

ther with another Indian, S. C., a long licensed Indian arms agent in London, they are an important conduit and source of foreign funds for Indian political leaders. In fact so much so that informed sources speak of a confidential cell within the Indian Government which as part of its assigned duties facilitates and coordinates the political aspects of this overseas relationship. S. C. of late seems to have become slightly eclipsed as a large part of the Jaguar deal he negotiated may be cancelled, and his dealings along with Kanti Desai with the South Africans selling Indian arms are over. But S. C. has been doing business with the High Commission over many years, long before the Janata was in power.

Arms merchants, government procurements, shady business, browbeaten bureaucrats, all to add spice to the open sewer of Central Government politics.

Two Telegu Films K. Balagopal

Much praise has been heaped on the award winning Telegu film *Sankarabharam* with only few dissenting voices; among them is that of a leftist students' organisation of Hyderabad which is reported to have complained that all the actors are Brahmins! They seem to have come close to a correct appreciation of the film but slipped at the end into a position of irrelevancy. For the caste of the cast must matter only to our 'reservationist' reformers and not to leftists. But what is true is that it is a film of,

by and for Brahmins. And when I say 'Brahmin' I do not refer only to caste but to all the self-proclaimed inheritors of what is presumptuously called 'Indian culture'; that is to say, all those who think the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan way.

The Indian social formation is commonly described as 'bourgeois-feudal'; this skeletal description must be filled in with neo-colonial specificities before one can understand it correctly; the Indian big bourgeoisie is not an independent progressive national bourgeoisie but a dependent peripheral component of the world capitalist system. As such the bourgeois half of the dominant strain in contemporary Indian culture is not a native growth but an imitative one; and what is being imitated is not a healthy liberal-bourgeois culture but the decaying and desperate culture of a monopoly capitalist-imperialist society. This culture, unsure of its prospects, seeks to withdraw and hide in abstractions, but its own democratic logic forces it out: profit-oriented bourgeois art can never cut itself off completely from the man-in-the-street, cannot hide itself from the people's eyes; and yet, it cannot reflect reality honestly either; hence it tries to rouse the 'instincts' rather than the intellect—in fact, precisely to dull the intellect—and so we have horror films, spine chillers, titillators, and the substitution of noise for music. And of course, imitation apart, all this suits the peripheral bourgeoisie's purpose, for it is no more capable of solving the people's problems. Finally, the (relatively) weak position of the peripheral bourgeoisie entails compromise with feuda-

lism, which surpasses that of a progressive bourgeoisie (the bourgeoisie, however progressive, never fully vanquishes feudalism, contrary to mechanistic thought; being democratic but never fully so, it needs must compromise with feudalism to stay in power). And herein comes the feudal component of the dominant cultural strain. True, this feudalism is also decadent, outdated; but a decadent feudal culture is different from a decadent bourgeois culture; having no democratic compulsions, it merely withdraws further and mummifies itself. It is this mixture of a neo-colonial 'vulgarised' bourgeois culture and a stagnant feudal culture that is the specific form of the bourgeois-feudal culture of India.

Naturally then, Indian film-culture is also thus mixed; seen from a commercial viewpoint, this is necessary because a mummified 'pure' feudal art would not sell, nor would un-adulterated Hollywood-style films since the vast majority of the people of this country are exploited in feudal ways. But such a marriage of degeneracy satisfies no one; it does not satisfy the bourgeois-liberal, who seethes at the pandering to 'superstitious', and it does not satisfy the Brahmin, who squirms at the 'vulgarity'; the Brahmin tries to tell himself (good bourgeois that he is!) that such 'vulgarity' is necessary to satisfy the 'mob' without which the game would be unprofitable; but some day he hits back, and the product is *Sankarabharam*.

Briefly, it is the story of a music-crazy Brahmin—(celebrated for his ability to render the raga

Sankarabharanam) who does all manner of things for his music. He takes the side of a prostitute's daughter because she too loves music and risks social boycott; when the boycott comes he raves at his deity and in the process brings down thunder and rain; and he nearly wrecks his daughter's marriage when the bemused girl mixes her notes, and the prospective groom, trying to help her, makes an ass of himself. Throughout, the message is drummed into the audience's ears: music, art, is not for titillation, nor for pandering to the vulgar tastes of the 'labour class' (to use an expression favourite with Andhras) but for 'advaita siddhi' and 'amaratva labdhi' (realisation of the non-dual nature of reality and the attainment of immortality); and throughout, there is an attempt at exclusiveness; as somebody was overheard saying, 'they' (meaning the riff-raff) will not understand this film.

Ma Bhumi

But it is difficult to accept that feudal exclusiveness is the right alternative to neo-colonial cultural slavery; and it is the merit of another Telugu film *Ma Bhumi* (briefly reviewed in *Frontier*) that it shows the way to the correct alternative. *Ma Bhumi* (meaning 'our land') is about the Telengana peasant's uprising of the late forties, technically-minded critics will probably fault it with limping and faltering a lot in the beginning, some of the actors have trouble with the rural Telengana dialect, the lambada girl, in particular, speaks like no lambada girl I have ever heard.

Ramaiah is the son of a jeetaganadu (a farm servant) of a 50,000-acre Zamindar of Nalgonda district. Something of a rebel since childhood, Ramaiah resents the oppression and leaves his village to finally end up working in a factory at Hyderabad, where he meets a communist trade unionist. From him, Ramaiah and the audience learn about surplus value and the October Revolution. Ramaiah then comes back to his village to take a prominent part in the uprising. The uprising succeeds against the creaky Nizam's administration but is no match for the Indian army which restores 'law and order', killing Ramaiah in the process.

The film has much to commend, from an analytical viewpoint. The transformation of a peasant into a worker, his acquisition of a proletarian consciousness and his return to his village to carry forward the democratic revolution; the stress on tribal-non-tribal unity (symbolised by Ramaiah's love for a lambada girl); the compromise of the so-called national bourgeoisie with feudalism (symbolised beautifully by the Reddy zamindar, who has run away to Hyderabad, returning home after the 'police action', with his sherwani off and a Congress cap on!); and the vacillation of the rich peasantry which fought the Nizam but wanted to accept the reimposition of the zamindar's hegemony by the Congress government.

Here we have the answer: the duty of art is to help the people to carry forward the democratic revolution by reminding them of past achievements and failures and analysing social movements

(without, of course, becoming a documentary). From this point of view, it is gratifying that *Ma bhumi* is playing in Hyderabad to houses packed, not with erudite intellectuals who have read their Lenin, but lower middle class and working class people in whose blood the spirit of Telengana still runs.

Letters

On Charu Mazumdar

Kalidas Kundu's article 'On the Charu Mazumdar Controversy' (July 26, 1980) is relevant and timely. Relevant because revolutionary politics cannot be grasped without understanding the process of the formation of the CPI(ML) which Mr Kundu has rightly pointed out as the process of rapid historical developments of the last two decades. Timely because revolutionary groups could be identified on the basis of their actual evaluation of a leading personality in the Indian communist movement, who for the first time initiated a politico-military line as a party programme.

In a period of restoration and the failure of the revolutionary groups to grasp the demands and aspirations of the masses, it is all the more important to consider the politics in the eighties as the continuation of the seventies, with historical lessons drawn from the past. But mistakes should not be highlighted ad nauseam only to strengthen right opportunist line. In fact, a similar situation prevailed after the failure of the