

film . Agastya (anglicized to August) Sen is the son of the Governor of the State of Bengal. Born into a world of urban, post-colonial privilege, he has been educated in the finest schools and brought up in the cosmopolitan whirl of Delhi and Calcutta. As is typical of his class, who speak and think in English, his range of reference is almost completely western—he invokes *Twin Peaks* on occasion, lipsynchs to Queen (done while driving, à la *Wayne's World*), uses Marcus Aurelius for his daily dose of wisdom from the classics. Just out of university, August has joined the Indian Administrative Service—the most influential and powerful cadre of civil servants in the country, the governing elite. As the film begins, August is sent off for a year's training to Madna, a small town in the backwaters of central India, where for the first time he comes into contact with rural India. An innocent abroad, brought into contact with the "real" India for the first time, August is in for all sorts of surprises, and, unable to deal with his reality, retreats into a world of daydreams and masturbatory fantasies.

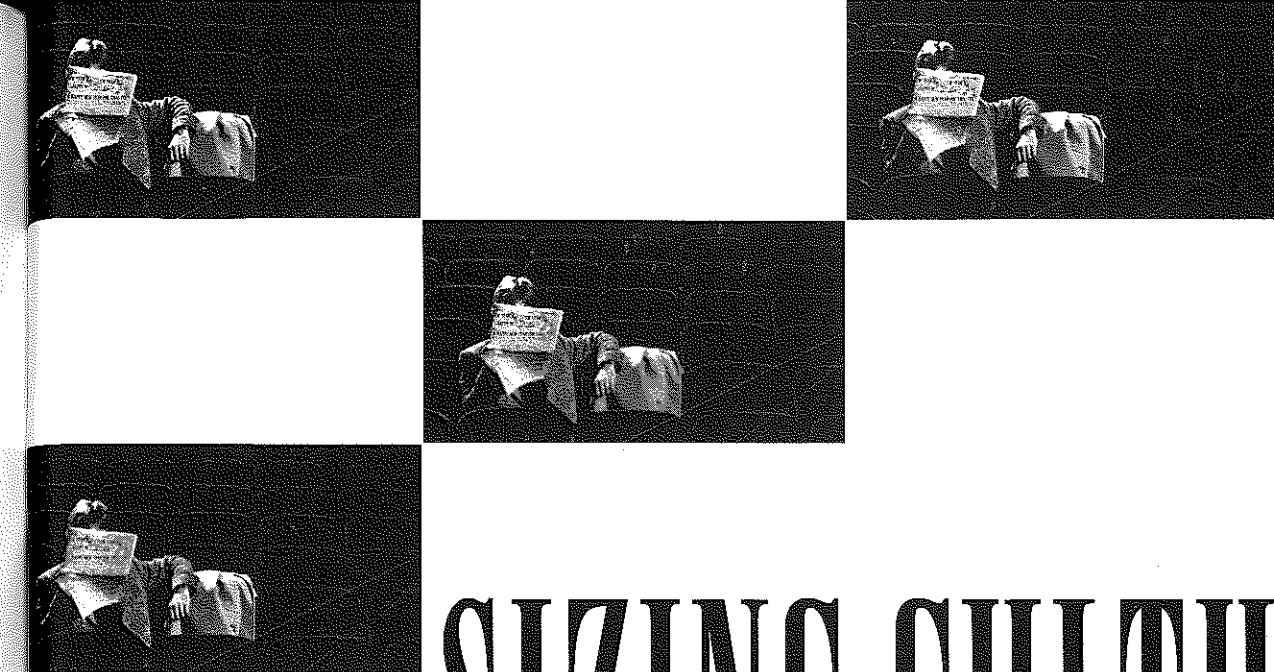
My quarrel with the film, in the first instance, is that the story is told from the perspective of a hip, urban westernized Indian and is designed to identify with equally hip, urban westernized Indians and Westerners. Everybody else comes off as being hopelessly provincial. It is a town populated by pompous bureaucrats and sycophantic minions, bored housewives, comic-book policemen and sinister servants, a nation of caricatures and "goons," to quote Sathe. What is particularly insidious about this is that the film has deliberately taken out the nuances and subtleties of the novel to achieve this effect. In the novel, August's central concern is the state of ennui that afflicts him—he has no real ambitions, no desires, and, recognizing this, chafes at his own paralyzing inertia. That is the reason for his retreat into himself. He is also fully conscious of and uncomfortable with his alienation from his own culture, but his level of perception that never translates to the screen. He says of Bhatia, a school chum also serving his time with the service in Madna, who is besotted with Western culture, that he is "just one more urban Indian bewitched by America's hard sell in the Third World." That line never makes it into the film; instead Bhatia is presented as a further validation of August's perceptions of the town and its people, and rural India by implication. *English, August* was made for Western audiences. It was shot in English (with the help of French financing) and there is no way that the Indian censor board is going to pass the film—with its nudity and salacious sex—to the Indian commercial market. It will probably be a great success in the West—unfortunately.

