

SETTING OUT SH

4:30 am. Colaba Causeway. Dark. Silent. Empty. The 'amoral' street action having only just moved indoors. A lone milk truck drives by. I walk up to a cab parked at the taxi stand between the infamous Leopold cafe and the very pious Eucharistic Congress building - hookers and early morning church goers may both avail. But then this is Colaba, Bombay's Soho district. Welcome to the jungle!

'Taxi! Bhai sahib, Cuffe parade jaayega?' Bhai sahib's lying in the front seat, his legs sticking out of the opposite window. He opens his eyes slowly, looks at me and groans disapprovingly at this upside down apparition that is unceremoniously yanking him out of his slumber. He rubs his eyes, puts his arm out of the window and turns the meter. That's a yes I figure, and before he can change his mind I quickly ask him to open the dikkie. He gets out ever so sluggishly, strolls to the back, opens the dikkie and looks down at my bag. It's big. It's soft. It can't possibly be heavy, can it? He screws up his eyebrows and reaches for it. He has no idea what's hit him. My very overweight, very paunchy, very listless cabby finds his body beginning to contort, his eyes beginning to protrude, his knees beginning to buckle and finally his 3 working muscles are forced to kick in. With 1 quick burst of energy and bulging eyes, he pushes the bag in "Arre baap re, what is in this, stones?" I smile sheepishly at his very original crack. Why do you think I didn't lift it fool? Lugging it here was traumatic enough. Manual labour at 4:30am, extremely inebriated after hard partying on a barge out at sea all night, with no sleep at all, is not a very fun thing to do. But what can I say? My 1 big purchase prior to a 5 month journey, and I screwed it up. I ran into a shop at linking road, saw a big, cheap, black bag that does the job, and bought it instantly. Having idiotically even ignored the most obvious sign of a bad buy - extremely wonderful salesman who seemed in a massive hurry to sell the damn thing. Well, at least it's managed to wake my cab driver up. No zoning out on the wheel. Thank God.

The meter's still ticking. He strolls back and gets into the driver's seat. I'm finally off. I have to be at Cuffe Parade at 5:15am. It's 5:10am now. Bombay's early morning smog comes wafting into the car. My tired eyes begin to drop and the aches in my body slowly begin to creep in. All signs of a mad mad party night. How am I ever going to make it through day 1 of my new job? I walked into my little apartment just half an hour ago, showered, changed, threw my toiletries in with the rest of the stones in my bag and in all of 15 minutes, I was ready to leave. A wild party on a barge out at sea, accessible only by special boats plying from the Gateway of India. Ultra exclusive. Ultimate Decadence. Models, wanna be stars, VJ's, industrialist sons, firangs (no exclusive Bombay party is complete without a smattering of the expatriate community) and all the other bold and beautiful of this metropolitan were all there shakin' their booty. And then there was me, with my 2 best friends - dressed in jeans and T-shirts sticking out like sore thumbs. Besides the host and my sister (the reason for my being invited in the 1st place), I knew nobody. For the most part, I spent the night fluctuating between exceedingly bizarre moods - alternating between having a drink because I was really excited with my departure, or having a drink because I was really depressed with my departure. Latterly, of course, it became more about having a drink because I was already quite intoxicated and to dance was the mood of the moment. And now, half an hour later, I leave for a 5-month journey around the country to shoot a documentary on the people of India and 50 years of India's independence. I am an eccentric product of an eccentric city.

Jupiter Building looms large. It's 5:20am and I'm 5 minutes late. The 1st day of the trip and I've already screwed up by getting the Production manager late to the shoot. We have to be in Bandra at 6am. As my taxi goes through the gate I crane my neck out of the car to look for Abhinav. Thank God he's not waiting downstairs and freaking out. I use the fancy intercom from the watchman's cabin to let him know that I've arrived. "Shai, I'm having tea with my parents, I'll just come down." Fine. I pay off the cab, drag my bag out of the dikkie and wait.

5:30am. The lift door opens. An elderly gentleman steps out. Track suit. Sneakers. The orange tick arrests my already very inebriated, very frayed senses. Could this be Abhinav's Dad? The gentleman glances at me, touches his toes a couple of times and suddenly bursts into a brisk walk. Colaba Woods beckons, I presume.

5:37am. I'm still waiting. Where is Abhinav? I wonder if his parents are going to come to bid him farewell. That's sweet. There's no one to bid me farewell, though. My friends and family love me dearly, and will miss me terribly, I'm sure. But, 6am on a Sunday morning? I think not.

5:40 am. Saeed expects us in Bandra in the next 15 minutes. If I weren't getting a ride with the all important production manager himself, I'd be freaking out by now. My 1st revelation of this very momentous day - our unit Production Manager is an odd one. Bonding at breakfast with Momma and Poppa while the Boss waits? Not a good sign Shai. Not a good sign at all.

SA

I am dancing. No. I am running. Fast. Faster. And then away. and beyond. a lover is anxious and close friend is finally realising my worth. But I want to run. away. It does not seem easy. Voices catch up with me and tie me down. I'm twisting and turning, a spiral phone cord has me coiled in its grip. I struggle to break free. But it starts to hail. Bisleri bottles. I am being bombarded, the little missiles pelting down with increasing velocity landing slap-bang on my left ankle that swells with each hit. I am trapped. The phone cords are tightening around me; the water is flooding in and all over me. I am slipping, sinking, but I have to float. And get up and run. Get up. Run. Get up. Run. Get up. Run.

Like a jack-in-the-box, I spring up but the recoil is too sudden. My right leg is entangled in phone cord and I flail helplessly in mid air and shut my eyes as my used and abused left leg bears the brunt of my headlong fall from my bed onto a dead mass on the floor. Fuck! 5:40 am. Overslept. Hardly slept. Wasn't supposed to sleep. Why didn't someone wake me up earlier? My room looks bombed. Did I sleep through a tornado? Did I step on a minefield? I am lying prostrate on top of a tote bag surrounded by a sea of maddening personal effects. Kurtas pyjamas dupattas khadi towels underwear toiletries medicines audio tapes lithium batteries Ektachrome traveller's cheques...I haven't even packed!

The kitchen light is on, the aroma of baking bread thick in the air. I limp to my door and stare hazy eyed at my mother, who is beatifically humming to herself and waiting by the oven. Is she crazy? What on earth is she up to? Carefully playing hopscotch around the jumble and tumble on the floor, I pick out and toss a minimum of the mess into my bag. Through the haze of my last-moment and mentally exhausted mind I do a quick time check. I can't be late. Thankfully, I'm in my travelling clothes. I took a bath at 4:00 am before zoning off into turbulent sleep. I have fifteen minutes to drink my water, take a dump and leave. Easier said than done.

Pressure! 7 glasses of water. 7 minutes on the pot. My father knocks frantically on the bathroom door. "Hurry up, Shaina. You're going to be late." Shit! No shit! "I'm coming paa. 2 minutes" But I can't find my shoes! I kick around in the debris of clothes and after much frantic searching, I find one lying under a towel and the other at the bottom of my just packed travel bag. Ouch! They're such an eyesore. Hideous turquoise blue Carona slip-ons that, a momentary mental aberration had allowed function to over power style. Well, they're no ruby slippers, but at least, they're travelling shoes.

My father is honking. The Watchman comes up to take my bag. I have 4 minutes to get to Georgina B. Not a problem. It's round the corner. I grab my camera and rush to the door, but my mother beckons me to the kitchen. Oh no! "Maa, not now, please! I'm very late." She just stares at me with her calm eyes. "That's not my fault dear, come on, take off your shoes." Muttering expletives under my breath, I kick off the turquoise slippers and click my heels as my mother hums a high pitched prayer and surrounds my head with an aura of agar-batti smoke. There's no place like home. There's no place like home. Thankfully, my fathers honking cuts us short and I push her out of the kitchen and out of the house, still hopping, struggling to get my shoes on. OK. I'm out of here! Jesus! My sister! I rush back in and plant a kiss on my little sister's forehead, who stirs in her sleep and hugs me tight. "Peace." Yes, 5 months without her, peace.

As we drive out of the gate I wave the watchman and the doodhwalla sheepishly. Today, they are smiling and nodding with approval. Normally they stare and whisper, as most times if I am awake to see the light of dawn, it's usually when I'm returning home from some all-night work or all-night revelry. Well, for 5 months they will have nothing to gossip about, the wild insomniac chick will be missing in action. Almost reading my thoughts, my mother asks, "What were you doing up all night? I bet you didn't sleep a wink" I groan inwardly. It's been a week of little sleep. I had to finish of screenplays for a TV serial that I was writing, finish the research for the trip. In between all the hectic work and preparation, under duress of my disco-hopping friends, I had donned the dancing shoes and gone a little crazy on the dance floor of a newly opened night-club, despite an early fall and had woken up, to a bulbous and grotesquely out of shape tendon and ankle which had almost, but not quite rendered me unfit for the trip. And last night, after bidding farewell to the slew of friends who had come to say goodbye, I had spent the remainder of the night on the phone, saying adieu to a love that was far away. And then quite unexpectedly dealing with an old friend for whom my imminent departure had triggered guilt and a certain fear of the ills that might befall me on the journey. She had howled on the phone and apologised for taking me for granted all these many years. Apparently the thought of me being out in the 'wild' had been too much for her to stomach. "Promise me, you'll eat from clean kitchens...promise me you'll drink only Bisleri mineral water. I know you. You'll think its cool to eat in hellholes and drink from stagnant wells!" My friends! I love them. But it feels good to leave them behind.

The small lane outside Georgina B is chaos, confusion and crowds. 3 Tata Sumos, 2 white, one deep blue-green and even bigger hulk of a Tempo traveller occupy the length and breadth of the road. Most of the crewmembers are here, I notice, Sumit, Barkat, Ayub and Ravi & KG have spent the night in the office. Sumit takes me to the green Sumo and points to the A/C vents, under which is a car stereo. I do nothing to hide my excitement as I whack him on his bottom. The little rat! So he had managed to convince Jennifer to install her car deck into the Sumo. "Well done, boy." Jangle, Chandi and Hari arrive in separate auto rickshaws, and then Brown's car pulls up. Shai slams the door and gets out. I cannot help but notice that she looks like death. What did she do all night, I wonder? Browns parents get out, Saeed's brother and family arrives, Jesus, I am thinking, this is turning out to be a big farewell party. But then this is a big trip. This is a big crew. I drag my parents away, cutting off their time pass and parting words to the crewmembers and bundle them into the car. Quietly, I say goodbye and wave as they drive out. This is the longest I will be away from home. I'm so fucking excited.

Shai and I go upstairs to the office. KG, Barkat, Ravi, Ayub 1 & Ayub 2 are transporting the trunks; winter clothes, research material, first aid kits; empty jerry cans, tripods, patlas, cutter stands, tarpaulin; loads of baggage, obviously essential to such a long journey as ours. Shai helps me with the tape trunk; I am to be sole rakhwalli of this burden of beta tapes, come rain or storm. Together, we carry it downstairs, where every one is executing their methods in the madness of loading the trunks into the vehicles, each member has their own building block perceptions, of how best the luggage will stack, and many minds crowd into the backs of the cars.

In the midst of all the planning and preparation, the camera is brought out. I have momentarily forgotten that we're making a documentary. Jangle, the cinematographer prepares to take the first shot of the...well 5 month trip. Chandi, the assistant cameraman is not to be found. No one knows where he is, though everyone recalls seeing him around. Jangle lifts the camera to his shoulders and sets the exposure. I hand Hari, the sound recordist a beta tape. He aims the gun mike at me. What on earth am I to do? Matter-of-factly he tells me to recite the tape number, date and location, over the colour bars. I do as I am bid.

"Tape # B.3, 20th April, 1997. Sunday. Departure from Georgina-B."

KG brings out a coconut, and in the grand auspices of Indian cinema, breaks it in front of the camera. We all clap enthusiastically. "Rolling." Jangle tilts the camera up and down.

Muhurrat shot: TCR 01:01:00:00. tilt up/down from unit and Sumos to Georgina B board.

Now the camera follows us, all crewmembers as we hustle and dodge each other, busy bees, every one of us wanting to assay our roles and jobs. Barkat, Sawat, Ravi, Ayub1 & Ayub 2, Shymole and of course Mihir flex their muscles, as they climb to the roof of the cars and secure the luggage under tarpaulin and ropes. Saeed's sister-in-law hands Saeed a bunch of bumper stickers with 'Om Shanti' written in relief in neon lettered Hindi. Embarrassed, he passes them around, and soon the vehicles are graced with the customary declaration. May peace be with us! But where is Chandi?

KG assigns road maps to every car; Brown distributes red felt neck pillows, one for each member, 18 in all, and cricket match umpire caps that purport to provide our motley crew with a semblance of uniformity. Ayub passes the Coconut around. Everybody grabs a wedge from the shell, prasad, for good luck. We are assigned our seats. Jangle, Hari, Chandi, Shymole, Saeed & Jennifer, the senior most crewmembers are to ride in the Tempo Traveller, which Mihir is going to drive. Barkat, Ravi & KG are to be in the white Sumo #1, driven by Ayub 1. Parvej and Raju, the camera attendants and Ayub 2 in Sumo #2 and last but not least, Shai, Sumit, Brown and myself in the wonderfully and aptly green Sumo, complete with car stereo, the envy of all.

Finally, a full half-hour behind schedule, we are ready to leave. Chandi is no longer missing in action. He has returned, and soon the news spreads that the day-tripper had forgotten his woollens at home, and anticipating a delay in departure had simply disappeared, not a care or bother to his work. Jennifer gathers the crew together. We hold hands and heads down observe a one-minute silence. I open my eyes and sneak a look around, at the many heads lost in prayer. A joint family of near strangers, that will have to stay together - through thick and thin - and stick together. I tighten my grasp on my fellow kith's and kin's hands, I can feel an emotional energy, as the onset of the journey begins to sink in.

After endless goodbyes with Saeed's brother and family and Brown's parents and last minute delays, the cars get into gear and begin to back out of the narrow street. Well, we're on our way, and I am already exhausted. Shai and I are in the back seat, shoes off, feet up, not fighting sleep. I inflate my neck pillow and rest my neck on it and quickly dismiss any delusion that it was designed to support the neck and bring sweet dreams while on the road. One week on neck pillow and you're sure commit yourself to the permanence of a spondylitis collar and a lifetime pain in the neck. Instead, I put it under the small of my back, where its presence might bring some relief. Shai and I shuffle and move, and soon find niches that will enable the 2 of us to sleep well. Slowly, I edge my toes in Shai's direction. I want to tell her that she is occupying too much space in the Sumo. Just because she's bigger than me, doesn't mean she can spread onto my side. But she is fast asleep. I snuggle into myself, put my sunshades on, and watch the Great City of Bombay leave us by.

Just outside of Greater Bombay, we stop for breakfast at a highway restaurant. I gorge down 2 plates of idlis, and watch the unit tear up their puri-bhajis and deep fat fried vada-paos, Bombay city's answer to the fast food of the south, and flood their innards with sweet and milky masala chai. Saeed sips his tea, outside in his cloud of smoke. I look around amused, a voracious crew and a chain-smoking meal-skipping director, and over 40 cups of tea on the tab instill the faith that this is indeed a film unit.

Still hungry, the aroma of baking cake from mom's kitchen wafts up and tickles my nostrils, teases my stomach. With an expression of a cat that swallowed a mouse, I hold on to my secret till the plates are cleared, the sugar at the bottom of the cups consumed and then, I let the surprise out of the bag. All hands descend on the banana & walnut loaf, still warm and moist with a mother's instinct and love for the prodigal daughter and her new found family. I've made my way to the men's hearts by proxy. Thank you mom. As they lick their fingers and scrounge for crumbs, I slip into my bag, a fat wedge of cake. For teatime, I whisper to Shai.

Crawling traffic edges its way up to bottlenecks on NH-4, and slowly we leave the urban sprawl of suburbia only to stop in front of the Thane Creek Bridge. The vehicles pull up to the side of the road and Saeed orders the camera out. A road map is opened on the bonnet of the green Sumo and Brown, Shai, Sumit, Jennifer, Saeed and myself pretend to pour over the route and record the taking of the all-important decision of direction, that being the already planned destination, Bijapur.

The green Sumo leads the way up, followed by the white Sumos, and last and ironically least important to the visual image of the journey, comes the Tempo, Traveller, the behind-the-scene, behind-the-camera car. The brand-new TATA Sumos had been loaned to us free of rent by TELCO, in a publicity coup that both parties, ad agency and us, had found mutually beneficial. For the generous use of the Sumos, Saeed was too shoot enough footage of the 3 vehicles burrowing their way through the varying and diverse terrain and weathers of India. So, a tripod has been mounted in the Tempo Traveller, and the first travel shot of the Sumos is taken.

sumo shot # 1: Travelling shot from the Windshield of the Tempo traveller, tracking the Sumos as they zip, single-file across the Vashi Bridge.

Now we are on the famous Khandala ghats. We spend about an hour taking shots of our cavalcade of vehicles.

sumo shot # 2: The camera crew is transported to a vantage-point. Top angle. The 3 Sumos, little dots, crawl up the serpentine route of the winding ghats.

sumo shot # 3: Same angle. Zoom into some detail of the 3 Sumos, crawling up the serpentine route of the ghats.

sumo shot # 4: New location. Left-Right pan as the 3 Sumos, with crew inside zip past.

sumo shot # 5: Against the backdrop of the famous Duke's nose, a gigantic outcrop of rock that looms large over the hill. The Sumos rush into the tunnel.

The coming out of the tunnel is a memory that has several layers of déjà vu for me. It is a sight seen a hundred of times, for if you are a middle-class Bumbaiya, then Khandala, Lonavala and Poona have been the first three destinations that have come to mind for a weekend getaway or even a day spend, though what used to be a 2-hour drive in my childhood, now takes more than double the while. Still, it brings back memories of growing up. A favourite butta stop, rainy day mist and fog, picnics with family and in my teenage years, with friends. Now, in the heat of summer, the vista is drab, no resplendent waterfalls, just heat and dry.

FIRST INTERVIEW

SA

sumo shot # 6: The Sumos rush out of the tunnel. Camera pans right to an open-top Gypsy and a group of people hanging out. Their merry-making and revelry drift in our direction. Instinctively, Saeed decides to interview them. The floundering crew follows their director as he accosts the group, a spectrum of representative youth from my very own city. Jangle decides to go handheld and Hari snaps on a cordless mike to Saeed's collar. So in the relatively new and well-appropriated tradition of MTV-on the road, Channel [V]-in the streets, the interview begins. Saeed rests himself on the railing bar of the Gypsy.

"I'm making a documentary. It's about 50 years of India's independence. Do you mind if I speak to you'll?"

"Of course!"

"Totally."

"Yaa sure!"

The gang appears seemingly confident and unperturbed by our intrusion into their picnic. They seem eager and excited; the video camera in their faces does not make them self-conscious. The group is a motley bunch, mostly in their late teens and early twenties. Outfitted and accoutred to draw attention, they carry along with their bandannas, skullcaps, baseball caps, hairbrushes and multi-coloured shades a street smart sensibility and an independent care a damn sort of empowerment. We wait for the laughter and idle chatter to die down. Then Saeed asks

What do you feel about the 50 years?

Laughter breaks out. Then, an awkward pause. A short girl with fingernails painted, each a different shade, short hair tucked beneath a Pepe jeans skullcap breaks the silence – “Great yaar!”

Loud laughter. Then a young guy, perched on the wall, in blue shades and a bandanna spotted with MTV logos.

“We need another 50 years to improve ourselves!”

More loud raucous laughter follows, Saeed, all-of-55, big and burly, long white hair, cotton kurta-pyjama, umpire cap on his head remains unnerved by the frivolity “What is wrong with us?”

The girl in the skullcap puts her arms around a scrawny guy in mercury-tinted sunshades “Nothing is wrong with us. We know how to enjoy...”

“We have Gandhiji...”

We turn our attention to a tiny, diminutive girl, surprisingly much younger than the rest. Her soft voice gets cut short as a raucous chant builds up behind her; a popular anthem from a recent Hindi film hit fills the air.

East or west. India is the best!
East or west. India is the best!

The camera follows the chant to the low brick wall on the edge of the road. A 20 something girl in faded denims and bright pink lipstick brandishes her neon yellow Zee comb like a defensive weapon. She shakes her head, brushing her over - bleached golden hair from her face “The Government!”

Saeed bends forward to hear her above the noise.

“Is wrong? How would you like to change it?”

“Change it? I think the young people should rule the world!”

Hoots and howls, Claps and cheers rent the air. The girl in the skullcap and the tiny one zoom in to frame and join their hands in a high - 5. Comments and one-liners abound. “Ya...not the oldies”, says one of the boys. Saeed, undaunted goes on.

“What would you do?”

Instant chorus of answer, followed by more howls and cheers.

“ENJOY!!!”

MTV bandanna guy lets out a whoop.

“The music calls!”

“We know how to enjoy, but other people don't know how to enjoy.” says the girl in the skullcap, now christened Ms. Enjoyment. A mock boxing match breaks out between the boys. Through the melee, the Back-Benchers shout

“Hey we love India, yaar.
Mera Bharat Mahaan”

Ms. Enjoyment continues

“The schooling is the worst thing about India”

MTV Bandanna jibes her

“And the Disc is the best thing about India?”

Tiny Girl steps forward

“Gandhi. He was a great ruler.”

Mercury-tint looks at the boys and comments on the Tiny Girls' line.

"Yaa. Peace, love and and...."

He falls over Ms. Enjoyment knocking off her skullcap and they both begin to giggle. From the back we hear someone

"Yaa, but he didn't know how to dress."

And another

"Yaa, but he also had 2-2 women by his side all the time."

Now we turn our attention to the open top Gypsy, where some older guys, part of the same group show promise of some seriousness. A big built man in his mid-20's with a fluffy moustache, in white, a condom denoting the 'O' on the Benneton branding that runs across the breadth of his T-shirt

"But politicians are screwing the country, man."

Tiny girl, determined to get her word in

"But whatever...Gandhi was a good man. Whatever he did was very nice for us."

Sensing a semblance of seriousness, Saeed asks his much-awaited question.

"What about our 1st PM: a man called Nehru. Do you know anything about him?"

Big condom man answers without much thought

"He was also a bloody chootiya."

More laughter, more hoots. The Back-Benchers add their views

"He divided the whole country."

"He loved children."

Big condom man continues

"He spoilt our country. Now, all the politicians are spoiling the country. We hate them. They are the worst."

"Yaa, They don't know how to govern the country" says Ms.Enjoyment. Mercury-tint friend looks at her "Our PM should be like, like..."

Ms. Enjoyment shouts and bursts out laughing

"... like me!"

"Sweet...humble... and and and..." Mercury-tint flirts madly with her and pinches her bottom.

Golden-hair girl comes charging into camera banging her Zee comb on her fist.

"You know what? In this country, we need a Hitler. Yaa."

Ms. Enjoyment looks appalled

"Aye paagal ho gayi kya?"

Golden-hair girl points to the group with her Zee comb

"Yaa! for all these kids to change."

Ms. Enjoyment and Golden-hair fall into a frenzied laughter.

Saeed asks them if they believe that India should be a secular country. A chorus of 'yes, yaa, definitely' confirm the unanimity of his question. Delighted by this refreshing insight, Saeed goes on

"What does secularism mean to you?"

