

'M1SS PALMOLIVE ALL--NIGHT CABARET

OR

THE KISS

c Kamal Swaroop

Baby faced Bhawani Singh, an aging man of forty, had been released a year earlier from his short service commission in the army and now ran a tonga service between Om Prakash picture hall in the town, and his village, ruled by a notorious MLA. Thakur Sangram Singh.

He was waiting outside the movie hall for the last show to end. He had fed his horse. Bullet, and was preparing to harness him to the tonga, talking softly to him all the while. The movie showing, "Sheronwali Mata" was a super - diaper hit.

Inside the hall, Thakur Sangram Singh was watching the movie with his cronies and bodyguards. He was dead drunk. The climax of the film was a scene from one of the miracles of Sheronwali Mala, a popular film's deity amongst the peasantry. She rode in her helicopter, dropping insecticide bombs, destroying the microdemons that devoured the roots of the crops. The Thakur was not impressed. He staggered to his feet, and was helped by his cronies to the exit. Outside the movie hall, Sangram Singh noticed Bhawani Singh's tonga and announced mischievously that he would ride with Bhawani tonight. The rest of the company climbed into their cars.

It was a full moon night. Bullet trotted on the cold tar road, listening attentively to his master talking to Sangram Singh. Bhawani was complaining about the Thakur's buffalo that roamed in his fields and ate up his crops. "Thakur Sangram Singh retorted that the buffalo, after all, was only an animal. How could he tell it what to do!" But Bhawani Singh continued to ask him to do something. Suddenly, Thakur Sangram Singh got very angry and challenged Bhawani to point out his fields. Losing his temper Bhawani removed the partition between the front and back seats, carved open the cushion of the back seat in a square, pulled out a fistful of the coconut coir stuffing of the seat, and said: "That's my field."

Accepting the logic of the argument, Thakur Sangram Singh tore the medal of bravery from Bhawani's chest, tossed it on the field, and said: 'Then that's my buffalo. Now, do whatever you please.'

Bhawani pleaded for the last time:

'Don't provoke me, Thakur. Ask your buffalo to behave.'

But the Thakur only repeated:

'Do as you please.'

The Thakur's bodyguards were trailing behind the tonga in their motorcade. Bullet knew his master's temper. His ears pricked up, he looked around. Bhawani Singh took out a handmade pistol from the pocket near his chest, and shot Sangram Singh point blank. A dead body rolled down onto the road.

The nightmare had begun. The spirit of the fugitive Bhawani rode Bullet. Bullet, foaming at the mouth, was running like the wind, away from the chasing sounds of the wireless, and the rain of bullets. Tired at last, he rose on his hind legs and neighed at the moon, which shone like a spotlight upon them. A stray shot grazed his neck and he fell to the ground. As a shower of bullets tore his body to shreds, he metamorphosed into a

black and white photographs or white photographs of the dead decoit Bhawani Singh it was a picture

police party showing off their new prize. The lady Commissioner of Police stood with her foot on the chest of the dead Bhawani. Suddenly, the body of Bhawani turned into a striped tiger. It looked up. The face of the lady Commissioner of Police paled with fear. The tiger came alive and escaped from the photograph. He reappeared in a circus ring. A trainer put his head inside the tiger's mouth, but Bhawani snapped his jaws shut. Beheaded, the trainer fell. There was panic in the circus crowd, and the panic spread. Fleeing from the man-eater villagers abandoned their homes, and turned to the cities. But the terrorist tiger Bhawani himself had no peace. Still haunted by the sounds of the police wireless, thirsty for days, he was frightened of his own face in the water when he bent to drink. Terrified, he awoke into another life-dream reality. A fresco of Sheronwali Mata appeared on the wall of his five-star hotel room. When he reached for his Gun Gun Mahadev, the fresco of the Lady of the Lion came alive, and a tiger ate a buffalo at the lake. The smoke of Chai & Nyas Sheronwali Mata Ki Batti fogged in his head as Mata said: 'See how many arms I have. Give me your arms. Bullet will lead you to me'

