

ISSN 0829-3686

# BICHITRA SAMACHAR

*Bichitra*



*বীচিত্রা*

The Newsmagazine of  
the Bengali People of Manitoba

---

Manitoba Youth  
Moving Ahead  
International  
Youth Year 1985

---



VOLUME 1 AUGUST, 1985

NUMBER 1

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

## ANCIENT BENGAL

Glimpses From Our Remote Past	p. 2
Customs of the Sena Period - Bengal	p. 3
The Role of Women in the Sena Period - Bengal	p. 5

## MODERN BENGAL

Kazi Nazrul Islam	p. 6
Rabindranath Tagore	p. 8
Foreign Student Admission to Vishvabharati	p. 11
Vivekananda	p. 14
Movies by Satyajit Ray	p. 16

## ISSUES FACING INDO-CANADIANS

An Old World Culture in a New World Country	p. 18
Think Tank 1985	p. 22
Think Tank Results	p. 23

## INDIA MOVES WITH THE TIMES

India's Space Program	p. 26
-----------------------	-------

# INTRODUCTION

---

As you are probably aware, 1985 has been declared the International Year of the Youth in recognition of the important role that youth play in today's world and that they will particularly play in the future. Over the year various activities have been planned to give young people the opportunity to display their talents and develop their potential.

Bichitra has recognized the importance of encouraging its younger members to get involved and, in keeping with this year's theme, it has initiated its own Youth Year project. This first issue of the newsmagazine, Bichitra Samachar, has been prepared by some of the Bengali community's younger generation in an effort to make Bengalis and Canadians, in general, more aware of Bengali heritage and the role that its community plays in Manitoba.

The newsmagazine itself contains articles covering a broad scope of interests, ranging

from Bengali history to religion. Also included are articles dealing with India as a whole and the issues that face Indians living in Canada. It is being published in conjunction with Manitoba Archives, who has expressed interest in including such information on our community in the Archives Library.

This first issue of Bichitra Samachar marks the beginning of what will hopefully become a permanent feature of Bichitra. Even though Youth Year officially ends in December, we hope that Bengali young people will continue to get involved with such activities. It is especially essential that we, the first generation to grow up in Canada, do not lose sight of our heritage and that we share this heritage with our non-Bengali friends. Such steps can only improve our understanding and tolerance as well as strengthen Canada's multicultural mosaic.

Reeni Bose

---

EDITORS:

REENI BOSE  
MILI ROY  
JAY SINHA

TYPING AND LAYOUT:

REENI BOSE

PUBLISHED BY:

Dr. Ranendra Nath Sinha  
President of Bichitra Inc.  
582 Queenston St.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3N 0X3



# ANCIENT BENGAL

## GLIMPSES FROM OUR REMOTE PAST

When examining the culture of any group of people it is always beneficial to look at the historical background of that culture. Therefore, as this newsmagazine aims to present the unique qualities of the Bengali people, it is appropriate to begin with their historical origins. Although the modern day Bengali states of Bangladesh and West Bengal (in India) were not established until the rule of the Muslims (1526-1862), they boasted of a highly developed civilization as early as the sixth century B.C. Detailed accounts written by Greek scholars as well as recent excavational work in the region of present-day Bengal provide a great deal of insight into the characteristics of Ancient Bengal.

### THE BENGALI ARMY DURING ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S CAMPAIGN

Greek scholars, such as Virgil and Pliny, provide the earliest accounts of civilization in the Bengal region. In their writings, they describe the presence of many autonomous tribes. Of these, two tribes in particular, the Gangaridai and the Prasii, stand out as being the most powerful and significant. The Gangaridai ruled a vast portion of Northern India, with the boundaries of their empire extending from the Beas River of the Punjab to the western bank of the Ganges River. Their neighbors, the Prasii, also inhabited Northern India but were based along the eastern bank of the Ganges.

Both tribes were especially dominant during the invasion of India by Alexander the Great and were noted for their remarkably well-organized and efficiently trained troops. According to the Greek philosopher, Pliny, the Prasii had already developed the art of elephant warfare, building up a reserve of 6000 elephants, by the time Alexander began his conquest. In fact, according to Dr. R.C. Majumdar, a celebrated Indian historian, the reputation of the prowess of these tribes was so great, that Alexander did not even attempt to undertake an expedition into their territories. Not only were they skilled in elephantry, but also in infantry, cavalry, and chariot riding, making them a formidable opponent for any invading army. Thus, one of the important characteristics of Ancient Bengal was its advanced military organization.

### DISCOVERY OF ANCIENT BENGALI CIVILIZATION

Another valuable glimpse of Ancient Bengal came in the 1960's when several archeological excavations were carried out in the region of Burdwan. These excavations resulted in the discovery of Pandu Rajar Dhibi, a pre-Aryan group of towns. These towns showed that the early Bengalis were not only skilled in military organization but also in sophisticated urbanization. Their towns consisted of well-built plastered houses, whose architecture displayed a remarkable amount of complexity for the time in which they were built.



# CUSTOMS OF THE SENA PERIOD — BENGAL

The lives of ancient Bengalis were spent within the confines of innumerable religious dicta and social stipulations. From the moment of conception to the moment of death, life was a virtually continuous series of ceremonies and rites. Although these customs had been performed as early as the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., knowledge of the actual procedures dates only as far back as the Brahmanical rituals of the 11th and 12th centuries. It is impossible to identify every custom that existed, but many of the major ones are known.

The first major rites in life were performed before the birth of the child. In Garbhadhana, a ceremony for impregnation, the husband was to dress in clean clothes, smear his body with scents, and sit facing the east beside his wife on kusa grass. Touching his wife with his right hand, he then chanted certain Vedic verses asking the gods' favour in impregnation. After giving his wife a mixture of five dairy products, the husband exchanged a bundle of fruit tied in yellow cloth with her three times. In the third month of pregnancy, Pumsavana was performed in order to obtain a male child. Although there were two versions of this rite, it essentially involved the kindling of a sacred fire before which the husband stood, facing west, and reciting Vedic verses for male progeny.

The Simantannayana ceremony to ensure the wife's welfare during pregnancy could be carried out in the fourth, sixth or eighth month. The wife sat facing eastward on

kusa grass, to the west of the sacred fire, "mangala", and to the left of her husband. He then smeared a pair of ripe figs with pastes such as white mustard, stood behind his wife, and strung them around his wife's throat with silk. The husband then parted his wife's hair with various implements, such as grass blades, reeds, and porcupine quills, while offering prayers to the fire. The wife was bathed, and finally, she ate the Krisara, a preparation of cardamum, rice and lentils. In the last stages of pregnancy, the father performed Soshyanti-homa to ensure easy delivery by chanting prayers to a sacred fire, and mentioning the intended name of his future son.

The moment of birth was celebrated by the ceremony of jata-karman. If a son had been born, the father bathed, chanted mantras, and rubbed the child's tongue with specially prepared powders, clarified butter and gold. The child was then allowed to nurse, while the father bathed again. On four different third days of the bright halves of the lunar months, the rites of Nishbramana were observed. In the evening, the mother held the child facing north and to the left of the father, handed the child to the father, and moved to her husband's right side, facing west. The father showed the baby the moon, offered the moon sacrificial water and performed purificatory rites. The child was named during the nama-karana ceremony, which was performed ten nights, one hundred nights, six months, or one year after birth. In this ritual, the mother handed the

child to the father, and sat to the left of her husband before the sacred fire, "parthiva". The father offered prayers to the fire, whispered the child's name first to the mother, next to the child, and then uttered more mantras.