Someone leads the pack

"Hindu-Muslim ..."

And predictably, the chorus joins in

“Bhai Bhai.”

And Ms. Enjoyment gets her word in. She points to the flirty Mercury-Tint
“See he’s Muslim I’m Hindu”

He looks at her with naughty eyes
“Bhai-behen?”

“Aye no yaar. Sorry. No thank you.”

Ms. Enjoyment looks into camera and gestures wildly
“See me I’m an Hindu but I’m having all Muslim friends. All Muslim friends.”

Shymole, our editor, in turquoise blue kurta joins the group. He asks them to name, who in their opinion was the best PM of India? Through the ruckus are heard a wider variety of responses

“Rajiv Gandhi” (in loud chorus)

“No No Morarji Desai”

“Aye shut up! Indira Gandhi was the best.”

“No not Morarji stupid.”

“No not Nehru. I think Rajiv Gandhi and VP Singh were the best.”

“Indira was the best.”

The camera sways from left to right, keeping up with the dizzying pace of the interview. Saeed moves closer to the wall, where a sincere looking fellow in a black cap with a white star has been watching the tamasha in silence. He now speaks

“See, I tell you that in this country we need a dictatorship. Democracy won’t work here because we’re totally corrupt.”

Big Condom Man adds

“Because in every house you get a politician and that should be banned. A politician should be well educated.”

Back-Benchers

“Not like Laloo Prasad.”

“They should learn to dress from us.”

The interview hinges, yet again on the fringe between banality and gravity. Determined to pursue some vital points put forth by the hitherto quiet boy in the star cap, Saeed probes on.

“Why do you prefer dictatorship to democracy?”

“Because, Democracy is just not working. Now what do you wish for your country? In the next 50 years do you want to lead it ahead, or do you want to lead it 50 years behind. Do you think we’re going to go ahead? What do you think?” His tone is aggressive. Cheers, applause and whistles commend him on his speech. Ms. Enjoyment takes a bow before him. “Wow, great, yaar.”

After a moments silence, Saeed answers his question.

“Yes, we all want India to go ahead. But you think that dictatorship will...”

Shymole, our editor cuts in

“You want dictatorship? Who’s going to dictate the country?”

Mercury-Tint points to Ms. Enjoyment

“A person who...”

Ms. Enjoyment raises her right hand

“Like us.”

All hands go up. She continues

“Like all of us. A person who is like all of us! With a sense of enjoyment, Sense of thinking, sense of caring, sense of love...”

Every one laughs and claps. Big Condom Man shrugs the humour off.
“There should be good leadership. We need a strong leader.”

“And an Islamic law! In this country there should be Islamic law!”

Saeed turns to the voice. It is the quiet boy with the star cap. Saeed is stunned to silence.
“WHAT???”

Quiet star continues

“Now look at Saudi Arabia. If anyone is doing something wrong cut off his hands. That is the way you can top all this. If someone does wrong, they should get their punishment.”

Most nod in agreement. Someone
“Yaa punishment should be given.”

Big Condom Man

“If you rob something the hands should be cut, in a public place, so that other people should know that when you've robbed what punishment is in store for you.”

Saeed looks perturbed by the serious turn, the interview has taken
“So let me rephrase this. What your saying is - because we've reached a stage of corruption we want a harsh...”

Quiet Star

“Yaa, harsh. Exactly.”

Saeed, still doubtful

“...harsh ways. Therefore dictatorship? Cutting off hands...?”

Quiet Star

“Exactly, exactly.”

Saeed tries to reason with them

“Now you take a place like Pakistan. We're talking about dictatorships. By and large its been ruled by the army. Wahan army ne bhi hungama kiya hai.”

Big Condom Man

“mein naa nahin bol raha hoo.”

Saeed, determined to prove his point

“Tho phir? What your saying is that there should be discipline.”

Big Condom Man

“One rule should be made for everyone.”

Back-Benchers

“whether PM or bhikhaari.”

“Yaa! Equal.”

Quiet Star

“See in Korea when there is a scam the politician has to step down. Look at

China they have such a large population but they stand somewhere in the world, naa? We have so many natural resources, so many intelligent people. We have everything but we're doing nothing. We're selling the country off.

We're selling the resources.”

“So if you guys are painting such a grim picture why are you so happy?”

Saeed's question is met with an awkward silence. Then one lot starts laughing.

“Because we know how to enjoy.”

And the other lot reaffirms their disgust and helplessness.

“The system is such, we can't do anything.”

The camera comes to a standstill. The final word is spoken

CUT.

Our first interview. MTV generation from India's Biggest Cosmopolis. Our reactions are as extreme as theirs were. An obnoxious wild-bunch of middle-class teenagers, clueless about the past and unconcerned about the future of their country. What a terrible way to start the journey. With an all-over-the-place, chaotic, free-for-all melee shot in much the same way. Disgusted, we bundle into our respective cars.

Our first interview. My peers from my city. As the resounding & violent impact of the interview subsides and the green Sumo follows the Tempo Traveller, I break the silence. Sure, these kids had us horrified. Here was a serious director wanting to conduct a serious interview. But these teenagers were out on a picnic. Shai & I wonder if our reactions would have been similar, say a couple of years ago, if we had been accosted in the midst of revelry and asked random questions of national importance. As we hasten to deny the fact, we begin to realise that even within the broad grouping of our 'new generation', we had preceded them, we had come a little before 'generation next'. And, even as recently as the early nineties, our teen years, being accosted by a camera in the middle of the road, would have awed us, perhaps rendered us speechless. The teenagers we met, were a product of the satellite TV boom, and while not exactly media savvy, were totally at ease with a camera in their face. And VJ's roaming the streets of Bombay, catching them in gay abandon, prompting them to assert their views with snappy one-liners and catch phrases coupled with racy advertising campaigns, had created an all-new 'brattitude', and had packaged, accessories and purchasing power included, for the urban youth, a late nineties sensibility, the defining mantra being "Enjoy". Still, beneath the veneer of multicoloured nails and multicoloured sunshades lurked a disillusioned and surprisingly hostile youth. Did they really want a dictatorship? Worse still, Islamic law? It was easy to dismiss the whole lot as clueless, shameless, hateful brats. Yet, it began to dawn on us, if our aim was to meet the people of India, rich or poor, young or old and chronicle their feelings about their country and her half-century of freedom, surely we had to give their words some countenance?

The Tempo Traveller has come to a halt. We look out of the window. A coal truck has run off the road and overturned in the wasteland below. The notorious Bombay-Pune Highway. Where every hundred yards, a painted sign warns of the perils of highway driving with morbid humour,, and every 200 yards mangled chassis's of crushed trucks dot the road.

We make our way down the incline. 8-10 workers are carrying the gunny bags of coal on their shoulders and transporting them from the overturned truck to the back up, a new truck that is parked on the side of the road. I insert a new fresh tape into the recorder, take some stills and bring out an examination board, replete with a fat pad of continuity sheets. I am to be the 'Continuity Girl', an appellation I fast chuck up along with my continuity sheets. I am a fast learner. I know there will be no need for any continuity. We find out if anybody was injured. Fortunately, everyone was safe, the coal too was safe. We take some shots of the workers lifting the gunnies and then Saeed begins to talk to them in Hindi.

He asks them about Nehru, and what they thought of him. To Saeed's pleasure they praise him to glory but then go on to venerate the daughter and grandson. 'The Nehru Khandaan was all good. Between them came

the fools, Morarjee Desai nay to pura vaat lagaaya.' They derided the politicians of today, branding them as corrupt and selfish. 'They think for themselves and if at all for their own people. Our Joshi-Munde government only uplifts their own people. We need leaders who think of everyone, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isaayee.' Yet, surprisingly, for some, the one good leader on the horizon was Atal Behari Vajpayee, the 'sensible statesman' of the fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

Most agreed that the country had made progress. 'We have some amenities in villages, schools and baalwadis which we didn't have before, yes, now we even have electricity.' But some didn't agree. Progress for them did not mean basic facilities. 'Most villages still don't have electricity. In any case, what good will electricity do? Every day, one has to slog hard only to eat, and yet one can't eat 2 meals. I don't think things have progressed for us.' Saeed tells them that he had just spoken to some kids from Bombay who were so fed-up and disillusioned with the current lot of politicians and state of affairs, and that they had wanted the army called in. 'If someone does wrong, cut off his hands...what do you'll feel?' And it came as a shock to us, yet again. 'Absolutely, Goli maarna chaahiye, Siddha. Rashtrapati Kaayda chaalu karna chahiye'. It was time for president's rule, they said. 'The military should be brought in. We don't want the police, they are worse than the politicians are.'

Were we really in a near state of emergency? The complacent stereotypical Indian, destined to his fate was actually ready to sacrifice his one right, that being his vote. For the common disenfranchised Indian, power was absolute, anyway. Be it, the zamindar, the police, the bureaucrat, the employer, the military. The poor never really had the freedom to exercise choice. Why, even their suffrage was laced with suffering, forced to cast their votes in exchange for the hope and promise of basic necessities that never came their way. Maybe our notions of the world's largest democracy in practice were romantic, tailored to suit a grand design planned 50 years ago. Small wonder then, if given a choice, in theory, they chose what they regarded as the lesser of the many evils; a militarist regime, a just might that would right wrong.

BETA NIGHT

We drive on, non-stop, for we are anxious to get to our destination before sundown. Shai and I compete with each other in our silent struggle for leg room and bum room and collectively argue with the boys with regards to the choice of music. We decide to implement some democracy and diplomacy and let Brown hear his tape. He snaps it in and passes the cover behind. Instantly we regret our decision. It's an MTV-type dance-hits remix compilation. Oh well, we will have to bear with it. Brown cranks up the volume. An Ace of Base Cover! Yes. A discoed faster more squeaky version of the sign (can that even be heard) blasts through my ears. We've listened to our share of music. We will just have to grin and smirk and bear with his. I search the ground for my abandoned neck pillow and put it to some more good use Yes. It makes for good ear muffers.

At night we stop at Indapur. We have travelled a total of 275 kms, a slow start for day one and have already broken the first rule, 'no night driving'. We park ourselves outside the driveway of what I assume will be our rest stop for the night. We gather outside, I am still amazed at the size of our unit as they pour out of the 3 Sumos and the one Tempo Traveller and hang around a tree kiosk...as I like to call them. Circle of Concrete, covering the stump of a tree, the foot high platform painted bright and gay, making a convenient and cool resting place for many a weary traveller and exemplifying the preponderance of semi-urban kitsch, in small town India. We sit around and smoke cigarettes and chat about the day so far. KG and Brown and Jennifer have gone in to see if we can get rooms for the night. It looks like a typical highway joint, a couple of multicoloured swings, a duck pond resplendent with mosquitoes, moss and lichen and thankfully no ducks. Dying fauna in highway joints is an all-to-familiar, none-to-pleasing sight. I think of all the fat fish I've seen in trickle drop rock gardens and still plaster-of-Paris oyster shaped fountains, stagnating in a distended torpor, their fins, a curious bilious green. I have stopped at these restaurants before. They are of a typical type, run by private enterprise. I've seen the likes of them in Gujarat and the more tourist-map routes of Maharashtra. But I have never spent more than an hour at these highway restaurants cum recreation parks. From the looks of it, we're going to camp here for the night. I'm very excited.

This hotel is quite a trip. The interiors are dismal. Barely coping with providing its patrons with basic clean & quiet, Radhika comes laced with fringe benefits. Ambient lighting! The rooms are dimly lit, by deliberate

design, not an incidental fall-out of low voltage or power fluctuation. Zero watt bulbs adorn the holders blue green red orange violet. Dinner is being ordered. We shower and change and bungle up into Saeed's room to watch and log the footage. He has an AC room; it has been decided that only one such room will be rented, for care for tapes and equipment, overlooking the fact that the attendants take care of the camera equipment and Shai and I take care of the Beta tapes, VHS tapes, VCR and laptop. The entire unit is present in the room; we watch the rushes with curiosity & vanity. There we are, sleepy, hung-over, fresh and excited preparing our imminent and eminent departure from Georgina B. I feel strange watching myself on camera. I wonder if the others share it too. It had been a fairly unnerving experience, having the camera record our every move as we went about our work. I watch my movements closely. If I am caught unawares by the camera, I look ok, but no sooner am I aware of a sneaky feeling behind my shoulder or a lens close at hand as I have sauntered into frame, I freeze and immediately look terribly self conscious and awkward. I see this in Brown too, in Jennifer, in Mihir and in Shai. Yet I can't help but feel that the light and grip boys, the spot boys, the camera attendants and our drivers are more camera-savvy and perhaps not as self-conscious of themselves as the rest of us. Their casual askance in the direction of the camera, the slight straightening of the shoulders, chest out, the flexing of the muscles, displaying their strength as they carry luggage, tie the tarpaulin over the carrier of the tempo comes very naturally to them.

An ear-splitting decibel of screams and cheers rents the quiet of the room. Hari rushes to turn the volume down, as everyone watches the first interview. Jangle's camera sways at a dizzying pace, keeping up with the chaos. The interview is analysed and the kids are dubbed as *junglees*, mutant products of the vast growing urban middle class of post liberalised India.

But our silence is given vent to when we see the interview with the coal workers. There is no colour. It's all black & white! A mishap on our first day! An accident or technical fault? After much examination, it is established that we had a faulty cable! Our DP is clearly upset and distraught. Personally, I kind of like the interview as it turned out. These men were hard working and honest. Their coal-black faces and charcoal-stained limbs and *banyaans* present a stark and startlingly real portrait in these shades of grey, a welcome relief from the Day-Glo mirrored brightness of the first interview.

I pour myself a drink with permission from Saeed. It has been an exhilarating and tiring day but the loss of this footage has put a damper on everybody's climbing spirits.

But this is not the end. Dinner awaits us. As per design specifications of Hotel Radhika, each floor landing has the same ambience, the moods vary as per the colours. The indoor dining hall on the ground floor is red-lit, and the outside washroom orange-hued. Thankfully, we are dining outside, by the fountains and ponds and fairy lights. The other guests are all men; they look like travelling salesmen, small town businessmen or sleazy politicians from 'mofussil' towns. The family restaurant milieu these places provide by day is definitely missing by night. The senior members of the crew eat and leave, while the rest of us sit down to a long and extended dinner. Half our crew is drunk, strangely I am unaware of this for quite a while. Male egos are fraying and already patterns of *panga* and put-the-spot-on are emerging. The dinner is disappointing. Malai-something, I cannot really tell, kaju-kofta, makhani indescribable-unpalatable-something-else. I long for a good decent daal fry and some boiled rice. But the spices are killing, any gastronomic longing, I squelch with huge swigs of water. I handpick the kaju-kismis from the Shahi Pullao and settle on a cut salad. I'm dying for some neutralising *dahi* but do not ask as Brown & KG seem harassed and inundated by orders.

A demand is on for cold drinks. And no one knows if we are allowed beverages on production account. Brown is getting a lot of flack and I can sense the coming of a crazy argument. I realise that I am to escape being party to many such like arguments, as coke and Pepsi & Thumsup make no difference to me. I do not drink aerated waters. Neither do I drink any tea. As contribution to the cribs and chaos I put in my little 'request' too. Simple food. Not fancy *Shahi-Nawaabi* wannabe attempts. This is day one. And I already feel like a toxic dump. If we are to endure 5 months of travel, changing weather and other such seemingly mundane problems, a simple diet will go a long way in sustaining our minds and bodies. I for one am paranoid about my stomach. A rather serious bout of intestinal tuberculosis in 1994 has left my intestines fairly incapable of the simple act of digestion, to be more precise, the act of excretion. I am pulled out of my *punya pet pooja*. The argument is hotting up; the spices are working. I watch bemused as everyone gets

personal with everyone. People they have only just met. I smile to myself. This is going to be an entertaining trip. A dull headache and a couple of bitter burps distract me from the crazy drunken revelry around me. I realise its time to retire.

Shai & I spend our first night together in room 43 of hotel Radhika. I take my medicines. I can see Shai look at me with wonderment and amusement. She will soon get used to my nightly routine. We leave the violet light on and settle into bed. We stay up into the night chatting about the members of the unit. Since Shai was the last member to join the crew, only a few days before today, I fill her in on the little I know about the unit. Sumit, I have known for a while. He is a great guy. He has a travelling heart, of that there is no doubt. He has spent days going over this large road map that belonged to my father. Its a classic old WIAA road map that we had used when I travelled through the north of India with my family. A most travelled unfriendly map if you ask me. Covering a length of over 7 feet and a width of almost 5, Sumit & I had bonded over the repair of the map a couple of weeks ago. We had spent hours cello-taping the creases. I remember the excitement and energy that surged through both of us, self-confessed intrepid travellers, as we crawled over the map plotting our route. Both of us-rapping a litany of places with the familiarity of the much travelled stops on the Bandra-Churchgate local.

Chickmaglur-Trichnopally-Purnea-Gopalpur-on-Sea-Taptapani-Garampani-Tang-lang-la-Baru-la-cha-places I know nothing about, but had grown attached to during map study only because of their adorable appellations.

Sumit was responsible for drawing up a rough blue print of our route based on the research file that I had been asked to compile. A rushed job, it had seemed rather inadequate for a journey such as ours. I had expressed my hesitation in taking up the task. "How am I to know everything about India?" I had asked in a worried whiny voice. No one had seemed to care. Saeed for his part had said that he required no research. This was a journey in the present. Our stories were to be about now in relation to then. Then being the 50 young years of independent India. The file had taken me 3 weeks to tabulate. I had gathered my information largely through statistics, news clipping and articles and (sad but true) from a quick cover to cover read through of the seemingly adequate and often offensive Lonely Planet Guide.

I give Shai more *goss* on the crew. As much as I am able to tell. I like what little of Shai I've known in the past week and hope that we can bear with each other during the long 5 months that lie ahead of us. The crewmembers are all cool. But all male. Working with Saeed, for over a year, I have become used to this All Male-All FTII-feeling that had pervaded the smoky rooms of Georgina B. Saeed very rarely worked with non-FTII's. Yet, our crew was all-new to me, this being my first Saeed Akhtar Mirza Production that had been blessed to see the light of camera action. Jangle, Hari, Chandi and Shymole, I knew nothing about, except, their designations, their lineage (esteemed FTII) and their nativity. Ravi, has been the handy-man about office, a street smart typical 'Bombay Chootiya', a title I have given him and one he has accepted with much pride. The rest of the members are unknown to me. Yet, most of them seem have a sense of craze and adventure, and a bullying nature so necessary for a film unit. Save for Brown, whom I guess, has been picked as pickle of the week. He seems the ripest candidate and I sense that he is going to be *pakaod* and fried and *chutnified* in the days that follow.

True, Browns job is not that easy In effect, he has the worst job of all. The controller of the purse strings. He is to be production manager, under Jennifer's supervision. He is to be liaison man, point to point man, pay bills, get us permission and generally cover all heads of production. Such a job, I would think requires, 1. an easy going nature, 2. an understanding of bureaucracy, 3. a wheeling dealing attitude to wangle out of 'triplicate' procedures, peppered with charm and a touch of class (not like that of a suave business man, more like the regular Mr. fix-it type) 4. and in general an amicable spirit, one who is down with everybody never mind their distinction.

In short, I refer to the many truly amazing and super efficient production people we have seen work on film units and ad films in Bombay. Nonetheless, his job is still a difficult one; film shoots are largely planned and one always operates within the local area and if outdoor, there is always a pre production recci. Our schedule will rest on a day to day plan, rather moment to moment. It would largely depend on what we see and encounter, and how far into the night, we wish to travel for room and board. The research trunk is loaded

with books and hotel lists but we will be want to make random overnight stops at strange unheard of towns and places. Abhinav is just not cut out for this job. I fear that he is in for rough times if he doesn't change his attitude soon. But I also realise that it is he who chooses to be hierarchical. Maybe not intentionally. But this brown university educated youth just simply cannot fit in with the rest of the unit. Shai and myself, both 'Bombay chicks' find him seriously stuffy and officious and preppy. The entire unit has decided, subconsciously perhaps even before the advent of this mammoth journey that they will give him his just desserts.

I am mesmerised by the violet light. I fall into a fitful sleep. Wake up is 6:00am.

SH

Oh Shaina, Shaina, Shaina how do you sleep with such ease on this rock of a mattress with this unchanged sheet in this shit hole of a hotel while my stomach hasn't seized its churning since its encounters with the 'luxuries' of Hotel Radhika. But what 'luxuries' are these that make one so sick?

Indapur in Maharashtra. A speck on the map of India. Our 1st destination. Welcome to Hotel Radhika. The 'up market' highway hotel. A haven for all those out of Dodgy land. The lobby - peeling walls, moth eaten carpets, 2 smelly L shaped couches. The 1st floor corridor - red light, 2nd floor corridor - yellow light. Bedrooms - tube light. Nice. Very nice. As I made my way down the stairs towards the garden for dinner, I was assaulted by what seemed to be at that moment one of the greatest marvels of interior decoration. Hanging stoically down the stairwell and demanding complete attention, leaving me almost tempted to shout out through a loudspeaker "Please Ladies and gentlemen bow your heads in a show of respect for the world's most hideous chandelier hanging here before you at Hotel Radhika in Indapur." The management is proud, as they most definitely should be, for having so magnificently succeeded in keeping this chandelier at this highly venerated position of the most hideous chandelier of all chandeliers, one putting even the most gaudy Bollywood set chandelier to shame. Pieces of glass in every size and every kitschy colour, all strung together to create a 5 foot inverted pyramid housing layers upon layers of dead little bulbs and generations upon generations of spiders with their webs creating a grotesque installation on the surrounding wall. Their clan seems to be rapidly increasing indicating signs of a family dispute over property in the offing - each little creepy crawly fighting over its own little bit of chipped coloured glass, its little crust of dirt, its little speck of dust. Hmmm.... an omen of sorts for our family of 18 destined to be stuck together for the next 5 months. And this, our 1st night spent together bathed in the dodgy luxuries of Hotel Radhika.

I walk into the 'fairy' lit garden of Hotel Radhika, where the steady rhythm of trucks and buses rumbling by on National Highway No 4A(?) remain a constant reminder that this is a highway hotel where one's stay is temporary. Thank God! Rather that, than being deluded into thinking that this hotel could be a pleasant holiday destination. The production department had to at least try and make amends, therefore the buffet dinner, outside in the garden, well-laid table... The pace of the chef, however, was obviously out of their control. After a half an hour agonising wait of stuffing papads down to muffle our rumbling stomachs, the food was brought out. Paneer makhanwalla, mixed vegetable with kajus and malai (uhhh), butter rice, hyderabadi daal and rotis. A sincere attempt at making an all-vegetarian meal exciting, but unfortunately one sounding the death knell for our already 'Bombay bhel puri aised' insides.

"Isn't this food too rich for us to be eating everyday? We should try and eat lighter stuff." As I serve myself to some yellow daal, I look across in the direction of the voice only to see Shaina very precariously serving herself to a couple of dots of mixed vegetables with kajus and malai, looking very concerned. Just as I am about to agree, Jennifer bursts in to say very emphatically that that this food is not a problem and besides it is the only decent vegetarian food that the hotel offers and production was trying to do their best and Shaina should not be "making demands". I look across at Shaina who seems to have suddenly dwarfed behind the table. Oops big mistake girl. Her naïve critique of the food has been taken as a serious affront to production, and now she will have to pay. A huge argument on food ensues.