He looked out. Near the window, a little girl was milking a buffalo. She offered him some milk. As he drank, he heard her say:

'Sitaram ! Sitaram ! You don't milk the bulls.*

The milk rose in his throat and when it burst out through his mouth, it was blood

He woke up again, this time in a tonga - stand in a snow covered hill station. Bhawani Singh roused his tpngawaia fugitives with a roll call. He said that Sheronwali Mata herself had appeared in his dreams, asking him to give up his arms at an unnamed place, and that he was setting out to find her. Before he started Samba offered him some Sitaram biscuits to take along. Bhawani took out his gun, tossed one biscuit in the sky, and shoot it as it fell. A neon sign of Sitaram appeared on the biscuit. It was an ad film on the T.V. 'Bhawani's asli pasand - Sitaram Biscuits.'

Meanwhile, his second choice, as concocted by the media for this campaign, Miss Palmolive, was descending in the lift. Although lowermost in the hierarchy of studio goddesses with their fancy animals, she had been chosen to serve the Lord Guru of the Studio Mytho, who had taken life samadhi in a glass case in a basement room of the building. Sitting down by the glass-encased emblem of Iter guru, she took out her contract and read it again - one role in one lifetime. Rebelling against the clause, she removed the golden tooth of her guru, and ran away to better multiple lives. Desperate to do different roles, she was even ready to begin again as an extra. But xeroxes of her contract had already been sent out. At an Extras Association roll call, they called everybody except her. The industry had been warned not to touch Palmolive again. Bound by her contract, haunted by the studio's spies who spread the word that she could do nothing other than her mythological 'Sheronwali Mata' role. Miss Palmolive was not cast again.

It was Amavasya night. Chand, a petty thief who ran a cabaret network from the moon, jumped the chasm between two highrise buildings, hounded by the police and many dogs. and disappeared down the stairs.

He was anti-gentleman. Not only was he a thug with a concealed blade in his walking stick, but he also utterly rejected both honour among thieves and the most primitive duties of friendship. Now, he rang a strange doorbell. Chutki, Palmolive's young assistant, opened the door. Pushing his way in before she could say anything, he lied: 'I am a friend of your mistress. Close the door.*

Chutki, a girl of eight made up like a woman of eighty, was filling in a press advertisement in a newspaper:

•BHAWANrS FIRST CHOICE - SITARAM BISCUITS.
WHAT IS TH E SECOND?"

Spelling out loud, Chutki filled in:
'P-A-L-M-O-L-I-V-E.'

She-pas almost finished when a knock sounded on the .door. Chand ran to hide in Chulki's room. The spies in saffron form tlie.JStudio Mytho had come to ask where Palmolive was. But Chutki refused to disclose the whereabouts of her mistress.

Meanwhile, When Palmolive came out of the Extras Association meeting, she spotted <i studio car fulls of men waiting for her. Making her escape, she telephoned her dancer boyfriend, Birju, at the studio for help, but he, too, had disowned her lie inly said "What about the golden tooth of Guruji? Have you sold it?"

He said she must return.

Desperate enough to turn into a whore to play many parts, Palmolive paced the street outside Churchgate station. Chand, unaware of her identity, sat on the railings of the bus-stand, watching as she walked up and down, almost'as "though waiting for somebody. After a while, when nobody carne, she tore up a photograph to shreds. The headlights of an approaching bus highlighted the pieces of the photograph as they fell Like an acrobat in slow motion, Chand gathered all the pieces of the falling photograph, and earned them his hands to the churchgate station subway, where he fitted them together like a jigsaw puzzle, it was a picture of a loving couple in front of a backdrop Taj Mahal. The thief looked up. Palmolive stood watching him. Her smile echoed in the desolate silence of the empty subway.

Answering her unspoken question, he said:

"This is not the first broken Taj Mahal that I have reassembled. I have seen many like you before. How much do you charge?"

Palmolive replied:

'Everything in your pockets and a silver dollar mote.
Chand said.

'Wait here.'

