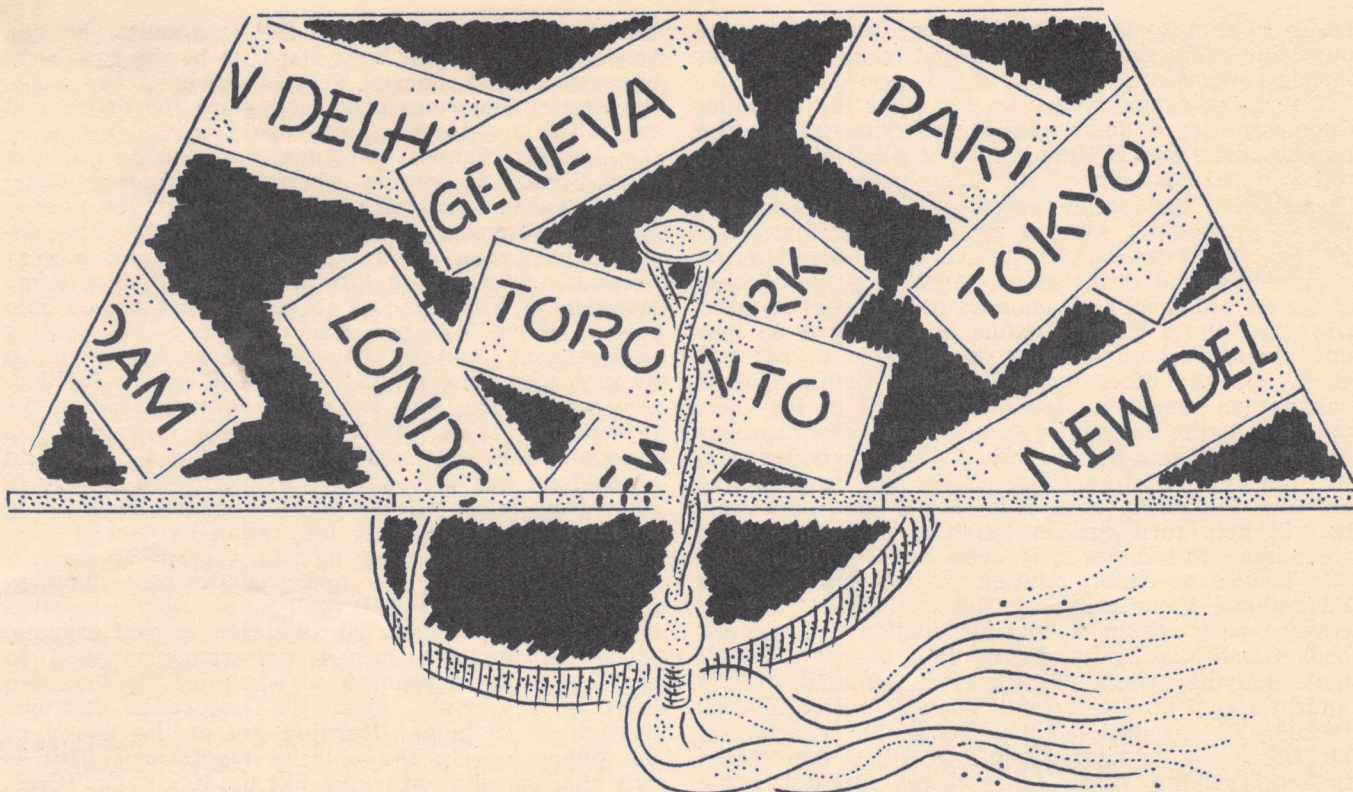
And so you have the charges before you. Our intellectuals and academics and scientists have all prostituted themselves. They have allowed themselves, moth-like, to be drawn closer and closer to the blinding light of power. They have been swept up from all corners of the country, most of them converging on Delhi, and then they have been sterilised. Too involved in the political system, too involved in peddling themselves and their intellects, these men have compromised whatever little honesty they could lay claim to. So that when the time comes for them to protest against what is morally wrong on the part of their benefactors, their tongues are tied and their pens stilled and their voices stifled. They continue to occupy their positions within the establishment, one may be moving up the queue while another is demoted. Why don't they try to escape from the clutches of their keepers, these paper tigers?

Ask any of them and they will answer in the same vein. State patronage is inevitable in a developing society like ours. State funding of education is a necessity. State employment of intellectuals and academics in administrative and managerial positions is a natural corollary to their acumen and calibre. It is all very inevitable—just as mountain streams flow inexorably into tributaries and then into rivers and finally out into the seas, lecturers and laboratory assistants grow into readers and research scholars, and then into professors and scientists, and from there into principals, heads of departments, and finally into the establishment.

These are very convincing arguments, and the paper tigers speak so sincerely, their faces suffused with 'commitment', that it needs a very thick skin not to be deluded. They bandy around impressive words: uplift, improvement, amelioration.

