

# Opinion

Vol. XXIV • JUNE 1983 • No. 6

## Goodness

A. D. Gorwala

Our standards have fallen disastrously and the likelihood of good men getting into positions from where they will be able to influence others in the direction of good has been reduced greatly.

**T**HIS nation, said a foreign observer, suffers from an insufficiency of good men. He could be referring to any of the countries of the Third World, which raises the questions — what is a good man, and why is it that some nations have an adequacy of them and some lack them grievously.

The dictionary meaning of GOOD is "having the right quality." What is this right quality? Primarily it would seem to be honesty in all aspects of life. The good man must be honest both physically and intellectually. He must be honest with himself, that is, not hiding from himself his own defects or excusing them to himself, or compromising so that he avoids looking at them. He must also be honest with the world generally, his own associates, and the people at large. Since he is honest the rights and wrongs of most matters will be apparent to him and he should not hesitate to throw his weight on the side of the right,

undeterred by the apprehension of any unpleasant consequences that might follow.

An honest person then is a rightly-oriented man who will form opinions not on the basis of what is to his advantage and what is not, but on the merits from the general point of view, that is, the point of view of public interest.

For an honest man to be called good, he should possess at least one additional quality. He must do no harm to anybody who does not deserve harm done to him. This in effect means that he must be free from envy, malice, cruelty, treachery, deceit and fraud. It follows that he must have values and standards and must live by and upto them. "Well, everybody does it so why not I?" cannot be his excuse for any malpractice that he may be tempted to indulge in. "Everybody may be doing it but it is not in accordance with the values I cherish and the standards I look up to,

so I will not do it," says the man deservedly termed "good."

Good men are not to be found in large numbers in any country in the world. They are invariably in a minority. What matters is the size of this minority. Where the minority is a substantial proportion of the whole, say at least 15 to 20 percent, the likelihood of welfare for the country is greater. For each good man even unknowingly has some influence on his neighbours.

"How far this little candle sheds its light  
so shines a good deed (or man) in a naughty world."

The form of government has considerable effect on the likelihood or otherwise of the occurrence of good men. Under a dictatorial government the public interest is generally taken to mean what the ruler considers to be the public, i.e. his own interest. The disinterested person who thinks otherwise is soon suppressed. From which it follows that in a dictatorship good men are few and far between and such as are truly good are often martyred, their goodness in itself attracting the wrath of authority which fails to see the need for any goodness other than which it considers correct itself. This may be one of the reasons why in the countries of the Third World generally there is such a shortage of good men. It certainly explains the very great scarcity of them in the communist dictatorships. Under freedom and democracy the climate is more favourable for the growth in numbers of good men. Yet here too authority can play a very serious blighting role. If, for instance, owing to the example set by autho-

rity, corruption is so widely spread in a country that most officials are corrupt, the honest man among them may find his own position untenable and thus may be driven, if not to adopting the means of his colleagues, at least to keeping quiet about them and letting wrong be openly done.

Of our own country it may be said with assurance that in all spheres of government and authority today, standards have fallen disastrously and the likelihood of good men getting into positions from where they will be able to influence others in the direction of good has been reduced greatly. There has been much growth in many material fields and we can if we wish draw up a lengthy list of our achievements to soothe our pride; but does that compensate for the great fall, amounting almost to near-extinction, of the "good" man? A nation can be strong in power and wealth, ruled by bad men—if they are sufficiently single-minded and ruthless enough to make their people sacrifice most things to that aim—goodness is not an essential for worldly success. It is however absolutely necessary for the peoples' happiness. The choice is each person's, will he or she be good and so contribute to the nation's happiness and mental health or will he or she be indifferent or definitely against the good, regarding it as irrelevant in the current circumstances.