He rushed inside the station to the platform. A train was just coming in. He leaped into a moving compartment, and cut his way through the crowd, picking the pockets of the people packed together like fish. When he emerged from the opposite door, he had a silver dollar in his hand. He ran back to the subway, but Palmolive had disappeared.

It was getting late. Chand still had business to finish before the break of dawn. There was no time to lose. Hurrying toward a multi-storey apartment building on the hills near the sea, Chand entered a door.

In this flat lived a family of women of all ages, part of the international cabaret network that Chand ran from satellite. Wearing work dresses and nightgowns, the women bustled about their chores gossiping about the day, exchanging beauty tips and nail polish, scolding the children who got in their way. Two naked children yelled with glee as their plump young mother chased them into the bathroom where the steam rose in clouds from the pails of hot water. The pressure cooker on the gas stove gave off the aroma of cooking meat.

When Chand came in, he was given a rousing welcome!" The women clung to him, draping themselves across his chest and his arms until he looked like some brilliant mythical beast. Children scampered over him, chattering excitedly like monkeys on a holiday. The women teased him, as though he were one of their own small sons. They flirted with him in their flimsy nightgowns, and it was only half a joke when one of them pulled his head down to smell the scent on her breast. A pretty young girl brought trays piled high with dry fruits and an assortment of delicately flavored sweets. It was many months since they had last seen him, and they had missed him. They also knew that, no matter how much they pampered him, he never stayed long enough to get spoiled.

The doorbell rang. It was Palmolive who, instead of waiting for Chand, had followed him to this building, and was searching for him from flat to flat. Before she could describe the man she was looking for, the women sensed that this was Chand's new find. Surrounding her, they led her in to him. She volunteered her story, that she had run away from the studio Mytho because of her contract, and was being hounded for it to the extent where she could not even get an extra's role. Then, the women of the cabaret told her what they did, and offered her a solution. Would she like to become a cabaret dancer?

'But how do you overcome your shame?'

They answered: 'Like this.'

The music came on. They started dancing with Chand, doing a striptease. They undressed Palmolive. The babies clapped. Chand watched the disrobing of Palmolive. A Jackson smile on his face. He seemed to enjoy half corrupting her, and his act set her feet on the primrose path to the roses and raptures of vice. As the music died away, the women decided that Palmolive ought to commence her career where it would be easiest.

on a beginner, in a not 100 age essive place wun an appreciative audience and suiTicieni wealth. They chose a nearby town, Ajmer.

Dasvn was about to break. His wrist-watch was sending signals that it was time for Chand to go. Before leaving, he promised Palmolive that the next Amavasya night he would land in Ajmer, and come to see her dance.

An electric moon waned on a hotel signboard.

Palmolive took to the cabaret like a fish to water, thoroughly enjoying herself every night at the Hotel Blu Moon. She came to be called the Cabaret Queen. Soon, the whole town was in love with her. Of all the women who felt threatened by her presence, only Parvati kne)' that she was actually Shcronwali Mata of the postcards. Was she avenging herself on the Studio Mytho by turning the goddess into a cabaret star?

One night, just before the performance, an electrical short circuit plunged the town into darkness. Inside the cabaret hall, candles were lit. The band, The Lunatics, was warming up. Palmolive began her act by roaming from lap to lap, enquiring after each customer, while the chorus sang:

'Olive! Olive!

' -v

O Miss Palmolive!'

It was Amavasya night. True to his promise, Chand had landed in the town. Me made his way to an ice-cream sherbet shop, shimmering with thelight of a thousand candles. The Walls were lined with mirrors and lass-paxied cupboards full of coloured sherbet bottles. He sat down at a side table, and opened a local newspaper. On the last page was an ad for Palmolive" cabaret dance. He looked around the lassi bar for someone who could guide him to the Hotel Blu Moon. His attention was caught by the reflection of an overcoat in the mirror. Parvati, the girl who was wearing it, was a gypsy who traded new stainless steel utensils in excliange for old clothes. Chand rose and approached her, intending to ask if she would sell him the overcoat. But he began by enquiring if she knew where Palmolive was dancing. He felt sure that a girl like her would know. By now, they were probably even friends. To all his questions she answered: 'Yes.'