Anna-prasana, still popular in a slightly modified form today, was performed six months after birth. The father bathed, recited verses, kindled the sacred fire, suchi, and offered prayers to it, in order to protect his child from hunger, thirst, and other suffering. He then fed the child while chanting mantras. Unlike most other customs, naimitlika - murdha - bhigrana seems to have been unique to Bengal. When the father returned home after a lengthy absence, he would touch his sons' heads in order of age, recite three mantras for long life and smell their heads, still chanting mantras. The ceremony of churda-karana or tansure was carried out in the first or third year of life. It involved the shaving of the head before the sacred fire, satya, and the recital of verses.

A very important rite was the upanayana or presentation of the sacred thread to a Brahmin boy of 8 to 16 years of age. The Brahmin conducting the function kindled the sacred fire, sanudbhava, shaved the head of the boy receiving the thread, bathed him, and clothed him. The conductor then recited prayers, and chanted Vedic hymns while touching the boy. After making certain vows, the boy was dressed in a girdle of munja grass, a black antelope-skin and the sacred thread. He

was taught a prayer and given a staff, with which he was to beg alms in order to present them to the conductor. He spent the remainder of the day at the same place, begging for more food to eat and worshipping the fire. From that day until death, he was to eat with only his thumb, middle and index fingers. Finally, the conductor was paid his fees.

After his upanayana, a boy would begin serious education, often away from home. On returning home after completion of his studies, samavartana was performed. Sacrifices and prayers were offered to the sacred fire, jyajnas. The student was fed, his hair and beard were shaved, and he was given a garland, leather shoes and a bamboo stick. He then mounted a bull-cart, travelled east or north and then south, and came finally to the conductor of the ceremony, to whom he gave dakshina or fees.

Probably the most important ritual during one's lifetime was marriage. Although the matrimonial process was complex and lengthy, only a general outline is given here. The general age for marriage of men was between 25 and 50. Girls were expected to marry before reaching puberty. The ceremony was centered around a sacred fire and involved an extremely long and detailed procedure, including the physical tying of the bride to the groom, the recitation of many mantras and prayers, the preparation of the bride by bathing in turmeric and later marking her with vermillion, and the circling



# THE ROLE OF WOMEN

## IN THE SENA PERIOD — BENGAL

Because Bengali society has been one of male domination since the beginning of recorded history, the greater part of any information that has survived from ancient times deals chiefly with the lives of men. Nevertheless, from certain works such as the Kamasutra and the Brihad-charma Purana, and from the words of certain famous men, such as the great judge, Jimutavahana, the nature of the lives of Bengali women in ancient times can be pieced together.

Approximately 800 years ago, at the turn of the 12th century A.D., women in Bengal had virtually no unique identity of their own, either socially, legally or economically but they were educated to some degree. The preservation of letters written by women of the time are evidence of literacy among some of them at least. Furthermore, because the prevalent religion was Hinduism, the Purdah system was not much in use.

The freedom of women, and in particular of married women, ended at that point. The first and foremost duty of any woman was obedience to husband or father. Thus, despite the absence of Purdah, the wife was free to do only that which the husband decreed. Even fasting for religious purposes could not be performed without his consent. Likewise, an unmarried woman was to allow herself to be completely ruled by her father.

Few women had any legal rights or privileges and few possessions that they could truly call their own. They did not work outside the home, although in certain cases of

shortage of money, wives worked at spinning, weaving or other such trades to earn extra income for the household. Very often, too, women had to share their position within the home, as polygamy was common practice at the time.

Without a doubt, however, the lives of widows were the most difficult. Legally, the widow had no claim to her husband's property after his death. It passed automatically to any male children. In the absence of sons, the property would pass to the widow, but she would have no right to the sale, mortgage, gift or other disposal of it, other than as directed by the husband's surviving family.

Socially, too, the widow's life was full of hardship. She was expected to live with her husband's family, in total compliance with its members. The remainder of her life was to be spent in devotion to the memory of her husband, living frugally and abstaining from luxury. She was to maintain the strictest chastity, and was not permitted to eat "tasty" foods such as meat, fish, eggs, etc. Despite following the various restrictions and guidelines, widows were still regarded by society as "inauspicious", and were excluded from virtually all festivals and ceremonies.

"Sati-daha" was present at the time. Widows were generally encouraged to follow their husbands into the funeral pyre to expiate themselves of all sin and to enjoy a new life in Heaven in the company of the husband. Women who had not done so at the time of



# MODERN BENGAL

---

## KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

Kazi Nazrul Islam is known as one of the top most poets in the history of Bengal. He was born at a time when British rule in India was fast coming to an end. This Bengali poet was hardly known to the outside world, even outside the undivided province of Bengal, as much as Tagore, Shakespeare and Milton were. He was indeed a great poet and composer, who was acknowledged by Tagore as one of the leading poets in the world of all times.

Kazi Nazrul Islam was born in a small village near Asansol in the district of Burdwan, India in the last quarter of the 19th century. He worked as a teenager in a restaurant in Asansol as a helper. Later, he joined the army as a private, fighting in Turkey and France, and was later promoted to Havildar. His description of war depicts how his sensitive mind was revolted by the senseless killings. When he returned to India, he saw the social and political injustice, and was moved by the British oppression towards the people of India. He composed poems which shook the nation to the point where his poems of Agni Bina (The flute of fire) were banned by the British Government of India. Such poems acted as fuel for the already bitter Indians and helped to spark the revolution. Kazi Nazrul Islam was called "Bid-roki Kavi" or "The Rebellious poet". His poem reads:

"Say, oh the brave one,  
say your head is held high  
above, which goes even higher  
than the highest mountain of  
the world, say, oh the brave  
one, oh the brave one, you  
will travel through the unfathomed sky, passing through the moon, the sun, the planets and all the stars, you will go through the midst of the universe, oh brave, you reach God's throne, I am now awake."

"Say, oh the brave one,  
God will make us successful,  
and will crown us with glory."

"Say, oh the brave one,  
my head be held high above the  
mountain, for ever and ever."

"I am cruel, untiring,  
undefeated, I am cyclone, I am  
destruction, I am worthy to be  
afraid of, I am a curse of the  
living world. I am undefeated,  
I break everything to dust, I  
do not obey time, I cannot be  
ruled, I break all ties, all  
the rules and regulations, I  
do not obey any law of the so  
called 'justice', I am the  
torpedo, I am a mine which  
destroys the battleship, if  
need be, I am the tornado,  
causing destruction, I am the  
revolution."

"Say, oh the brave one,  
my head is held high -  
forever."

"Say, am a saint, a soldier, a  
prince - I am a Bedouin, I am  
Ghengis Khan, I do not bow to  
anybody except to myself, I am  
thunder, I am a volcano, I



will burn the universe, My mind's open, I laugh and dance, I will create a stance."