Should the food be lighter?

But some people like rich food.

We aren't going to be eating much non-vegetarian food so we should ensure that this food is tasty enough. But does oil equal taste?

The battle goes on and on and on with our 18 member crew throwing their opinions and loud voices across a long table, battling each other and the rumbles of trucks passing by.

This was all just too bloody much for me. Honestly, I couldn't care less about the type or colour or taste of the vegetable. As far as I am concerned the word vegetable doesn't deserve any discussion time at all. Now if the discussion were about chicken or fish then by all means, play on. But vegetables?

My only sad realisation at this meal was that non-vegetarian food was obviously going to be a complete No No while on the trip. 5 months of vegetarianism translates into 5 months of weight loss. That, I can deal with. My diet for 5 months - daal and rice. Decision taken by me for myself. How wrong can one go with daal and rice? I envision, however, a long long period of suffering for all these poor people around me with big ideas about their vegetables. Accept defeat now and move on for none of you will ever be happy. As we travel on, the choice of vegetables will get even more unreal and to then discuss how they should be cooked and whether to have dahi, or rotis or rice, or all, alongside means setting oneself up for daily trauma with menu selection.

After 20 minutes of incessant arguing a decision was taken to ensure lighter food. Also, rice, roti and dahi would be served, and if anybody wanted anything specific, he/she had the liberty of ordering it and paying for it. Fair enough? Not really. Actually, not at all. What about my chicken and fish, I wanted to shout? Why should I have to pay for it? I bit the kaju in my mouth and let better sense prevail by quietly accepting my weight loss program.

GURRRRRRRR – ooh my stomach still churns so badly, and this yellow ceiling above my bed does nothing to make me feel better. I look over at Shaina. She sleeps beautifully. Didn't she mention some kind of perennial insomnia problem? Hmm... where did that go? Dear God what have I set myself up for over these next 5 months? Its only day 1 of 147 and everything is already swimming around me. This whole trip happened so fast for me. 4 days ago I was propping up sets as prop assistant in the production design department of a feature film. Desperate to get a 'proper' job, I called Saeed Mirza having heard through the grapevine that he was to make a documentary / travelogue on the country. "Why don't you come and meet me tomorrow?" Saeed said to me on the phone. I went.

Saeed Mirza's office; Georgina B; 5th floor; Bandra.

I sat down before him, we exchanged a few pleasantries first...Yes, I was in college with your son, another Xavierite like you, I live alone in a flat in Colaba, my parents moved to Goa a few months ago... Before we could actually get started the door burst open and a young lady barged into the room "Sorry. Sorry. Saeeduncle have you seen my wallet? I can't find it anywhere." She glanced up at me for a second, and then rushed around the room, checking drawers and cupboards, opening and closing boxes... 'No' Saeed muttered quietly while I just sat there with a serious case of interview awkwardness - the pretending to be calm and composed but NOT, look. She circled the room a couple of more times, mumbled some abuses under her breath and finally left, slamming the door shut behind her.

I then looked up at Saeed. Great we can now continue. But, the door opened again. I turned to see another Assistant Director type young chick entering. She shoved some pictures into Saeed's face. "Saeeduncle choose one of them for Raja's role?" Saeeduncle. Saeeduncle? What is that? He pointed to one picture, looked back at me for a second, and then turned to look out of the window, very calmly slipping into 'am now in deep thought' look. She smiled at me and walked out. Could he be her uncle, I wondered. No. He couldn't be uncle to both these women could he? They just work for him. That's all. It's this uncle, auntie, respect for elders' trap that these poor girls have fallen into. A trap which I am most careful not to fall into anymore. Enough. I have millions of so called uncles and aunties floating around all over the world. But who are they? Just some random bloody strangers! Now here I am a random stranger and potential employee sitting in the office of a renowned director. So how do I address him? Not 'Saeeduncle' for sure - I have no desire to extend my already rapidly growing extended family of parents' new-found friends. So what shall it be? Mr. Mirza? Saeed sahib? Mr. Saeed? Sir? Sirji? Brother Sir? Just Saeed, I'm sure, would be completely

blasphemous. Well, until I get the courage to ask him, I'll just have to do the mumble thing I do so well - start with a bang and quickly regress into a whimper (much like a dying Walkman battery). I wonder how long "Uh, uh, Sa...a...ee..." will last?

Finally when we were alone again. He moved his gaze from outside the window and turned to me. I have to get him to start this interview, I'm thinking, I don't have all day. I look at my watch. Shit! Chor Bazaar shuts in 3 hours and I have to shop for tomorrow's shoot. "Haaa. So you were saying?" I attempt to break the silence. No reply. I now begin to feel really stupid for being there. He hates me. He won't even talk to me. This is not even funny anymore. Why did I come here? This was all such a bad idea. Maybe I should just leave.

" 'Long years ago I made a tryst with destiny.....' spoke Nehru 50 years ago when he addressed the nation on Independence Day." Saeed suddenly bursts in.

He speaks. Thank God. He speaks. And just when I was contemplating legal intervention for having to deal with those 20 melodramatic minutes. With the same Nehruvian drama and passion, Saeed continues "50 years ago, Nehru made a speech 'A Tryst with destiny'. You might have read it?" I nod my head. "In the speech he envisioned the India he wished to create. A secular, democratic united India. You know young lady...I am a traveller and have travelled all over the world. This project is a dream for me. I plan to travel through every state in the country. I want to explore the India of today by speaking with the people of the country and trying to understand the direction that India has taken - to what extent has Nehru's vision been achieved and how has it been achieved. If it hasn't been achieved? Why not."

Excitedly, I lean forward in my seat to listen to his every word. But a documentary on Nehru and the 50 years of India's independence could be anything. What exactly is Saeed looking to document? I hope through his interactions with people across the country a subsequent critique of Nehru's ideology will follow? Nehru had a vision. A very progressive vision. Upholding the concepts of democracy and secularism, technology and modernism. He was projecting India into the future. But how ready were we as a nation to comprehend and live out these idealisms? Was it easy for us to just simply shrug off centuries of colonising and catapult ourselves into a modern India? Was India ready for Nehru's vision? How much of this development was felt by rural India? And partition? What happened to secularism there? These have always been questions I've constantly asked myself. There are no simple quick answers. But I do know 1 thing - Nehru's vision did and has failed. What Saeed should try and do now through the documentary is analyse why and how. I only hope this film is honest and critical. If it becomes simplistic cheer leading for Nehru, the film will merely serve to add to Doodarshan's already heaving 'The Gandhi family & Its 'sacrifices' for the country' shelf. We have too many of those. It might as well not be made.

So how exactly do you plan on putting your ideas onto film or Beta as the case here may be? Who in particular are you going to interview? Is the documentary going to only be interviews? Man, may God help the viewers. Will we be spending time and living in villages for long periods? I tried asking at least some of these questions.

"Yes yes, we will definitely be spending a lot of time in villages. We will only interview 'ordinary' people, the common man, no 'important' people, no politicians, no film stars, no government officials, and no intellectuals. We only want to hear the Indian people talk." I nodded my head and smiled trying to conceal my irritation at all the 'loaded' words he'd just used. He went on. "We will be travelling for 5 months by road around the country, through every state - starting from Mumbai, we drive through Pune, Kolhapur and on to Goa. After a couple of days here we head towards the coffee plantations of Coorg, Chikmagalur and on to Mysore and Ooty.

He picked up a cigarette and lit it "By the way do you drive?"

I looked around as the small Air conditioned room slowly began to fill with smoke "Uh Yes, I do...but on the highway...uhh..."

"We're going to get 3 Tata Sumos and 1 tempo. I just had a slip disc, you know and I should ideally not be doing this trip at all now. I should stay here and rest but this is something I've waited all my life to do. Pay my 'salaams' to the man whose death brought tears to my eyes. You know when Nehru died, I cried. "

I looked at him in disbelief and smiled sweetly.

"It's going to be difficult, but I'll manage. We already are a crew of 15 with only 1 woman. I don't mean to sound sexist but I'm looking for 1 more woman, particularly someone who can double up as both an Assistant Director and Assistant Sound recordist."

"Well... I've never really done any sound work at all. But, why a woman Assistant Sound Recordist though, I don't understand?"

"Well, I feel that having a woman involved technically with the crew will make an impression on other women we encounter in villages and towns. Also, as the boom rod in itself is quite intimidating, having a woman working the boom will make it less intimidating."

So, in essence, what he's looking for is a prop, I'm thinking. Hmm... is this trip worth me forsaking my feminist ideals?

Saeed noticed my furrowing eyebrows and continued. "Anyway, let me continue with the route. Through the Nilgiri hills we enter Coimbatore - the industrial capital of Tamil Nadu, move on to Trichur, Cochin, take a boat from Allepey to Quilon and then Trivandrum and on to Kanyakumari. From here on to the temple town of Madurai, then to the ex French colony of Pondicherry and on to Chennai...." He pauses thinks some more and continues "We go to the Andamans too - to Kaalapani. From here to Tirupati to the famous temple of Lord Venkateshwara. We then pass through Kurnool to reach Hyderabad and Secunderabad. After checking out Gopalpur and Chilka lake - the 2 fishing communities from 2 opposite coasts, we go to the temple town of Puri, Bhubaneshwar and Cuttack. Through all this remember we are meeting people, spending time with them, talking to them, understanding their lives, their expectations of the country, their hardships... "

"We enter the Santhal belt of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and then Orissa. Have Nehru's ambitions for tribal India even been remotely realised? I truly wonder." He paused, looked out of the window again and put his cigarette out.

After a silence, he suddenly begins to rush through "From here onto Jamshedpur, through Rourkela, into West Bengal. Through the Bankura district and Birbhum to Calcutta and Chinatown. Then on to Purnea, Jalpaiguri and into the North East - Shillong, Guwahati, Tripura, Mizoram, Kohima and I will definitely stop at Nellie. From here, onto Gangtok, Darjeeling and finally Siliguri. Through Darbhanga, Patna and a boat ride through Varanasi. We go into the depths of UP - Ayodhya, Allahabad Haridwar, Dehradun, Lucknow.

The next leg of the journey will take us to Simla, then Manali and on to Ladakh.

From here into Kashmir, Srinagar, Jammu and then out into Pathankot, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Ambala and finally to New Delhi. From Agra on to Jaipur, Ajmer, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer towards the Rann of Kutch. From Kutch to Ahmedabad, Ratlam, Ujjain, Indore, Nasik and back to Mumbai." He took a deep breath and lit another cigarette.

By now I was almost on the floor, ready to do anything he asked of me. But I contained myself and very casually said "So when do we return?"

I got the job.

And now here I am lying on a very yellow sheet, staring at the very yellow ceiling of room #10 Hotel Radhika. So much for the allure of exotic locales. Indapur in Maharashtra was not on that list, Saeed. I've been deceived. But then poor Saeed's not having it easy either. We went to his room earlier to view today's footage - my oh my - a room begging for a harem to take residence. Red velvet headboard, red velvet curtains, red carpet - red, red, red the colour of passion. Ooooh. The honeymoon suite huh? As the viewing continued, I looked around at all the guys - some smoking, some drinking, chivda floating around. Who are all these people really? We met only 2 days ago at the pre-production meeting, and today we're all expected to laugh at each other's jokes, share each other's worries, give each other a shoulder to lean on... Why? All I remember of that pre-production meeting was walking into a room full of MEN. Much to my horror, I was introduced as 'Shai Heredia hailing from Goa'. How was I to understand that regional diversity was primary, on Saeed's agenda in crew selection? A little India we are. MP, Orissa, Kerala, Bengal, U.P, Punjab, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa... 'Hailing from Goa' though raised most eyebrows and brought forth many approving smiles from everyone in the room. Hmmm...Goa chick, bindaas chick!

Only a few names stuck in my head after that meeting - each with reason.

'Brown' the production manager. What a pain in the ass. A 'corporate' type. Brown University U.S.A. graduate (the obvious origin for our nickname). What is he doing here? Production manager on a documentary as production heavy as this? What's his story? Shaina Anand one of the Assistant Directors - name no 2 I couldn't forget. This meeting was our 1st official introduction. The unofficial one being "Saeeduncle have you seen my wallet? I can't find it anywhere." She seems a complete flake. Roommates for the next 5 months - uhhh makes me shudder. I wonder if we'll just get by, or end up becoming soul mates? 5 months on the road. 2 women living in each other's hair. Soul mates? NO WAY. We need to just survive each other. That's all. This is just a job. I'm not hoping to make any life long friends here. Jehangir was the cameraman, or so I thought, when Saeed mentioned the name at my interview. Only to discover, much to my disappointment, at the pre-prod meeting that I'd heard wrong. His name was really Jangle and he was from Madhya Pradesh and he definitely wasn't the lovely Jehangir I was looking forward to spending 5 months with. Shyamol - the editor. An FTII (Film & Television Institute of India) type. That's the other thing I remember about that meeting. I was in a room surrounded by FTII graduates. This editor here, at first, just seemed a tad too verbose for my liking. With every sentence, he went on to get more irritating, then more over bearing and finally just too bloody familiar, considering we'd only just met. After the meeting, attempting to break the ice he asked me

"SO you can sing huh?"

"Uhhh...Sing? Uhhh...Yes, I guess I can." An awkward answer to a terribly awkward question.

"No... you're from Goa so I was sure that you can sing. We need to have some singers on the trip."

Am I missing something here? Is this a picnic and are we all 10 year olds? The Goan stereotype, of course comes as no surprise. We Goans - the drinking, singing, dancing, 'shake it up, bugger it up' lot. How blasphemous that I can sing but do not flaunt my 'Goan appendages'? Somebody...quick...a guitar, a piano, a hip flask... please ...I feel so terribly inadequate.

It's insane! No matter who you are, or how educated, or how exposed, the Bollywood Goan will always rear its drunken head in forming one's perception of the Goans or 'Goanese' (if you choose to be obscenely politically incorrect). This perception, nonetheless, is not an entirely false one, when you consider how the Goan stereotype originated in the 1st place. Pick up 2-3 commonalties among people in the community, expose them to be the norm and there you have it - a perfect stereotype; a narrow perception perpetuated by an exceedingly powerful Bollywood. Is it asking too much, therefore, that people with the so-called 'right' exposure (which FTII prides itself on imparting) display just a little bit of intelligence and hold back fleeting offensive statements?

And then the piece de resistance -

Saturday 19th April - a day after the pre-production meeting and a day before our departure, I walk into my empty apartment, after a long day of manic organisation of life before a 5-month journey.

I turn on my answering machine:

'Hello Shai. Uhh...this is KG...Production Assistant for Saeed. When you come tomorrow please bring your guitar with you, okay? Bye! See you!'

WHAT???

I dropped my bags and burst out laughing.

The Faulty cable. The Faulty cable. Our 1st huge technical hitch and an entire interview is ruined. But we're lucky this once. Bombay's only 250 km away and a new cable arrives perfectly on time at 6am in the morning as promised by the technical guys. Day 1 and our initiation by fire. A much relieved lot and highly impressed by the efficiency of USL, we're now all set to leave.

"Leave for Bijapur and find a hotel before we get there" Saeed says. The 4 of us designated to the green Sumo happily take on the assignment. Cool!! We can chill out. Listen to some good music. And drive like the wind. No stresses at all. We take off with music blaring, speeding down the highway and chilling out in the car. No fears of 'the director sahib' looking over our shoulder disapprovingly at "these youngsters of today" and their need for speed.

"Lunch Time" Sumit announces indicating to a dhaba beside the road. Should we stop here or should we drive to Bijapur, book a hotel and then eat? Sumit looks at us in shock, lines forming all over his forehead "Are you guys crazy? Bijapur's another 2 hours away I'm starving." We stop at a quaint little dhaba with a well-manicured garden with neatly placed flower baskets and benches to sit on outside, and tables and chairs inside. We walk in. We're the only people there. A young boy appears, happy to see us, he directs us to a table. He's followed by an elderly gentleman who flashes a smile at us and comes to take our lunch order (or so we think). He hands us a Menu card "We only have eggs and bread to day." He says very candidly and flashes another smile. Okay...we look at each other and burst out laughing. Shaina and I don't eat eggs and Shaina doesn't even eat white bread...so there...we're going to have to starve. I order a Coke and Shaina heads for the counter to buy some biscuits which we wallop down in a hurry as we are suddenly made aware that today is going to be a no lunch day for us. Sumit disgruntled by the transformation of his BIG lunch into a measly breakfast orders 2 omelettes and bread. Abhinav orders the same. We hang out at the dhaba and chat with the owner and the little boy. Both keep floating in an out...chatting...washing plates. Who's doing the cooking inside? We really don't know. It turns out the dhaba is new and not many people have come here as yet. The fields behind belong to the owner and he opened this place on a lark. (Well obviously, I'm thinking, he's running it like that).

Sumit turns the music on in the car, and leaves the door open - music while we eat breakfast/lunch. But Brown. How unbearable can one person be? Over the past couple of days, I've been ignoring most of his weird comments and statements, but today I just took off and the entire drive up here we've been fighting like cat and dog, much to Shaina and Sumit's amusement. He brags so much about his work, life, friends... and most of all he lied about delaying our departure from his building. He actually told Saeed that I delayed him and to my horror he flatly denied his 20 minute delay to my face. The things people do to remain in the good books of the master. Pathetic! I just think the guy's terribly insecure. I guess he's totally aware that the entire crew has way way more experience than he does - in fact he has no film experience - and he knows that everybody's laughing at him. I guess with that constantly going through your head there is a need to prove yourself at every point - whether it be with selecting a hotel, to selecting from a menu, to allocating rooms, to even just having normal conversations with people on the crew. He (for some crazy reason) seems a little intimidated by me and by taking him on today, I've really unnerved him. It's quite hilarious actually because the arguments are about banal and childish things like taste in music, restaurants, bars...All absolutely boring stuff but then he thinks his word is Gospel and well...I don't think so at all. That's why I feel he should realise that and begin to be more open to other people's opinions instead of constantly blabbering about how his word IS IT...(calm down Shai).

Anyway...

...having Brown around makes this trip even more of 'a trip'. We're travelling for 5 months, shooting a documentary with a crew consisting of people from every state in the country and here we have a Production Manager (the most important guy on a trip of this magnitude) a Brown University graduate, a corporate type, totally clueless about filmmaking, totally clueless about the intricacies involved with a Production Manager's job, and in general totally clueless about the finer points of dealing with people - one can't bring Cuffe Parade attitude to small town hotels and villages now can one?

10 minutes up. No food.

20 minutes. Still No food. What if we see the other cars drive by. We'll be fucked. The panic button is pressed. We wait some more.

30 minutes. What's going on?

"Khana kahan hai yaar." Sumit shouts into the kitchen. Promptly, the little boy steps out with a tray in hand. Were they waiting for us to yell for the food or something? The boys wallop down their food. We pay the bill and head to the car. As Sumit gets into the driver's seat, my mind begins to tick. Now, I pride myself on my driving ability and what a perfect way to become an A1 driver than to drive while on this trip. And what better

time to start than now when no one's around. No Saeed. No Jennifer. No anybody. All there is, is an empty highway in front of me. I get in to the driver's seat. Sumit quite willing to share this task of driving hands me the key much to Brown's horror. I put the key in to start the car, and take control of the wheel. I want Sumit to sit in front for moral support I indicate to Brown, but NO. He refuses to get out of the front seat - his back problem remember? So what if I'm driving on the highway for the 1st time. So what if I've never driven a Sumo before.

The seatbelt's on. The car's in gear and we're off. It feels great to have this huge beast of a car in your control. It's serious power. What with a super powerful diesel engine roaring under the bonnet and power steering! Sitting on these high seats I feel like I am floating, actually I feel airborne. This is the cockpit and I am the pilot. A highway drive is a completely different experience altogether. It's serious stuff. Since it's my 1st time, I have to focus all my energy and concentrate really hard. Should I overtake? If I do overtake will I be able to time it right? Are my gearshifts too jerky? Despite the excitement and the preoccupation with getting comfortable with the car and getting a feel of the highway experience, my head keeps buzzing with insane thoughts. I suddenly feel exceedingly responsible for everyone in the car. We'd seen so many accidents already and this was Day2 - we had 4 cars, 18 people and miles and miles to travel. Anything could happen. There is a reality of road travelling that everyone has to deal with. I seemed to be dealing with it even before we left. As soon as I was told we were going to be driving through the country my mind started working overtime with visions of ghats, mountains, passes thousands of feet high, and every possible dramatic aspect of nature that could facilitate an accident began to come floating in and out of my head every so often. Fortunately I knew better than to cloud my perspective of the trip with these thoughts. I ignored my pessimistic and paranoid side. If I hadn't, I'd have never been here.

And then I hear Sumit's voice "Why don't you try going into 5th gear?" The 5th gear? The concept in itself seems alien. In Bombay using the 5th gear would mean having to multiply marine drive 10 times in order to do full justice. Wow! What a trip though! The freedom of 5th gear – riding down the highway, no gear change jhanjhat, and no driving stress, JUST CRUISIN.

BIJAPUR

SA

The Gol Gumbaz is truly a magnificent site. Said to be the world's second largest dome, after the St. Peters Cathedral in London, it stands tall and glorious, in the middle of the walled city of Bijapur, the old walls broken for the most part, now an enclosure of crumbling History. Like most Mughal cities, gates for entry adorn the north and the south. Bijapur is often called the Agra of the south. It was Jennifer's idea that the first icon, the first monument we show in our series be a saracenic one, one belonging to Muslim rule and one that people hardly know of. So, to the Agra of the south we have arrived. I stand around tentatively looking for direction. I still don't know what I am to do during a shoot. The tape has been labelled, the time code checked, the date and location spoken over the colour bars. As the camera crew takes a few external shots, I snap a few working stills and proceed to take shots of the Gumbaz with my own camera. I am to be the official still photographer, for which I am to use Jennifer's camera, A Pentax 110esuper(?) I myself invested a fair amount of money in rolls of transparency film. Give my colour slides over colour prints, any day. I am excited to have with me a Minolta 7i, the acquisition of which hasn't come through hard work but through emotional blackmail and undignified begging and grovelling. It took a lot of coaxing for my father to be 100% convinced, not of my dedication to film, or my travelling spirit, but of my 'guarantee of safety'. If my father was sure of one thing, it was my careless streak. Now, having acquired it, I am super particular of it, I guard it as I would guard dear life.

I enter the Gumbaz. I catch my breath. It truly inspires awe, the vaulted ceilings, the terraces and verandas and archways going 8 stories high. One wants to sit down, pause a moment and enjoy the silence, try to catch the beating of a heart.

But never! That is not to be. Public monuments are picnic spots, desecration zones. The Gumbaz has become more famous for its echoing gullies than its sheer splendour and grandeur.

I look on bitterly at the tourists around me as I repress my anger. Children run in and out of the tiered verandas. Screaming single words and popular ditties from film songs, people whistle clap shout, and create an all-together deafening roar. I hasten to get out, laughing sadly at the irony of what has become of the 'whispering galleries' of the Gumbaz.