Mrs Indira Gandhi is commonly acknowledged to have developed the art of cultivating and neutralising intellectuals to perfection. She was very clever in professing to make the nation socialistic. She not only neutralised the Marxists by slowly drawing them into the administration, but she also pampered the centrists and the rightists. It is said that Jawaharlal Nehru University, once touted as the best institution of higher learning in this part of the world, was actually set up as a neat resting place for troublesome Marxists.

What in reality has happened is that instead of being crucibles of competing ideas, all these universities which enjoy maximum government patronage have in time become crucifixes for opposing ideas. Look at B. D. Nag Chaudhuri, vice-chancellor of JNU during the emergency. He actively participated in stifling dissent on the campus, allowed police to enter the university and the hostels and to interrogate and



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arrest students, and clamped an iron hand down on all activity bordering on the political. Now of course he has resigned as VC, but his personal fortunes have in no discernible way been affected. Four hours after returning from Geneva he was on his way to the airport to catch a flight to Gauhati to attend a scientific conference. He now feels that minimum interference from the government is desirable and that is not happening. But political interference in science does have positive aspects, he says. Look at world war II, when British and American and Russian scientists were drawn into governmental work, and thus helped defeat Hitler. But what Nag Chaudhuri fails to recognise is that it was also scientists as spineless as ours who helped Hitler unleash destruction and death.

On the other hand look at a man like Professor M. G. K. Menon. Hardly the absent minded sort of person who would boil his watch and look at his egg, Menon is a suave and experienced handler of men. Today his exertions have paid off—he heads no less than three august bodies, the CSIR, the department of science and technology, and the department of electronics. But a short while back Menon had been unceremoniously divested of two important posts: those of the scientific adviser to the ministry of defence and the director general of the Defence Research and Development Organisation. And a former official of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), that organisation made infamous by Kao and Mrs Gandhi, provided the little known information that Menon had been an adviser on electronics to RAW. What is Menon making of his present posts in CSIR, DST and DE? He is notorious amongst his subordinates for poor administration and lack of dynamism. How can one man anyway hope to make a good job of three different posts? Soon Menon is slated to quit the department of electronics, and is likely to be succeeded as officiating head by the DE's joint secretary, Ashok Parthasarathy.

Ashok Parthasarathy is another classic instance of the axiom that 'every good boy deserves a favour'. He is fortunate in possessing a well known father—G. Parthasarathy. And so, this man who once read physics in England and is a 'scientist' of no consequence at all, with no scholarly papers of note to his credit and hardly any research work worth the name, suddenly gets appointed to the department of electronics. He is now 'in' with the Janata set-up; that is obvious. Finance minister H. M. Patel and V. Shanker, secretary to the PM, are his present 'godfathers'. But few people may be aware of the fact that Ashok Parthasarathy was not long ago the scientific adviser to prime minister Indira Gandhi.

But that is nothing; transiting easily from one political set-up to another is the forte of our paper tigers like Nag Chaudhuri and paper cubs like Parthasarathy. Another good example is that of professor R. C. Mehrotra, who has been vice-chancellor of Delhi University for quite some time now. Once Mrs Gandhi's hatchet-man, today Mehrotra unabashedly kowtows to his new Janata masters. One quickly learns how to safeguard one's position. Those who try to withdraw from the system suffer intense withdrawal symptoms. Take the case of Sukhomoy Chakravarty, D. R. Gadgil and B. S. Minhas, all three of whom were once in the Planning Commission. Chakravarty tried to get out of that death-trap for economists and suffered a massive heart-attack due to the harassment he was subjected to. Gadgil was said to have been a staunch socialist and a confidant of Nehru's, but after he eventually quit the Planning Commission he 'privately' waxed eloquent about the hard times he had been subjected to. Minhas was a young and idealistic economist until he joined the Planning Commission. He crossed swords with Mrs Gandhi and ultimately quit the commission. Today he teaches, but he has disappeared into the wilderness. These examples prove that it is far

easier to cling to one's hard-won position than to opt out if the going gets rough. One just takes humiliation in one's stride.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Planning Commission is a death-trap for economists—for the honest ones, that is. Governmental posts always suit the opportunists very well. The present Planning Commission, headed by Professor D. T. Lakdawala, proves this point. One of its members, Prof. Raj Krishna, is reported to be very unhappy in the commission, and wants either to go back to teaching at the Delhi School of Economics or to accept an offer from the World Bank. Krishna apparently is in that unenviable position of not being able to opt out easily. On the other hand, Dr J. D. Sethi, another commission member, is quite happy in his post, oblivious to the barrage of innuendoes and accusations fired at him. Whatever be Sethi's merit, he is devalued in the eyes of those economists he beat to the commission's cushy chair. His nest is lined now. How he will help turn our exploitative economy into a Gandhian one remains to be seen. Sethi, who incidentally is also a senior adviser to the United States Educational Foundation in India (USEFI), another coveted post, concludes his introduction to his latest book *Gandhi Today* by saying, "For over a decade I have had the benefit of discussing my analysis and interpretation of Gandhi with Prime Minister Morarji Desai". Which, said another Gandhian who thinks Mr Desai doesn't know Gandhi at all, is tantamount to Sethi making sure of a smooth innings in the Planning Commission.

