

FROM THE EDITOR

A SYMBOLIC SIGHT

"Picture yourself in a cage, with bars all around. Faces, some snarling, some jeering, yet others open-eyed in awe, move past you. Peanuts, paper balls or even plantain peels come flying at you. Little 'devils' dance around waiting to poke you in the sides while elders warn them to keep their distance from you. Difficult, isn't it?"

This is an extract from a report in the front page of *The Hindu* (24 May '88).

The wild animals subjected to this humiliation were brought from a zoological park to the venue of a political party's conference in a city. The party is in power in the state which contained both the zoo and the venue.

The issue that immediately comes to mind is man's conduct towards animals. But let us keep that aside for a moment. Let us concern ourselves with man's conduct towards man, to be more precise to the context, the politician's attitude towards the people.

In what way could the animals sulking in their cages contribute to the ideological or organisational deliberations or help the delegates solve problems of the state? What is their relevance to a conference of politicians and party workers?

They were brought there to attract, entertain, and impress the crowds. It is symbolic of the state of affairs in politics. Nobody in the party seems to have felt the sting of the shame inherent in the situation — that politicians must impress the people through such utterly crude and uncouth means. No political party can be totally bereft of sensible or intellectual elements. When will they learn to raise their voice against such primitive ways of impressing people?

There are several political parties who speak out against the use of money in the Elections. Is there any fundamental difference between influencing votes through money and through other wrong means? Isn't erecting ever bigger cut-outs of leaders and trying to influence the voter only a degree less bad than pushing a currency note into his hand — for both the methods play with his ignorance? Even worse — far more harmful — is the effort to confuse the voter's perspective in regard to illusion and reality. A gentleman might have performed miracles in a film, acting in the role of an Avatar. To project that image of the gentleman on a political platform is to promise a performance of similar miracles by him in the socio-economic field. Let the sensible elements in all the political parties think if this is not childish — if not a deception played on the voters, ultimately leading to their disillusionment with the very institution of politics.

Political parties must learn to thrive on ideology and service to the people, not on the helpless animal. This is a must if our democracy is to become healthier. And all politicians will agree that our democracy ought to be healthier.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

HEART-ATTACKS FOR SALE

Will you like to be suddenly taken prisoner in Africa? Alternatively, will you like to witness a missile attack in the Gulf war, of course, not without running the risk of being hit by a splinter or spark from the dazzling exchange?

The offer is made by an ambitious London travel enterprise which takes pride in naming itself as "Holidays for Maniacs".

Obviously they are sure that there are enough maniacs to give them business. They might be even more sure that non-maniacs too would soon be inspired by the maniacs. After all this is the day of the maniac!

Sometime ago the largest travel agency in Mexico had launched only a slightly different programme. A cavalcade of luxury buses carrying their clients through a hilly region came to a sudden halt at night. Some masked men, guns, pistols and daggers in their hands, entered the buses. The guide's panicky voice advised the ladies and gentlemen to hand over their valuables to the bandits to avoid being killed. The passengers obeyed. Two or three of them swooned away. One had his first heart-attack.

The cavalcade reached its destination. The "bandits" were the first to descend. They removed their masks and were seen ready to receive the guests. The tourists now realised that the 'raid' was a part of the well laid-out programme meant to give them a taste of real adventure!

We do not know if this is still continuing. The doubt emanates from the common knowledge that while to see violence is sport (generally on the stage or on the screen) to become a victim of violence is not. While there is satisfaction in showing sympathy to a victim of violence, there is no satisfaction in becoming the victim proper.

But, who knows, the laws of psychology are perhaps changing. Perhaps the TV watcher in the West is bored with merely witnessing violence and now he desires to become a part of the scene, if not as a performer of violence, as its target.

Is the modern man developing a morbid inclination for suffering vulgarity and violence? Perhaps that has made the world atmosphere what it is, for in the ultimate analysis, we get the world we deserve. That has also made the "Holidays for Maniacs" Club so boldly offer us such pleasures!