I join the unit. They are taking ambient shots of tourists. Our eyes set upon a family group of about 10 people walking around the monument in quiet dignity. This grace and tranquillity is provided by a tall strapping lady, definitely over 60 years of age. Her body straight, her shoulders back, her 9-yard Maharashtrian Kaashti sari tucked tightly into her buttocks, she holds her head high. A huge circle, covers the width of her forehead in bright red sindoor. This radiating disk seems to provide her with her centripetal charm and energy. We are drawn to her and Saeed decides to interview her. She proves to be a solid lady, and a woman of few comments. She ruminates on her paan and answers our questions with nonchalance and at most times with indifference. Her sons and other members of her group are more eager to make up for her lapses of silence. She continues to stand there stoic, untouched, the brilliant corona on her forehead drawing us in, tempting us to get closer to her. Now and then, she looks up at the boom rod in annoyance. Saeed gently pursues her with questions, but it's a dead interview for the most part. Our questions about the country's 50 years of freedom bounce back at us. We watch the interview, with impatience. Jennifer comments to me. "Her classic good looks drew us to her. We should refrain from getting taken in by people's striking features." I couldn't agree more with her. I hoped we would leave her alone, we have no business disturbing her peace.

I am still hazy about our documentary. It's an interesting concept to be taking a poetic and momentous speech; Nehru's 'Tryst With Destiny' as a take-off point, for that document contains the dream ideal for a young nation, and 50 years hence, it might make for a good counterpoint to see how much of that dream has been realised and how much, in realisation have become living nightmares. Indeed, the very tenants of new India, Democracy & secularism, bringing with it the ideals for prevalence of equality, linguistic & regional minorities, seem to have become double-edged. Saeed intends to make the episodes, as a series of letters to Nehru, something that I see as nostalgia, without real purpose. Still, Saeed is too independent a director, I'm sure he will not make the series a state-paid tribute to the founding father of the Nehru dynasty. Yet, I can't help but think that if our journey purports to be a subaltern chronicling of oral contemporary history, then people's opinions of our first Prime Minister seem rather inconsequential, and retrograde.

We see a family resting on the steps of the monument. Saeed decides to interview them. We lead them to the back of the Gumbaz, where there is some semblance of quiet. Mr. Ramakrishnan, his wife and 2 young boys have come to Bijapur from Kaotal, a small town in western Karnataka to seek admission for their 10-year old son, in a prestigious science school in Bijapur. Now, they have come to see the famous Gol Gumbaz, a sight which Mr. Ramakrishnan admits have left him speechless. "I have forgotten my everything, sab hosh hi ud gaya...I can't express in words." Well, it's pity that that is not the case with the other tourists.

He expressed happiness at heralding India's 50 years of independence, saw progress in development and security with regards to higher education and science, and his children's future. "I come from a poor family. Now I'm enjoying a middle class existence. 20 years ago, I didn't have a radio. Now today I am enjoying a colour TV. On the whole our nation has got very bright future, but we need a non-corrupt political leader. I'm very much afraid because of the political disturbances and corruption." Saeed asked him what he thought of Democracy and Secularism adding that we had met a bunch of kids who had wanted dictatorship in the country. Mr. Ramakrishnan had begun to smile, almost as if Saeed had taken the damned word from his mouth. "I'm really one of them, to vote for dictatorship. Right from nearly 20 years I'm tilting towards dictatorship, because in a dictatorship no one can sit idle. Everybody has to work hard to get roti. In our democracy some people are getting richer and richer and most of the middle-lower class are becoming poorer and poorer. This, the gap will be minimised if, for a few period, say 10 years we have this dictatorship. As for Secularism! Now in fact in our country it has become very meaningless. In India we all talk so much about secularism. First of all, I am a doctor, in order to get admitted even in a hospital we have to fill a form where they ask, 'what is your caste?' Wherever, you want to fill a form you have to state our caste and religion. What is the meaning of secularism then? Our diversity is a good thing. But we need a best leader. One who can lead all castes & creeds, all rich & poor together. Not just Hindu, Muslim, Christian."

One more to vote for dictatorship. One more reaffirmation of the tenuous state of our democracy. Yet, there was a silver lining. The flamboyant city-bred teenagers, the black & white labourers and the staid and subdued Mr. Ramakrishnan had all supported the ideal of secularism. It was a reassuring sign, that 5 years after the dark clouds of majority communalism that had threatened to tear apart the weave, the fabric of secularism still lay knotted in the hearts of these Indians.

It is almost sun down. Our DP wants to take shots from the 8th floor of the Gumbaz. I accompany the unit upstairs and we take some wonderful shots of the city. The now crumbling wall visible from end to end marking the borders of history and kingdoms as they flourished over 300 years ago. I am made to walk up and down the corridors and am subjected to a number of retakes. Walk slowly, that was too fast. I go along with this bit of modelling. I hope we never use these shots. They seem really badly staged and have no consequence.

All this walking, climbing and modelling around has aggravated my ankle, and rendered me tired. My back hurts a little and I put my hand on my shoulder to rub it down. I soon realise that my Minolta is not with me. Panic mounts as I hobble down the winding flight of stairs and into the courtyard. I was sitting on the grass; the camera has got to be here. I try not to get worked up. It's only been a few minutes. I rush to every member of the crew. Everyone gives me different stories. Some look at me with mocking sadness, others with genuine concern, most too preoccupied to care. Shai and Sumit accompany me on my frantic hunt. I finally find my camera safe, inside the tempo. Relief and joy as I cling on to it. No one tells me how it got there. A nasty joke, I think. Nonetheless, I thank the entire unit for their care and concern and admonish them. I will get back at the culprit, I warn mockingly. I can see smirks on Ravi, Barkat and Shymole's face. They tell me its Brown who did it. I very much doubt that. Whoever picked it up did the right thing by not telling me. I have had quite a fright. I know I will have to be more careful. I will guard it more than I guard my dear life.

Back at the hotel, we start to transfer the footage. We already have a backlog since the viewing at Indapur was cut short. It is Shai's job to log the footage on her laptop. I am to help when required. Somehow, instinctively I take on equal responsibility of the logging. It is a mammoth task, one even 2 people are going to find hard to cope with, I am sure. In any case, at least Shai has a formal job, assisting the sound recordist. I have nothing much to do, and am dying to look important. We transfer all the footage and play back the VHS. And another technical hitch crops up. The visual has transferred but there is no audio! "Faulty cables!" Everyone deduces as a first knee-jerk reaction. After about an hour of trial and error we isolate the problem. And not surprisingly it turns out that our antiquated VCR, a beat up piece from the early 80's that has been lying junked in our office for the longest time cannot transfer sound. Well, another delay. Tomorrow, the boys will have to find a video repair shop in Bijapur.

We have dinner together in the dingy dining hall and sit around chatting while the mosquitoes have their feast on us. I take a short walk around the place. It is a sprawling complex, with rooms overlooking the inner courtyard that for lack of care has become an overgrown, untended mess. Hotel Adil Shahi was obviously designed with care. But executed all wrong. Like everything else in the country, I callously remark to myself. Great on paper. Ineffectual in practice. Take our constitution for free India! Ouch!

I am so aware of these dinner table comments; most educated middle class intelligentsia often makes. I wince every time my parents say things like that. How un-PC! As much as I loathe arm chair pontificators-people exercising the right to intellectualise their country, speaking authoritatively about the cartoons hurling tables and chairs in parliament for the whole nation to see on national TV day after day, the corrupt cops, the stupid reservation policies, subsidies, red tape, forms in triplicate, the U R in Q syndrome, a nightmare for urban Indians; bitter reactions to aspirations going unfulfilled without being grateful to the healthy and wholesome meal on the table or the laughter of their healthy and wholesome children -I know we all tend to do the same thing.

Back in our room, I struggle to close the wooden door. The bolts are screwed on crookedly, and I hurl my weight against it. There. Done. Shai is having the same problem with the bathroom door. I guess the windows can be left open, the entire frame looks crooked. We take turns to find a good plug point for the goodnight

mosquito mat contraption that KG has just delivered to every room. Finally, it fits into a socket, and yes we see the light. We are ready for bed. Tip-pit-plop-ribbit-ribbit-khrack-chack-chack-kree-kree-tip-pit-plop-khrck-chhack. Leaking taps, creaking fans, noisy crickets and talkative frogs, ambient tempo that soothes the mind before sleep moves up slowly.

22nd April, 1997.

Saeed is interviewing the gardener of Hotel Adil Shahi in the front lawns. We are to provide background movement. The entire unit carries their luggage to-and-fro from the lobby to the Sumos. Vehicles loaded, interview complete, we rest in the lobby waiting for KG and Brown to return from their quest for a video repair shop. I whip out my diary and begin to write. This morning has been special, and I want to put my fond memories down.

Dawn had seen us at yet another medieval monument, the Jod Gumbad. We had been told that it was the shrine of a great Sufi Baba. The sun had risen behind the domed monument, and in the treetops, the birds had chirped as a light morning breeze had rustled their nests. We had heard that people from all parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka, irrespective of their faiths flocked to the darga for healing and prayer. There was a pond by the darga, whose holy water was said to cure disease and insanity. Men, women and children lived in the compound of the Gumbad, some there on their own volition; some abandoned by their families. For months on end, they live in the ruins, their meagre belongings and worldly possessions stored neatly in niches and archways carved into the stone walls of the monument. I sat down quietly and watched a little girl, not more than 3 years of age, a little red kanji, draping her head and shoulder like Little Red Riding Hood walk up to the pond. She washed her hands and then headed back to where her ailing mother lay under a tree. She picked up a cup, walked up to the shrine, where from a kettle, someone filled her cup with water and handed her a slice of lime. Carefully, balancing the cup in both her hands, she tottered back to her mother, rubbed some of the water on her mother's stomach and made her drink the remainder of the liquid and suck on the lime. But her job wasn't done. The obedient daughter had yet to complete her duties. She walked back to the shrine and bowed her head down and kissed the darga before joining her mother in the shade of the tree.

Our cameraman took some ambient shots. Mostly of people praying, in meditation circling around the darga, or doing their ablutions with holy water. A man lay chained to a tree, a huge padlock around his ankles. In a cart parked behind a thicket of bushes and trees, lay a young child burning with fever being nursed by his mother.

Right in front of the monument sat a group of women, old and young, playing with children. Jennifer, Shai and myself sat down amidst them and exchanged stories. They were the most beautiful women I have ever met, it was hard to believe that till barely a few days ago, they had been possessed by the devil, had been 'banging their heads with rocks', as Sai Bi, a wonderfully talkative old woman had told us. If what they said was true, then there was certainly something to be said about the faith they had in the legendary *darga*. In fact, despite the obvious suffering that we saw around, the Jod Gumbad had provided us with quiet and sanctity and an instant peace of mind. And Grand Momma Sai Bi had charmed us with her comparisons of then and now. Our era and their era.

Voh zamaana alag tha
Yeh abhi ka zamaana alag hai
Hamara zamaana alag hai
Tumhara zamaana hai
Zamaana palti palti... palat ja rahi hai.

Those were different times, our times. These are different times, your times. Time is somersaulting. Going round and round. And everything is changing so fast.

And yet, between Old World Sai Bi and New Age Shaina, I could find common ground. On matters of food. Sai Bi's words of wisdom were my vindication. As Jennifer and Shai listened to her, wide-eyed and with new-found respect on matters culinary, I hugged her in delight, for here, I had found my soul mate.

"Insaan is no longer muzboot. He gets ill eating 'current' ka atta, 'current' ka chawala...! In Pehle ka zamaana, we had to wake up at 3 am to grind the wheat and flour ourselves, go walk a long mile to get water, with the khada on your head, then come back, then cook. Then drink water. Now everything comes ready made: water, heat, atta. We used to pees it in the chakki, now, everything is ground in the 'machine' with 'current'. It gets hot. Garam garam atta, garam garam mirchi, garam garam sab. There's no strength in the food. Jaldi pakathe hai, maa voh to tumhara 'current' ka hai naa. Fast cooking. You cook on the 'Bunsen'; we didn't have all that. Get the wood, light the wood, eyes should water your nose should run, that's cooking!!!! That's good khaana. That's thaakath ka khaana. And what is this bread? You'll eat machine made bread. And tea! Garam milk-chai you'll drink. All this kills the strength. It goes into you and kills your intestines, your guts. You'll walk around, chalte phirte nazar atte...chala bai chala, chala bai chala and you don't even know.

Such candid abandon, I had never come across before. She spoke of how they had to cover their faces in the earlier zamaana, then spying the men with the video camera lurking around; she hastened to throw her sari pallu over her face. "We still have to do this." But Jennifer caught her on that. "What rubbish, You're only doing it now, in front of the TV." Quick on the uptake, Sai Bi bursts out laughing and covers her face completely. "Ai, amma. No! Allah ho Akbar!" She bursts out laughing, suddenly very shy. Then she quickly makes the women bid us farewell. "They have come from bahargaon, say bye to them. OK by girls, you have far to travel!"

We indeed have far to travel and intend to make good progress. The boys have arrived with the VCR. Each car is loaded with a kool-keg. Brown puts drops of chlorine into each keg. We are to be at the mercy of 'cloriwat', to provide us with safe drinking water. I don't seem to care. For me, water is life, I seek it, drink it everywhere without a care as to what its source might be. We now drive full speed ahead on NH 13. I have travelled by road to Belur, Halebid, Shravan Belagola and Mysore and I recall being super-impressed by the Karnataka state roads and buses. Even the official tour guides assigned to sites by the ASI had been very well informed and had provided us with interesting bits of trivia and sound information, unlike many I had come across in Rajasthan and in North India. We stop for lunch at Hanuman's Dhaba. A highway restaurant that caters to the National Permit drivers that traverse these roads from the heartland of the north. Surprisingly, we eat a most delicious meal, north Indian style, the channa-masala has everyone smacking their lips and begging for seconds and thirds. Hanuman the owner, willingly complies and rolls out rotis over rotis, complemented with fried chilli pickle, Andhra style. Saeed interviews Hanuman, while the unit fills the edges of the frame, for once, not conscious of the camera, so engrossed are they in their afternoon fiesta.

HAMPI

We drive past the Almatti dam and head into the heartland of Karnataka. It's way past sundown. Our DP is driving the green Sumo. We settle down and chat, sing a few nostalgia-laced Hindi film songs to break the ice. He is a reticent chap, very taciturn; his voice has a whiny timbre. He seems older in his manner & disposition than most of us, a type of person who will share a joke or two, but maintain a healthy distance marked by professional hierarchy. I gaze out the window into the western sky and scream with delight. I can see the comet Hale-Bopp. Brighter and bigger than could ever be seen from amchi mumbai, she swirls and throws light into the clear sky. I am instantly reminded of home. Sky gazing always makes me a little homesick. I cried as I stared at the stars while on my first trip away from home. I was 9 years old and on a 5-day school trip to Goa and had been the punching bag for my seniors, as they had discovered me, sitting alone in the garden outside our hotel sobbing gently. 'I'm missing ma and daddy. Daddy always shows me the constellations when we go to the beach! Look, that's Orion's belt!'

Now of course, I long to be away from home. I have an unquenchable wanderlust. I think warmly of my stargazing parents. When they are far away, I derive from them the same calm and peace I get from the stars. A familiar and trusting, constant and steady guiding light. Tempting you, beckoning you to choose your own path, blaze your own trail.

Never showing the way, just being around. I am grateful to them for giving me this freedom. In my recent adult years I have travelled a fair amount in India on my own. I have no savings, whatever little I have earned I've been quick to spend by getting away from home and travelling as often and as far as my purse strings able me to reach. And to think that this time round, I will get paid to see my entire country is almost unbelievable. I thank my stars, our stars. Trusting companions to every traveller. Then. Now. Forever.

The half-moon goes up in the east, lighting her half of the sky. Mammoth shadows loom large over us. The topography has metamorphosed from barren land to a battlefield of time. Giant rocks 20-30 feet high lie scattered about the earth, on either side of the highway. Like ancient meteorites from an end of the world shower. Their silhouettes demand silence. The wind whips my hair against my face. I pull the flapping wisps off my face, surprised at the moisture that wipes off my eyes. I am so happy. We will be in Hampi soon.

23rd April.1997.

The giant rocks shine under the merciless sun. The dark oily surfaces glint, the light mustard hued facets contrasting, creating their own patterns as the sun moves up. Rock piled over rock, balancing precariously, like stubborn empires, withstanding the test of time. The land is vast and barren, short fat green brush spring out of the earth with sporadic regularity. A lone bird dives off a high rock, swoops past the ground and soars off into another land. Natures art, surreal in the morning bright.

An occasional palm tree passes us by. Gently, the hand of man begins to interfere with this vista. Smaller stones scattered about the edge of the road leap to life. Archways beckon. Man's leitmotif of love and beauty appear on these stones. We are travelling along an ancient road, that man has paved for centuries.

I long to get down and savour this symbiosis. Mans art. His marvel with stone complementing natures creations.

We move on. Sadly, I have to experience this poetry in motion. Temple ruins spring up alongside; the gateways get more elaborate. Soon I find myself in the centre of the testament of a great kingdom; I have yearned for long to see.

We park our vehicles amongst the busses and vans. The sun beats down, the temperature a few good degrees hotter than the rest of region. The ruins are spilling over with people. We soon find out that we have missed the annual temple Rathayatra - that celebrates the marriage of Shiva and Parvati - by a couple of days.

We take some shots of the architecture. The yatri who are here, on summer holiday or pilgrimage have come largely from the villages of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The urban middle class is not conspicuous by its absence. Still, foreigners abound in plenty, shirtless and lobster red they walk around in a daze.

A procession walks down the main street. We rush to shoot it. The drumbeats frantic, the energy level of the dancers defying the sapping power of the heat. As tourists pile on to a local bus, that is honking desperately overpowering the beat, we notice a good number of foreigners taking up space on the roof of the bus. I have always appreciated the European traveller. True, their money goes a long way here, and they can travel the land cheaply by their standards. Yet, they are so adaptable to their surroundings and really explore spaces. I could not imagine any of my friends back in Bombay travelling by local bus. Still I do nothing to suppress my irritation that mounts when they come east to seek spirituality. The well done lobster on the top of the bus has a tattoo covering the length of his back "Om nama shivaya, Bom Shanker."

People live in Hampi. It is not a long forgotten ghost town. Pilgrims and travellers live under the shelter of the pillared ruins, cows graze; fires burn. On the other side of the pond is the old Hampi market. It still functions today and is the walkway to the temple. We take shots of the architecture. Our motley crew is bound to gather a lot of attention. Little children pass us by, following us, pleading us with requests. What is it they want, we wonder. They all seem to be driven by a single quest for pens! We gather as many as we can and give them off. Strange request though, Pens?

The noon sun is blinding. We call it a wrap and go back to our hotel. We are staying at yet another KSTDC hotel. Hotel Indraprastha. This place too is designed with attention and care, and unlike its Adil Shahi counterpart, lives up to every bit of its grand design. The long cool pillared corridors and flat ceilings are a decent attempt, imitative of the Vijaynagari architecture. The rooms are simple, neat and above all, very functional. The food is fresh and light, but more than the basic amenities this hotel provides us with is the warmth and sincerity of the staff that I will not forget. The meal they had whipped up for us last night was quite a treat considering we had checked in well past their kitchen hours.

It's too hot to go out again. We sit down to watch the Bijapur footage. Saeed has made a rule that the footage be watched by the entire unit. Shai & I take turns making a rough inaccurate log, the actual logging will be done only once we are able to transfer. This way, we are able to complete the description of the shots. Sumit zooms in and out of the room with the handcam. Most of the gang is caught napping or dozing off, some even in deep slumber. Saeed is clearly irritated. This is a working day. He roars and wakes everyone up. He vows to use this footage in the series.

By 4:00 pm., we head to the Vithaleshwar temple. A fight breaks out outside the entrance. A very vocal lady appears to be very agitated. She is with a group of about 30 people. She argues with the gatekeeper in her native Kannada. Raju, the camera attendant is from Karnataka. He translates the entire altercation. She is upset that the authorities have charged an entrance fee to the temple. It is an archaeological site, the authorities argue, not a functioning temple. The argument ends with the party moving off. They don't have the money to enter.

Elitist measures. An Opposition Party calling card. True, any measure for the comfort and well being of the consuming people, if charged a price gets dubbed as elitist in our country. So we have no more than 4 first class compartments on a local train, a one-rupee charge for a jogging park comes under flack. Anything for free or subsidised is branded populist. The arm chair pontificator greets these measures with cynicism. If we charge a fee, the people will respect the parks amenities. If people are willing to pay, why not have more first class compartments? True. True. True. But in a country where this fast and rapidly all consuming middle class is growing in geometric proportions to the population growth, how infrequently do we spare a thought for the over 800 million other fellow citizens? I wish we could think more often, and save a penny or two for all our thoughts.

Rs 5 means nothing to me. We should be charged Rs 50. The foreigners, a lot more. That group should be given a subsidised entrance. In 50 years we have planned a grand design. But in a post liberalised India, this design, I fear might be abandoned for a grander, more immediate one, limited to the benefit of a chosen few.

The Vithaleshwar temple is famous for its singing pillars. We watch, amazed as the guide hits his fingers on the ornate carved stone. Sa re ga ma pa dha ni Sa - Sa ni dha pa ma ga re sa. Each note produced by a firm whack on each of the octagonal facets of the pillars. No one admits that his notes are terribly off-key. We express our fascination, as do other tourists. I try my hand at it. A little hit and my fingers hurt; the sound I create-a bare dull thud. I wonder if our guide has steel joints in his fingers. Surely his bones must have broken. And that light hollow metallic sound. From the solid stone pillars?

Saeed is shooting the unit with the guide. Again, I am wondering if we need to waste footage on all of this. Our unit looks like a bunch of freak anachronistic hippies. Short batik kurtas with cotton pyjamas, Jennifer, Shai and myself, blue pink and orange. My dupatta over my head and shoulders. My cameras dangling. Brown has a cap on. A handkerchief dangles from it, he looks like an Arab sheikh. Sumit too has a dust cloth hanging from his cap, held firmly in place by the elastic band that stems from his shades. He has a bandanna on his forehead, one he made himself. It's painted with the Indian tricolour!

Parvej, the dude, a bright orange singlet, muscles flexed as he carries the camera on his shoulders. Suddenly I am beckoned and the camera is dumped on my shoulders. 'These girls do nothing. Let's see how strong they are.' I readily agree. For the remainder of the day, I am to carry the camera, recorder and the tripod, while the male members of the unit smirk and giggle. I wonder why I don't dump the weight back on them. My ego comes in the way. I want to prove that girls are as strong as boys are.

And perhaps, in playing the game according to their rules, just as immature. Then to Shai's delight and chagrin, she is handed the gun & the rod. Shai has her first go with miking. She squints towards the western light, her arms taut and flexed, her face tense and contorted, the boom rod held high above her head. Jangle shoots her as she trains the rod in the direction of a crowd of people near the singing pillars. I see the boys exchange smirks. They seem satisfied that the girls are finally working!