\* \* \*

In order to decide whether censorship of films should continue, a relevant consideration would be the difference in behaviour—especially in regard to sex and violence—of

the inhabitants of countries in which there is no censorship and those in which there is censorship. If under censorship the people are more restrained and less violent, than those in countries in which there is no censorship, there may be something to be said for it. But who will hold that in both these aspects in Sweden and Denmark—examples of freedom from censorship—conditions in these respects are worse than those prevailing in India? Are the Swedes and the Danes more lascivious or more violently criminal than Indians because their films are not prevented from showing spectacles of permissiveness or violence?

The theory that crime rises because of film violence seems rather far-fetched. It may be so in an instance or two admittedly, but over a period it will very probably prove to be a mis-statement. Other factors enter into the rise and fall of crime, the most important being the rise and fall in the quality and efficiency of the law-enforcing element. Where these have deteriorated, owing to political influence, corruption or other reasons, there will naturally be an increase in crime. Make them as efficient as they were before 1947 and your crime rate will fall despite your films not being censored.

On sex the film argument is ridiculous in a country like this where in most temples the organs of generation receive honoured worship and the walls are decorated with erotic sculptures, some in the most flagrant positions. Can it be said that erotic films will exercise a

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detrimental influence on persons whose places of worship show that they regard such tributes to fertility and sex as natural and worthy of respect?

Some in favour of film censorship say they do not want the present system to continue. Let independent persons be appointed to boards of film censors and let there be an appeal from their decision to an independent appellate tribunal consisting of knowledgeable people, and men of experience and integrity, then all will be well. But who will appoint these Boards and Tribunals? Why, surely the government, who else?

Perhaps then it would be worthwhile to try the experiment of freedom from all censorship of films for say, two years to begin with, and assess the results independently thereafter. Let the film makers do their best or worst, let the spectators see everything they want to, it may well happen as is reported from Denmark that in the end the trend towards pornography and crime is downward.

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# Gandhi

Gauri Deshpande

Attenborough had to make the choice every artist must, this is my truth, it may not be the entire truth but it is as close to the truth that matters.

CURIOUSLY enough, the two films that I thought were two impressive and outstanding achievements of the eighties, were not made by famous directors, but by successful ex-actors. Both won a galaxy of awards for the two men and were profusely praised by critics, though were not blockbuster box office successes. The first was Redford's *Ordinary People*; a low-key, minimum-cast movie, shot almost entirely, but for a few flashbacks and such, inside homes, shops and offices. It did for me what I want the few movies I see to do: affect me so profoundly as to bring about a significant change in the way I look at the world. It asked, demanded responses from my conscience that I found I had forgotten how to give. It was, moreover, a movie that I wanted to see a second time, but could not bear to.

The other is a quite different movie, as unlike the first in scale, cast, locale and direction as can be, and yet totally like it, in that it also demands these same responses from our consciences: Attenborough's *Gandhi*. There is much in it that the Indian purist will certainly cavil at, the most glaring being the total disregard to actual likenesses. Ben Kingsley does not really look like Gandhi except in the long shots and from above. The lower part of his face is so totally unlike him, espe-

cially the squared-off chin, that it sometimes spoils an otherwise meticulous performance. With the exception of Nehru, it is the same with almost all other actors, and though Saeed Jaffrey has carried off the Sardar with great aplomb, the startling difference between him and the idea one has of the Sardar is intrusive.

Where Attenborough's success lies is in the fact of his having been totally correct in transmitting the essential flavour of the man he set out, with obvious love and respect, to portray. Very wisely he left alone the quite eccentric, often ridiculous and at times injurious theories that the Mahatma held regarding such diverse topics as medicine, sex, nutrition or economics. To pay attention to these would have meant committing the same mistake that the Mahatma's detractors commit; that of expecting him to be omniscient, and then blaming him for not being that. Attenborough concentrated on what Gandhi was extremely good at: provoking people to act upon their consciences. The question is often asked mockingly if Gandhi would have been any good against, say, the French in Algeria; as though the fact that he dealt with the British (supposedly more likely to play 'cricket' and follow the rules of the 'game') somehow detracts from his achievement.