Economists are creatures well worth patronising. Professor Amlan Dutta, head of the Gandhian Institute at Varanasi, is known to be an extreme

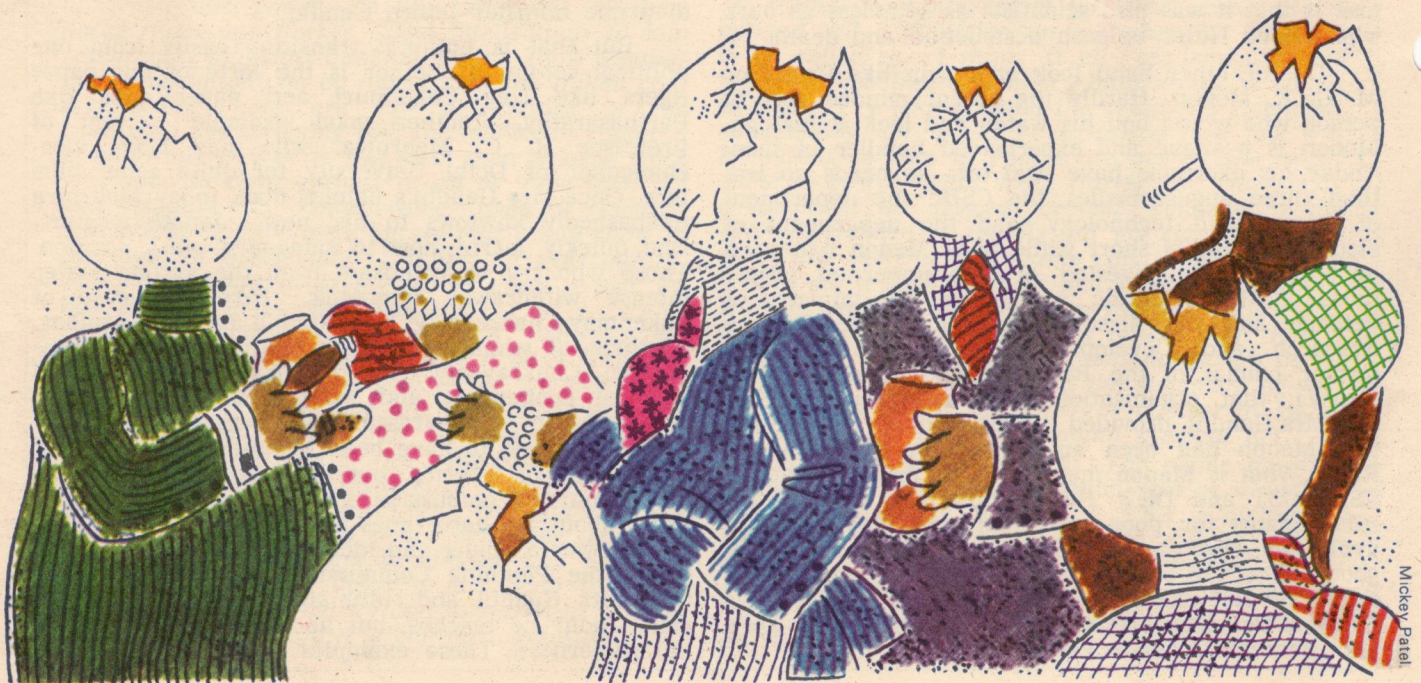
right-wing economist, very anti-communist, but an able and honest man; he is slated to be the next vice-chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University. Obviously, the new rulers want to do away with the impression that JNU is a Marxist stronghold!

Marxist finance minister Dr Ashok Mitra of West Bengal is another example of ideology being swept under the carpet in order to assure oneself of a comfortable existence. A fiery and strongly-opinionated man, Mitra not long ago did a very profitable stint in the World Bank. And during the emergency when other Marxists were tossed into prison, Mitra sat out that period as a visiting professor at Sussex University. Says Subramaniam Swamy, who likes to think of himself as one intellectual academician who has never compromised on his principles, "Ashok Mitra was asked how he, as a Marxist, could ever work with the World Bank. And he said he was actually trying to subvert the World Bank from inside! Somewhat like James Bond trying to subvert the KGB after infiltrating its ranks!"

When almost every monetary grant to centres of research has to be approved by the education ministry, and when it is well known that education ministers like Professor Nurul Hasan, a good example of an academician turned powermonger, used to approve grants depending on who toed his line, can there be any doubt about the accusation that our institutions of higher learning are at the mercy of the puppeteers in the shiksha mantralay? This is why chairmanships of bodies like the ICSSR, the ICHR, the UGC, and the NCERT enable one to be in the position of being able to influence, or at least to have the dubious pleasure of carrying out the decisions of the education minister.

EGG-HEADS OF THE WORLD UNITE
YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR YOLKS.