Warmed up and ready for some more action, we attempt to take some track shots. This makes Barkat & Ravi's day. Out comes a skateboard complete with a tripod screwed firmly on. But the ground is too rough, the track shot, jerky and crooked. Not to admit defeat, the boys bring out 2 long wooden falis. I have been wondering what crazy paraphernalia we are carrying in the back of the tempo. Wooden patlas, lights, coloured gels, skimmers, 1/2 dozen reflectors, cutters, light stands... The fali doesn't work either; the skateboard keeps running off the track. While packing up, the fali hits Hari on his forehead. He quietly nurses his wound as the other boys joke around. I am happy they got a chance to expend their energy. They were getting restless.

We are back at the old ruins. It's almost sundown. Here again I am made to model, walk up and down the ruins with Sumit and Mihir, waste the precious energy of my lithium battery by clicking slides of next to nothing out of frame as our DP wishes to take some low-key shots of temple roofs silhouetted against an orange sky, interspersed with the flash from my camera.

We pack up for the day. On an impulse, I ask our director if we can hang around and explore the Hampi ruins for a little longer. The ready agreement comes as a pleasant surprise. Barkat, Ravi, Parvez, Raju, Sumit, Chandi, Shai and I stay back.

Barkat and Ravi have done us a huge favour. They have scored some weed for us, me and Shai from a Sadhu. A huge packet for Rs. 30/-. Eager to split up from the rest of the crew, Shai and I make our way to the Hampi market.

We find a secluded ruin. Shai rolls the stuff in a cigarette. We light up and enjoy the dusk falling over the land. This is a bonding moment for the two of us. Less than a week ago, Shai attempting to break the ice, curious to find out what I'm like, had asked me if I smoked. Cigarettes? I had asked. Sometimes. No I mean smoke, smoke! My face had lit up. I had nodded my head vigorously. I can recollect the lovely smile that had lit across Shai's face. We had connected then. Now barely a week later, here we were in Hampi. Stoned. Destined to spend the next 18 weeks together. We laugh aloud. And toast to a memorable evening. Our first joint together.

Giggling like best friends, we traipse down the ruins into the market place. Evening lights are coming on; the market bears a festive air and is teeming with people. Existing within the old framework of 300 years ago, the market place by night is lined with sellers displaying their various wares. Chuna-miti, Haldi-Chandan, limestone & clay, turmeric and sandalwood, hillocks of rainbow-hued coloured powder lie in equal sized mounds. Lured by the fairy lights up ahead we move on. There, resting on a pedestal stands the soothsayer, the fortune-teller. Touts entice us. A loudspeaker calls one and all. For 2 rupees you can listen to your future. The mystic man stands barely a foot and a half tall, his entire hollow PVC body riddled with tiny lights flashing in frantic alternation. I decide to go first and excitedly put the disco LED headphone on my ear. With a seriousness that belies the ridiculous aura of the robo-jyotish, I listen, intently. 'You will travel far and wide. Take care of your health and you will go places!' Shai takes over from me, the pre-recorded cassette; the voice distorted plays on giving her similar gyan into her future. We crack up, thank the bhavishyavani, our guru, and proceed. We bump into Sumit, walking the streets alone, having a good time. I cannot resist the urge to shop in this kitsch filled market place. We buy some beaded chains and I fall in love with a black stone shallow plate that I deduce must be an idli mould. It weighs a stone, but I am determined to carry it with me. We are nearing the temple. The Rath looms large in front of us its wheels almost 6 feet high. We are blessed by the temple tusker, a baby elephant painted and decorated and are accosted by charlatan Sadhus, who call out to us in English, anxious to sell us their stock of marijuana. We beat a hasty retreat.

As we walk back, we hear the strains of a guitar. We step into this little roadside stall. Bob Marley smiles down at us from a huge chaddar. The strumming ambience provided by a German tourist. The owner invites us in. He is a young local; his German compatriot lives with him in the tiny one room at the back. This is his fourth month in Hampi. Having done his spiritual route...Manali, Benaras, Goa, he has fallen in love with Hampi. We hang around and chat, for a while, both men thinking that I'm Israeli and Shai Hispanic. This is not unusual. Indian women aren't seen very much, travelling alone. They light up a joint and we share it. We are behaving like hippy-dippy tourists I am aware of this and a little embarrassed. It's almost 8:00. We have to meet up with the gang. We say goodbye to the strangers.

I soon realise that I have left my security blanket, my dupatta at the cafe. In 3 days it has become an integral part of my being. I am irritated with myself and my carelessness. And it's too late to go back and retrieve it. Oh well, it's a beautiful hand printed cotton cloth. I am sure that our friends will put it to good use at their cafe.

After a sumptuous meal back at the hotel, the unit meets up for a briefing. A lot of rules have been laid down, things have changed. I have sensed this coming. Indeed, I have wondered why this did not come earlier. There is to be a new seating arrangement as Saeed feels that cliques are emerging and that the unit was having too much fun. Our party-of-four has been broken; I am to be in the tempo traveller with the camera crew and the director, while Sumit & Shai will enjoy the green comfort of the Sumo. My left ankle has swollen up again. I haven't been exercising caution in matters orthopaedic and otherwise. Today's activity has taken a toll on my ankle Back in the room; I bandage it and start my bedtime routine.

Since the first night in Indapur, Shai has been watching my nightly schedule with silence. Today, she ventures forth and tells me that she thinks I am weird and that my vials and bottles and hot water therapies freak her out. I am carrying a huge quota of softovac, an ayurvedic mixture that I have grown accustomed to and little white plastic bottles of homeopathic davai to keep my stomach and the rest of my body in order. Before rising and setting, I drink copious amounts of water, if I find the provision to heat it, I believe that I will have a good sleep, or a good head start to the day. I am chronic, my set of problems unique to my crazy body and mind. I am an insomniac too! It strikes me as really funny. It has taken Shai a few days to comment on my quirky mind and bowel habits. My mother and friends in Bombay were the first to side up with Shai. Your poor roommate, she will have to deal with your crazy antics for 5 months.

I laugh. Shai is going to get to know me really well. I fill her in on my physical history, go to graphic lengths to describe simple bodily acts till she begs me to shut the fuck up. We talk into the night, bonding. We talk about ourselves, our likes & dislikes, loves & hates, common friends. Our views on cinema and the journey we are undertaking and the strange fate that has thrown us together. I was to be the only young woman on the trip. 6 days before departure, Saeed under a very suspect pretext sent out an alert for another girl. 'But we're already too many, I had whined. And what will she do?'

A highly hypocritical reasoning is hurled at me: What sort of a comment are we making about 50 years of India's independence if there's only one young woman on the trip? Besides a woman operating the boom will help in villages. We need an assistant to the sound recordist!

I remember sulking around office all day as a number of women came in for interviews. Friends and colleagues of the already finalised male members of the crew. I was in a terrible mood. The stench of hypocrisy never fails to settle in my brain. I had continued typing out my research, anger and dissatisfaction mounting as I went through a state-wise Human Development Index ranking. I didn't think that another woman on the trip could mean companionship for me. Didn't see that logistically it made sense too, we were a 17-member unit, with 2 women, one being the director's wife. Surely I was not going to be given a separate room.

When I heard that a girl called Shai had been selected, I laughed out loud in disbelief. Heredia? Shai Heredia? Fate definitely had a hand in this. Shai's parents are known to my parents. They are new but good friends and my parents had recently returned from a wonderful holiday at her parent's house in Goa. But the 2 of us had never met. Both had been aware of our common interests and careers, though. Shai had no experience with boom operating, but had been chosen from the bunch of older, more experienced women

because of her disarming nature, and her bindaas attitude. Tonight, I confess to Shai that I suspected Shymole's hand in fishing for another woman. The thought of having to bear with the director's wife and me for 5 whole months would be a big enough reason to frustrate the all male crew!

As it turns out, they will now have to deal with Shai. An equally frustrating task, I am sure. I am so grateful that she is here. We can see our friendship causing future problems. Shai and Shaina. Frick & Frack? The terrible two. Double trouble. Bombay's bitches. We laugh out loud and get our cheap thrills giving our partnership nasty names and ourselves undue importance. We are too cool. On that self-aggrandising note we call it a night. Wake up is 4:00 am.

24th April, 1997.

5:10 am. The moon is setting. Fires are dying. Tungabhadra Lake is coming to life. As dawn begins to break, pilgrims enter the water for their morning dip. Some pray to the rising sun and bless themselves with the holy water; others seem busy with their daily ablutions. Here, I find a sanctity and beauty, in devotion and way of life that I haven't seen at other pilgrimage places. Temple bells ring out, children laugh about and splash in the water. Yet, there is an air of peace and quiet. A boat appears on the lake, an unusual disc of woven cane, I wonder how it succeeds in staying afloat. It gracefully glides off to the other bank. The landscape is stunning. A flat, dark bathing ghat, gently sloping towards the water. There are icons carved on the floor, people walk over them freely. We take some ambience shots. My camera has run out of lithium, so I am shooting with the official camera. It has not been working; the meter reading that had appeared faulty from the start of the journey has all together stopped working. I'm setting the exposure, by intuition, trying to judge the sunlight on my own merit. Such beautiful faces, their peace of mind evident in the reflecting light of the lake. Away from the ghat, Sadhu's sit in caves, deep in meditation. I have the shutterbugs, I click away. An eye snaps open, the deep-in-spiritual-contemplation Sadhu demands money for posing! Indeed his dress and get up, his painted face, his raw hide skin, matted dreadlocks provide a picture postcard pose for foreign tourists, me included. With eastern spirituality for sale, I can't fault this sage for becoming media savvy.

I go through a short bout of guilt pangs, for behaving like such a tourist. I quickly psyche myself and they go away.

Saeed accosts a Sadhu as he emerges from the river. He has donned a red kurta, and his dark face bears a gentleness and sincerity that is exceedingly calming. He strikes us as a genuine sort, as he speaks of the far lands he has travelled. He gave up his farming life in Andhra Pradesh 8 years ago and since then has travelled the length and breadth of the country on his spiritual quest. He has a travel companion, a man who joined him along the way, somewhere in Rajasthan. They haven't communicated with each other, but have been travelling together for months. Saeed spots a chain on his neck and asks him what the pendants were. He tells us that the first one, a *tulsi* bead is from Kashi and the *taweez*, he picked up from Baba Sharief's *darga* in Ajmer. His parting words to us were *Khudha Afiz*. We had our picture post card of India. A Sadhu. Matted hair and painted face, wearing Hindu-Muslim brotherhood on his sleeve.

My sensory devices are suddenly activated; the aroma of steamed *idlis* drifts past me. I go with the flow, the hunger in my stomach propelling me to fall at the feet of a matronly lady, a basket of tiny idlis at her feet. At Rs 1/- for 4 fluffy little cakes, I soon run up a bill of 10 rupees. I have an idli fetish, and these are my first in South India. The unit follows my chosen path and soon an impromptu breakfast session breaks out, the old ladies hot cakes completely sold out. More *idli valla's* show up out of nowhere. I daresay I tuck into some more. Behind us is the lake's sole eating joint. *Bom Shanker*. It hasn't opened but a gaudily painted board displays the menu. Clearly catering to the Non-Indian tourist, the menu comprises of jam & bread, sunny side ups, omelettes, muesli and milk with bananas, French fries and fritters. The meal plans, American, European, continental are punctuated with laugh riot spelling mistakes. We have to take a picture of this. I start to refill my camera only to discover that I hadn't loaded it in the first place. Ravi and Parvej have a field day at my expense. I feel foolish and incapable but laugh along at my stupidity.

Back in the Hampi market, the camera crew goes to take shots of the Rath we had seen the night before. Shai and I walk through the maze like lanes of the settlements. In the middle of a crowded alley, Shai spots a

cigarette shop, selling every desirable brand of foreign cigarettes, including the elusive Camel Lights that are hard to come by even in Bombay. She quickly acquires some Marlboro lights and wonders of wonder, though not as surprisingly as we would like to believe Rizlas!

I fear that Hampi is turning into a hippie paradise. And sadly, right now, we are being firm patrons.

We check out of Hotel Indraprashta. The entire unit thanks the staff. I make a note of their names. Jennifer has bought a bunch of thank you cards that we plan to send along the way. Truly we have had a most pleasurable stay in Hampi and our heartfelt thanks goes out to (names from diary).

GOA SH

25th April, 1997.

"Tomorrow morning, we'll leave for Goa" Saeed announces with great aplomb at the dinner table. Perfect. Well done Sumit! So, the 'earnest Assistant Director' performance paid off. Earlier this evening, a very annoyed Sumit burst into our room "I can't believe we're not going to Goa. We're in Dharwad, Goa's only ___kms away. It's ridiculous not to go." Aha, I'm thinking, so my hard sell on 'the beauty of Goa, it's white sand, blue sea...' has worked on this landlocked Lucknowi mountain trekker who's only sight of the Arabian Sea has been from the filthy sands of Juhu beach. If I work on him just a teeny weeny bit more my bakra here will do very well in the master plan. Brainwash Sumit and send him to our leader. I have no time to waste. We're practically knocking on my parents' door and besides, I can feel the red konkan mud beckoning. I have to get there. I slip into my manipulative best. Sumit's frayed nerves making him a perfect victim. 20 minutes of reason and rationale continue. "Sumit, you're the only 1 he'll listen to. Only you can make him change his mind". All the earnest AD reasons to be thrown into the conversation with Saeed are thrashed out - 'it is essential to cover Goa as part of the documentary as it was a Portuguese colony', 'it received independence only in 1961', 'it's India's youngest state', 'we're supposed to cover every state, we can't leave Goa out', 'we're so close'. Sumit left the room an empowered man all set for the performance of his life. It had obviously worked. Mission accomplished. I will finally be able to meet my parents, have my fill of prawn curry rice and receive the 'fond farewell' I missed on Day 1.

7am. The crew galvanises like they never have before. The early hour posing no dampener on our high spirits. We're off to Goa and everyone has already shifted into the Goa party mode. The map is pulled out. Dharwad - Goa, 150 km, about 5 hours, via Anmod Ghat. ANMODGHAT- I had had the privilege of travelling on it innumerable times en route to Goa for summer holidays. Sliced into the mountainside, cruising through forests with wild life, the Anmod ghat was a fitting start to adventure holidaying in Goa. The highlight of my journey was a surreal boulder, that was soon christened 'Shai's pet rock'. This mammoth sized boulder, sticking out very precariously from the mountain, hanging directly over the road, threatened to make it's final drop on every car that went under. But, I remained convinced that my very special ritual would save me. Stare at it directly, and hold your breath until you clear it. Here I am many many years later looking to perform that ritual again.

As the road winds through forests, over steep climbs and perilous descents, travelling shots become the order of the day. We cruise quietly through. All of a sudden, the tempo in front of us comes to a halt. Saeed and Jangle step out and call for the camera attendants, Barkat and Ravi. Shaina & I jump out of our newly assigned seats in the white Sumo with Ayub 1 wondering why our entourage has stopped slap bang in the middle of a ghat. Inspiration coupled with boredom has put Jangle in the mood for adventure, it turns out. Music to all our ears. These silly travelling shots from the Sumo do absolutely no justice to the most picturesque ghat in the Deccan plateau. Jangle wants to put the camera in the back of the tempo and shoot the other 3 Sumos winding up and down. But how? The tempo windows are tinted and really small. An intense discussion ensues. Barkat (lightman and Mr. Fix it) makes some outrageous suggestions, and despite ridicule from his mates, he gives into his urge to experiment. Along with his very loyal friend Ravi, Barkat gets down to his antics, as the rest of us stand aside and watch. First they unload the back of the tempo. Load 2 trunks instead. Cover the trunks with a spare mattress so it takes the shape of a mini bed. The doors are opened wide and are tied with rope to the carrier on top so that they remain open.

From 1 of the white Sumos, Barkat unscrews 2 seatbelts. Jangle is then asked to get into the back of the tempo. Once there, he is made to sit on the mini bed facing out of the door. Chandi and Raju with the recorder are made to climb in behind him. Chandi hangs on to a seatbelt snapped tight around Jangle's waist so that Jangle doesn't fall out and Jangle is tied with another seatbelt to the camera so that the camera doesn't fall out. Jangle's hands are now free to operate the camera. AMAZING!

We jump into our cars and take off. The balancing act of man and machine in front of us leaves most of us nervous as hell. I distract myself with the search for 'Shai's pet rock'. Where is it? We've already been on this ghat now for 30 minutes and it hasn't shown up at all. Could it have finally fallen? On a car? I stare out of the window very perplexed by that thought. 10 minutes later, Jangle's hand goes up and the tempo comes to a slow halt. I breathe a sigh of relief. Jangle has a smile on his face. The little stunt worked I presume.

A triumphant Barkat steps out of the tempo - the man of the hour, no doubt. Innovation his forte, we discover. He comes straight to the Sumo Shaina and I are sitting in and mutters something to Ayub. Ayub looks at him aghast. We're made to get out. And to everyone's horror. Barkat begins to unscrew the back door of the Sumo, promising Ayub as he does that he'll fix it back. Jangle, obviously on a high with all this machismo, now wants to take some low level shots of the road. As the rest of us hang around, jobless as ever, we notice a strange figure coming up the hill. On a closer look, we notice a heavily bearded man on a heavily loaded bicycle. He cycles up to us, smiles, waves, and cycles on. Intrigued by this strange character, I run behind him looking for what might be a very interesting interview on Anmod ghat. He sees me and stops. With his smattering of English, he tells me that he's from Japan and is travelling around India on a bicycle. Unreal! I smile at him, exchange a few half bows and turn around to look at our jantha party. Sigh! This guy's on a cycle, and look at us. I can see Jangle getting into the Sumo. I run back to find Shaina quite happily handing her neck pillow to Jangle to use as a support under the lens. 3 hours we've spent on this stunt photography. For what? To enrich the film? I don't think so. To rejuvenate the crew's already waning interest in the documentary? Most likely.

Highway No __ leads us into Goa from the east. We stop for lunch at Ponda. Perfect. Old Goa is just 20 minutes away from the Divar crossing. I'll be home in half an hour. A huge surprise for Mum and Dad. Wait a second? The crew plans on coming with me. "Visit Shai's parents, check out the village and maybe take some interviews". I completely forgot Sumit the bloody double-crosser swung that in while working on Saeed. No No No. This is not going to be the surprise I'd planned. It'll be more of a shock. Some prior intimation is required. I head to the restaurant phone. After what seems like a million tries, the Goa department of telecommunications finally gives in to my persistence. After doing the initial 'Surprise Mum I'm 20 minutes away' bit, I drop the bombshell. "What? Oh my God!" She shouts out to my Dad "Kit, Shai is in Ponda. She's coming here with the whole crew." "Should I organise tea, coffee, snacks, some cake..." I leave my mum fretting on the phone. "Bye Mum. I'll see you soon."

I am designated driver for the newly appointed camera car - the Sumo, the tempo having been banished to the back after Jangle's revelation that the Sumo is much smoother post the stunt photography. Over an incline, and here we are in the magnificent city of Old Goa - the once capital of the Portuguese colony that became famed throughout the world during the 1st 100 years of Portuguese rule. Unfortunately only a handful of imposing churches and convents still remain. Completed in 1605 the laterite Basilica of Bom Jesus (housing the tomb of St. Francis Xavier) and the Se Cathedral (1619) are the 2 most prominent. We drive past them as I relate a quick highly selective history of these magnificent monuments. "You know, the square of the Se Cathedral - the yellow one on your right - was where, during the Goa inquisition, the guilty had to undergo their last act of faith. If they failed it they were burnt at the stake. And this one on the left - The Bom Jesu is where the preserved body of St. Francis Xavier rests. The same body that had its toe chewed off by an over excited young woman during one of the expositions." Saeed looks at me, a little perturbed by my very gruesome welcome into Goa.

A left turn, and we're under the Viceroy's Arch (built in ____ to commemorate Vasco da Gama's entry into Goa) and down to the ferry point for Divar island. "Here we are Saeed. This is the ferry we take to get to Divar." Saeed's face lights up. Coconut trees, a river flowing by, old churches in the distance, an island and a ferry - all just too perfect to imagine.

Jangles' focus remains fixed in the viewfinder as he makes sure to capture these sights as perfectly as he can. We stop at the jetty. A ferry has just come in and people and cars begin to come off. Suddenly Jangle breaks away from the camera and exclaims loudly, "Arre! Cars can also go on the ferry? I thought it was only for people." I burst out laughing.

"Shai! Is this an island?" Saeed beams as he steps off the ramp, evidently quite astonished at the vast expanse of land before him. Much like everyone else who visits here for the 1st time, he too, I'm sure, expects to see a very dapper Kit Heredia (Onassis?) standing at 'his' private jetty and welcoming you to 'his' private island. Unfortunately such tropical island exotica, such pleasurable decadence thrives only in dreams. The reality is that Divar is one of 4 islands in Ilhas, is ____Km with a population of 3,500 distributed over 3 picturesque villages. Divar is far from the city slicker's notion of an island as a) you cannot see the other end from where you land b) there's no beach; it's encircled simply by the Mandovi river and marshy land and c) there are no mysterious forests crawling with 'natives' and poisoned arrows. Yet, Divar is the most enchanting island in all of Goa. Steeped in history, the island was home to the Saptakoteshwara temple - the 1st Hindu temple in Goa. A number of other temples sprang up ever since and the island thus became known as Devaddi or God's place.

As designated driver cum tour guide, I climb into the Sumo with Saeed beside me. People stare. At me. At the camera. At Saeed. At the crew. Who are these people? Where are the stars? What are they shooting? Terribly embarrassed, and in super quick Rajnikant style I put on my dark glasses. This sleepy island has been invaded by an unwieldy bunch of 18 people and 4 giant vehicles, and I am the Judas. I quickly put the car into gear and take off. "You know, Saeed my parents live in the ancestral home. Over the years my mother has been renovating the house. But they only moved here 8 months ago..."

"Wait, wait" Jangle interrupts "let me set the frame, then you start talking." I move around uncomfortably in my seat, directed by Jangle as he sets the frame. "Fine. Now don't move from that position." What? How am I going to drive this damn car? Hari passes me a lapel mike. I struggle to put it on. All this with trying to keep one eye on the road and the other on the little monitor tucked under the dashboard careful not to destroy Jangle's so carefully composed frame. A large face fills 3/4th of the screen. It's mine. A wide angle shot with my cheeks and dark glasses right in the foreground - gross distortion. I cringe at the sight. At least the dark glasses can go. I take them off. "No no put them back on." Jangle shouts. I do as I'm told. I can feel the camera now practically caressing my cheek. With all this, I'm expected now to make casual conversation. Pointing to the kilometres of fields on either side and sounding stilted as hell I burst into a litany.

"See these fields, they're rice fields. " I point up to the approaching hill at the end of the road. "Look! Up there you can see the Divar church. It's apparently one of the last Baroque churches in Goa." Apart from a few oh's and aah's no other reactions come forth. I continue. "Divar is a very hilly island. The 3 villages St. Mathias, Piedade and Naroa are distributed over these hills. My ancestral home is in Piedade. Oh, actually, Naroa is where the legendary Goan folk song 'Aao sahiba porthori vetha' originated. It's the story of some women who try to bribe a fisherman to take them across the river. They offer him jewellery. So that's why the song goes 'Ge ge ge ge ge, ge ge sahiba' but he refuses 'maaka naaka go, maaka naaka go.'" Jangle cuts in "Accha that song, from Bobby." Man, the power of the filmi reference. It'll never cease to amaze me.