The answer has been given by

Attenborough in a beautiful cameo scene : there are the British, including the Viceroy (John Mills) and his many advisors, a bit shamefaced after the atrocity of Jallianwala Bagh, and especially the completely unrepentant and callous response of General Dyer (Edward Fox), its perpetrator. There are the Indians, Panditji, Sardar, Jinnah, Maulana and Gandhiji. Everyone is embarrassed. The Indians because they feel that the British have somehow let them down by playing such a foolish card at this juncture. The British because they know and they know that the Indians know, etc., that they can no longer keep up the pretence that they are here only in a paternal, beneficial capacity, just to teach these "savages" some valuable and necessary lessons in modern education, law, administration, industry and so on. No one quite looks anyone else in the face. And then Gandhiji looks up with his charming smile. He is never embarrassed. And his sense of humour rarely deserts him. He looks at the Viceroy with great sympathy and great firmness and speaks as though speaking to a child : "I think matters have gone beyond compromises; I think it is time for you to go." For a moment they are all stunned; then the Viceroy speaks up, saying that he admits that General Dyer is an extreme . . . and Gandhiji again breaks in : "It is true that there are few General Dyers amongst you, but he is merely an extreme example of the principle that lies behind the presence here of all of you." (I may not have the exact words.) And there it is, in a nutshell. What he opposed was not so much the British, as the principle behind their pre-

sence in India. Certainly, if he had had the cause to, or the opportunity to do so, he would have opposed the presence of the French in Algeria, and would have evolved a strategy to fight it.

There are many such telling moments in the movie : Gandhi saying : "I never advocated passive anything;" Gandhi being impish in Jinnah's opulent home, Gandhi's face lighting up on seeing that his visitor in gaol is Panditji, Ba telling Miraben and Margaret Bourke-White "Not yet!" and then the three women bursting out laughing. There is no point there in discussing the question of whether it was "right" of Gandhiji to eschew sex, to conduct experiments about it with himself and his family members as subjects, to make several silly pronouncements on it (which unfortunately a whole lot of his followers accepted, rather than dismissed as an eccentric's foolishness). Attenborough is again wise in electing to ignore these thorny and useless issues and in accepting that the man was what he was; indubitably great in certain areas and also indubitably wrong in certain others. Perhaps in a biography on a more comprehensive scale, there is room for such topics but in a movie which sets out to portray the "essence" of a great man, these things are only distracting and fragmenting.

History too, may take exception to some of Attenborough's statements : was it necessary to show Golwalkar's involvement in Gandhi's murder in so explicit a fashion ? Was it necessary to portray Jinnah (Alyque Padamsee) in quite so unsympathetic a manner ? After having been dismissed so precipitately from the

movie at an early date, why does C. F. Andrews remain consistently absent? (I do not have a biography of Gandhi at hand here, but memory seems to suggest that he did not disappear from Gandhi's life forever, as he did in the movie.) But what comes through are all the strengths of the Mahatma; his stubbornness, his great good humour, his patience and his mischief, his simplicity, his shrewdness (which Jan Smuts recognised early on) which he successfully disguised, his capacity for sustained and imaginative effort, the great affection he felt for his associates and followers and the love this engendered.

In spite of the 'cast of thousands' which any movie made about India must inevitably contain, Attenborough has not given in to any of the clichés that movies about India always do. Perhaps there are one or two unnecessary shots of beggars, but only one or two. The rest of the poverty and squalor portrayed is essential to the subject matter: Champaran for example. And in spite of the same cast of thousands, it has ended up being a very private movie. That is because Attenborough has remained essentially faithful to his own private impression and judgement of the Mahatma, and I agree with him, because in the case of a man as historically important, as controversially multifaceted, as affective to modern thought (witness the return of 'small is beautiful,' etc.), one has eventually to choose a vision, perhaps slightly distorted, perhaps not absolutely accurate, and stick to it as a guideline through a maze of material. Certainly there is no dearth of such material about Gandhiji; many of his associates and

many people who remember him perfectly well are still alive. But finally Attenborough had to make the choice every artist must: this is *my truth*, it may not be the entire truth but it is as close to the truth that matters. After all, he was not testifying in a court of law, he was making a statement about the essence of a man and what he stood for; and he has succeeded brilliantly.