ADLAI STEVENSON



Nurul Hasan is a case in point. A man who has not produced a single book, and has guided only three Ph.Ds in his lifetime, he patronised men like Professor Satish Chandra, who heads the UGC, Moonis Raza, and R. S. Sharma, ex-head of the department of history at Delhi University. Any academician who did not agree with his CPI-slanted line soon paid for his foolishness. One institute that benefited was Barun De's Centre for Research in the Social Sciences at Calcutta. Hasan approved an unlimited ICSSR grant for the centre and annual grants approved by him touched Rs 10 lakhs. On the other hand, Rajni Kothari's Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi was subjected to some harassment and from 1967 to 1975 it received a static grant of Rs 2.5 lakhs annually. Kothari is a well known political scientist. He has led the application of the behavioural sciences to the analysis of political trends, something for which he has won recognition from the Americans. When Kothari criticises western political analysis, he couches his criticism in the carbon-copied language of his behavioural brothers in the US. May be, as one interested party put it, Kothari's institute did get substantial funding from western institutions. But such foreign grants too have to be approved by the education ministry. And with Nurul Hasan warming his seat, that would have been well-nigh impossible. It was only during the time when Dr M. S. Gore was secretary of the ICSSR that an annual increment of Rs 50,000 in the grants to the CSDS was approved reluctantly by Hasan. And today these funds stand at Rs 4.5 lakhs annually.

Barun De, who is a relative of Siddhartha Shankar Ray, and was thus in a position, during Hasan's regime, to influence decisions in Delhi, made hay while the sun shone. But the sun has to set sometime and when it rises a new heap of hay is ready to dry. Today, after endearing himself to Mr Morarji Desai, Rajni Kothari is the chairman of the ICSSR and his institute's problems seem to be a thing of the past. Recently Kothari's CSDS received a grant of nearly Rs 40 lakhs from the Ford Foundation, ostensibly to help it revitalise its library and utilise the huge stores of data it has collected. Kothari's proteges protest that Ford Foundation grants are not suspicious at all, it was only because Nurul Hasan refused to approve previous offers that they had not got any funds. Which may be true in a sense—it can easily be verified that institutions like the Centre for Political Studies at JNU headed by Professor Rasheeduddin Khan and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Bombay (now headed by M. S. Gore), received generous Ford Foundation funds, urged on by men like J. P. Naik. In fact, the prestigious department of Chinese and Japanese studies at Delhi University which is now headed by V. P. Dutt was set up almost entirely with Ford Foundation funds.

Today, Dutt is singularly unrepentant about the role he played in organising sycophancy for Mrs Gandhi, an attitude adopted by both benefactress and benefited. During the emergency, Dutt, then the head of the Chinese department in Delhi University, assiduously went around mustering support for the 20-point programme and for Mrs Gandhi's authoritarianism. Very soon he became notorious for his unashamed sycophancy. One day he managed to rope together around 20 lecturers from Delhi University and herded them "like cattle" to 1, Safdarjang Road. To his consternation, however, Mrs Gandhi and



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Sanjay felt he had not brought enough people, nor people who were important enough. Clearly Dutt had been lackadaisical. In the university, to worsen his dilemma, his colleagues avoided him for being a chamcha of the regime. But Dutt's faithfulness paid off handsomely: he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, quit as head of the Chinese department, and settled down to the life of a parliamentarian in his house on Balwantrai Mehta Marg. Came the Janata government, and Dutt's fortunes improved, if anything. The man who had been temporary head of the Chinese department at Delhi University, Tan Chung, was unceremoniously kicked out (he is now at JNU) and Dutt resumed office as the head.

In conversation, Dutt is a smooth talker, sincere in demeanour. He says, referring to intellectuals compromising themselves, that it is not merely a question of adjusting your views, but trying to take a share of the loaves and fishes as well. Referring to his critics, he says a person, while looking down on others, may himself be playing the same role of acquiescence. If academic-intellectuals want to play a role in leading society, says Dutt, making available

a scientific and rational analysis of the forces at play, then they must stop being cynical opportunists and stop throwing mud at each other. Dutt has a habit of saying things that can be admirably applied to himself. Intellectual dishonesty, he defines, consists in trying to be virtuous when the going is good and obsequious when things are bad.

Dutt wrote a long fifteen-page article for 'Asian Survey', published by the University of California Press, in December 1976. Titled *The Emergency in India: Background and Rationale*, Dutt's thesis studiously parrots the things Mrs Gandhi was saying in her tirades against her opposition. A developing society, writes Dutt, "cannot afford the luxury of what Myrdal called a 'soft state'." In one passage of the otherwise impressive PR job for the dictatorship, Dutt describes the RSS in terms that could have described the Indira regime itself: "...belief in total control over the political system and structure of the State and the establishment of a fully authoritarian regime... utilisation of the discontent of the lower middle class in order to capture power...and use of the politics of the 'big lie'..."

DUTT makes one point that is sensible: he says that an intellectual who is worth anything would be sought after because of the dearth of 'high-level' intellectuals in India. Quite true. No Indian intellectual has ever suffered immense physical and mental deprivation for his views. Dissent has been brushed aside or laughed away, but never really repressed. Why then has there never been a strong intellectual movement that could keep a watchful eye on governmental malpractices? The answer is that the intellectual's position in our system has never really been threatened. His stance may be sterile and his opinions unimportant, but he has no pressing reason to step outside the chalk line drawn around his ivory tower by his keepers.