In the end, she gave him the overcoat. But, walking out of the parlour, running his fingers through its numerous pockets, his hands closed on something metallic and cold. He took out a gun, and stood looking at it for moment, cross-eyed with wonder. Then, he threw it back to Parvati wno was still sitting finishing her buttermilk at the bar. Parvati, taken aback by the gun, caught it as it sailed through at air toward her. The beam of an autorickshaw headlight searched Chand's face for a Hash. In the darkness, a jeweled knife clattered to his feet. As the autorickshaw screeched to a halt, the two boys inside screamed. 'Anthony! Anthony!'

Sensing their fear, Chand held the accelerating auto fast in his hand, picked up the knife, and jumped inside. Holding his knife at the driver's throat, Chand said 'The Hotel Blu Moon. Fast!'

The auto shot off, leaving the smell of scorched rubber tyres behind. Outside the Blue Moon, Chand paid the toys. Then he opened the doors to the dance floor, chose a corner table, and sat alone. Palmolive noticed him at once and, making her way from table to table began, slowly, to approach him.

Meanwhile, the boys in the auto, Chotu and Abbas, were trembling with excitement. Half a century after his disappearance, the ghost of Overcoat Anthony still walked in the interiors of the town! Chotu and Abbas rushed with the news of the night to Jagdish, the police photographer. Jagdish's ambition in life was to "photograph the legendary Overcoat Anthony at least once as a gift for his father-in-law who believed that Anthony, the good-hearted dada, still lived, an ageless beauty of a man, frozen in time. He was working on a book on his hero's life. He had proof of his existence, newspaper cuttings of his exploits, and even a replica of Anthony's old overcoat that he had gifted to his daughter, Jagdish's wife, in her dowry. Hurriedly collecting his kit, Jagdish first made his way to his father-in-law's house and woke the old man up with the news before rushing off to take his photograph. The rumour was gaining momentum.

The city was still operating on private generators and candlelight. Alerted by Chotu and Abbas, police cars with flashing lights and waiting sirens cut their way through the darkness towards the Blue Moon. As the cops burst into the cabaret hall, Chotu and Abbas pointed out Chand. Camera bulbs exploded in his face. And then the random gunshots began in the dark. Chand, disguised in dark glasses, ran for his life. In the pandemonium that ensued, policemen sealed off the exits, and no one was permitted to leave.

Hours of interrogation later, they had peeled off the layers of the legend of the overcoat, and were sorting out the further story of Miss Palmolive. The advertisement in which she had, through Chutki, become Bhawani's second choice after Sitaram Biscuits had linked her name with his, and the concoction was brewing nicely in the cauldrons of Use media, and it was dawn before the Cabaret Queen and her customers rose to go.

Getting up from a game ofummy with Parvati, Palmolive gazed at a huge hoarding of Bhawani standing outside the windows of her hotel room. Shamelessly he declared, in that early morning light:

'My second choice after Sitaram Biscuits

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Miss Palmolive.'

Sprawled across the double bed, tickling the soles of her feet, Parvati teased her mercilessly about his obsessive love for her. Defending herself, almost in tears. Palmolive told her that she had never met Minwini Singh in her life.

Several minutes passed, with no sign of the moon

Bhawani and men moved from place to place, searching for the energy zone where Mata would appear before him for the ceremony of the disarmament. This was a sort of negotiation between him and the babus of the government. The sleuths of R.A.W., questioning the advertising ethics that transformed a fugitive like Bhawani into a multinational biscuit hero, set about ways to reform him. Bhawani was the first one to become an advertising star while still on the run. Only the advertising network could reach him.

Meanwhile, he, whose celibacy was legendary, had to correspond with Palrnolive, since their names were mixed by the media. She challenged the nature of his exploitation, he sang of purity. Anything could carry a message, a kite, a card, a crystal ball, a pigeon or a planchette. She asked:

'What is the real meaning of the song, "Come September"?

Is it freedom or independence?

If it's love, is it population?

Is it destruction?'