Another film designed for the West and the elite art-house circuit is *Bandit Queen* by Shekhar Kapur. It was perhaps one of the most controversial films at the Festival. In what is probably a Festival first, there were reports of the real life heroine of the film threatening to sue the film's producers and the Festival if the film were screened. Word was, depending on who was talking, that she had either refused to see the film or that the producers had refused to allow her to see the film. *Bandit Queen* tells the story of Phoolan Devi—a sort of contemporary Robin Hood. Escaping from a history of poverty and abuse, Phoolan Devi

became the leader of a gang of men who led daring raids on towns and villages, and thwarted government forces for years. By the time she was finally negotiated into a surrender in 1983, she had achieved cult status and the title Phoolan Devi (Goddess of Flowers). She is now married to an MP and is running for office herself. The film is based on her bestselling autobiography and is a tremendous film in many ways, carrying an emotional punch from the opening frame that never lets up until the credits roll. Seema Biswas as Phoolan Devi does a tremendous job in what from all accounts was a harrowing role. Apparently she was so traumatized by a crucial scene in the film, where she is paraded naked in front of an entire village, that shooting had to be suspended for four months. The film is, it should be acknowledged, a sensationalized thriller. The energy of the film is fuelled by the sheer emotional rage of the sexually ravaged Phoolan Devi. The profound social and political circumstances—the tensions between castes, the fight over land that had as much to do with the gang warfare—are given short shrift. But then the film is really no more than what it was meant to be: an action thriller.

Of the documentaries, Anand Patwardhan's was the most compelling. *Father, Son, and the Holy War* is Patwardhan's ambitious follow-up to his 1992 documentary, *In the Name of God*—the vibrant film that documented the religious wars that erupted in 1990. *Father, Son, and the Holy War* attempts to trace the roots of the fundamentalist violence that has become so much a part of the Indian landscape. The documentary is divided into two parts; Part One, "Trial by Fire," refers to the fires that are burning up Indian society. In one chilling section Patwardhan interviews a brother and other men related to a woman who committed sati—the ritual self-immolation of widows that is now illegal in India, but that is becoming more popular wrapped as it is in fundamentalist fervour. The men have deified the sister for, in their view, her act of religious conviction. In another section, the filmmaker interviews a social worker who was savagely attacked and her husband killed in an apparently random attack. Punctuated by charred scenes of carnage, this section is disturbing, compelling; it is Patwardhan at his best. Part Two, "Hero Pharmacy," is more ambitious and works less well. Here Patwardhan looks at the cult of the machismo that has always been present in Indian society, but that is now taking on sinister ramifications. He looks at the roots of violence that have historic antecedents in the warrior society of the past and are now being newly affirmed by the Schwarzenegger/Stallone/Hulk Hogan school of machismo that has made its inroads into Indian culture. Patwardhan's over-all conceit is an interesting one, if a little facile. Five thousand years of patriarchy does not fully explain the sudden explosion of fundamentalist fervour that is now erupting all over the world. His skill as always lies in his capturing of the kinetic intensity and fervour of life on the street. If you are looking for real images of India, look to Patwardhan.

Steve Pereira is the co-ordinator of Desh Pardesh, a South Asian cultural festival and a writer and artist living in Toronto.



DOWN SIZING CULTURE

In my current copy of the *Toronto Star*, I find the following item:

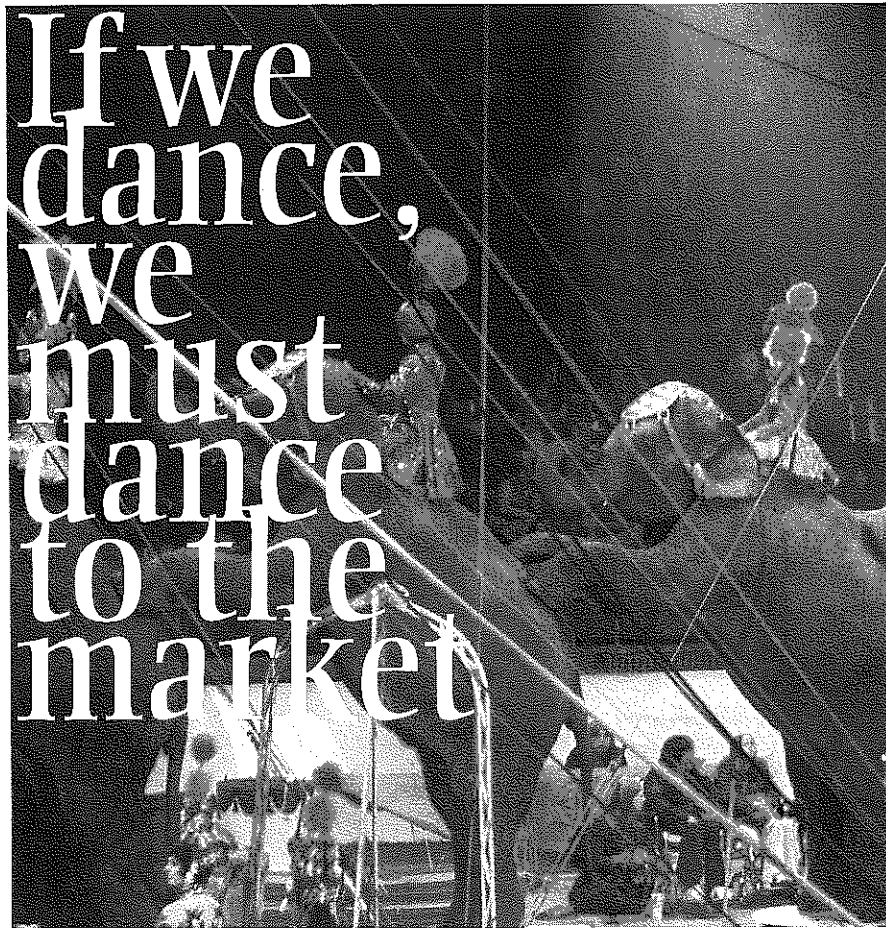
The most prominent casualty at the Jewish Community Centre is the Leah Posluns Theatre, whose entire 1994-5 season has been axed. The theatre, formerly designated as North York's official theatre, has been shut down indefinitely for the first time in at least 17 years.

The main reason is that JCC directors have spent a \$2.4 million endowment fund set up for the theatre to pay the operating costs of the centre. Bernie Ghert, president of the Jewish Federation, which is trying to sort out the centre's financial situation, says that without this support, the theatre has now become a serious financial burden. . . . Sources say staff at the Leah Posluns Theatre are outraged at what has happened. They claim the theatre has always been solvent, and the endowment fund—capital raised or donated by businessman Wilfred Posluns—should never have been touched.

(Henry Mietkiewicz, *Toronto Star*, August 28, 1994)

by Ioan Davies

If we dance, we must dance to the market



If I had wanted to invent a news item to start this piece, I could not have done better. We have been told repeatedly by federal and provincial agencies that if we want culture (e.g., magazines, theatres, dance, film, etc.) these should be self-sufficient, that the government should have no part in the dance-shoes of the nation. If we dance, we must dance to the market. The saga of the Jewish Y shows how the market dances and ignores a large segment of its community.

In their urge to abandon the responsibility to govern, most governments in Canada, imitating the United States and Britain, have chosen to ridicule the idea that the state should have any part in funding any aspect of culture. Robert Fulford, using a state-subsidized network, organized a programme through the fall of 1993 on CBC's "Ideas" on culture and the market in which most of the major speakers argued against the state having any-

thing to do with culture. The programme did not, of course, include schools or universities which are integral to culture, and which are, in most cases, funded by public money. When we talk of culture now, we talk of the state backing off on its support. Yet the state spends increasing moneys on culture. In Toronto, the SkyDome was built almost entirely with state (federal and provincial) money, though it was made to look like a triumph of private enterprise. The Winter Garden Theatre was heavily subsidized and so was the North York consortium of theatres and concert halls. The O'Keefe Centre is currently being rebuilt with some state money. The figures here are astronomical by the standards of this magazine. Yet it is this magazine (and many others like it) which are being squeezed until the pips squeak. Why?