Mentioning men like Dutt and Rasheeduddin Khan in an analysis of intellectual prostitution is unavoidable. Both have personified the nadir intellectual compromising can descend to. Both, during the emergency, went around trying desperately to get colleagues to sign a statement of support for authoritarian measures. Today, their critics in both Delhi

'We are a mindless people'

Dr R. K. Dasgupta, director, National Library, Calcutta, has quit Delhi in a sense. He was Tagore professor of Bengali at Delhi University previously. He also almost quit the directorship when there was some confusion over the confirmation of his appointment. He told New Delhi exactly what he thought about a lot of the goings on in our groves of academe.

"WHEN I started teaching there were only two universities in Bengal, which meant only two posts of professor in my discipline. Our greatest ambition was to become a lecturer on the Rs 200 to 500 grade. Today people want to be professors right from the moment they are born. And not just that. In order to arrive one must head a centre or an institute. Academicians want above all to wield administrative power, be like chieftains to their flocks. Long ago Barker asked intellectuals to stop researching and start thinking. I don't know whether that exhortation can be repeated in the Indian context today. There are 120 universities in the country. I am assuming that the quality of research is uniformly mediocre. But even then if some work was done in right earnest at all of them then try and visualise the considerable body of research that would be generated. Surely that would show in the level of intellectual activity in the country. There's no point in saying let us think. I fear we have become a mindless people.

"The proliferation of research centres and establishments in the country are a bane. The real sufferers are the old and established universities in the country. I know they are in a mess. But this way they sink deeper into the morass. Frankly, should not any centre for the study of social sciences in Calcutta be some kind of an autonomous body within Calcutta University? In Britain, where institutions have grown over centuries, there is some kind of a tradition as to who does what. In communist countries there is one body in every sphere which gives clarity and direction to what is being done in it. Here it is glorious confusion. Take

the three institutions, Sahitya Akademy, the National Book Trust and the Publications Division. Does anybody know who is supposed to do what? The same sort of work on, say, Bankimchandra is being done by at least two of them. The rise of institutions can be traced to the careers of the academicians who at some point of time have caused them to come into existence. What is the logic of having an Institute of Economic Growth when within the same Delhi University there is the Delhi School of Economics? Just go through the Delhi telephone directory under 'Institute' and 'Centre'. You'll find so many names that seem to indicate duplication of effort. Of course, I hope there isn't such lack of clarity of thought and expression that institutions doing different things have been given similar names.

"What is an intellectual for if he cannot stand up and call a politician an ass when he deserves to be called so. I think if all academicians got together then Indira Gandhi's bluff would be called in a day. Try taking round the country a statement condemning her, you'll be surprised how few will be willing to sign it. People are scared she might come to power again soon. During the emergency a statement was passed around condemning the 42nd amendment. I readily put my signature to it. In return there was a phone call from the police asking me to call on them and I received a letter from the income tax people saying my return was faulty. I had in fact received a refund from them a short time back. Nothing much happened thereafter. I am happy to say that the statement against Mrs Gandhi had a vastly larger number of signatures than the one taken round praising her.

"Let's come to the present. The prime minister suddenly said that the education system would be changed within six months! This is dictatorial behaviour of the worst sort. Who did he discuss this with? How did such a crucial policy decision evolve? All the vice-chancellors and academicians of every description have a right to be consulted on such a vital issue."

University and Jawaharlal Nehru University, and outside, will point out proudly that not many intellectuals and academics followed their examples. But then that was *passive* resistance: these so-called 'dissenters' chose to withdraw silently from bodies that would attract Big Sister's eye and stuck solely to teaching. Nobody *actively* protested. One person who tried to get these intellectuals to sign a statement protesting against the emergency describes how difficult it was for these self-righteous people to bring themselves to add their signature, to carry out that written demonstration of dissent. Everybody, but everybody, cowered behind the doors of their institutions, content with collecting their pay packets every month! What if the emergency had continued indefinitely? What if elections had never been called? We can rest assured that all these men and women who today trot out Dutt's and Khan's names as the "two arch-villains of the emergency" would have silently accepted the situation. Don't we all agree that silence is taken to signify assent?

Again, mentioning the emergency is unavoidable. It symbolised the vassalhood of our intellectuals and academicians, and showed up the utter spinelessness of the paper tigers. One such person, faced with these charges, could only retort that journalists are as much to blame.