She continued to dance at the cabaret hall, coming back every night to her hotel room where, outside the window, the story of their love grew on the hoarding of Sitaram Biscuits, her messages to Bhawani documented by mysterious media forces.

While Palrnolive waited for the postman, mute news was spreading through the network of housewives. Sheronwali Mata, the goddess of the postcards, the star of the film, was coming to town, and every woman in the club knew the date and time of her arrival. On that day, they were to gather in the cinema hall where "Sheronwali Mata" was running in the morning show. Mata herself would make an appearance and give a rare sermon on the maladies and cures of our times. Parvati had organised it neatly.

Dawn was still a few hours away. Parvati and Palrnolive sat painting their nails, giggling over some private joke. The love story on the hoarding outside the window had grown. Then, they talked of Chand. For Parvati, it had been love at first sight. She showed Palrnolive the gun that Chand had thrown back to her at the lassi shop. Palrnolive wondered aloud:

'The town is nice, and the police are good. Still what makes a girl like you so brave? Is there a way to get rid of all one's fundamental fears?'

'There is a way.* Parvati told her.

'A lioness will be standing next door, at the gates of the Telephone Kiosk.* The lioness is on night duty. If you can ride up to Durga Ghat, swim to the centre of the lake and pluck the only lotus blooming there at mid-night, you won't be afraid any more.'

Palrnolive picked up her cat, put the gun in her handbag, and climbed down the stairs wearing Parvati's clothes, hiding her face as she passed the receptionist. She rode the Luna through wide, empty streets, the night wind in hair. Suddenly, at one point, a gang of dangerous teenagers blocked her path, and surrounded her vehicle. But before they could attack, the cat sprang over her shoulders into one boy's face, and sank her teeth into his

neck. As he dropped dead, more from fright than anything else. Palmolive speeded away.

Since the night when Chand had been trapped on the earth, wearing the identity of Ov coat Anthony, hunted by the police and school children, the city had grown used to the perpetual darkness of the nights that was now beginning to be lit by garlands of colourful Diwali lights. The trees were laden with light - bulb fruits.

At Durga Ghat, Palmolive parked the Luna beneath the falling autumn leaves of an ancient banyan tree. Under a thicker root nearby, two legless sadhu babas smeared ash sat on beds of nails on wheels, watching her. She took off her clothes, her sandals, and her handbag, and slid into the water like an electric eel. In the distance, the lotus glowed.

On the other side of the lake, a tiger was shot with a morphine gun, picked up and loaded into the dicky of a car.

Palmolive surfaced from the water, the lotus flower in her hand. Dead fish floated past her face as she began to swim back to the banks. There was silence in the air.

Meanwhile, one of the sadhu babas had wheeled his bed of nails to Palmolive's clothes, opened her handbag, and found the gun. Returning to his place beneath the tree, he put the gun to his temple and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened, just an empty click. He threw the gun to the other sadhu who also put it to his head and pulled the trigger. A blank bullet burst. The babas heart missed a beat. Losing his precarious balance, he landed on his spiky seat, and was nailed through the butt.

A monkey who was watching them jumped down from the tree, collected Palmolive's clothes, walked up to the dead baba, picked up the fallen gun, and disappeared into the leafy darkness again. With his first shot he lit up the eastern sky. It was the crack of dawn.

Palmolive emerged from the water, naked from head to toe. As she searched for her clothes and the handbag, she noticed the monkey on the tree, chattering in her face, brandishing the gun. Quickly, she put on her sandals, picked up the cat, and ran towards a house across the street. Seeing the naked woman with a cat in her arms, running down the street at dawn, the milkmen on their bicycles lost their balance and fell, whitewashing the street with milk. Just then, the early time carried the rowing team in its dingy passed by, illuminated by the light of dawn, and knocked at a door on the landing. The police painter who opened the door froze at the sight of this magnificent beauty. Like a somnambulist, he opened a large trunk, took out a gorgeous bridal dress, and covered her nakedness with it.