To say, as Miraben does towards the end of the movie, that Gandhiji has shown the world a way out of the madness is to perhaps make too sweeping a statement. After all, he could do what he did because he was the sort of man he was. If tomorrow the Prime Minister decides to fast (not that she is likely to) in order to change the hearts of the Sikh community, she is all too likely to be allowed to die (as Sardar said he would be!). But he certainly did show the world that there is another way. A slow, uncertain, painful way; but in the final analysis a surer, gentler, *human* way. That that way was not in the least likely to be followed in ages to come, even Gandhiji knew well. As Ms Bourke-White said, in the end, there was a sadness about him. He was not naive enough to believe that deep-rooted prejudices and hatreds would disappear because a few thousand, or tens of thousands or even millions took oaths in mosques and temples to eschew violence. He may have agreed to give up his fast because there was not much point in continuing it (and there is another beautiful cameo piece there when Panditji comes to his bedside to plead with him: the harrassed new Prime Minister, not yet the great

Elder Statesman and World Leader, quite desperately anxious about this pigheaded old man, and at the same time quite madly exasperated). But it would be quite unnecessarily patronising to believe that he himself believed in an unending Hindu-Muslim amity. That Attenborough's statement should begin with the murder is quite fitting, because that after all, is Gandhiji's final failure and Attenborough's (and our) final sorrow.

Having been brought up in the stronghold of the anti-Gandhi faction in India, I have heard, not infrequently, statements that obliquely condone that murder. Even quite responsible and otherwise sensible or admirable people have been found saying: He would have wrecked the national economy, he would have imposed intolerable legislation, he would have meddled endlessly in the administrative process, he would have exploited the respect in which the national leadership, and especially Panditji held him, and so on. All these have seemed to me responses from the depths, an unease that arose from knowing that what he would have done, indeed, was to have continued to needle their consciences and their comfortable convictions of superiority and their cautiously ambitious plans for their children in post-independent, Indian, India. In a very wryly ironical statement which will appeal only to an Indian perhaps (it says much for Attenborough's perception that he caught on to it), the movie shows a scene where Gandhiji is making a speech; there is only lukewarm applause when he calls for the settling aside of religious differences;

even more lukewarm applause when he calls for the abolishment of untouchability, and wild cheering when he calls for the expulsion of the British. The first two asked for a far-reaching and fundamental revision of life's values as most Indians saw them. The last was the easiest to respond to and the easiest to achieve.

I was only a small child when Gandhiji was murdered (no matter how much the murderer would like to justify that act as an ideological assassination, it still remains a private and cowardly act of violence against an old, small, defenceless man); and though my parents were not Gandhians, they certainly were as staunch believers in the power of conscience as he, and accordingly brought us up to be the sort of persons that he might have approved of. However, it took an Attenborough to make me ask: how much am I really prepared to suffer for the sake of my conscience? Will I really be able to, willing to, stand on a street corner on a packing box and shout out against injustice and make a fool of myself? And when I asked myself that, the sorrow hit me: thirty-five years after the event; thirty-five years of believing vaguely that what he preached was okay but a bit far out; thirty-five years of believing that "they" should do something about this, that and the other. Finally, when once again at the end of the movie, Nathuram Godse's bullet hit the frail old man, I was speechlessly drowned in a sense of utter loss; because the answer was: indeed I may have done much that I now feel incapable of in the person of my own frail self, had he been alive.

## A Question Of Ethics

M. K. Rathish

THE other day I heard an IAS officer giving a talk on productivity to managers. A lady. She is considered one of the most brilliant IAS officers in the state. Somehow she diverted the topic to 'ethics' and gave a right, roaring homily.

She said that misguided secularism has made us stupid. We have taken 'moral science' out of the curriculum of schools. She pleaded for a re-introduction of the subject in schools. In Christian-management schools they wisely teach 'moral science'. She spoke of her little niece who is studying in a convent school and who scored 86 marks out of 100 in 'moral science.'