"Sometimes I am cool, sometimes restless, sometimes I am autocratic, I have no fear, I break the pride of the Proud, I flow like water fall, I am bright and I shine forever and ever, I grab hold the neck of the most poisonous snake, I am son of an angel, I am restless, I break all the rules and regulations. I dance like mad, I am crazy? but at least I have known myself, today all my ties are open, I am free at last. I will rest when the cries of the oppressed will not be heard any more, when the oppressor will surrender his sword - I then shall feel tired and shall calm down."

"Say, I am brave, I challenge the universe, my head is held high, if need be all alone."

Kazi Nazrul Islam was not only a leading poet, but also a writer and composer. He composed songs based on his own poems, many of which are very popular amongst the Bengalis.

His writings regarding the life of a Soldier, in which he describes his experience as a soldier in a Verdun trench in France, indeed touch the heart.

Through his many poems, we find that he had a keen sense of humour. He also had a vast knowledge of both Muslim and Hindu religion, which is shown through many of his poems.

He wrote thousands of unforgettable poems, songs and writings before he was afflicted with a devastating illness before reaching the age of 35. In his writings, he showed equality amongst the Muslims and Hindus of the then divided India and called all the other religious denominations under the one flag of independent India.

His later life was marred with sadness. He lived a life of dependency and died in P.G. Hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1976. Although he lived to be over 70 years old, his active life was less than 35 years.

He will indeed be remembered as a rebel poet who was one of the pioneers of liberating India. "May God bless his soul."

Mohammad Mujibur Rahman



# RABINDRANATH TAGORE

In the year 1861, Rabindranath Tagore was born in the house of the Tagores in Calcutta on Tuesday, May 7 between 2:30 and 3 o'clock. He was born the seventh and youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, the leader of the religious reform movement, Brahma Samaj. The Tagore household was one of wealth and academic brilliance. When still a young boy, Rabindranath began to show poetic talent and he was urged by his family to express his creative ideas.

However, he did not like school and his days there were depressing. In 1875, at the age of 14, he left St. Xavier's school in Calcutta and his name did not appear in the list of students promoted to the next grade. In 1878, he went to England with his brother, Satyendranath Tagore and his family to make another attempt at formal education. He went to school in Brighton and studied English literature in University college but did not complete any course of study before returning to India in 1880. Although his formal education was not a great success it gave him a solid base in the literatures of various languages - namely Sanskrit, his native Bengali, and English (especially the Romantic poets). With this knowledge, he combined the influences of classical and contemporary India with those of European culture.

Rabindranath's talent matured after his marriage in 1893, at which time he lived for several years on the family estate at Shileida on the Ganges. During this time, he

used the Bengali landscape as a source of inspiration for his verse, which became more reflective in content and more varied in form. In addition to essays, reviews, and short stories, Tagore also wrote a number of dramas, novels, and philosophical works which interpret the ancient wisdom of India in modern Western terms.

In 1901, Tagore fulfilled a life long dream by founding a school at Santiniketan which embodied his ideals of education - namely, student freedom from traditional rules, open air classes, and students of all countries working together. His school was established with his father's blessing on the seventh day of Poush or December 22. In later years (1921) Tagore added to his school an international university, Visva Bharati, for students wishing to study Eastern civilizations. The establishment of this University fulfilled his life long goal - Unity of Man through Universal Knowledge.

A turning point in his life was in 1912 when he again set sail for England. In London, his friend, William Rothenstein, the English artist, arranged a reading of his poems in his house. W.B. Yeats read the poems to a distinguished gathering. As a result, in November a limited version of Gitanjali, or Song Offerings, was published in England. The translations were done by the poet himself, the introduction by W.B. Yeats, and the frontpiece had a pencil sketch of the poet by Rothenstein. On the 13th of November, 1913, news reached Santiniketan that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for



Literature for Gitanjali, the first Nobel Prize ever to be awarded to an Asian.

In 1913, Tagore was knighted by the British crown but six years later he gave up his knighthood as a protest against the massacre of Indians in Amritsar by the British army.

Tagore was an extremely artistically diverse person and it is impossible to form an opinion of him after reading only one of his works, as many Westerners do. For example, Gitanjali is one of his finest works but it does not show the humorous or satirical side that was revealed in many of his short stories. As well he was a musician, singer, and composer, who created his own style of music, Rabindrasangit, which was named after him. This music was a mixture of classical music and songs of the common people.

During the next 30 years, Tagore expressed his genius through every form of literature, through dance, through music and even through painting. His writings were no longer for India only, for the whole world listened to his poetry and songs.

In between his creative work, he took extensive lecturing tours throughout the world as he was getting invited constantly. He toured Europe and North America almost a dozen times, Japan and other Asian countries, including China, several times. His tours also included Latin American countries.

To give an example of the

kind of reception he usually got, I would like to mention one of the many tours he undertook:

On his eighth foreign tour, he arrived first in Italy as the official guest of the Italian Government in 1926 and he attended the Grand Reception, given by the Governor of Rome, in the eternal city. His play, "Chitra", was performed in Italian and some of his songs were rendered in Italian. The next stop was Switzerland where he was invited by Romain Rolland. From there, he fulfilled lecture engagements in Vienna and then came back to England. He stayed 21 days in Oxford and then sailed to Oslo, Norway. He lectured at the University Hall in Oslo and then went on to meet members of the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. He then stopped at Copenhagen to lecture and went on to Germany. In Germany he lectured on "Indian philosophy" at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall and was received by President Hindenburg. At this time he met Albert Einstein and had a long talk with him. After Berlin, he visited a number of places in Germany lecturing and reading from his poetry and plays. The next stop was Prague in Czechoslovakia where he attended a performance of his play, "Post Office" in the Czech language. Around this time, he took ill and was compelled to cancel trips to Poland and Russia. He had to take rest in Budapest after his lecture. When he reached Belgrade in November, a huge crowd gate crashed to listen to him at the University. He then journeyed to Sofia and to Bucharest where he was honored by the King and the Roumanian

people. The next stop was Athens, Greece where he was decorated by the Greek government with the "Order of Redeemer". From Greece he went to Cairo where he was received by King Faud and his ministers. From Egypt he came back to his homeland and reached Santiniketan on December 19.

It is noteworthy that during a part of his tenth foreign tour he was invited to Canada by the National Council of Education of Canada in the year, 1929. He arrived at Victoria on the 6th of April and after 10 days, the poet left for U.S.A. on another lecturing tour.

On August 7, 1941, at 80 years of age, the poet breathed his last breath. He left Santiniketan on July 25 for the hospital in Calcutta. On the morning of July 30, he dictated his last poem, in which occurs these lines....

**The last reward he carries  
to his treasure house  
the unwasting right to peace.**

His memorial service in Santiniketan concluded with the words of his song...

**And may he know in his  
fearless heart  
The Great Unknown!**

Prasun Tagore





# FOREIGN STUDENT ADMISSION TO VISHVABHARATI

Bengal has always been known in India for the culture and learning of its people. These qualities were perhaps best epitomized by Rabindranath Tagore. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Tagore founded the Vishva-Bharati, a university at Shantiniketan, which to this day passes on the Tagore tradition of arts and literature to its students.