We reach a fork in the road and take the narrower, more uphill road on the left. We are now in Piedade. We drive past a row of pretty little cottages; one of which houses the pharmacy. With no more information about the island to impart I promptly burst into nonsense talk. " See that little cottage on your left, it's the local pharmacy." We drive up and down the undulating road, past charming and beautifully maintained old homes. Their residents peacefully sitting out in the balcao are suddenly shaken out of their slumber as our contingent rumbles by.

"... and here on the right, is the village chapel." A white chapel comes into frame. An old woman is seen praying outside. A quick rosary before heading to the market, maybe. Saeed asks "So what's the ratio of Hindu's - Muslims on the island?" I mutter "...well, I think 50/50." Safe answer. Honestly, have no clue. Besides this basic indication of what's where, and who's who, I know nothing much else about Divar. Ironic.

I spent my entire childhood trying to forget the dilapidated ancestral home on this remote island of Divar; we were annually dragged to see. And now I anticipate that I will spend the most part of my adult years yearning to be here.

Left from the village school, I follow the road up the hill. White and red; standing alone with regal splendour and enveloped by greenery my 'Saudades' appears on the corner. It's proud owners waiting patiently at the balcao for their rambling rose. We drive up. Hardly overwhelmed to meet my parents since only 3 weeks had passed since I'd seen them last, a very cool hello follows. No melodrama - much to everyone's disappointment. 20 minutes of introductions follow. Saeed and Kit; Iona and Jennifer - it had been so long; they'd met so many years ago, how is Jean, Chantal and Irene. 'Phaalarrger' the house of talkers, as 'Saudades' used to be called, and its inhabitants had met their match in Saeed and Jennifer. We Heredia's love to talk and in the past 5 days I've realised that the Mirza's do too. Suggestions on the documentary follow. Places to visit. People to meet. Issues to cover. "Why don't you interview Dattaram? He's an old congress supporter. Must be about 85 years or thereabouts?" my mum suggests. It turns out he owns the village bar and is quite an articulate old man. Hmmm owns the village bar...that's interesting. We decide to go. Quick phone calls are made, and a bunch of us jump into 2 Sumos and head to the posro (village square) a 2-minute walk away. My mum comes along as well "We can go to the church on the hill after that. You'll get some beautiful shots from there."

Dattaram Kesarkar - a doddering old man in a white impeccably starched kurta and dhoti - meets us at the bar. Sundowners are in full swing inside. Saeed pops his head in. Voices drop abruptly. An outsider has intruded their comfort zone. They become awfully conscious. Saeed looks around. It's too dark to shoot in here. Besides, disrupting Sundowners is blasphemous. Instead, we'll set up just outside the bar and disrupt village traffic at the main junction between the 3 villages. To my surprise Hari hands me the boom rod. What have I done to deserve this? Twice in 2 days! Hari's softening. In the past 5 days besides hang around Hari just to make my presence felt I've done no real assistant sound recordist work at all. "I'm sure I'll be able to do it. I'll learn on the job", were my confident words to Saeed at the interview. But I need to at least be given a chance, don't I? Well...I guess it's finally come. My 1st interview as boom girl. I better not screw it up. I extend the rod, adjust the Sennheiser and try to look very professional as the eyes of the entire village are on me.

My mum rushes up to me, "Elvis is here" she whispers. I turn to her "Who?" "He's the sarpanch, idiot, go and introduce him to Saeed. Maybe he can interview him as well." I turn to look at 'The King'. Elvis the 40 something village sarpanch is a moustachioed, chubby, pot bellied, smiley guy. I smile back and introduce him to Saeed. Saeed smiles. Elvis smiles. We all smile. Elvis is seated next to Dattaram. A gaudy tiatr poster is positioned perfectly behind and I take on my job as boom girl - in shorts and batik kurta standing in the middle of the road, lifting a big danda over my head. My mother looks on very proud.

The camera begins to roll. Dattaram speaks in marathi, Elvis in English. Dattaram a strong supporter of Nehru in the post independence years is obviously a very disillusioned man today. "The respect for humanity that Nehru had, no one has today. He gave people pride. Today's generation has no respect for humanity. In the past 50 years, jyasti sudhar nai jhale. Phakth gadbad. Not much improvement. Only confusion." Elvis, a product of a much later generation and a man with a foot in the door of politics, seems compelled to justify (partially at least) the efforts of his parents' generation. He smiles "We have seen some development...with roadways, waterways etc but disadvantages are also there. I mean to say, with law order and all. We're not happy about that." He smiles again. "Go to see like... we have come up from one side like...go to see, today you don't get labourers for local jobs and all. The middle class has remained in the middle." His sudden serious expression slowly breaks into a smile yet again.

Rickshaws, cars, cycles have by now all come to halt around us, and practically the entire village watches highly amused by the interviews that are underway. At the sight of the locals laughing Elvis begins to shift around in his seat. Dattaram, however, is on his own plane. Now visibly agitated with the issue at hand, he bursts in "During the Portuguese regime, Goa was so good. Only the word 'swatantra' did not exist. Now we have 'freedom' but we're not happy. Sukhi naahi. There is no one to help the people. All are greedy and think only about themselves. Fast money. Easy money. After Nehru, corruption started in the administration. See our PV Narasimha Rao, he has a corruption case of 12,000 crores against him."

What kind of India do you want? What kind of future do you see for the young generation? Saeed asks both of them.

Dattaram says very matter of factly "Sab log sukhi hona hai. Everybody talks about secularism. There's no meaning to it. In fact this very word has increased divisions. Bharatanchi tukde-tukde jhale.

Elvis agrees "Yes, yes."

Dattaram continues "We need a strong man who will be trusted by people, and will implement laws properly. Te kadya cha kai nai. Phakth kagaz madi kayda aheth."

Elvis promptly agrees "It is correct."

"So, what's happening here, is that the younger generation is agreeing with the older generation?" Saeed adds, clearly amused by Elvis' unthinking replies.

" Yes, it is correct. He has more experience; he is a senior man. I should agree, no?" An entire sentence spoken, he smiles proudly.

I struggle to hold back loud guffaws, as I'm petrified that Hari might pick up the slightest untoward breath, and never again will I get to even smell the boom rod.

Attempting to lighten the conversation, Saeed asks "In the evening, what happens here?"

"Nothing much. Aadmi daru peeta hai, they drink, they have dinner... The government is there, and the janata is here. A manual labourer makes up to Rs. 100/- in one day, and with that, he's happy. " Dattaram finally lets a smile slip through his lips. "CUT" Saeed yells and thanks the 2 men. Elvis jumps up to leave, but is accosted by my mother who badgers him to fix the dates of the village carnival that she's involved in organising.

I pack up the boom rod. Hari doesn't seem too excited about the job I've done, but then "it's my 1st time and I'll learn" I promise him. I look up to see Dattaram get up, pick up his perfectly starched dhoti and head back into his bar. His words still ring in my head - "During the Portuguese regime, Goa was so good. Only the word 'swatantra' did not exist. Now we have 'freedom' but we're not happy." Aren't these the words you would expect from those who had no real desire to be a part of India, for fear of losing all their privileges - the Catholics, the educated, the landed gentry? But such strong words out of the mouth of a Hindu Goan and a strong Congress supporter are a sad reflection of our times. During the Portuguese regime, it was men like Kasbekar who became freedom fighters and gave Goa independence. Today, Dattaram Kasbekar, is evidently a very saddened man. 36 years ago, he witnessed the attainment of independence and now 36 years later, he is witness to the rampant destruction of this ideal, and that of democracy.

"5th July is a good date. Okay. Okay. I'll fix it" Elvis promises my mother. I'll do anything to get out of this embarrassing situation with the entire village watching me, is what he really wants to say. I turn to look at him waddling away from the scene as fast as he can. I smile to myself : "Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis has left the building."

We pack up from the posro and head to the church at the top of the Piedade hill. The sun setting before you, a Baroque church behind you, the Mandovi river flowing below you and hills around you - an altogether magical moment. This is the Goa I know. This is my Goa.

SA

We drive on to Panjim. We already know where we are staying, Holiday Beach Resort on Candolim beach in North Goa. This is the Goa I am familiar with. Shai's parents have offered to take the two of us out to dinner and permission has been granted. I greet the familiar staff of HBR. I have come here before, during last year's monsoons when cyclones had hit the coast of Goa. It is a decent place and it strikes me as ironic that Saeed & Jennifer had recommended it to me as this is where they used to shack up when they were building a house in Goa. A double bedroom goes for Rs 100 in the off-season, in peak season, though it is 3 times as much. Goa is beautiful in the monsoons. And quiet and soporific. You do not rave till dawn, but take pleasure in the sunset and moonrise, long beach walks under the clouded skies, the occasional showers and storms adding drama to an otherwise sedate and silent holiday. I had come here with 4 girlfriends and our only problem with the off-season was that you were conspicuous by your presence, our chick bunch drawing a lot of attention from the local population, who were quite surprised to see a group of naturally well baked brown skins, lying on the beach, walking around in Sarongs, singing songs around bonfires, smoking cigarettes and getting drunk on cheap red wine and feni. We had been subject to some voyeuristic harassment in Colva, a strip of beach in south Goa frequented mostly by Indian tourists. Their most 'seemingly harmless' but most annoying act being that of clicking photographs. Some even had the gall to walk by, brushing closely against you as the shutters clicked away.

Frustrated, we had moved to the north, the Siquerim-Candolim-Baga-Calangute stretch, which sees almost as many tourists annually, as the entire population of Goa. Here too, I remember strolling alone on a beach at sunset sickened at the sight of a group of locals chatting up a white-skinned lady and clicking photographs with her. I had kept a watchful eye on them and soon had found them circling in on me as I followed the ebbing tide in search of shells. The nasty flashes of the camera had upset me and I remember feeling cornered, with no where to go, a desperate anger mounting within, at my apparent state of helplessness. On shouting at them, they had run along the stretch. Furious, I had returned to the road and accosted a couple of local guys, whom I had chatted with over the past few days. "I want the roll exposed. Its not just me they've been harassing". We had caught up with the shutter terrorists and I grabbed the camera and exposed the film as both teams had got into a ridiculous physical fight that I had tried my best to quell. On walking back to the hotel, my two men in armour were quick to correct me, "they weren't Goan boys, we told you they wouldn't be, Goan boys don't do that, we told you that they were probably Mangalorean. They are".

It's ironic that I think of this incident now. I seem the biggest voyeur of them all. Here I am, assistant to the director, my job-to find us good subjects for interviews, my job-to take still photographs, my job-to log and label the footage we have exposed, help edit it, help script and mould the series. Every time I feel a discomfort taking a photograph, I wonder how to deal with it. It will kill me to know that people felt the same way as I did, if I took their picture without their consent, or our camera man took their shots. It's not a simple question though and I have no immediate solution to offer.

It's been an enlightening day. The Island of Divar hadn't been the sun surf and sand floating mass the unit had imagined. Yet, the startlingly short ferry ride had delighted us all and it had been a treat to see Saudades, Iona's labour of love. Her hard work and exquisite taste have transformed an old abandoned house, nearly in ruins to a beautiful and well kept home. We had watched the sunset from the top of the hill, my first in Goa that hasn't been witnessed from a beach. The view had been memorable, a vantagepoint, from where the grand churches of old Goa had looked enchanting, their triangular roofs and bell towers playing hide and seek with the dense foliage. The morbid soul in me had veered to the graveyard, the portals of which bore an ominous but very practical saying 'Today, it's me. Tomorrow, it will be you!'

Shai's parents take us for dinner to the Octopus in Siquerim. We spend a pleasurable though a tad trying evening together. In the past 7 days I have forgotten my table manners and basic etiquette and find it a bore to appear well behaved and speak in propah English. I realise that I have grown accustomed to our boorish meal times. Shai's mother is a darling; and has the same childish enthusiasm that my mother exudes. We give her the girlish low down on all the men in the crew. Shai's dad Kit appears very concerned about our health and well being, and obviously not very happy with the fact that we looked terribly unkept dishevelled. "5 months is a long time, young ladies, you'll soon find yourselves fatigued and running out of energy if you don't take care of yourselves." He warns us against eating cut salad and curd at restaurants. Shai has had her fathers grounding, she has refused to touch a single tomato or carrot or cucumber slice and has refused to imbibe the goodness of yoghurt. I have been surviving solely because of cut salad and dahi and will continue to eat them. Tomorrow, being Sunday, the unit is supposed to have an official holiday. Shai has decided to spend the day in Divar with her folks.

26th April, 1997.

The rays of the sun, like pinpricks, sting my eyelids forcing them open against my nightmares. As the room bleaches in, I begin to focus and indulge in the Herculean / Atlas like task of lifting my head over my shoulders. I hold it in place as colour slowly seeps into my brain. I pull out the pins and needles from parts of my body. My throat has swallowed all the sands of Goa but the vengeful hell fire in my stomach still burns with ferocity. Dying, I crawl to Venus, begging for a precious drop. The jug falls to the floor empty. I find my oasis, a pink basin. With a roar she gushes forth and I whet my water lust with salinated water. My innards sizzle, poisonous gasses come forth in little bilious pockets. Exhausted, but having curbed the demon raging in me, I fall back to bed.

After dinner last night, we came back to the hotel. The unit was just finishing their meal. I remember indulging in yet more food, the lightly stir-fried vegetables and fried rice, a treat to the stomach.

I can't recall how it happened. I don't know who suggested it, but we managed to convince Saeed to come with us to Tito's for a drink. We gave him one solid reason, that being it was important to understand Goa as a hippie haven as well as Goa of the fishing villages and churches and temples. Saeed looked hilarious in his long kurta and Nike shorts, we hadn't allowed him to change for fear he would have changed his mind as well. I think he was past caring, the rising alcohol level in him letting him go with the flow. Tito's is a crazy place, what in heavens name were we doing there, Saeed, Brown, Shymole. Sumit, Shai and myself, I wonder? The camera crew, the technical crew, the drivers and Jennifer had abstained from coming. It was not as crowded as I've seen it. Right now, in mid-season, Shai and I had still managed to run into a couple of common friends from Bombay. In my younger days, I have survived a stampede outside during a gate lock up as the place gets out of hand and overcrowded. During peak season, it becomes a haven for the Bombay tourist eager to meet with the rest of Bombay and get their trance-fix as they end the old year and ring in the new. We got Saeed down with the Goa rave scene, told him about the Dutch, German, British charters that start coming down every October. Of the drug scene, the easy to score ecstasy and acid and cocaine, the flea market, the day & night raves, the fast spreading popularity of Goa Trance the world over. This has been the Goa I have known, loved and hated.

We got up to dance a bit. I remember I didn't last very long. Last night was hardly the time and place and occasion to let go, dressed as I was in travel clothes dancing with new found friends who were ignorant of the heady world that lives deep inside the heart of electronica.

Back at the Candolim, in lieu of a relatively late 8:30 wake up, we had hung out on the beach in various stages of inebriety.

Now, 8 glasses of water and a cold head shower later, I feel considerably fresh. I have a lingering breakfast on my own, write off a few postcards to friends, fill up my travel diary. It's only been a week of travel but it seems much longer. We have travelled a good deal, have seen a lot. But somehow, I'm, still at odds about the 'raison d'être' of our docu-series. Shai too shares my reservations and misgivings. I have worked with our director for almost 2 years now and am aware of his take on the politics of the land and its people. In fact, he has been a major influence on my thinking, being a mentor of sorts to me. He has taken Nehru's momentous 'tryst with destiny' speech as a starting point for his thought process. The series will be in the form of personal letters to Nehru, the father of modern India. As we travel the land, we are going to address and assess the issues that bog the foundation stones of modern India: Democracy, Secularism and Socialism and its pillars that support this edifice, so necessary for the building of a modern independent nation. The benefits gained from carving out new states, modernisation, industrialisation, economic planning, education, federal and central governance, regionalism, reservation, and its fallout's, unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, bigotry and religious intolerance, human rights abuse, progressive corruption, secessionism. We have no real structure, our shooting ratio is huge, we are to make 13 half-hour episodes. There is no guiding format for interviews, save for asking people about Nehru, and the country's Independence, both retrograde and seemingly pointless questions in my opinion. Yet, the spontaneity and freedom this lack of planning can provide us with is what I am looking forward to. An openness in mind and heart in understanding our country, so young, so old. I for one have exorcised myself from all notions and learning. Dissatisfied with old hat ideologies, I long to arrive at a new understanding of my country. With a conscious effort, I have left my spectre of the arm chair pontificator at home, surfing satellite channels, reading carefully chosen editorials. I am optimistic and hope to return home with a first hand comprehension of what knowledge and studying leads me to believe, a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-lingual anachronistic vast land that Gerri-meandering fine lines have cut, cracked, curtailed, divided and fortified into volatile but ancient earth of criss-cross-roads, bound in space but lost in time, struggling for identity under a novel but ageing face of the worlds largest democracy.

KG and Jennifer have purchased a new VCR. I heave a sigh of relief. I have been openly irritated by the antiquated short-sightedness manifested in carrying old videos and cameras prone to non-functioning. I hasten to bring out the exposed beta tapes; there is a lot to transfer. We have a lazy lunch; I sneak a peg of cashew feni into my water and let my mind ferment with vacant thoughts.

SH

1pm on a hot summer afternoon of the 26th of April 1997.

My rickshaw comes to a slow halt alongside a freshly painted blue board with white letters - 'Ferry point to Divar'. I pay the rickshawalla whose surprise at my destination has still not worn off despite the 40 minute ride. As I reluctantly hand him Rs. 200/- (daylight robbery the other word for public travel in Goa), he looks at me confused. Why does this girl want to go to the island of Divar in the middle of the Mandovi River, 20km west of Panjim, far, far away from the tourist scene? His brains are bopping with questions. Pissed off with the expense, I walk away in a huff.

Ssshhit!!! Where is the ferry? Walking up to the ticket booth, and peeping in through the window, I see a balding middle aged man sitting with his shirt buttons open, sweat trickling down the curly grey hairs on his chest. He wipes the sweat off his face with a soaking white hanky and slowly looks up at me. Such a pained expression on a man's face, particularly a man in Goa - the land of the 'jolly good fellow' - is really quite disturbing. Is this poor guy begging for sympathy for having to do this job? I wonder. Sitting in a hot little concrete room with summer at its unbearable best, battling with the droplets of sweat falling onto the tickets as he cuts them is a bit too much to deal with for this susegado Goan. In my uniquely obscene mix of Konkani and English, I ask him what time the ferry is expected. "1:30!" he mutters under his breath. I look at my watch. Shit it's 1:05 now, which means another sweltering 1/2 hour wait, under 'Ferry point to Divar'. Susegado Shai Susegado!!!

I walk back to the concrete hut and light a cigarette. How do I bide my time? I turn to notice a bunch of very forlorn, very sweaty people, who'd just missed the ferry as well. A young man opens his car door. Sounds of a crying baby and a grumbling wife filter out "I told you no, that it is 1:00 and not 1:15. Idiot you are men." He slams the door and makes his way to the cold drink stall. A cold drink should calm her down. Actually, he seems like he needs one desperately. He picks up a Coke from one of the ice buckets. "Chaa men, they're all so hot." He shouts out to his wife "Annie its hot, men. You want?" Annie ignores him, still in a sulk. He buys 3 Cokes and heads back to the car. A Maruti van comes speeding up to the ferry point. The driver, obviously highly over confident of his timing and much to our horror, heads straight for the ramp. Someone shouts a warning "There's no ferry, men." A second later, the driver realising his goof up, brings the car to a screeching halt a few inches away from the water line. Jesus. This guy's crazy, he would have driven right into the river. Well...as he reversed off, my eyes caught a little board strategically tied to a coconut tree by the ramp. It's large lettering unable to ignore 'Fernandes Undertaker and Coffin Shop' with a drawing of a mini coffin (just in case you'd forgotten what they look like) on 1 side and a mini cross (just in case you'd forgotten what community 'Fernandes' come from) on the other. Goa Goa Goa.

Now we're all sitting in silence. Patiently. Giving one another the occasional look. Is it just my imagination or are they all staring at me? I stub out my cigarette, beginning to feel terribly uncomfortable. Why are they still staring? The cigarette's gone. I look down at myself. Oh oh now I know. It's the 'You tourist what are you doing here?' stare. Well, with my hippy-chick look - little shorts, mirrorwork bag, pierced nose, filthy chappals, cigarette in hand, what else could I expect? I couldn't possibly be a good Goan girl now could I?

So who am I? Is there a term for people like me?

Firstly, I take great offence to being branded a tourist type in Goa. I visit Goa at least 3 times a year. My parents live in the family ancestral home now. I've been holidaying here all my life. So how can I be branded a tourist? I don't feel like one at all. In fact I've never ever felt a stronger sense of belonging to any place ever. So why do I feel a part of Goa but yet not?

For the 1st time since our departure I actually feel inspired enough to pull out my diary and write. What a perfect place to start. By the divar ferry with the Mandovi river softly lapping the shore, the ruined tower of St. Augustine towering over me, hills in the distance and the handsome Konkani railway bridge going by. Far from the madding crowd, engaged in constant discussion on what to shoot, where to shoot, who to shoot, and enveloped by this quiet air with finally some time to myself I feel ready to open my mind and write. I turn to page one and make my 1st entry. Day 4 in Goa.

Why has Goa suddenly taken on this completely different character for me? Until recently, being Goan was solely associated with frequent holidaying in Goa with family and friends. But now, since mum and dad restored the ancestral home and decided to move to Divar, issues about my identity have begun to creep up inside of me. Why should that be? Shouldn't it be simple and straightforward? I was born and brought up in Bombay. 4 generations of my family lived there. The cities cosmopolitan nature was a huge influence on my upbringing and lifestyle. Bombay has always been my home. Then how do I explain this warm feeling that comes over me every time I come to Divar? "Because your roots are here," everyone suggests. "This is where you belong." 'Roots'? 'Belong'? What are these words used so loosely to rationalise such a complex feeling that people the world over find so difficult to fathom.

For the lack of a purely rational answer, I'm inclined to think that maybe the truth is highly simplistic. One is always looking for greener grasses, whether with friends, family, homes, environments, lovers. Here, my beautiful ancestral home in the village of Piedade Divar, Goa is the greener grass when compared to life in Bombay. And the warm feeling that comes over me every time I come here, is purely that of quiet restfulness. Would 'roots' and 'belong' be terms I'd be content with using if my ancestral home was in Patna, Bihar? Could this really be true? And is the idea of nostalgia or 'Saudades' about ancestry and roots simply a romanticisation of a very practical need to find that quiet restfulness for the soul somewhere?

I look up to see that idiot driver in the Maruti van jumping the line and speeding up to the ramp yet again. Loud abuses are hurled at him by everyone else. Why is he doing this? I've never known anybody to a) jump the line at the ferry point and b) not get place on the ferry. When we arrived yesterday, all 4 Sumos + the tempo + some other guys Mahindra jeep - all got on quite easily. Much to Jangle's horror. I cross to the other side, thoroughly entertained by the harassment that the Maruti van driver had to face while he was trapped on the ferry with all those he'd jumped in the line.