Men like Dutt and Khan and Hasan and Nag Chaudhuri are not the only culprits in this self-abasement. It so happened that they were close to Mrs Gandhi during her last years as prime minister. In the past many men who today pen or mouth shrill criticism of the former prime minister huddled under her wings. Romesh Thapar and Rajni Kothari are both known to have been members of Indira's 'kitchen cabinet' in the late sixties and early seventies. Thapar in particular was very close to the lady between 1969 and 1971. He says that in the old days when power was transferred from the British a whole lot of people earned positions and reputations. Today, he bemoans the fact that we have succeeded in destroying every reputation around. Success invites envy, he goes on, and we can never work collectively. Retired men, the favourites of ministers, are recalled from hibernation and assigned important posts. Thapar headed the India International Centre for a year ("I set it on its feet again") and the ITDC for three and a half years. He claims that he got out when he realised he had done his job and did not cling like a leech to positions. He also acknowledges that he was responsible in many ways in encouraging the "congealment of power at the centre", meaning with Mrs Gandhi, and that he has realised his mistake today. "Collectivisation", says Thapar now—"collectivisation is the answer". "We have to open our doors to new passions, new thoughts. The disease lies in the fact that no intellectual is willing to admit the crisis within our system", Thapar mouths. During the emergency Thapar shut down his *Seminar* voluntarily. Others say that he turned anti-Indira when his angling for an important post in the government or at least an ambassadorship did not succeed. He denies this hotly. Leaving that aside, have Thapar's well-worded commentaries on our political system in the columns he writes week after week, in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, or his other articles, made any difference to the system? Has he penned words that have moved people to support his stand vociferously? In a way Thapar personifies a paper tiger best of all. The studied manner, adequate props and carefully modulated



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growls at equal time intervals are all there. But to what abysmally ineffectual purpose! Does anyone ever remember a single telling phrase from him which lived the week out? When did he last tear somebody to pieces and cover himself in blood? Must Subramaniam Swamy be the only person whose words occasionally upset one's calm?

Rasheeduddin Khan and others of their ilk are, as pointed out before, *personae non grata* today. But they are trying hard to rehabilitate themselves with the new set-up. And if the past is any indication, they will succeed in rehabilitating themselves. How many of us know, for instance, that Khan edited a book *People's Prime Minister* that was published towards the fag end of the emergency and was abruptly withdrawn before it could hit the bookstalls? Try and get a copy of that book today and you will realise how effectively one's tracks can be covered. Khan is credited with having written an extremely fawning introduction to the book.

Dr S. Gopal, head of the Centre for Historical Studies at JNU, is the author of a biography of Nehru that is one of the "biggest hoaxes in recent times", according to one of Gopal's former research assistants. The biography is reported to have been put together by Gopal's assistants, and then he gave it a "cursory inspection", and sent it off for publication. A similar charge of wrong credit against Gopal refers to his editing of the collected works of Nehru, which is also said to have been largely the work of his research assistants. Any intelligent reader of the volumes published so far will see that the collected works are poorly edited and badly put together, that there are hardly any cross-references and insufficient annota-

tions, and that there is no mention of the work done by those poor research assistants. Gopal is a powerful man in his own way, but again at the mercy of his benefactors, and he cannot brook the sharing of credit with others. At one time he was director of a government aided project on the freedom movement. After three years and an astronomical expenditure of Rs 12 lakhs, nothing at all emerged from his labours, or rather those of his assistants. Gopal also has posts like the chairmanship of the National Book Trust and a membership in the Indian Council for Historical Research in his bulging bio-data. He can claim, if he were to write his autobiography years later, that he was also the historical adviser to the ministry of external affairs. When he does lecture to his students at JNU, he is said to be authoritative and clear in his diction. But when is he on the JNU campus? During most of the year you will find him either in England or in Paris where he works with UNESCO. His JNU post, which logically ought to be his most demanding one, is obviously a pastime for him. When in Delhi he even frowns on accommodation provided by JNU and stays at the posh India International Centre.

It is no wonder, then, that the social sciences and the humanities are the fields where government interference, patronage, and manipulation can be most profitable to the establishment. Every well known institute or department or centre in Delhi and elsewhere has without doubt suffered in terms of scholarly work put in and results turned out because of the politicking of their heads. If the grants, fellowships, and scholarships doled out by the ICHR, ICSSR, CSIR, and UGC were totalled, they would finance more than one mammoth countrywide adult education scheme. If all these grants had yielded a substantial body of work, then criticism would have been unjustified. But how many papers have been published, how many theses written, how many reports completed? Where *does* all that ostentatious research go? These questions will never be answered fully, because that would involve opening too many closets and revealing too many skeletons. If Kothari's centre spends lakhs on a project which, applying behavioural techniques, comes to the earth-shattering conclusion that women voters in India vote according to the wishes of their husbands, and if economists like Gadgil have been responsible for the entrenchment of a mathematically-oriented, rigorous school which has in effect made a mess of our planning, can the monetary and material investment in our paper tigers be justified? Why should a Chinese study programme be given to JNU and not to the Vishwa Bharati University in West Bengal, where a good and solid Chinese department already exists? Why should JNU get a Sri Lanka project when it could and should be given to either Madras University or Annamalai University? Why has a sincere social scientist like M. N. Srinivas been shunted off to the Institute for the study of Economic and Social Change in Bangalore, there to wither away under the dulling influence of V. K. R. V. Rao, himself another loser in the power game?