She said even those who did not learn 'moral science' in school could learn the right thing to do in a given situation. For herself she has found one little strategem very helpful. She would ask herself: "Would I let my little son do it?" If the answer is "yes," she would go ahead. For, no one is more precious to her than her little son.

There is a touching naivete about

her arguments. As if people do unethical things because they do not know what is ethical and what is unethical.

IAS officers are a brilliant lot. No doubt about it. But I doubt whether the same can be said about their ethics.

This is not to belittle IAS officers. This is just to prove how difficult it is for an employee to follow the dictates of his conscience when the employers are of dubious moral stature.

De Quincey said somewhere that a conscience is more expensive than a wife and a horse and carriage. That was the 18th century. These days it is far more expensive to maintain.

Now if you are fussy about ethics you will have to be prepared to take the begging bowl. For you will have to lay your livelihood on the line.

Things being as they are, I admire the brazen cheek of our IAS lady in talking to a group of professional managers on ethics.

How cynical can one get?

## Family Life :

### With Some Families, You'd Be Better Off Without It

Stefan Konig

Most families avoided and concealed their conflicts. Tension was suppressed in the interest of harmony at any cost.

THE bosom of the family has long ceased to be a source of warmth and comfort for many. For

some it can be a source of constant anxiety and distress.

Certain inappropriate forms of

behaviour can even trigger tormenting physical and mental disorders, Heidelberg University psychologists say.

Michael Wirsching and Helm Stierlin of the family therapy unit at the university's psychosomatic clinic state their case in a book published by Klett, of Stuttgart, and entitled *Krankheit und Familie* (Illness and Family).

They work on the assumption that there is no such thing as an illness that takes its course regardless of mental and social factors.

They noted at the outset of their research work that in many of the families they treated serious and often chronic physical illnesses governed the lives of all members of the family.

At the same time serious conflicts that affected family life seemed to heighten their physical susceptibility to a wide range of complaints.

Wirsching and Stierlin took a closer look at 55 families whose members included a juvenile patient with a psychosomatic disorder.

Their aim was to learn more about the forms of behaviour within the family that can give rise to such complaints.

Twenty-nine of their patients suffered from allergic complaints of the lung (asthma) or skin, 26 from serious inflammatory diseases of the stomach or intestines.

The first group was found to have suffered from early childhood from skin trouble, breathlessness or hay fever, but the later complaint was not so marked at that stage.

In many cases the complaint was a well-known factor because other members of the family already suffered from it.

The second group of sufferers from stomach and intestinal disorders as a rule did not develop symptoms of their illness until later in life.

But they were frequently seriously ill, even to the point of being at death's door.

Most families avoided and concealed their conflicts. Tension was suppressed in the interest of harmony at any cost.

This was often a longstanding family tradition maintained over several generations.

Children were overburdened by being given the part of a referee or a lightning conductor to play, and if tension still increased it was the children that became ill.

They were the scapegoats, and with their sacrifice aggressive conflict was appeased.

Yet if the children regained health temporarily, tension flared up again.

This vicious circle often ended for all concerned in a painful war of attrition in which a makeshift family balance was with difficulty maintained.

Three types of family match this pattern.

The first is one in which several generations still live under one roof, having failed to separate. They have no secrets and everyone knows everything about everyone else in the family.

Yet all unpleasant experiences are never mentioned, the aim seeming to be to carry on at any price.

The second, or split family, is one in which one parent has figuratively turned his back on the other and constantly denigrates it in front of the child.

He (or she) never fails to claim to be a paragon of parenthood, and

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children who grow up in such a family often later idealize the "good" parent and anxiously hope they themselves will not turn out to be like the other one.

In their own marriages they accordingly try to maintain a super-human ideal of harmony, one that is bound to come a cropper.

The third category is denoted as families in the process of disintegration. It regularly consists of one parent who was thrown out by his own parents and another who had close links with his.