Although it may not be feasible for Bengalis living in Canada to attend the Vishva-Bharati as regular students, it is possible to sample its teachings over one academic season as foreign Casual Students. Foreign students may choose one of following course offerings as their field of study for the entire year:

1. A survey of Indian History and Culture.
2. Modern Indian Culture with Special Reference to Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.
3. Indian Philosophy
4. Ancient Indian History and Culture
5. Indian Art (Theory & Practice)
6. Indian Music (Theory & Practice)
  - Tagore songs
  - Hindusthani Classical Music (vocal)
  - Hindusthani Classical Music (instrumental)
  - Esraj
  - Sitar

7. Indian Dance (Theory & Practice)

- Manipuri
- Kathakali

8. Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, Tibetan Language and Literature

9. Sanskrit Language and Literature

10. Rabindra Literature

11. Indian Classics

Foreign students will not be permitted to study without a student's visa, and must be in residence on campus for the duration of the course (July to June) with the exception of vacation times. The last date for admission to a course is normally August 31. All classes are conducted in English which is advantageous to Foreign students from Canada.

An examination must be taken at the end of the academic year in which candidates may obtain pass marks with a score of at least 36%, and distinction marks with at least 60%. Completion of a course earns a Certificate of Proficiency in that subject. For more information on attending the university, write to:

Deputy Registrar (Academic)  
Vishva Bharati  
Santiniketan - 731235  
West Bengal  
INDIA



Where the mind is without fear  
and the head is held high,  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken  
up into fragments by narrow domestic  
walls;  
Where words come out from the  
depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving  
stretches its arms towards  
perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason  
has not lost its way into the  
dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward  
by thee into ever-widening  
thought and action—  
into that heaven of freedom,  
my Father,  
let my country awake.

Robin Dranath Tagore

Sentiniketan



অবীর্



# VIVEKANANDA

Bengal has been the birthplace of many great thinkers and philosophers including Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Ramakrishna. He was the first Swami to share the spiritual heritage of Hindus with the rest of the world, and especially with America. He was the founder of the Ramakrishna Missions, whose aim was to provide individual salvation, food, education and spiritual wisdom, in various parts of India and abroad.

He was born as Narendranath Datta on January 12, 1863 in Calcutta. Educated in Sanskrit, English, and Bengali, he spent all of his childhood years in British-run schools. He soon proved to be an enthusiastic, intelligent student, who approached everything with great fervour. He was particularly inspired by the works of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, who spoke of the perfectability of man.

As a young man, Narendranath was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, a revivalist movement and was a great skeptic of religion. In this frame of mind, he visited the great Ramakrishna, who instantly realized the great potential in this young man - "When Naren comes in contact with suffering and misery the pride of his character will melt into a mood of infinite compassion." Ramakrishna enabled him to find oneness with God and all created beings, subsequently inspiring him to see God in man and to regard service to man as the highest form of worship.

Narendranath soon began to travel around India, at

which time he became aware of the spirituality and wisdom of his homeland, in addition to becoming acutely aware of its problems. It was during these years of teaching, learning, and experiencing that he formulated his own beliefs.

In July, 1893, Narendranath was sent to America by one of his admirers, the Raja of Ramnad. Assuming the name, Vivekananda, he set off for Chicago with the intention of speaking about Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. When he arrived there, he found that no one had registered him, making it impossible for him to speak. Homeless and friendless, he decided to go to Boston. It was in this city that he made the acquaintance of a Harvard professor who not only gave him money but also wrote him a letter of recommendation to allow him to participate in the Chicago gathering. However, Vivekananda lost this letter of recommendation on his way to Chicago, dashing his hopes of speaking to the Organization. Nevertheless, luck was on his side again. While in Chicago, he met a woman by the name of Mrs. Hale, who quickly realized that he was a delegate to the Religion Parliament. Mrs Hale wasted no time in providing him with lodging and getting him the credentials he needed in order to speak to the Parliament.

On September 11, the Parliament opened. Vivekananda instantly captured the attention of the American audience who had never before seen an Indian dressed in a flowing red robe and orange turban, so much so that they



applauded him the moment he entered the hall. When his time to speak came, he addressed his audience in a simple but commanding tone as he greeted them, "Sisters and brothers of America!" He spoke to the gathering about the oneness of existence, the pureness of the soul, the oneness of God, and the harmony of all religions.

His talks were met with enthusiastic interest and by the end of the conference, he had spoken on eleven different occasions. Americans began sending him generous donations to further his cause, which he used to finance his American missions.

However, not everyone greeted him with such enthusiasm. He was repeatedly attacked by Christian missionaries who had received little attention at the Parliament in comparison to him. To make matters worse, he openly criticized American Christianity sparking the anger of the clergy and the media. He also was criticized by orthodox Indians who disapproved of his eating beef. But, Vivekananda refused to let this slow him down. He criticized these orthodox Hindus for being "caste-ridden, superstitious, and hypocritical".

Vivekananda continued to preach in America. The rich societies of New York and Boston offered to finance him on the condition that he would only associate with them. However, Vivekananda refused to do so and instead relied on the help of his less wealthy friends. He moved to New York where he lived for a short time before visiting England.

In a short time, though, he decided that it was time for him to return to India.

On January 15, 1897, Vivekananda returned to his homeland receiving a hero's welcome. He wasted no time in setting out to revitalize his Hindu disciples. His western experience had impressed upon him the need for holy men to concentrate on helping their fellow men rather than only living as recluses. He felt that knowledge of the Scripture alone was not enough to become closer to God. "Who cares for your Scriptures? I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully, if I can arouse my countrymen to stand on their own feet and be MEN inspired with the spirit of action." Although this new attitude of his was met with skepticism at first, he succeeded in founding the Ramakrishna Missions, which were the first Hindu missions to attempt to deal with the poor and sick. Vivekananda also toured the country extensively in order to inspire Indians to maintain their identity in spite of English domination. In one of his discourses, he stated, "India will be raised, not with power of flesh but with the power of the spirit not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love."

However, Swami Vivekananda's health was rapidly deteriorating. His hectic lifestyle and serious diabetes forced him to return home after touring Europe. On July 4, 1902, at the age of 39, Swami Vivekananda passed away. His life may have been short-lived but his impact on the world will not be forgotten.

# MOVIES BY SATYAJIT RAY

The art of moviemaking is one which can be constantly improved upon for the camera cannot always capture the detailed reality which a director wishes to create and in turn visualize. Bengali director Satyajit Ray, in his thirty years of filmmaking, has done more than just better the quality of Indian films; he has set an example for the rest of the world.

Ray's movies seem to tell their stories in the way that nature conducts its business. In a process of growth or erosion in nature one does not actually see the plant growing or the rock beginning to erode. However, with Ray's methods, it is as if time lapse photography is used to seize detail with the film-speed being increased to a normal rate so that normally unnoticeable action seems to occur before the viewer's eyes.

Ray's twenty-fifth and most recent film is "The Home and the World", an adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's novel, Ghore Baire. The film is set in Bengal in the early twentieth century at a time when old world traditions were losing ground to the enthusiasm of the new national independence movement, Swaraj. "The Home and the World" is about a romantically and philosophically complex love triangle. The principal character is Nikhil, a wealthy, modernistic landowner (played by Victor Banerjee) who persuades his wife, Bimala, to come out of her stereotypical, passive, female role and enter the real world. She becomes attracted to Sandip, an old friend of Nikhil's and now

leader of the Swadeshi movement to boycott foreign goods, after finding that his forceful nature appeals to her over her husband's sensitivity. As Nikhil looks on, Sandip manipulates Bimala for his cause and himself.