Two instant answers. Governments are not afraid of giving money in order to turn culture into a com-

modity to be sold to the highest bidder so that the spectacle is seen to be culture. It doesn't matter who brings the spectacle: we will provide the venue. Toronto must become the specular capital of the world, and hence we will get tourist dollars from those benighted souls in Buffalo, Rochester, etc. who hunger for culture. (So, too, with Caribana, Caravan, etc., which allow the multicultural segments of the city to focus their energies on an event rather than create a culture of engagement). The second instant answer is that governments have given up on the idea of providing subsidies by which those organic intellectuals or creative artists who are opposed to its everyday concerns might do their thing. The issue is not whether culture is downsized, but under whose auspices, and for what reasons.

In the Victoria Commonwealth Games the Australians came out on top because state and private funds worked together to make sure that they would be on top. In a recent visit to Kenya I discovered that one of the very few lively cultural centres was sponsored by the French Government. (France? but this is a former British colony). Every country is apparently under the gun because of the IMF, the World Bank and the Junk Bond crises of the late 1980s, but each works on different cultural priorities. It seems not to matter much whether accountants (such as Paul Audley in his report for the Ontario government or the more recent report, *The Business of Culture*, by the provincial cultural advisory group) produce figures which show how much the cultural industries, collectively or separately, make, the various Canadian governments decide that culture must be downsized. Whatever this means in terms of banks, factories, the service industries, in culture it means that the cultural products must come from elsewhere and that there will be no investment in human capital.

But to promote downsizing, there must be an ideology, a smokescreen, to make the entire venture respectable. The position of the loony right is clear enough and hardly deserves intellectual discus-

sion, although their power for mischief-making should not be underestimated. Their position, represented by the likes of John Crispo and the Reform Party, is a purely ideological one in which the market controls all and 'minority' views will ultimately be snuffed out because they will never control a sufficiently large segment of the "market." (This is coupled with a paranoid corollary that organizations like the CBC and the Canada Council are necessarily controlled by the "left" because they are subsidized by taxes).

Much more interesting, because they see themselves as the voices of the cultural establishment, are the columnists who have been totally sucked in by market rhetoric and anti-intellectualism. Fulford, Michael Coren, Andrew Coyne, John Bentley Mays and sometimes Bronwyn Drainie have made a job, over the past year or so, of bashing state subsidies for the arts, while Bruce Blackadair in the *Sunday Star* pathetically goes out of his way to denigrate anything Canadian in his search for quotable gob-bets from American magazines. The argument that they all advance, of course, is that internationalism is pluralism, that having imported culture raises our standards rather than making us a cosseted backwater. The curious feature of all this is that the examples used are invariably American. It is as if, in the funding of culture, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Britain, Spain, not to speak of the Low Countries, Scandinavia or Australia, did not exist. Pluralism, it seems, works between Canada and the USA, but not within Canada, and hence countries which have various ways of handling their internal differences are not important because they are not American. In Fulford's "Ideas" series there was not one voice from outside North America, and most were from the USA. Will Straw has argued that "the range of publications, sense of sustained dialogue and presence of shared concerns which seem to many Canadians to characterize cultural studies in Australia has offered a more appealing and viable model than those of either Great Britain or of the United States." In the United States, large foundations

(Ford, Guggenheim, Carnegie-Mellen, Fulbright, Rockefeller, etc.) act as surrogates for state sponsorship of the arts. In Canada we have none of these. The slickness of Fulford's or Coren's prose and their pretensions to scholarship barely conceal the ideological agenda that accompanies their work.

The other aspect of this campaign is the sheer anti-intellectualism of the exercise. In different ways over the past year, Mays, Fulford and Coren have weighed in with pieces which attempt to show that academic scholarship consists of unreadable prose organized by totalitarian thought police whose object is to denigrate great art and literature. Emily Carr gave occasion to both Fulford and Mays to take wild swipes against post-structuralist critiques of her work. In neither case did they refer to a body of work, but rather to single examples of writing which they disliked. That the issues have been thoroughly

debated in *Parallelogramme* and various gallery catalogues is never recognized. The critical sideswipes by these writers hardly invite dialogue, but rather present us with a set of executive flats against any politically engaged attitudes with which they disagree. The name of the game here is to denounce any politics that seems to come from the left, label it politically correct and academically obfuscating and then ask why the state should be funding such rubbish.

The ultimate problem with all this is that it is couched in the language of "common sense." But this is precisely what ideology is all about. Because, in the end, what this type of chatter does, for those who really do want to "downsize" culture, is to create the climate of opinion that makes it legitimate. The language may seem civilized, but the consequences are brutal.

Ioan Davies is a *Border/Lines* collective member.

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