In the long term the two do not

complement each other as intended, and the child is unable to bridge the gap either, because it needs much love and care.

The reject then often leaves his new family in the lurch, while the parent who has close ties with his own parents frequently returns with the child to the bosom of his original family.

For the child, Wirsching and Stierlin claim, the experience is felt to be a hopeless succession of ties and rejection by its parents.

*German Tribune, April 24, 1983.*

## Humour, Soviet Style

The rumour runs through Moscow that meat will be sold in a small shop in the suburbs the following day beginning at six in the morning. Ivan rises early and crosses town to find a long line in front of the shop. He waits ten hours and finally arrives at the counter.

"Give me two kilos of beef."

"No beef, comrade," the butcher replies.

"Very well, pork then."

"No pork."

"Lamb?"

"No lamb."

"You mean I've come all the way across town to stand in line for ten hours for sausage?" Ivan asks, enraged.

"No Comrade. You haven't. We don't have sausage either."

Ivan leaves the shop growling, "This damned Marxism-Leninism is a disaster. Nothing works, and there is nothing to buy."

A policeman overhears his comment and stops him. "Comrade, I

heard what you said. It is a crime against the state. A few years ago you would have been shot on the spot for such subversive remarks. These days the State is more lenient. I'm going to let you off with a warning this time. But watch your tongue in the future."

Ivan returns home to his wife, furious at the wasted day.

"Did you get the meat?"

"No," Ivan replies. "There is no meat. Things are getting worse and worse. Now they not only don't have meat. They don't even have ammunition."

The all pervasiveness of the Soviet secret police is mocked by this story:

A large, handsome American automobile was parked on a street in Moscow. A man walked by and stopped to admire it. He rubbed his fingers over the finish, he felt the tires, and he stared awestruck at the upholstery.

"What a beautiful Russian car," he

said to a second man who had also stopped to admire it. "What magnificent, magnificent work we do here."

"Fool," said the second man. "Don't you know that that is an American car, not a Russian car?"

"Yes," said the first man. "I know it's an American car. But I don't know you."

The Sofia end of the Sofia-Moscow hotline has only an earpiece.

In a first grade classroom in Moscow a teacher is telling her pupils how wonderful it is to live in the Soviet Union. "It is grand to live in the Soviet Union, to be a Soviet child, for whom everything is done, whose parents have a wonderful apartment, where the food is good, and where the children all own the most beautiful toys . . ." She notices little Vanya sitting in the back row silently. "Vanya," she asks, "What's wrong?"

"I want to move to the Soviet Union," he sighs.

**Question:** What is "International Proletarian Solidarity?"

**Answer:** When there is no meat in Leningrad and they strike in Warsaw.

A man enters a barbershop in Warsaw for a haircut. The barber starts cutting his hair, pauses for a minute, and asks what he thinks will happen in Poland. The man rolls his eyes but does not answer. The barber proceeds to cut his hair, but continues to press the same question. He receives no reply, only a strange look.

When the man leaves, the barber's co-workers chide him for asking

embarrassing questions, saying "That was the Prime Minister himself." The barber replies, "I know, but every time I asked the question his hair stood on end, and it was much easier to cut that way."

The party propagandist delivered a lecture to the assembled employees of a Soviet collective farm. He predicts on the bright horizons of Communism, the classless society of which Marx had dreamt and of which the Soviets are still dreaming, a Utopia in which there is no state, and there is abundance for all.

Next day, two peasants discuss the lecture.

"I didn't understand what he meant by these 'bright horizons' all the time, did you?"

"Well, you know what bright is, don't you?"

"Sure I know. But what does horizon mean?"

"That had me puzzled, too, but I looked it up in the dictionary."

"And what did it say?"

"A fictitious line between earth and sky, which recedes into the distance as the observer approaches."

**Question:** What is the definition of aggression?

**Answer:** Aggression takes place if one country moves into another country militarily before the Soviet Union can get there.