It is particularly interesting to observe Ray's scrupulous attention to detail in this movie. The principal backdrop of most of the film's action is Nikhil's mansion and eventually, the viewer notices the meaning which each area of the house expands. For example, the sitting room, the meeting place of Bimala and her lover, is considered neutral territory since neither Sandip nor Bimala fully dominates it. Even the corridor between the inner and outer apartments holds meaning as it is here that Bimala, feeling both fear and pride, first enters the outer world. The film ends tragically with an act in which the viewer cannot help but be immersed in the quality of performance and where every movement is an experience.

The narrative style of filmmaking which Ray employs makes his films understandable to all viewers, including Westerners. This is because each of his characters is given a detailed and coherent background which adds to the history of Ray's narration. Ray has adapted a trilogy of films unlike any other from the Apu trilogy - Pather Panchalii, Aparajito and Apur Samsar - the cinema's most refined Bildungsroman (the novel form that tells the story of a boy's growth to manhood). Using long stretches without dialogue and scenes of people



just walking around, Ray succeeds in giving the viewer total insight into events before and after they occur thus allowing the films to flow smoothly.

Ray's film, "Days and Nights in the Forest", tells of four wealthy men from Calcutta who are off to vacation at a rural guest house. While they are driving out to the country they drive very fast and thus, the countryside is blurred suggesting their lack of awareness of the world and themselves. At the resort, they meet two Calcutta women in whose acquaintance they become reawakened to the beautiful world around them and most importantly, to themselves.

With most of his life having been devoted to movie-making, Ray has disclosed his varied thoughts on life to the film audience. Beginning with "Pather Panchali" and

"Aparajito", Ray has gone on to the detailed analysis of the Bengali aristocracy in "The Music Room" and "Devi". In "Company Limited" and "The Middleman", Ray satirizes the morals of Calcutta's modern commercial middle class. He has also done amusing, even comedic, detective stories for children as in "The Golden Fortress" and "The Elephant God". Besides directing, Ray has recently composed his own scores and operated the camera.

Thus, Satyajit Ray has set an example for the rest of the world in how to make quality films. Through his realization, understanding, and use of the beauty of the world as well as his meticulous investigation into the history of character, Ray has shown the world the finest quality of filmmaking.

Jay Sinha



# ISSUES FACING INDO-CANADIANS

## AN OLD WORLD CULTURE IN A NEW WORLD COUNTRY

The first East Indian immigrants to come to Canada arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia immediately after the turn of the century. Most of the immigrants were Sikhs and many were honourably discharged soldiers from the British Army Service in the Orient. Since all of these immigrants were members of the British Empire and with British citizenship, they created problems for the Canadian government who had no intention of letting Canada be "overtaken" by foreigners. If any discrimination was shown against them, anti-British organisations in India would take action, possibly violent action. The British Columbia government tried to bar East Indians by using the Naval Act, which required the writing of a stringent educational test before entering Canada. This idea, however, was abandoned for Canada feared that it would cause conflict in India.

In 1908, the Canadian federal government solved their problem by passing a regulation which stated: "All immigrants to Canada must arrive by continuous journey and on through tickets from their homeland." Because there was no direct steamship service between India and Canada, this regulation barred East Indians without saying so outright. As a result of the new regulation, the number of East Indians arriving in Canada dropped from 2623 in 1908 to 6 in 1909. The British Columbia government conducted an investigation as to why so many East Indians had arrived between 1905 and 1908. The enquiry revealed that prior to the influx of immigrants, certain transportation companies had advertised in India that

Canada was welcome to labourers and therefore, offered cheap rates.

Between 1909 and 1945, no more than 100 East Indians immigrated per year (see Fig.1). This reduction was more than likely the result of Canada's strict immigration laws.

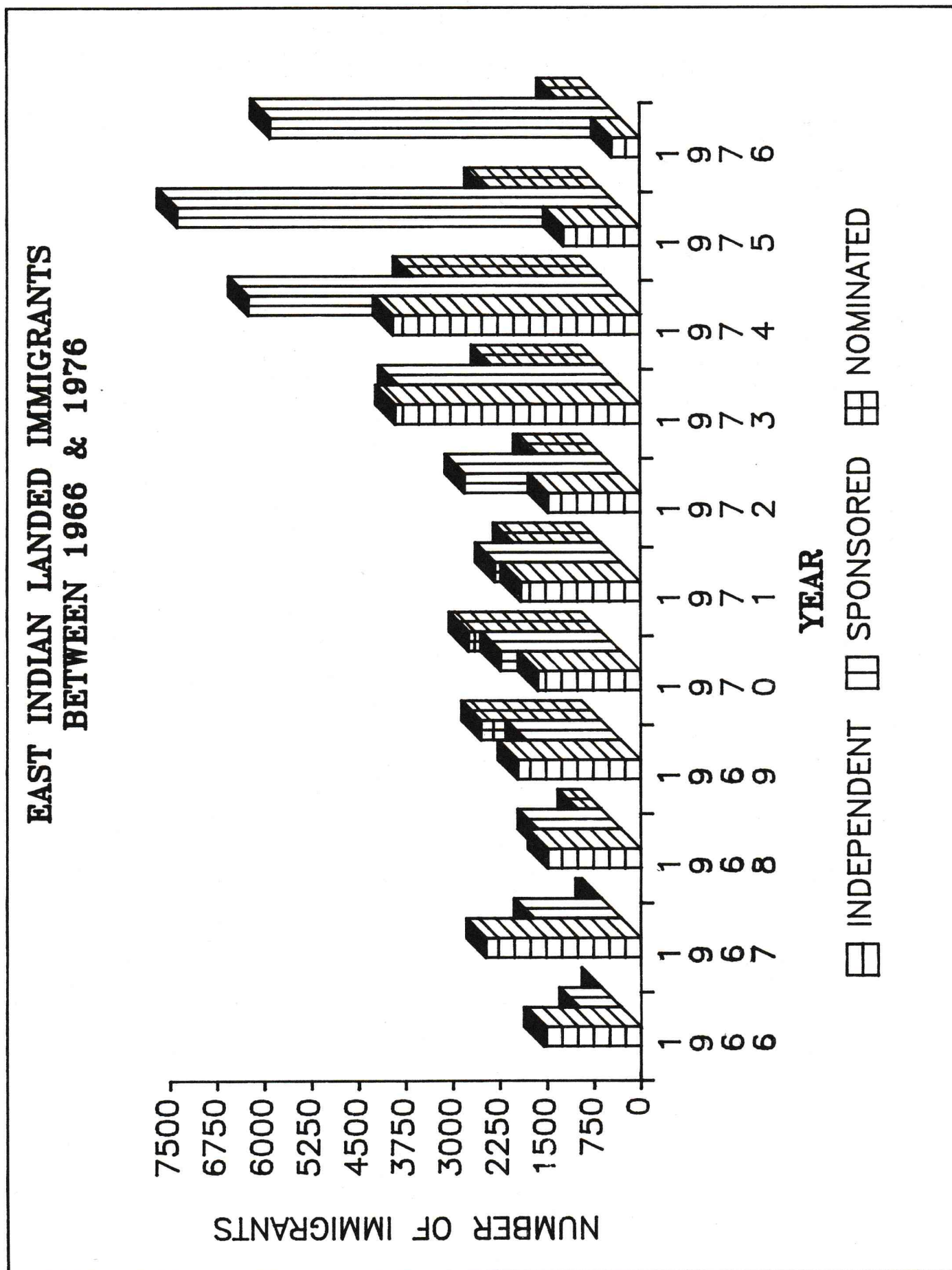
In 1947, Prime Minister Mackenzie King refused to allow any changes to Canada's then racially discriminatory immigration policies, which would cause "a fundamental alteration in the character of our population". Nevertheless, Canada has become, without a doubt, a multicultural society as 1977 statistics show that Canada has over four million immigrants. It was not until the 1970's that the immigration policies took on any favourable changes from the immigrant's point of view.