The amount of damage wrecked on our educational system by the paper tigers is too enormous to be inventoried. Currying favour with political bosses is like walking a tightrope. No holds are barred, no words spared, in the rush to gain favour. It is all one merry shikar, with hunters and hunted changing places with bewildering frequency. Pig-sticking may be an enjoyable sport, but sooner or later the hunter himself gets impaled on the boar's tusks. Therefore

can there be any serene and uninterrupted pursuit of knowledge on our campuses?

Last year, when the government banned certain history textbooks, a big controversy erupted. There too it was not a question of ideology but of paper power wrapped in ideological packaging. Wasn't there a time when leftist interpretation of history was the reigning orthodoxy? Hasn't there been a man like Professor R. S. Sharma, former head of the department of history at Delhi University, who blatantly saw to it that appointments to his faculty were contingent on the aspirant's Marxist faith? Sharma is accused not only of stuffing his department with fellow-travellers, but also of seeing to it that they were, as far as possible, Biharis! Once, two professorships were advertised, and one of the eminently suited applicants was a professor in the University of Sydney, an Indian. The two men eventually chosen were mere lecturers—Sumit Sarkar from Calcutta and R. R. Shukla from Patna. Both were given readerships, and within six months of their appointment, promoted to professorships with five advance increments in pay! Their appointments sparked off a big furore and Sharma was lustily condemned for his machinations. And so an 'outside, impartial' expert was called in to evaluate the two men selected. He is said to have actually stayed at Sumit Sarkar's house, and the two are said to have driven down together to the 'hearing' from Sarkar's place after a good lunch one day. What happened to Sharma when his fortunes declined? He had planned a big trip of academicians to the USSR, and at the last moment, he himself was refused permission to go! So the biter was bitten, once again.

These cases should not be considered in isolation. The crux of the problem is that it is very easy for the paper tigers to allow themselves to be pulled into the establishment. And in this corruption of souls, Delhi plays no mean role. If you study the devaluation of our academic and scientific and economic institutions, you cannot but come to the conclusion that it is solely because of the tendency of Delhi to attract 'talent' and 'expertise' like a gigantic magnet. Once-solid universities like those in Calcutta and Madras have been over the years losing valuable personnel who have all migrated to Delhi. Regional universities may offer more scope for serious academic work, but Delhi offers tempting material frills. Moreover, winning grants, scholarships, fellowships and even visiting professorships abroad is far easier from Delhi, for there are extremely strong possibilities that the men who will interview you for one of these grants are well known to you and are familiar with your capabilities. There is a political connection, too, in the financial deprivation of regional bodies. Calcutta and Madras, the two majestic old universities, are today ghosts of their former selves because, as one person pointed out, there aren't enough politicians from Bengal and the south in Delhi!

There is another very important reason for the flow of our intellectuals and academicians to Delhi, which is that in India there is no respect or admiration or recognition for academic performance or research work per se. Everything ultimately has to be validated by the government. Even if you are a Bhabha or a Saha your achievements aren't enough in themselves, unless you end up being a vice-chancellor or a member of the Planning Commission or the head of a 'research institute' or of bodies like the ICSSR, ICHR, UGC, NCERT and CSIR. Some of these senior posts are equivalent in rank to a

secretary or a minister of state, and so the comforts and the perquisites that accrue to these posts are an irresistible attraction. Nag Chaudhuri's sprawling bungalow on Tughlak Road is crammed with objets d'art and furnished in impeccable taste, and the pipes the master of the house smokes have expensive imported tobacco to fill their bowls. Dutt's bungalow too is well-furnished, while Romesh Thapar's *Seminar* shames the rather decrepit building it is housed in with its trendy carpets and modern furniture. Even Kothari's centre on Rajpur Road hardly looks as though it has suffered monetarily. Rasheeduddin Khan, who was also nominated as member of the Rajya Sabha by Mrs Gandhi, stays comfortably in his official residence at Pandara Park.

What could be the solution? What could possibly yank these paper tigers out of the quagmire they have sunk into? If we accept the thesis that they

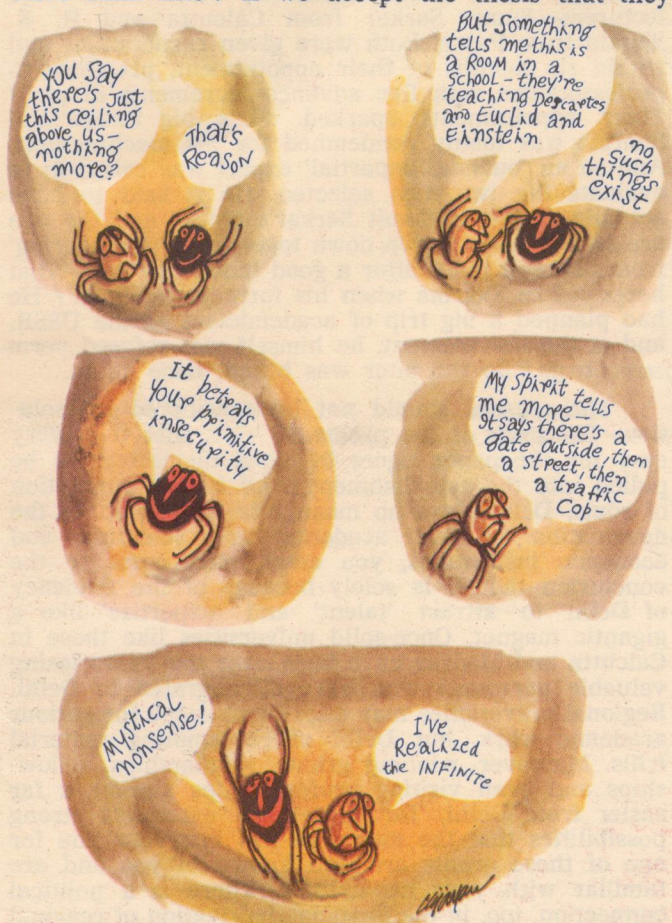
on you, and so you scramble unashamedly for the crumbs thrown your way. It can also be claimed with some certainty that most intellectuals were not repulsed by the emergency as such. They were only upset that they had been upstaged by the boors who ruled the roost then. It was merely a matter of "Why not us?"