Mum and Dad seem quite relieved to meet me at 'home' before I take off on my 5 month journey. That's totally expected considering I gave them the shocking news of my 5 month journey just 4 days ago. Until yesterday when they met Saeed, all they knew was all I knew when I walked in to Saeed Mirza's office. He was 1 of 4 film directors, including Bhupen Hazarika, Shyam Benegal and Girish Karnad, commissioned by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to make a film to commemorate India's 50th year of independence, and Saeed had chosen to travel around the country and shoot a documentary. The excitement on being selected to travel with him was momentary, as all the uncertainties that go with a new job began to slowly creep in. My apprehensions about and expectations from the entire trip and the documentary more so have been tremendous, but I just haven't had the time to discuss these with anybody. Today will be the 1st real holiday I'll have since that 1st meeting with Saeed but I can't discuss my worries with my parents. My worries then become their worries, and that unnerves me further, stressing me out more. But as usual, my parents play their role so perfectly well, that before I know it I'm at the dining table spilling out my guts. And once I start, I really let it rip.

Well...this trip is about several things for me. It's not just about travelling around the country - though that was the initial attraction. At the end of the day we're making a documentary film about India over the past 50 years and the spirit of the Indian people. How have we as a nation progressed or regressed and how have we as a people struggled through? A mammoth task. Comprehending the Indian people and the dynamics of a country centuries old is something intellectuals have attempted to do for centuries now. Theories upon theories have been proposed, commended, discarded. India is a complicated, complex, intriguing country resultant of a history of the same nature. And here we are a bunch of ordinary people - no flaming intellectuals, no theorists, and no historians - on a discovery of India.

What makes us so special? Why should we be the enlightened ones?

It would be extremely presumptuous to think that this documentary will be such a luminary film that Indians all over the country will be energised to make a change. The only real discovery I see happening is a purely personal one - a self-discovery. We will end up making our own little personal discoveries about ourselves as individuals and our role as Indians in post liberalised India. We will discover our own India. We will discover the Indian in ourselves.

The perspective of this documentary doesn't seem to be very clear. To make a film interesting and insightful, along with a definite conceptual axiom it is extremely essential that one has a focussed methodology. Improvisation and spontaneity is what documentary filmmaking is about, but improvisation and spontaneity without clarity of perspective makes the documentary film hollow and ineffectual. It comes across as illogical floundering and to spend 5 months and 1 crore of Rupees floundering would be unforgivable.

Somehow, well into Day 4 many interviews and discussions later, I can still feel some serious floundering happening. My only hope is that the documentary will begin to take some shape soon, so we can all focus our attentions on 1 thing and not be all over the place as we are now. What is this documentary about? India today? Yesterday? Historically? Indian people? Modernisation? Technology or the lack of it? Differentiation b/w states? Secularism? Nehru....WHAT? It can't possibly be everything. How will we put it together if we aren't clear ourselves on what we're saying or what we want to say?

We're going to spend time in villages living with people and really experiencing the Indian spirit at all its levels. Such an exposure will definitely be a tremendous learning experience for me. If this documentary eventually does mould itself into a coherent, insightful piece of work facilitating Indians in their comprehension of the country, it could become one of the most engaging and inspiring films made in and about India. A fitting celebration for India's 50th year of independence.

SA

At 4:00 pm., break is called off. Sumit, Jangle, Hari, Chandi, Parvej and myself find ourselves at Baga beach, clearly Goa's most populated stretch of sand, evident even so late in the day and season. We take shots of the colourful beach stretch, a discordant harmony of fishing boats and coca cola umbrellas, scavenging cattle and tanning human forms. Most beach shacks are closed, we find out, there has been a crack down on operations without valid commercial and bar licenses. Still the age-old restaurants, like Britto's and St. Anthony's stand strong, important concrete landmarks they have become for most Goa bums.

I interview the owner of Hard Rock Cafe. Union Jack and commonwealth conglomeration flags flap in the wind, essential reggae compilations beckon you into the shaded casual ambience of Bernard's shack.

He reinforces the stereotype of the eat drink and be merry Goan. For Bernard it's either the beaches of Goa or the oil rich shores of the Middle East. "Why won't I be happy about tourism? Otherwise, I will have to go to the Gulf and work with the sheikhs. Here you either cater to tourists or go fishing. Even the tourist season lasts a maximum of 6 months. So we earn for 4 months and spend for 8 months"

The rest of the unit joins us. Shai is back from her parents place. Bernard sentiments are echoed by James & Santos, 6282, & 4440, 2 young guys who run a private taxi service who Saeed interviews.

"We think India has progressed in the past 50 years, there has been a lot of tourism. Its feels good to go around town driving the tourists, it's a good experience talking to them."

They hadn't given much thought to the 50th anniversary of our freedom, and could give us no idea of how things for their parents had been different under Portuguese rule. As a wish for India in the future, James desired happiness and Santos, hoped that everyone could live happily together and hoped that Goa wouldn't see riots based on differences, the likes of which had rocked Bombay a few years ago. We asked them what their thoughts were on Jawaharlal Nehru. James told us, that he didn't know much. "History has gone away, that's the past. But I think he was a good man" A bystander added in, "He liked children, and red roses"

Saeed spoke to Robert, the owner of Britto's, a concretised restaurant overlooking the beach. Business was slow, the afternoon siesta time giving way to a pleasant sun set. We set up frame inside his restaurant. Again Shai & I were instructed to fill up frame. We occupied the table behind our director and Robert. Irritated, we suppressed the urge to order a full meal, posing as we were as patrons. The interview suffered several breaks as our DP was not happy with the background.

Shai and I had to change positions several times, aesthetic satisfaction was derived when my red dupatta was placed on Shai's white t shirt, and a bottle of Mirinda placed in front of me for good measure and contrast.

Robert, nearly 60 though a fore runner in the tourism business was quick to point out that the older generation hated the onslaught of tourism, while the younger generation loved it, the environment providing them with opportunities to make a 'quick money, big money.' ""Most tourists who frequented my place are either German or English. A lot of British charter flights come down. They come here to beat the winter. Instead of spending money on warm clothing, they come here and enjoy the sun. Nudism and drugs are things the older generation doesn't approve of. They worry that our boys will get spoilt with this foreign culture."

This, he found especially dangerous to the local population. "Goa is different from the rest of India. Goans want an easy life, they don't want to work hard Goans want a simple life, they like their drinks, dance, music and food. Like me. I might not dance anymore, but I still love my drink and food."

Yes, in the past 50 years our economy has improved. But we are governed by corrupt politicians. We need young leaders, not those who fight for their chair to sit on. I like young leaders, like that guy, Subramaniam Swamy. But we also face wide scale unemployment. And yet, there are some people who don't like to work.

On a nostalgic note, he spoke about some memories he had of Portuguese rule. "Life, then was different. We could get things like watches and good cheese. Things were cheap. But of course, we had no freedom. I remember walking down streets and making way for the Portuguese coming in the opposite direction. We had to move off the road into the dust, it was embarrassing when we were escorting women. Yes, things were very strict then.

"What did he feel about the future of India. About secularism?

I can't speak for the Indians, but I feel that when the BJP comes to power, there wont be secularism or freedom of religion.

While Shai and I had played out our roles, invaluable asset of the prop department as we were, a customer at the next table, a ready & willing prop had begun chatting with us. He was a shippie, from England in his early thirties. All through Roberts interview he had kept us occupied with going through a constant supply of odds and ends that he would send across to our table. His ID card, some photographs of himself with friends, bangles and scarves, presents he had picked up in India. He seemed very interested in what we were doing, and we sensed that he was angling for an introduction with our director. When Saeed was done with Bernard interview, we got them chatting and snuck out of frame. I still wonder why Saeed decided to interview him.

Sun burnt to an unhealthy degree, his eyes lined with kind premature wrinkles, gold-rimmed shades, a biker bandanna a thick gold chain, a heavy bracelet and a flashy watch, he certainly did not represent the archetypal hippie or trancehead, rather the more conservative working class Englishman, a provincial man whose merchant navy career has enabled him to explore many far away shores. He imitated his fellow countrymen, sitting in a bar in his hometown in Yorkshire, England, made fun of their accents and lack of conversation....

"The problem being, my life has changed from where I was brought up. Because of the way I've chosen. To be honest, India is about the best place that any man can chose to live on, particularly here, Goa, because here, people greet you with smiles in this place, and its the way I want to live my life. In this culture. But there is a difference is Goa. Its my type of people here I've been to Calcutta and Bombay as well. too many people. You put 2 rats in a small cage, they fight. You put them in a big cage, they don't fight. That's my reason for liking Goa. This time I come here from Bahrain, I've been here 9 days. I might stay here for the rest of my life. If I could earn a living here I would rather live here than anywhere in the world. Its simple as that. Because I got my head screwed on right. Money isn't everything. I've never wanted big piles of money. In England, its different, everybody greedy, its a rat race, they want more more more. My culture finished in England. My culture is with the Goan people. I've answered you honestly, my feelings from the stomach.

This guy was alright. He was trying his best to express his new-found worldliness with grace and magnanimity. He was quite a preener too, and a performer, his askance glances into the camera did not escape me. Whatever. We gave him his 5 minutes in the reflected lights.

While taking shots of the handicraft stalls, most of which are run by Kashmiris and sell a wide range of whatnots, Rajasthani rugs and wall hangings, silver and semi precious stones, Tibetan masks and boxes, Bastar tribal handicrafts, I couldn't resist some window shopping and started talking with a shop owner, a very gracious middle aged man, Nissar Hussain who I was surprised to know had left Kashmir 16 years ago. The wife, warm and large hearted took me upstairs to the mezzanine for a cup of tea. Her 2 sons, both of whom were born in Goa were adorable, their apple cheeks sun-kissed and rosy pink. They displayed such respect and decorum in their demeanour. We decided to interview the owner and Sumit set up frame outside the stall.

The sun was setting, it was magic hour. Nissar Hussain's weather beaten face in close-up, as I could see in the monitor projected an aura of calm, that was evident even before he started speaking. His beautifully clean and simple Urdu, peppered with English phrases had a lyrical quality; somehow just looking at his kind face created a sense of warmth and trust. "Goa. Because an 'atmosphere', that was different. An 'environment' that I liked. There is natural beauty here like in Kashmir. And it's 'suitable'. The weather here is moderate, in Kashmir it's either too cold or too hot. And of course, there is tourism here and my business is to do with tourists. So that too suited us. And the culture here, its not a 'particular culture', its a 'mixed culture'. You can 'adapt' whatever culture you want, no one will question you as to why you do what you do. In a sense it's a 'free culture'. That's why I liked this place. There was silence when we came here. Khamoshi. You could say 'quiet.' I liked it here; it wasn't crowded like other cities. Now crowds are growing, things have changed, something is not right.

But surely, a growth in tourism has helped your earnings?

If there are more dealers and shopkeepers, then there are more tourists too. Competition hasn't really affected me". Sumit asked him if there had ever been a problem of accepting him into this environment. "That depends on an individual 'nature'. The 'mirror looks back' at you the same way you look at it. How you 'behave' with people in the environment you want to live in reflects how they behave with you. 'Personally', I have had no problems with my locality. We are accepted here. If there is a wedding, some reason for sadness or joy, we partake equally.

Have you been influenced by Goan culture, say language?

'Language'. See I am at such an age where it is not 'easy' to bring about a change in language. However if someone speaks to me in Konkani, I understand Konkani. Very rarely do situations arise where I am left have to a last resort to communicate in Konkani, I speak it somewhat. But here largely, for some reason, every one is content with speaking English. This is why I haven't really learned the language. His darling boys as if on cue look at their father eagerly. He beckons them into frame. They sit down, their poise and demeanour giving way to a hint of shyness at the realisation of being on camera. "However my kids... come, these are my 2 children. They speak Konkani, read and write it too and they really like the culture here. If I tell them, go to Kashmir, they don't 'agree', even for a 'visit'." Oh my kids have no yearning for Kashmir. They've been there 2-3 times but they don't like it there. They like it here. This is their 'mother land'. They were born here. This is their culture.

The younger one's name is Saaz. The elder one, Kaama studies in the 8th standard, and Saaz is in the 5th. Sumit asked him what he wanted to give them in terms of upbringing.

"I want to give them education and thankfully till now I have been successful in doing so. But 'way' they have to ascertain for themselves. I neither want to make them Kashmiri, nor do I want to make them Goan. I want to make them 'insaan', human beings. I want to give them the learning of understanding the pain of other fellow beings. Someone is Goan, some one is Kashmiri...These things I don't believe in. All human beings are one, cut them and they bleed the same colour.

All are one, their wishes and aspirations one, their 'feelings' one. In the same way, religion. Religion. Yeh andar ki baat hai. It should be inside you. This is a matter of the heart, and shouldn't be worn on the sleeve. You shouldn't speak about it. It's about finding your 'way', and how you can keep yourself in 'limit'. Therefore, you can chose and embrace any religion. I have no wish to send my kids down a 'particular line'. They have to find their own path; there is no pressure on my behalf.

Sumit thanked Nassir Hussain. Immediately came a spontaneous invitation, "let's all have tea." We politely declined, as we had to get going.

We took some travel shots of Baga and Calangute by night. On automatic exposure, these blue shots had a strange surreal quality, the lanes looking like in some fairy town. I found myself thinking of Nissar Hussain and his family. I was so happy that Sumit hadn't asked too many questions. Here we had footage that spoke for itself. That perhaps without saying much about anything, said a lot about Indian culture. With such a worldview for the future and such grace and understanding for the past, this man, I wish had been a model of virtue for his generation. A generation whose adult life was moulded by the birth of a nation, that instead of being nurtured with love had been poisoned by hate, embittered by old feuds and dwarfed by a burden of history, that didn't forget, but didn't forgive either.

Back at Candolim, we took some ambient shots of a beach shack by night. Frank Zappa's shack is famous during the peak season with the tourist's from Bombay congregating here to catch up with the lives and gossips of the city.

This was our first 'night shoot'. Barkat got us all into a crazy production of replacing the low volt hanging bulbs with bigger brighter ones which he pulled out from his light trunk. The unit modelled. Parvej and Ravi flexed their muscles as they played a game of carrom with some foreigners. We had some refreshments and returned to the hotel. Since we had taken the camcorder and left the Beta recorder, Raju had managed to dub most of last week's backlog. We sat down to transfer our day's footage, our director was happy with the day's shoot. I found myself thinking of Nissar Hussain's lovely wife and children and hoped that they would always stay that content, that nothing would shatter their blind faith in humankind. As for the Yorkshireman, I imagined him back in his hometown, talking to his 'old boring mates' in his 'old boring pub', over a pint of Guinness, gloating about his wisdom and the interview he had given while on the sandy beaches of heavenly Goa.

SH

27th April, 1997.

Last night Saeed sprang it upon me again, and here I was thinking that with that 1st meeting I'd gotten away with it. "I want to interview your parents" he announces. "Oh... and don't tell them. We'll surprise them tomorrow morning." I look at him sheepishly and run out of his room into the sanctuary of mine. "What do I do, Shaina? I can't not inform my parents, they'll kill me if I just land up on a Sunday morning with Saeed and crew in tow demanding an interview." After a lot of deliberation, I take a decision, rush down to the phone booth and call my parents as late as 11:30 to break this terribly important news. Saeed, of course, will never know for my parents have been given strict instructions to behave adequately surprised.

9am, and we're on the ferry, on our way to Kit and Iona Heredia's residence. We arrive there to find not only the Heredia's, but also the Lima Leitao's - family friends with their 4 children. This doesn't phase Saeed. After a decent bit of acting on my parents' part (I have to say), Saeed tells Jangle to roll the camera on instant entry into the house. We really were barging in with bloody style. Thank God I told my parents. Thank God I told my parents. Thank God I told my parents.

The camera rolls. A handheld entry into the house. Kit Heredia makes the necessary introductions and Saeed begins to chat with Noel de Lima Leitao, instantly. The camera wanders away following the children and adults as they scatter into various directions. It soon returns to Saeed and Noel.

Noel de Lima Leitao: We haven't really done any forward planning to work out what direction we should be taking.

Saeed Mirza: Has this liberalisation process helped?

N: It helps eventually in terms of putting more disposable income in the common man's pocket but is that the B all and all? I don't think so. But what you want to do is to improve somebody's quality of life. Not just put money in his pocket.

S: Which is what I want to know about tourism in Goa. You know it does give us certain kind of benefits but then is it also, strangely enough, a source of non-development of other infrastructure, which is crucial for a long term...

N: Actually tourism, you say, does a lot for Goa but I also think it's got an evil side as well, in terms of putting a lot of pressure on the infrastructure. During the tourist season, for example, the common man cannot afford fish because the prices go up 3 or 4 times. There are so many more people to feed. Goa has a population of 1.2 million, another 1.2 million come in. So how do you cope with the same infrastructure for telephones, for electricity, for housing, for food, for vegetables...We don't grow our own vegetables here. They all come from Belgaum. That's why I say it's an extremely tenuous position. We have to therefore go for value added tourism, if we're going in for tourism at all.

S: The impression one gets is 'hey fellow well met'. This is at a visual level but at the other level maybe it's not that...

N: No. As far as I'm concerned there's big cause for concern here. I feel we should be planning what we want, very carefully, well in advance, and we're not doing that.

S: A kind of short term view.

N: No no we're driving from the seat of our pants. There's no planning at all. We're taking every day as it comes. That's not a very good thing. That's not the way the ancestors of this place worked. They used to plan years ahead.

S: What does independence mean? Has there been a major change? By independence I mean from 1961 onwards.

N: Aah. The economy definitely has developed a hell of a lot.

S: It has?

N: Yes. But the infrastructure has only started developing 5 or 6 years ago in any measurable way. So maybe 30 years nothing happened. And then 5 years it was very quick. Rushed. Unplanned.

S: Does the meaning of the word secularism really hold good in Goa?

N: Yaa. (smiles) That's one thing I hope will not get ruined. That's 1 thing Goa's firmly based on. That foundation. And I think that might pull us through in a crisis actually.

S: No anxiety about the future on this front?

N: No. For me, No.

S: No indication?

N: Well a lot of people are trying to fray the edges but I don't think it's going to work at all.

Saeed breaks the conversation here and indicates that we create a more formal set up for a more formal interview. Handheld and hanging out in the balcony is a bit messy. A formal interview is set up within minutes. Saeed is seated on the left of frame, Kit in the center and Noel on the right. The rest of us (including Iona and Nayantara - Noel's wife and the children) sit along the steps beside Saeed. The camera begins to roll mid conversation...

Noel: And my ancestry from my mother's side, there were people who used to run news papers and write things that were not acceptable to the Portuguese regime.

Kit Heredia: And you mustn't forget that in those times Goa was absolutely feudal.

Saeed: Ya

K: I mean, you had people who lived on your property who were what they called mundkars - the equivalent of serfs - they couldn't go and work for somebody without your sanction, even if you had no work for them on your property, fields or wherever. You had to allow them to go and work somewhere else. That's really how bad it was, in terms of feudalism being practised.

S: The concept of democracy, is not very old in Goa, 1961 onwards. Has it taken root in a sense of assertion of one's beliefs, feelings...?

K: I think it has.

S: Has it taken some kind of shape? If it has, what kind?

K: No. It's taken much the same shape as it has in the rest of the country and therefore its not working. By that I mean, in a democracy you take a vote on an issue, and what the majority has decided stands. The minority is then expected, notwithstanding the fact that they've lost the vote, to work towards the end that has been decided.

S: Right.

K: Unfortunately in India (and even more so in Goa and I'll come to why its more so here), once the minority lose, they begin to work even harder to bring down what the majority wanted. This is the tragedy of India. Democracy is just not working. And I don't know whether that comes from the fact, (and this is my own personal view) whether we like to admit it or not, that India is essentially Hindu - over the centuries. And I think the whole concept is alien to the Hindu psyche, by virtue of this illustration - You have the Hindu undivided family, where the karta called the shots. Short of how large your family would be, he's telling you exactly how much you'll spend, where you'll work, your education level etc etc. And then 1 fine day you step out on the street, you can't open your mouth at home, and you say democracy is my birthright? Now somewhere or the other, this doesn't work. I'm wondering whether we need to amend that concept, certainly the Westminster kind, and try and adapt it, which is what is happening today in this country. Coalition politics has come to stay.

K: I'm saying the people who have different viewpoints on the same subject at least are coming together for the sake of the greater good. And I think that holds some promise.

S: And I think it genuinely represents the aspirations of people, the kind of divisions that exist in society are now coming together in the government, you know.

K: No but Saeed, I would also like to say 1 more thing. I don't think this country had any other option but democracy. The reason is that when you have a continent (India's not a country; it's a continent) with this diversity in religion, ethnicity, culture, language, you name it...there's no way you can level it all down and become like the Japanese or the... I don't know... Taiwanese and so forth. There's just no way. Now if you don't have a system whereby the aspirations of all these little groups can bubble to the top and be smoothed over in 1 shot you have a serious problem on your hands. So notwithstanding the fact that its not working the best way it should, and that we are shall we say, trotting along slowly but surely and not at the pace that some of the others have, I think its in our interest to do it at 4% GDP.

S: And not to aspire to be an Asian Tiger. The Asian Tigers are primarily little states of 6 million, 10 million, 15 million people. We are 960 million people so let's...

K: Precisely. And with autocratic systems.

S: ... and extremely autocratic systems.

K: That will never work in a continent like India. It cannot work. An example could be the whole of Europe under 1 man. What has the Italian got in common with the German or the Turk with the Portuguese? It's impossible. And therefore the system is fine, it's necessary; it just needs to be adapted, and I think it'll happen, only we may not be around when it does finally fall into place.

S: Well, I'm going to live for 348 years. I don't know about you.

K: Only?

S: 348. I've decided.

K: Well 348 is obviously a very special figure.

Everyone laughs.

S: You know this basic structure that we're talking about actually stems from a guy who I felt had this kind of faith. 1 was democracy and the other was pluralism. And that's the reason for my journey actually. I cried you know when Nehru died on the beach at Shivaji Park. I was there. It disturbed me a lot. I remember a friend of mine asking me Saeed why're you crying? I'm also disturbed, but why're you crying? I said you won't understand Baiju because to me philosophically speaking the idea of a democracy and nationhood and pluralism in the beginning of nationhood are absolutely essential as concepts.

K: Indeed. In fact it's what rose to rake what we call 'civilisation' which was defined by Auden who said 'a civilisation is the degree of diversity attained and unity maintained.' And the other very pertinent observation was made by somebody writing a book on India, I can't remember the name, who said 'civilisation is not a being, it's a becoming.' I'd recommend you read Gita Mehta's 'Snakes And Ladders'. I just put it down. And she's really gung ho on India notwithstanding all the problems that we have faced.

It's a book that while your travelling will make a lot of sense to the perspective that you have on the subject. Will you be able to pick it up? Or should I give you a copy.

S: No we have a copy at home. I wish we'd brought it. I'm recommending another book to you it's called 'In An Antique Land' by Amitav Ghose.

K: OK

S: He's in a very kind of Nehruvian mould and yet...Are we looking at the future with a certain amount of hope or is there anxiety somewhere tinged along with it.