The new immigration policy regulations became relatively more humane and contained many changes to help immigrants. They eliminated discrimination by race or by nationality and also made it possible for a visitor to apply for an immigrant visa to live in Canada while in the country. Sponsored immigrants now included only dependent close relatives of independent immigrants. In addition, a nominated class of immigrants was formed to help nondependents live in Canada.

In the late 1960's when jobs were abundant in Canada, there was a flood of independent and sponsored immigrants from many countries into Canada. East Indians composed a moderate portion of this influx (see Fig.2). As the economy was stable, most Canadians were



Fig. 2a



# **EAST INDIAN LANDED IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA BETWEEN 1966 AND 1976**

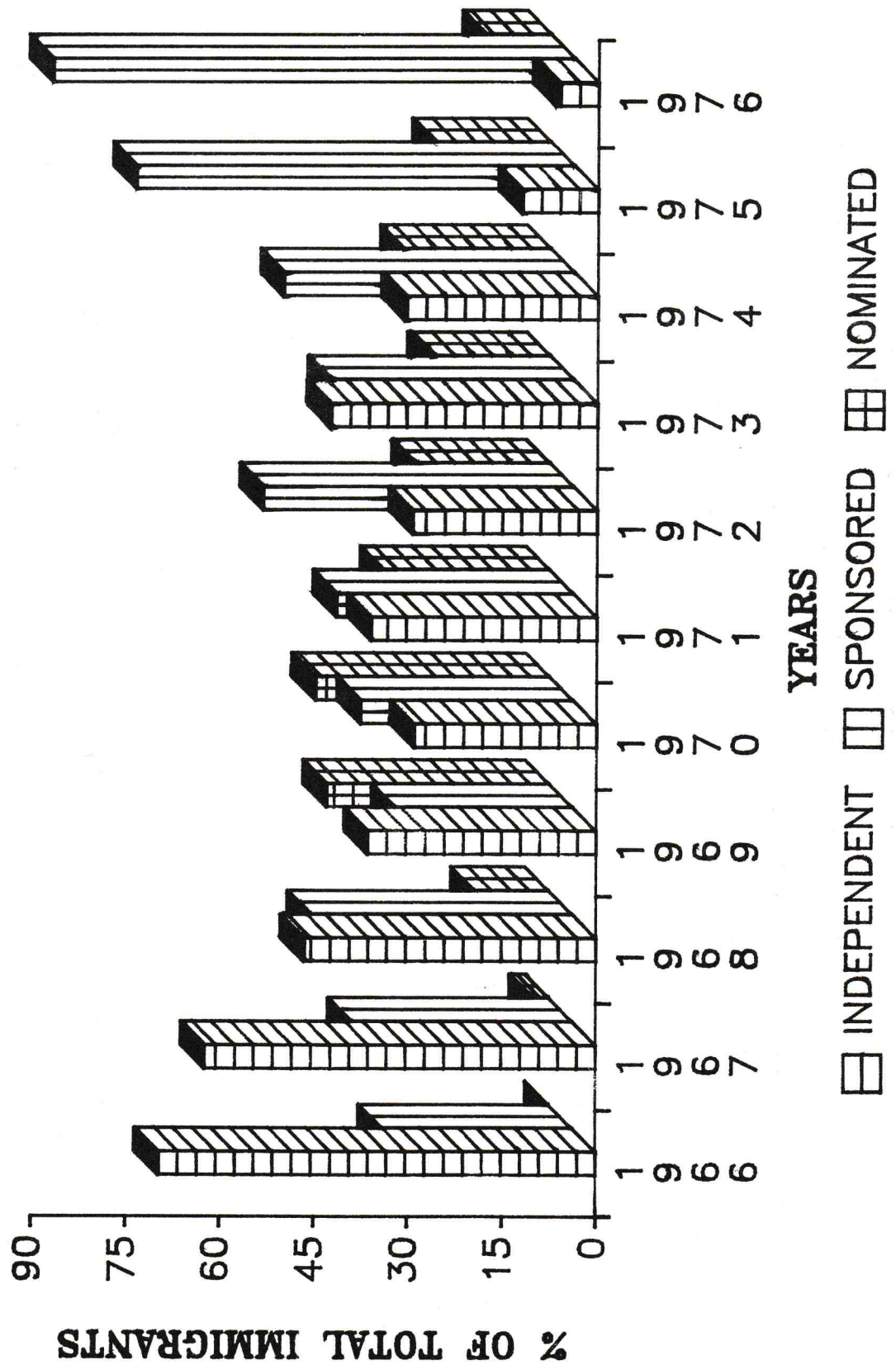
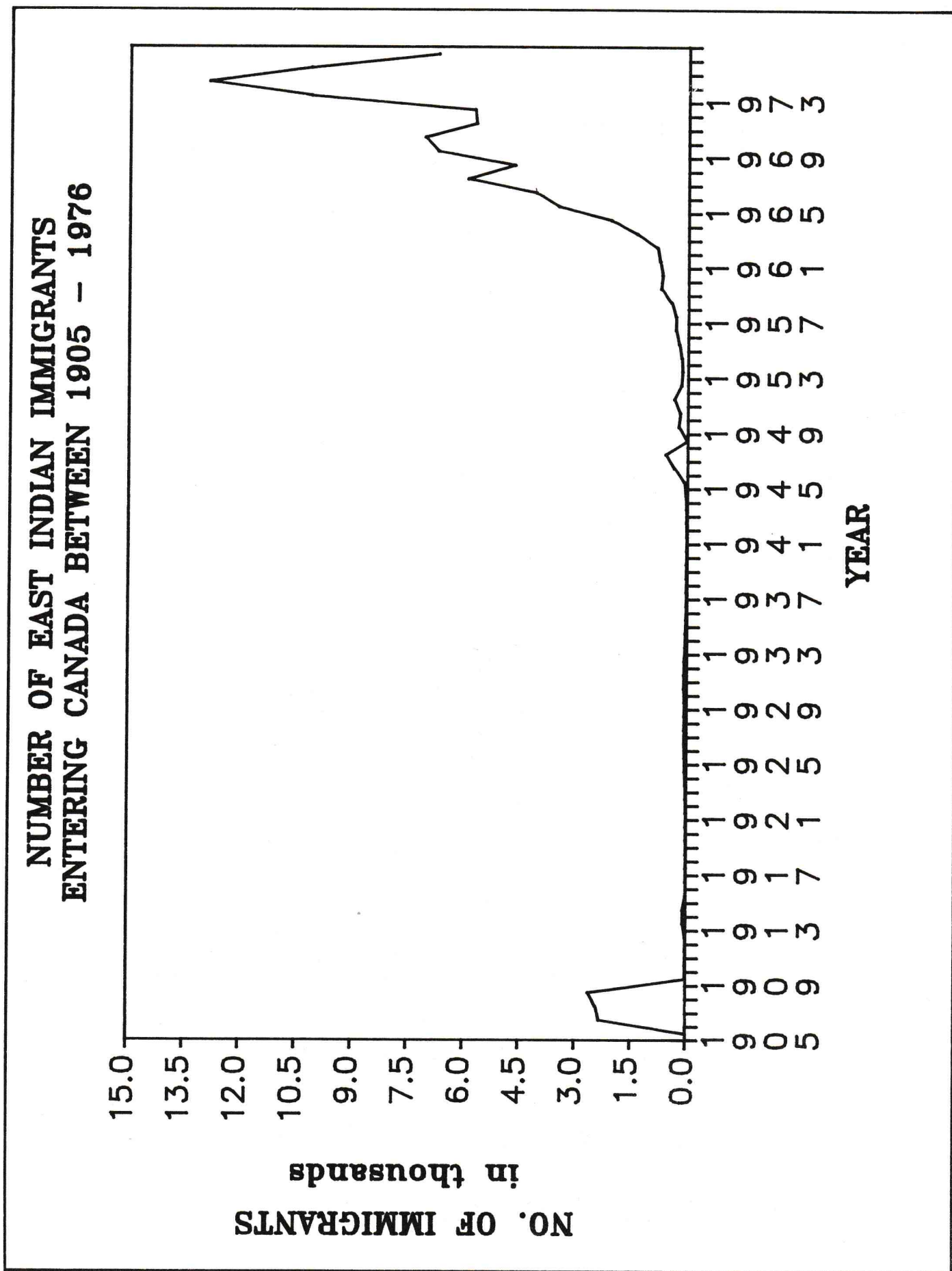