Meanwhile, another story had developed in Purnavati's life after Palmolive left her that night. Kierkegaard from hiding, Chand had come to declare his love for the gypsy girl. Romance was a welcome diversion from the tedious business of running away. But soon, he had to hide again, underneath the bed. A rich Arab had come to court Miss Palmolive,

To propose marriage, and to offer her a network of petrol pumps in return for her hand. If marriage was unacceptable to her, he was still willing to give her everything in exchange for a night in her company. He had been seeking her favour for a long time and had, like many men in the town, spread stories of his intimacy with her although the truth was that he had never even seen eyes on her, yet. Parvati, pretending to be Palmolive, unaware of her actual relationship with the Arab, told him that she was pregnant, hoping to put him off. But the Arab persisted in saying that he would wait for her until the child was born, on one condition - that she should give up dancing. In return, he would pay all her bills.

Then Palmolive returned to her hotel room in the morning, wearing the hndai gown, her room was littered with children's toys, and the hotel was hot with rumours that she was carrying an Arab's child.

At Durga Ghat, Jagdish* the police photographer, was taking pictures of the scene of the crime, of the handbag, of the pygmy baba who had died so mysteriously, of the blueprints for a home-made atomic bomb, a guide to alchemy, of a trigger-happy monkey holding Durga Ghat at gunpoint. The place was terror-struck. Emergency meetings were called to find ways to make the monkey give up the gun. Was it a violation of the religious code to shoot a monkey down? How much paperwork was involved?

Simultaneously, at the police station, the telephone network was working overtime. The pieces of information that came in were being welded together with imagination as the police painter tried to reconstruct the story from the beginning. He painted a naked lady on a Luna with a cat on her shoulders, a boy found dead in the middle of the street, claw-marks on his face and neck, the dead bote, the monkey on the tree, the fallen bicycles and the milk on the road, and the sleeping tiger in the dicky. Then, they compared the paintings with Jagdish's photographs, and conferred on the comparative objective realities of the painted image and the photographed one. Neither was closer to the truth.

The police had succeeded in tracing the owner of the Luna, the telephone operator whose younger brother was Chotu of the autorickshaw. He had already spread his story all over town, beginning with his classroom, to spite a senior boy at school who claimed to have slept with Palmolive, pitting his adventure story against the make-believe love tale of a roadside Romeo.

Meanwhile, the pigeon brought Palmolive a letter from Hhawnni, informing her that he was taking the lot Mess ol'Tniiigarh. He did not know that she was stationed in the same town that he was going to conquer, in a dream, he had struck a deal with the Mother of the many arms, whose face looked exactly like Palmolive's on the wrapper of a special agarbatti, 'Chaitanya Mata Ki Uatti', copyright, the Studio Mytho. This was, a drug device developed by R.A.W. in association with the Studio Mytho, using the poster of 'Sharonwali Mata', a picture produced by them. It was believed that the programmed dream-inducing fragrance of the incense would set the scene for a surrender of arms, initiating a dialogue with the terrorist, dacoits and defaulters who were the natural consumers of the product. They were available in a variety of fragrances, each set for a

different purpose and a different dream. The one Bhawani used, for instance, was inducing him to give up amis

The day of Paimoiive's meeting with the women of the town dawned bright and clear. Palmolive had overslept. At 9.45 a.m., realizing how late it was, she rushed to the movie hall, leaving the hotel just as the police, led by their clues, arrived at her door. They looked into an empty room filled with children's toys. Had she run away with the wealthy Arab?

The movie hall filled slowly. It was a special show, for ladies only. At last, the doors were closed. The jeers that at first greeted the cabaret queen who sat with her cat changed to cheers when the women finally recognized her as Sheronwali Mata of the postcards. She was asked to come onstage. When her discourse ended, a non-cooperation movement was launched - a resolution was passed that, to punish their errant husbands, the women would go on a sex strike until the occasion of Paimoiive's last performance, which was to last a whole night

On that night, they decided, they would gatecrash the cabaret hall, catch their husbands in the act, and give them a piece of their minds.