K: I would like to quote Krishna Menon who at the 1st major session in 1952, I think in the UN when an American delegate or was it Lester Pierson (I don't remember) who said to him, "How will India manage with independence?" And he turned around and said, "We'll muddle through." And I think that is the story of India over the last 50 years. We have literally muddled through. Happily. Notwithstanding the fact that we have muddled through. The tragedy of this country is not how much we attained but how much we should have done and lost out on. Thanks to the politics. Thanks to the... just to the size and the vastness of this continent. There are opportunities that we've lost we'll never get again, and that is the tragedy of India. Whether you talk of economics, you talk of education, you talk of welfare, and there are lots of opportunities...

N: This is where I'm anxious. That we've just muddled through.

K: Take the case of Goa, Noel?

N: And in a place like Goa? It's small enough to manage.

K: And we can't do it.

N: You don't have to subject yourself to muddling through. It's small. We're talking about 1.2 million people and 1.2 million visitors. Surely you can plan for something the size of Bandra?

K: It's just unbelievable.

N: You don't have to plan for more than Bandra. This is the basic concept. And we're not doing that. For me, it's a shame. That's why I'm filled with anxiety.

Jennifer: what do you feel is lacking in Goa?

N: You see, I feel that somewhere along in Goa we have taken a turn towards the so-called 'quick buck'. The boom he was talking about. People want to dip into the honey pot too quickly. But building a state; building a land takes time. It takes consideration, it takes planning, it takes application. And it takes a paradigm shift in a person's attitude or the psyche of a people and the psyche of a culture. And I fear that in the last 2 or 3 years I've seen signs of Goa, sort of, sliding away from these very high principles. I think goondaism is getting a foothold. People are not backing issues because of the issues.

S: It's a chap with the immediate idea and there's an immediacy which is occurring, rather than a long term view.

N: Actually its not just in Goa, you'll be surprised. Its not linked to Goa. You see it in its most horrific form in let's say Bombay.

K: Yes. But its that much more tragic when its in a small place like Goa.(points to Noel)

N: When it's in a place like Goa which is so small...you know, that's where the anxiety, the tragedy of it really hits you face on.

Iona says off cam and bad sound

I: And also being a new state; it has everything going for it.

K: Yes.

I: I mean it could have done wonders. That's the tragedy.

K: It's a lost opportunity, in effect.

S: Can you move a little forward Iona so that we can see you.

Iona comes and sits forward.

S: You were saying?

I: I said it was the youngest state and instead of muddling through here again, we could have learnt from the mistakes they did elsewhere. We're going the same way, and that's the worrying thing. And there seems to be a dreadful greed, you know, as Noel says to go for the honey pot. It's as though they're on borrowed time. (concerned tone)

S: What does a poor man do because he's seeing images. He's seeing immense prosperity on images and he doesn't have. Because the images, the construction is coming through the media.

I: Hmm Media.

S: Because its coming in a kind of form which is very very enticing. And in that, the aspiration. I've always had a...look this image is being viewed in Saharanpur. In small towns, in villages, in all kinds of homes NOW. And there's no accountability. The other problems is that nobody goes to jail...unless you're poor...

I: That's true

S: ...nobody goes to jail for the crimes that they've committed against a nation and a people. Nobody goes to jail. SO there there is no accountability, a message is passed through to ordinary people GRAB. So grab and take it now. So why the hell have you to wait when nobody else is waiting.

K: There's no accountability. That's the bad part of what's happening.

Saeed turns towards Kit.

K: And the good part is that the build up of aspirations has taken the entire control out of the hands of the politicians. I have always believed that the politicians whether in power or in the opposition have and unwritten agreement to keep this country poor, uneducated and in penury. (counts 3 on his fingers) Now that's finished thanks to travel, thought and television (counts again). The whole world as you said Saharanpur knows as much as Monte Carlo now and there's no way you are going to hold them back.

S: The forces are going to be unleashed.

K: The forces have already been...

S: The social forces.

K: That's the point. The social forces have already been unleashed and they are in no position to control it anymore. That's why the politician is looking for the short term. He has no issues, he's got personality on which he pledges his future and people are not going to sit back and let it happen. So you have social strife and I guess unless the economic levels get raised, you'll continue to have communal strife... I don't know, cultural strife...

S: That's it. This is what my fear is because then you require scapegoats to turn attention

No there will always be scapegoats.

S: To turn away attention.

So then you turn it into a vision.

S: And then you turn it into very narrow visions of a world..

That's right.

S: The broad mindedness goes out. The pluralism goes out.

That'll be a stage. It'll be a stage Saeed.

S: ...and then what's going to happen

No...

S: And therefore like he said comes the crunch. Then I'd like to know the edifices, the structures which are strong enough to hold it. Or are they strong enough to hold it? I don't know.

K: You already have 1 structure that's holding out against the rest. The legal system. And I think slowly you will find each 1 of them come back into playing the roles they were originally designed for. It'll take time but I think it'll happen. Hopefully our children's children will see it. But the politician will not be in charge for long. Not the way the aspirations...You know in Goa, this is the other problem being a small state we have, for half the size of a district. We have 40 MLA's, 16 Ministers - 1 even a Minister without a portfolio -

S: Diwan - e - am, Diwan - e - khas! Saeed laughs.

K: Bilkul. We have, I think on average, 1 government servant for about 475 Goans, as against the rest of the country which is 1 for several thousand. We have more government and less administration than we need, with the result that every 2-bit issue is a major problem for the local politician to work on. I mean, if 500 are going to decide whether you get elected or not, you have to be very very careful, what you do, what you say. SO nothing moves at the pace that it should. So notwithstanding the fact that this is such a small state, we are where we are.

The Indapur uncomfortable stomach churn has been on for the past 2 hours – and I haven't even eaten any kaju kismis or malai this time. It's this entire parents' being interviewed and allowed to pontificate for camera experience that has brought it on. To have my father talking and talking and talking, suggesting books to read, and quoting quotable quotes is all just too embarrassing. But, no matter how hard it might be for me to admit, the truth is that some of Dad's observations regarding the concept of democracy, impact of tourism in Goa and the impact of media on societies within India, were really quite insightful. Strangely, despite the fairly sombre content of this conversation, I'm somehow left with a strong optimism for the future. We've muddled through the last 50 years and I foresee us muddling through the next 50 years. It's just the Indian way, I guess. Our muddling through, however, can be made easier only through the explosion of media in the country. It is the only available tool left for us ordinary citizens to destroy the unwritten rule among politicians to keep the country uneducated and poor. The world is a much smaller place today, and people are slowly getting more aware of their rights as citizens and human beings of the world. Television is the most powerful tool of change (if used efficiently) and having its forces unleashed is something that many in this country fear, but in the long term this seems the only short cut (if I may call it that) to creating the awareness that education has so failed to do. Change is not a bad thing. We Indians need to stop fearing it.

SA

We're staying at the ugliest hotel in Colva. Its ridiculous to call this place a hotel, a hostel would be more appropriate. A long and squalid row of short squat grey double-decker matchboxes plotted on arid land, constructed on prime sea facing property but designed to give one a the sense of being in a nondescript environment, a living quarter in a government run institution. Thankfully we take the luxury double rooms and politely decline the suggestion of community living in their 4-6-8-12 seater dormitories. In a state like Goa, where budget accommodation, like good Goan food is there for the taking, a little exploration is inevitably rewarded-quaint cottages with clean & quiet, genuine cuisine, spiced but not quite-state tourism corporation joints such as this one cheat the Indian tourist, coming from small towns in packaged organised tours. They spend fair amounts of money for a family vacation, and unwittingly pay quite a price for their defenceless position. For these hotels, tariffs on par with other budget finds in the state, provide nothing for the savings a family has invested in vacation.

The heat of the afternoon is intense and sapping. After a heavy meal in the lodge dining, an unsatisfactory mixture Punjabi and Goan cuisine, the former an unblended deluge of ready made aap ki pasand types masala, the latter, a local speciality Xacuti, a massive attack of nutmeg, any other subtleties vanquished in their effort to come to the fore, the unit crept into their concretised boxes for a much needed siesta.

Shai & I set up our logging system and spend the afternoon in rec-pause-type-rew-control+S-stop-play mode. At four, part of the unit goes off to shoot in Ponda. Our aim is to interview people in the Hindu villages. Brown, Shymole and I are left behind. I continue trying to overcome my logging back log as Brown walks around the room in his acupressure chappals showing sporadic interest in his hardbound copy of Indira, by Pupul Jaykar. Shyamol lies about nursing his ankle and occasionally bursts into a melancholic Bengali folk song causing me to start confusing his off-key Baul for pain-filled howls. He had twisted his ankle outside HBR, slipping into a little ditch after the drunken revelry on the beach.

SH

Ponda is eastern Goa's major commercial town. More interestingly, for nearly 2 and a half centuries after the arrival of the Portuguese, Ponda remained under the control of Muslim and Hindi rulers until the Portuguese commenced their rampant destruction of temples in the Old Conquests when many Hindus ran away. However, by the time Ponda itself came under Portuguese control, increased religious tolerance allowed the Hindu temples to remain in existence. I explained this background to Saeed when we first stepped foot into Goa, for Ponda was our point of entry. From Dharwad, the Anmod ghat had brought us into Ponda and then ironically straight to Old Goa - a city once known as the Rome of the East; the principal city of the Portuguese Eastern Empire.

Now, in Colva - only an hour away from Ponda, Saeed suddenly decides to interview visit some villages in Ponda. A bunch of us head out, Shaina stays behind as the logging backlog has steadily increased. We arrive at Borim village next to the Navdurga temple. A group of youngsters are chatting outside the temple. Saeed joins them, seats them, the interview is set up and the camera rolls.

S- no in your opinion, Sir...we got independence 50 years ago, you can answer in marathi, in these 50 years what good and what bad has happened. You tell me?

Old man - During the Portuguese sarkar, everything was closed. If you were a Hindu then definitely you couldn't speak your mind at all. You were shut up all the time. If you even said 'Jai Hind' you were put into jail immediately. That was 50 years ago.

S - And now?

Old man - No. Now nothing.

S - What's your name?

Old man - Manohar Divari.

S - We just went to a village nearby called Divar. We met one Kasbekar Saab who said that during the Portuguese regime there were laws, rules...now there's nothing like that. People only think about earning quick money today. Everything has broken down. What do you think about this?

Sailesh - See... that entire side of Divar was under the Portuguese entirely. In fact, even now there are still relatives of people from Portugal there. They come and go from there. So their connection is still strong with the Portuguese. This doesn't mean that there are no kanoon nowadays. There are laws, but the only difference is that then there was Hitlershahi rule, and now that is not there. Now kanoon acha hai. Now if somebody steals he's caught and whatever punishment has to be got is given.

S - is this only Goa or all over the country?

Sai - I think all over the country.

S - Everyone who commits a crime goes to jail?

Sai - Not everyone, but little little they do...

S - Who goes to jail?

Sai - See... wherever the law is well enforced, they get caught. Now even in the law there are robbers.

Saeed laughs

S - Everyone says that corruption has increased. What do you think?

Sai - yes of course it has.

S - OK so how do we deal with it?

Sai - You just have to line them all up and shoot them. Only that law works well.

Saeed laughs.

S - You said that what was the Hitler zamaana was bad and now your saying this?

Sai - No just this one thing. The good things should be kept. The bad things can go.

S - It's good to shoot people?

Sai - Yes for that, it's good.

S - Now let me ask you 1 more question? In your opinion, what kind of India do you want? Not just Goa. India? I know your young, but think and tell me when you think of India what kind of India do you want?

Sai - India should be like this that wherever you go people say it's 'Saare Jahan se accha'.

S - Okay. So you mean that people should love their country.

Sai - yes.

Everyone does love their country, but if a man is poor what kind of future can he expect for himself ? What is your opinion?

Sai - See. The government only should take care of them. They should give them some facilities.

S - Yes, they should. But are they giving any?

Sai - yes they do, but...

Other young boy cuts in.. " But they're on paper."

S - So they're on paper. What's your name?

Boy - Sudesh.

Now Sudesh says they're on paper and you're saying that they give.

Sudesh - yes. But they're not implementing them.

S - The plans are there, but they're not being implemented.

3rd guy - In small small villages they do give - the government gives, ministers give. But if you get it you get it if you don't you don't.

S - In your opinion is this poverty increasing or decreasing?

Sudesh - Increasing.

S - Now how do we solve that?

Sudesh - The politicians do everything na..?

Everyone laughs.

S - So you tell me what do you want for the country?

Sudesh - With just reading, writing and getting 2 vakth ki roti, Bhaarath is not going to be happy.

S - Then how can it be happy?

Sudesh - I'm not speaking on behalf of any political party or anything like that but what I feel is that by implementing the civil law code, there will be some benefits to the country. I'm not speaking on behalf of the BJP. In fact I'm completely against then but yet I feel that by having the civil law code...

S - Uniform civil code.

Sai - yes. By having that, things can be better. But corruption...

S - What's the relationship of corruption with the civil code?

Sudesh - See, the civil law code is implemented in Goa and nowhere else in the country. But even after that corruption goes on. In Goa corruption keeps increasing. But nobody can catch the Ministers or Government servants.

S - Why?

Sudesh - Why? Because we have only started this. We people only feel that after giving money only then can things happen. Otherwise not.

S - Okay so 1 is the uniform civil code. Then, what else do you want? How can the country progress?

Sudesh - Now one big issue in the country is unemployment.

S - Is it increasing or decreasing?

Sudesh - Increasing. Just like Aids is increasing, so is unemployment.

Everyone laughs.

S - So your a young man, what do you see in your future?

Sudesh - That I don't know.

3rd guy - That we've left on God. Man can't do anything.

S - What's your name?

3rd guy - Ajit.

S- The way you guys are talking you are painting a very grim picture of the future of the country. You'll are young, I have become old now but you should at least...

Now see. Our 1st PM. His name was Jawaharlal Nehru. What kind of man was he?

Sai - he was a good man.

Ajit - People say that he was a good man, we haven't seen.(laughs)

S - There were 2 things that he had a very strong belief in. 1 was democracy - that every human being must have a vote. That is very important. And his other strong belief was that in our country there are all kinds of people...

Sudesh - Secularism.

S - Completely. Now what happened with secularism? There are Hindus, Christian, Janis, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists... Then there are also linguistic groups. People speak Marthia, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Konkani...then there are differences in food, houses... all this is our country. The word secularism doesn't impose anything on all these things, let it be like that. What is your opinion on this?

Sudesh - Jawaharlal Nehru said all this at the time of independence, but then why do riots happen.

S - Correct that is what I want to know? It's only on paper...

Ajit - See. On the 1 hand on paper, in the constitution, people are all equal. But then we're divided into castes and are treated differently like the Dalit for example. If that is there on the 1 hand and on the other we're constantly told that everyone is equal and should be treated equally then what do we do?

S - yes. Exactly. A man can get very confused.

S -Tell me about tourism today? What do you feel?

Sai - As tourism increases, our problems increase here. For these tourists who are coming the food that is sold to them is sold at a double price. Like for e.g. In Karnataka they get tomatoes for Rs. 5 but here we get

them for Rs.10. See because they get used to supplying for tourists at high prices, the people who sell continue to sell to us at high prices, even after the tourists leave. I've just given you an e.g. of tomatoes but this happens on everything.

S - If everything is on paper and isn't being implemented then what do we do? How has this been allowed to happen?

Ajit - The public should be inspired public ke andar josh anna chahiye.

S - josh anna chahiye.

Ajit - Then everything will be okay. If we don't want something, we don't want it.

S - but does anyone listen to the public?

Ajit - the government will have to. It does. See what's happening is that people feel that something's happened to you, it's happened. But it hasn't happened to me then it's okay. That's how people feel now.

S - So in your opinion the future's going to have a lot of problems for you?

They all laugh

Sai - We will all have to do something together.

S - Yes you must. You'll be young, I'm old. My time is over, you should do something.

Sai - Old is Gold.

Saeed laughs.

Ajit - If you are with us, then we can do something. We need some strong leaders. Like Subhash Chandra Bose.

S - Absolutely. That's why I'm listening to you. All this will be shown that I came to this village and people feel like this. And I'm travelling around the country and speaking to people.

This is how Goa I am - I was not even aware that there was a uniform civil code practised here. The code was instated by the Portuguese and to date law courts in Goa are bound to abide by it. But how has it worked? And how can it work in an All India context? (Legal analysis to include)

SA

Nature professes her freak behaviour with a hint of predictability. The unusual heat of the afternoon had augured some change in weather conditions. As though in respite for her harsh noon time behaviour, a summer breeze begins to blow. Doors and windows bang shut, the whispers of the sea and the trees alluring and enticing. Shai and I stirred from our catatonia rush outside. The cool breeze lifts us and we jump down onto the parapet. We light up a joint and lie down and listen to the sound of the wind. Trees sway, leaves rustle, dust swirls, our clothes flap against our bodies. We soon have company. Chandi and Hari, Beany & Boney, occupants of the adjoining room, have follow suit, tempted by the invitation of the wind. We implore Hari to play for us. His diffidence is yielded to the cool night air. He brings out his flute and loses himself in his own manipulations of the wind. The sea roars, palm trees fall at the feet of the earth; sand grains and leaves dance in frantic circles, all instruments of the wind. We shut our eyes, Hari plays on, the wind and his flute engaged in a battle that actually seems part of one design. Inspired and undaunted by her fury he takes his notes to a higher and higher plain. A wave of brilliance, the sky splits in two, Hari completes his raga and the earth's sky rents a shower of applause. Too moved to get up, we remained transfixed as our climactic performance plays on until, softly slowly gently it fades off. The trees silent, the sea quiet, the dust swept, the night sky dark and light. Our hair matted, our clothes soaking, our eyes smarting with disbelief; we hurl ourselves back into our boxes.

Later that night, At dinnertime Hari confesses that he had played the Megh Malhar.

SH

28th April, 1997.

Village life and the tourist scene. Our story of Goa has covered the 2 obvious ends of the spectrum. But without a glimpse of the historically significant architecture of South Goa, the story would seem totally incomplete. I insist that leaving South Goa without footage of the spectacular houses of Margao would be blasphemous, and after much persuasion Saeed gives in. "No interviews" Saeed warns us. "Just shots of interesting architecture." Shaina, Jennifer and I are selected to handle this shoot entirely.

We drive into Margao. A crowded street takes us into the main square surrounding the church. I indicate to everyone that we should get the camera out and just walk through the street. At 1st glance, the square looks like that of any little Goan town but on a closer look, you see some of the most exquisite architecture encircling these streets buzzing with scooters and cars and people. We walk around the square, peeping in to the houses and chatting with its residents. Most of the houses here, we notice, are extremely well maintained, with each possessing a distinct character, colour and grace. Enamoured with the exteriors of these homes, and their exquisite balcaos Jangle decides to ignore Saeed's instruction to be back in 2 hours. We shoot and shoot and shoot...for Jangle has lost himself in the balcaos, the dureegs, the combe's on the gates...

South Goa truly has it all - virgin beaches, quiet villages, fields, forestry.... And they all still thrive in perfect unison primarily because South Goa is still relatively untouched by incompetent tourism planners who are responsible for much of North Goa's abuse. The Portuguese like most colonial powers, used religion to assert their strength in the colony. It has been said, however, that the people of South Goa were not converted by the sword like those living in the old conquests were. They were instead lured into Christianity by gifts of property and wealth. Thus, south Goa became entirely controlled by the landed gentry - the bhattkars. They laid down the law for the serfs who worked on their fields - the mundkars. The Portuguese went about propagating the feudal system in the hope that conversion would thus increase. The bhattkars were encouraged to adopt European styles of living so as to create a separation from their Goan roots. This resulted in a fusion of 2 cultures manifested mainly through the architecture of the bhattkars homes, which thus became central to this entire process of re-enculturation. Since the slow decline of the agrarian feudal system, liberation of Goa in 1961 and the subsequent new tenancy laws, the income needed to maintain old houses has steadily increased thus resulting in the neglect of old homes and a subsequent loss of respect for old architecture. Yet, surprisingly a significant number of bhattkar families, have managed to maintain their houses somehow. But for how long these magnificent pieces of architecture will remain for us to behold, I wonder.

I thus make a sad farewell to Goa - its architecture, its ambience, its charm, its food, its people, it's all... Here ends our trust with Goa.

60 km out of Margao, towards Karwar and we're back into Karnataka - new sights, new sounds, new smells, new discoveries...At 80km per hour our 4 little homes cruise down the Goa - Karwar highway. Expecting little from our new destination we follow the highway nonchalantly through ghats and wooded areas. Suddenly, the road slices narrowly right down the center of a hill. At the other end, we're welcomed into Karwar by one of the most spectacular views ever - aquamarine water with white sandy beaches, surrounded by hills in the distance. The road continues onto a bridge, which looks over the confluence of the sea and the river.

Breathtaking! Simply unimaginable! We stop.

We spend 5 windblown minutes on the bridge and let our cameras click away. I experiment with composition, exposures, angles...everything. But to capture what the naked eye can see is next to impossible. In my mind's eye. That's where this moment will have to remain - special only to me with not even the most lyrical of descriptions ever able to articulate my extraordinary experience of actually being there and feeling the moment.

The unexpected view having left Jangle with a very run of the mill shot, we decide to head back and reenter the bridge. We drive back for a 2nd shot. We U-turn. Back into the hill and out and onto the bridge. Jangle's happier now. As we come off the bridge, we notice a crowd gathering underneath. The camera car takes an unexpected turn and heads in the direction of the commotion We all follow. People are running around madly and shouting out for an ambulance. Our cars get to the site of the action and we all get out. "What's happened? What's happened?" I shout out to Ravi, who seems to have already got the scoop. "A girl jumped from the bridge!" he shouts and walks off. A young girl had only just attempted suicide. While we spent our time hooing and haaaing at the spectacular view and faking shots, a young girl had just tried to kill herself. She had just tried to end her life.

It turns out that a fisherman had seen her fall; he jumped into the water and brought her to safety. I refuse to step out of the car. The story just leaves me cold. From my car window, I catch a glimpse of her lying in the corner, surrounded by local fishermen, villagers and passers by like us staring staring staring.

The camera is immediately brought out of the car and Saeed begins to speak to people at the sight. By now a huge crowd has gathered around her...staring at her as she screams hysterically, spits out water and lies there in a dishevelled state. All of us seem equally shaken by this incident and sensitive enough not to shove a camera into the face of a traumatised suicide victim. She's only a young girl, I tell myself. And she tried to take her own life. Nobody knows who she is or where she's come from...Who is going to take responsibility for her? She is obviously extremely distraught, screaming and weeping uncontrollably. Saeed ensures that she is going to be taken care of by the people there, and we get into our cars and leave.

This entire episode is all too disturbing for me. We drive on in silence. Why did she do this? Maybe she'd failed in her exams, maybe a jilted lover, maybe fear of marriage, maybe anything, how will we ever know? But what will be her fate now? Imagine her plight now when she goes back home. The taboo of having done this in the 1st place. Who will marry her? She'll be considered off her head. She'll remain emotionally scarred all her life and her entire existence at home is going to change drastically. And we have witnessed a moment that will change her life forever.

We arrive in Karwar town, and stop for lunch. I am unable to eat lunch but I look around at everybody laughing, chatting, behaving like nothing strange had happened. Everything, and everyone's back to normal. How can we be this desensitised? Does living in Bombay do this to us or are we just being normal and practical adults? I don't think I understand the workings of the human mind. I don't think I'll ever understand the workings of the human mind.