Fig. 1



content and not particularly concerned with this. This situation changed abruptly in the mid 1970's when the economy became unpredictable and jobs became scarce. Many Canadians became opposed to Canada's permissive immigration laws. The Canadian government responded by introducing the new Canadian Immigration Act, Bill C-24, which tightened the reins of immigration into Canada.

In 1971, according to the census of Canada, there were 67,900 East Indians in Canada. By the time that the new Immigration Act could be passed in the parliament after national debate and enforced, the number of East Indians in Canada had

jumped to approximately 100,000. East Indians now live in all parts of Canada, with three-fourths of them residing in Ontario and British Columbia

A race of people who are willing to work and adapt to life in another country can only be a positive addition to the character of that country. Thus the East Indian people have successfully integrated into Canadian society and added a great deal to the Canadian multicultural mosaic. It is evident that East Indians will continue to benefit Canada in the twenty-first century by developing old world cultures in a new world country.

Jay Sinha

## THINK TANK 1985

For a community, being permanently away from its place of origin, to live fully in an adopted country many adjustments to new realities must be made. Some of these adjustments are easy to make; others are complex requiring persistent effort, and are often painstaking. And there are still other realities that are nearly impossible to adjust to. The Bengali community in Manitoba is a relatively new addition to the province's ethnic mosaic - its first settlers arrived in the late 1950's. At present, about 40 families live in Manitoba. As members of a pioneer community, many Bengalis are concerned about preserving their language, culture, religions (mainly Moslem and Hindu) and their way of life for as long as possible through

their present and future generations in Canada.

To address such concerns and to explore realistic solutions, choices and alternatives, Bichitra organized a two-part think tank. The specific objective of the first part was to generate as many new ideas from its members as possible. All ideas were welcome and recorded without critical appraisal in two separate 12-participant group sessions. The ideas came in response to five questions reflecting the common concerns of the community. The individual responses of both groups were combined and edited to avoid duplication and are presented below to stimulate further thought and problem solving both by the Bengali community and by others interested in developing a harmonious



# THINK TANK RESULTS

**Q1. What is Bengali history, culture and way of life? How does one define Bengali identity?**

1. People living in West Bengal & Bangladesh who lead the Bengali way of life.

2. People living elsewhere, who lead the Bengali way of life and whose ancestors came from the above regions.

3. People in items 1 & 2 who may not completely lead the Bengali way of life but who nonetheless enjoy it and are proud of the Bengali heritage.

Some characteristics of Bengalis and their way of Life

1. Characteristic language, food habit, costume, family traditions, religious rituals and festivals.

2. Fond of eating a certain type of food that includes fish, vegetables, milk product sweets, etc.

3. Characteristic ceremonies include marriage, thread ceremony, prayers, offerings to gods and goddesses).

4. Intellectually inclined, leaders, organized, free-thinking, literature-loving, artistic, politically aware, social reformers.

5. Sober but emotional, reserved, compassionate, polite, graceful, respectful of women (perhaps, stemming from worship of "Shakta" or Motherhood).

6. Not prone to change traditional ways (Westernize) easily.

7. Dogmatic, clannish, snobbish, critical to the point of being destructive, tendency to prejudice.

8. Parents too protective and not receptive to new or alternate points of view (this is not necessarily a Bengali characteristic but may be indicative of the way the older generation runs its affairs).

**Q2. How much of the Bengali heritage can be realistically retained under Canadian conditions by the immigrant population and their progeny?**

1. Some participants felt that knowledge of Bengali language was of paramount importance. Others felt that this may not be totally feasible. In the latter case the least our children may achieve is a pride of Bengali achievement based on knowledge obtained from sources written in a language they understand. However to get a true flavor of Bengali thinking, a knowledge of Bengali is desirable.

2. Eating Bengali food at home and teaching children how to cook such food.

3. Observance of Bengali festivals (religious and cultural), wearing traditional costumes, performing Bengali songs, dances and drama.

4. Encourage children to read Bengali literary creations, write essays on Bengali topics, organize cultural seminars.

5. Motivate children to be involved in potential developing activities which will foster Bengali awareness. Summer job opportunities aimed at researching and documenting Bengali heritage is a possibility. Delegate more responsibility to the children.

6. Create exchange programs (with help from Govts. of Canada and India, Shastri Indo-Canada Institute etc) allowing our children to spend time creatively in India in exchange for students from India visiting Canada for a similar purpose.

7. Start Bengali Language classes with emphasis on spoken Bengali (children may find it more relevant). A library, rich in resource material on Bengal, should be created. If this is not possible immediately we should help stock the Winnipeg Public Library and widely advertise the availability of books on and from Bengal.

8. Obtain educational documentary movies from the Indian High Commission.

9. Last but not least, enlightened parental attitudes and good communication skills will be necessary for the successful continuation of the Bengali way of life in Canada. The approach has to be non-threatening and should take into consideration the fact that our children are growing in a different country than ours. They may often not see things the same way as we do. Most of all we should be consistent by having the same standards for us as we have for them and by setting good

behavioural examples. It is important for the children to see us absorbing what is good in the Canadian way of life (to which they perhaps have a greater affinity). This feeling demonstration of a desire to give and take will encourage greater cooperation on the part of the children in appreciating things whose relevance they may now question or may not often appreciate.