A journalist once asked a Czechoslovak official why Czechoslovakia, a land-locked country, maintained a Ministry of Marine Affairs.

The Czechoslovak thought about the question for a while and replied, "Perhaps for the same reason that the USSR has a Ministry of Justice."

# Snakes In The Glass

R. Tiruvengadam

Snakes usually like and prefer seclusion and calm. Normally timid and nervous, they try to escape and seek cover when disturbed. A snake attacks or bites only when it is brought to bay and left with no way to escape, or when a person accidentally treads on it.

Since the last two years there has been a disturbing increase in the number of youngsters, who without any concern, or even a thought for the poor snakes' welfare, conduct what they call 'record breaking and highly daring' experiments of living with a number of venomous snakes inside a specially built wood and glass cabin. All these youths are self-declared and self-certified herpetologists.

These modern 'sarp yagnas' are money-spinning rackets. They are an absolute hoax and in the bargain the poor snakes in the cabin are the sad, unfortunate victims of human cruelty, selfishness and exploitation.

The first of such purposeless and damaging experiments in India was carried out by one such herpetologist of Poona, Nileem Khaire. In his 72-hour feat, over 14 snakes died due to hostile and unnatural conditions, constant disturbance, strong lighting and frequent manhandling while being shown to the stream of visitors. Some snakes like the banded krait attacked and killed a few snakes including 3 or 4 cobras! A snake is cold-blooded and has a body temperature much lower than man. When a snake is held for more than a few minutes there is a flow of

temperature (heat/warmth) from our body to the snake's, which is harmful to the snake and causes irritation and great uneasiness. They become thoroughly uneasy and upset at the slightest disturbance. They do not feed unless they are in an atmosphere of favourable temperature and calm environment. All snakes without exception are delicate and it is, therefore, little wonder that so many snakes die when constantly exposed to so many hostile factors in such 'Living with Snakes' experiments.

Another young man, through constant 'yagnas' like these in a number of places, earned over seven lakh rupees as profit after accounting for all expenses and the tax he had to pay to the municipal authorities at those places. And he has gone away to the Middle East to earn more! In his experiments, on an average 5 snakes died every day and spanning all his experiments at different places, over 130 snakes have laid down their lives in silent sacrifice.

The glass cabin in which these experiments are performed is fairly high with sufficient room for the snakes to creep and hide along the walls. The constant disturbance by visitors and exposure to strong lighting keeps them absolutely still and inactive due to uneasiness and fright. The herpetologist wears thick clothing, protective shoes, has a snake stick and an assistant. So where is the bravery? He is not really exposed to any danger.

Nileem Khaire's 72-hour feat was

vigilantly supervised by the famous snake expert from Calcutta, Dr. Dipak Mitra, Director of the Calcutta Snake Park. Dr. Mitra, a Ph.D. in Zoology and Master of Toxicology (the study of venom), has 29 years of practical experience of all types of snakes and he also manufactures anti-venom. With Dr. Mitra looking after his safety, where was the question of a display of courage or bravery? Conceding that Khaire did carry out a remarkable feat to prove that snakes do not harm or attack without provocation, what is the purpose behind the alarming number of young people conducting such feats one after another?

As per an article in the *Jansatta* (26-11-1981), two jeeps have been placed at the disposal of a herpetologist performing at Nadiad who daily goes out to catch snakes from nearby areas and is so skilled that

he caught as many as 350 snakes in about 3 days. This intensive snake hunting is proof enough that the herpetologist needs a large reserve supply of snakes to replace the many that die in his experiment. Snakes are protected species and come under the Wild Life Act. How has the Forest Department allowed these people to catch so many snakes without a licence? And on what grounds have they been permitted? And by whom?

These 'yagnas' should be banned forthwith throughout India. The governments of West Bengal and Kerala have already banned these 'yagnas'. The wildlife of India is the treasured property of all Indians and we must not allow it to be harassed, tortured and exploited.

Abridged from *Compassionate Friend*, journal of Beauty Without Cruelty, January-June 1982.