Meanwhile, Jagdish, drunk with drowsiness, had returned home late in the afternoon. For, eighteen hours, he had toiled in the darkroom, developing and printing his rolls. As his photographs had been syndicated to the newspapers overnight, but when he got home, his wife was missing. He searched everywhere, in the corners, in the cupboards, under the beds, inside boxes, down the well, at the lake. Giving up at that point, he went to see the police painter, who was also Gayatri's rakht brother, and his ideological rival, who had never liked him. He was told that she was not there.

Jagdish's wife, Gayatri, was always threatening to leave him. This time he was especially incensed that she had faded Anthony's overcoat for a set of stainless steel utensils, particularly since it was a gift from her own father on her wedding day. But Gayatri couldn't have helped it. Left to her own devices the whole day long while her husband was out, shooting crime on the streets for the police files, the overcoat had become a living thing. Had Anthony surfaced this time just to see Palmolive dance? By giving his overcoat to the gypsy girl, she had hoped to lay his ghost.

Still searching for Gayatri, Jagdish went to his father-in-law's house, but the old man only laughed mockingly at him. The overcoat, he said, was not important, but the disappearance of his daughter was a serious affair. It was then that, setting out together to search for her, they realized that every man in the town was looking for his wife. They had disappeared, and taken over a movie hall like a parliament of women presided over by the cabaret dancing avatar of the Goddess, of the Lion herself who, rebelling against the clause in her contract, demanded many lives in one lifetime.

Failing to find Gayatri, feeling her absence keenly, lonely in his heart, Jagdish sat down on the steps of the temple built *in* the mountainside. A woman, returning from the temple, saw his woebegone face and the keys *in* his hands, and asked: 'Bhaisaab, what are you doing here? I met your wife while buying these samosas. She must have reached home a long time ago.'

He ran back home, but Gayatri still had not returned. Determined to teach her a lesson, he carefully hanged himself from the ceiling fan. Gayatri entered the house, her mouth full of rehearsed excuses, but when, at last, she looked up, she let out a horrified cry. Momentarily petrified, she whirled into action as consciousness returned, shattering the glass bangles on her wrists, erasing her sindoor on the wall. Blood poured from her nose as she clung to Jagdish's body, confessing that the pull of her love was stronger than the power of Palmolive. Jagdish faking death, moved by the outpourings of love and grief at his feet, could not restrain a tear. It fell onto Gayatri's unturned face. As the teardrop scalded her cheek, she opened her *eyes*, and Md looked into Jagdish's impish smile. Furious that he had made a fool of her, she refused to help him down.; Instead, she settled herself on the cot, tied a rope to his ankles and nibbling a little snack, rocked him like a cradle, crooning snatches of a lullaby between bites.

It was the night of Palmolive's last show. Chand sat with Parvati, romancing by the poolside. Suddenly, she broke loose from his arms and declared that she wouldn't make love except on a tiger skin p.j. Chand vanished and reappeared *in the* kitchen of the Lions' Club, where the tiger stolen from the sanctuary had been skinned, and was being cooked for a special dinner for the members. After the feast, they were all together at Miss Palmolive's all night cabaret dance. Chand returned to Parvati with the tiger skin. As they made love, he watched the Lion's Club party from above.

Meanwhile, Bhawanti Singh had taken Taragarh, the site where he would surrender his arms. Each man had taken his post. Everything was under control. The arrangement for the ceremony were being supervised by his lieutenants with the workforce of the government machinery. Feasts were cooked while Bhawani gave sermons to busloads of* schoolchildren who were rubbing shoulders with police and dacoits alike. The place had turned into a picnic spot. The chief minister was to arrive for the function. The wife of the Inspector 'General of police, who had engineered the surrender, took a liking to Bhawani. Claiming that she was his rakhi sister, she fed him iaddoos. and cracked her knuckles against his temples to ward off the evil eye. Bhawani spoke of palmolive. the second love of his life, and of his abiding faith in Mata. The other dacoits were being photographed, interviewed, offered sponsorships, employment, marriage, trips abroad.