**Q3. What concrete steps can be taken to enhance the image of the Bengali people in the eyes of the general population?**

1. Be good citizens by being well-mannered. This will enhance our self-image.

2. Get involved in community, school and political activities so that other people can get to know us and of our qualities, firsthand.

3. Greater awareness of the image projected by the news and television media of us and our country of origin. We should try to inform media about the good side of Bengal and India. The educational modules used by the School system is often obsolete or incorrect. Our community should work closely with the School Board to change this, particularly at the elementary school level.

4. Cooperate in making Folklorama successful.

5. Invite children and adults of other ethnic groups to our homes and help them learn more about us. Person to person dialogue is essential.

6. We should not overreact to



racial stresses. Remain open-minded.

**Q4. What sort of relationship do we want to foster with other Canadian ethnic and non-ethnic organizations, religious groups and political parties?**

1. Several issues have been covered under Q3.

2. Should support larger organizations (e.g. NACOI) involved in fostering the interests of people from the India subcontinent. This is particularly necessary since our own organization, due to its small size, may have inadequate clout or visibility.

3. Individuals rather than Bichitra should visibly participate in political activities.

4. Invite members of other religious groups to attend our festivals.

5. Participate in International Centre, Citizenship Council, Folklarama, Canada Day etc. activities.

**Q5. Do we work towards an archive, book or something to preserve Bengali culture for future generations in Canada?**

1. The idea of archiving our ancient heritage and our history in Canada ( by preserving identities, roots and individual biodata) received unanimous support.

2. Explore the possibility of utilizing the Multicultural Library for displaying our literary holdings. This library will be started shortly. A literary club could be formed.

3. Collect from our members photographs pertaining to Bichitra activities over the years, and make an album.

4. Produce a regular news letter, which could be later compiled in the form of archival material.

5. Create a display of Bengali arts and crafts material, films, videos depicting India's culture, monuments, historic buildings, tourist material, ancient archeological and modern developments in Arts and Science. (This material would be obtained from the High Commissioner's office in Ottawa).

Other Suggestions:

1. Raise money for Language School & for Library Stock-up collection by donations and fund-raising.

2. Apply for Non-profit, charitable organization status for tax-exemption purposes.

After approximately 6 hours of active discussion the meeting was adjourned. The participants left with backs that were a bit sore but with minds that had been aroused by the event. They broke up into small informal groups and continued discussing other issues of vital importance such as the art of parenting in a new milieu, the relative importance of Bengali v/s East Indian identity, ways of getting involved in community activities, etc. Since these topics were not the ones originally selected for discussion in the Think Tank, the

# INDIA MOVES WITH THE TIMES

## INDIA'S SPACE PROGRAM

Many inhabitants of the Western World have no idea of the immensity of India's space program. They are plagued by the belief that a poor, developing country like India does not have the ability or cannot spare the money to conduct a space program. This is not true. India definitely has ample scientists and technicians with the capability of doing space research. In terms of money, former Indian Prime Minister, the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, put it very well when she said, "The point is not in the money we spend. Research in this field will help solve the main problems facing India. This expense might be compared to the money spent on the education of children - it will be repaid with interest in the future." It was with these ideas in mind that India commenced in developing a space program in which success has already been spectacular.

India's Space program was truly inaugurated on April 19, 1975 when the first Indian built satellite was launched into orbit. The "Aryabhata", an artificial Earth Satellite built in Bangalore and weighing 360 kg, was successfully launched from a Soviet rocket for the purpose of astronomical experiments. This launch was followed by other successful as well as unsuccessful attempts at conquering the sky and venturing into the unknown. One such launch which emerged as a landmark event for India's space program was the launch of an Indian built satellite from an Indian built rocket. On July 18, 1980 the 35 kg satellite, Rohini-I, was launched from the A-stage roc-

ket, SLV-3, as a test run. This launch qualified India as the seventh full-fledged member of the "space club", the group of nations capable of launching objects into space by rockets of their own manufacture.

The Soviet Union has become a principal factor in the Indian Space program for it has launched Indian satellites from its own rockets and has assisted Indians by giving them the necessary know-how in certain areas in the field of space technology. The first Indian cosmonaut, Squadron leader Rakesh Sharma, was launched into the orbiting Soviet space station, Salyut-7, on April 3, 1984. His stay in space lasted eight days during which time he performed an experiment to study the formation of metallic glasses (metallic materials highly resistant to radiation, high temperature, and chemical attack) and photographed parts of India for potential natural resources (eg. subterranean water and hydroelectric power). India plans to use its ever-advancing space knowledge to carry out in-depth studies of the country's natural resources and to assist farmers with more accurate weather predictions. Because Indian farmers are greatly affected by such natural climatic occurrences as drought, hurricanes, the direction change of the monsoon, and the melting of the snows from the Himalayas, information received from space satellites will be of great help to them.

Thus, when a country who is a prominent world power in the field of space technology,



such as the U.S., spends billions of dollars towards building space weapons, India can be more than proud that her modest contribution to the world space program is for the betterment of mankind.

Jay Sinha

#### Ancient History Cont.

Further excavation revealed that these Bengalis had developed extensive trade systems and agriculture. It is particularly noteworthy that the citizens of Pandu Rajar Dhibi were in close contact with people of the Mediterranean world, and the island of Crete in particular. Evidence for this can be found in the discovery of several articles bearing Cretan symbols.

Therefore, it is apparent that the Ancient Bengalis were a remarkably well-developed civilization. They showed a high degree of sophistication in many facets of life, such as in military affairs, trade, and lifestyle.

Reeni Bose

#### Sena Period Customs Cont.

of the couple around the fire. Many details of the process, however, varied from village to village. The complete marriage ceremony lasted over several days.

Although there were many other major rites leading up to death, they will not be included here. The ceremonies in earlier life, however, were the most significant. It can still be clearly seen how strictly the lives of ancient Bengalis, especially of the Brahmins, were ruled by the various religious and social customs of the time.

Mili Roy

#### Role of Women Cont.

their husband's death, were also encouraged to enter the pyre at some later date, physically holding any article that had belonged to the husband, and concentrating the mind on him. This was said to perform the same function of purgation, and renewal of happiness and union with the husband in Heaven.

Mili Roy

#### Think Tank Cont.

multicultural society in Manitoba and Canada. In the second part of the think tank to be held in August, 1985 these ideas will be criticized and sieved out by the members of Bichitra for common use.

Ranen Sinha  
President, Bichitra

#### Think Tank Results Cont.

content of these discussions in not being reported. Most participants felt that more input from members of the younger generation is highly important and that this was available only to a limited extent during this Think Tank. What little was heard from them suggested the need for another session specially geared for them. It is obvious that of paramount importance to our community is an atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect between the parents and children. This can only come if their respective points of view are clearly understood and are discussed with an open mind.

Recorded by:  
Dr. Biswas, Dr. Malakar  
Chaired by:  
Dr. Sinha, Dr. Bose  
Compiled by:  
Reeni Bose