This Brahminical mentality breeds qualities like needless disputation and senseless quibbling. Each paper tiger lives to belittle the others. No paper tiger tries to cultivate a serious commitment. There was in the past, and even now there is, glib talk of the 'democracy of the illiterates', the need for a 'hard state', and the need for a 'limited dictatorship'. There is always a loose and liberal outlook and a reluctance to throw one's lot in fully with a particular political line. No intellectual fulfils his true role of a perennial critic, and even if he does comment adversely, he does not stand by his words. In time he is reduced to a mere apparatchik in the political machinery.

This is where the impotence of the paper tigers shows up most glaringly. Why have they, after they achieved their positions, spent their time systematically making their unluckier colleagues miserable, or playing their favourites? If they do aspire to positions of true power, why is it that we still don't have academicians turned full time politicians? This is because the government, the ruling clique, has always lived by the principle "This far, and no further". The paper tigers have been undoubtedly let into select Brahminical chalkcircles, but once inside, they can never dare to step out. What has happened to the good work they may have done in their professional fields before turning paper tigers? Why don't they have the courage to opt out of the system and return to their true avocation, that of furthering education and research and the dissemination of knowledge?

There is no doubt that distance from Delhi does help in resisting suction into the establishment. K. N. Raj's institute in Trivandrum, V. K. R. V. Rao's institute in Bangalore, Ghanshyam Shah's institute in Surat, Barun De's in Calcutta, Amlan Dutta's in Varanasi, or Gore's TISS in Bombay have all done good work in their spheres, albeit with financial help from the centre. There is centrally-approved funding, but there is definitely more autonomy than that enjoyed by the institutions in Delhi. So the only solution to the intellectual and academic rot centred in Delhi may be to consciously plan a dispersal of talent to regional centres; to have statutory funding of institutions and to safeguard against bureaucratic meddling and prejudiced doling out of posts and grants. Locational distance from Delhi will help burst the bags of intellectual pus in the capital. An academician who is far from Delhi can go about his work relatively unhampered by politicking, and comfort himself with the fact that "Dilli door ast".


But the situation today is bleak. The paper tigers have gone too far into the murky, twilight world of manipulation, patronage, foreign junkets and power jockeying. Not only that, a whole new generation of paper cubs is ready to follow them into intellectual prostitution. Headboards planted on wellcropped skulls, fists clutching testubes and chalkpieces, the paper tigers station themselves beneath the street-lamps of the establishment, waiting for the next customer to come along. Scalp after illustrious scalp hangs from the belt of the government. It is a sad scene, a hopeless vista, an Orwellian truism in which all paper tigers are debauched, some more debauched than others.




must inevitably be called upon to provide administrative and organisational leadership, that their talents ought not to be wasted in the narrow confines of their academic or research institutions, the answer would be that they ought to retain their position in the establishment only for a while and then return to their professional callings. That has never occurred: once inside, they find it impossible to tear themselves away. Also, in a manner traceable to the colonial British tradition, these paper tigers thrill to the fact that they have made it to that elite, high-level set of privileged mansions coinhabited by ministers and army generals, secretaries and private assistants.

It is a very Brahminical environment and it engenders a sterile Brahminical neutrality. If you want to get in on the fun, you feel insufficient and inadequate if you don't have such positions conferred







I have
the vision



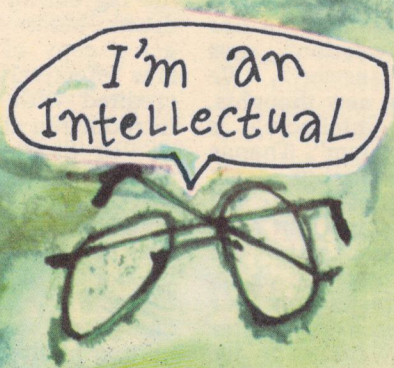
I have the
clarity



But I shan't
do anything
about what
I see



Because
I see for the
person who
wears
me



I'm an
Intellectual

Vijaya