But palmolive, hearing on the radio that Bhawani was giving up arms, sent him a letter through the pigeon post:

'Quila lautayega to khilayega kya?'

'If you return the fort, what will you feed me?'

She was agreeing to marry him.

The pigeon flew away to the mountaintop and dropped the letter in Bhawani's lap just as he was about to at least the Document of surrender. He gave the letter to Samba to read, since he himself had never learned to do so. Samba read it, and whispered the message into his ear. Bhawani changed his mind, slipped a pistol into Samba's hand, and whispered something in return. Samba caught the wife of the Inspector General of police unawares. Twisting her arm behind her back, he held the gun to her head. Bhawani announced over the mike that he was going down to town on urgent business, and that the ceremony would have to be delayed until his return. Samba held the mountaintop at gunpoint while Daku Bhawani Singh was drawn towards a dream.

Still ignorant of the fact that Miss Palmolive was the sheroonwali Mata of his dreams, Bhawani rode down the mountain slope on bullet. The first person he met was the Arab who ran the petrol pump. When he entered the town, he was mobbed by adoring fans, and welcomed like a Diwali night. Bhawani Singh rode through the streets, an Ex-ruler concerned for the welfare of his subjects, carried by his people to all the best Haunts of the town, the parks, the restaurants, the underworld.' When the Lions* Club members heard that he had come, they rushed to *invite* him to the feast. The man deputed to escort him, however, had just swallowed the tiny radio transmitter that was fixed inside the tiger of the sanctuary, to keep a track of him. Following its electronic beep, two detectives from the sanctuary had afscy-farided up at the party, and kept trailing the man who had swallowed the transmitter.

Bhawani was the star of the party. Women swooned over him, reveling in the power of a man who could remote-control the fortress on the mountain with the barrel of a gun. **His** celibacy was legendary, *and* his description of his dreams of Mata* brought tears to people's eyes. Someone asked how Bullet knew where Mata would appear before him, Bhawani replied: lie diiinvi tin* IIMM'ol"< 'ofise N<<f>liMnIH'i", wlurh *ho will Miiy In htm

Another Suggested:

'Would you like to visit Palmolive tonight? Some say she is pregnant, but now the Arab denies the child. Perhaps *it* is overcoat Anthony's or anyone else's in the town.'

They started for the cabaret hall, leading Bhawani's Bullet by the bridle. Women leaned out of their windows to watch the procession as it passed. Firecrackers exploded in the sky.

Sprawled on the stolen tiger skin, Chand and Parvati watched the festivities at the foot of the hill. Above them, Taragargh shone like a jewel, lit for the ceremony of the surrender of arms.

The police, trailing the man with the overcoat, were spotted by Chand from this vantage* point. Paranoid that he would be caught, he rolled swiftly into the pool. But, once in the Water, a long-forgotten dogbite began to reverberate, convulsing his body with shudders. His head thrown back, he howled at the sky, and drowned like a mad dog horrified by

water. The policemen, who had seen strange things that night, fled from the picture of Parvati standing by the pool on her tiger skin rug, her loose hair rippling *in* the breeze.

Perhaps the moon returned to the skies at last.

The neon phases of the moon flashed once more on the signboard of the Hotel Blue Moon. The power had returned to the town. Police's dance had begun. A stream of *men* were pouring in, but Bhawani had not yet arrived.

The police station on Ourga Ghat was still in contact with the other stations. The monkey was still holding the gun. And the baba's death was still a mystery, "the manuscript found beneath his bed of nails was to be serialized in a newspaper, to teach people how to make home-made atom bombs. An overcoat was found at the poolside. Was Anthony still alive? Had he been visiting Pahnolive? And who were these studio spies against whom she appealed for protection? There was heavy security at the cabaret hall tonight. The wireless transmitted messages from the policemen who were trailing Bhawani's horse. The Lady Commissioner of Police whose husband Bhawani had killed in combat was constantly in touch with the Inspector General of Police on the mountaintop where everything was still the same. Samba still held the Inspector General's wife at gunpoint. The Chief Minister, who had *arrived* in a helicopter, was undecided what to do. Should they sacrifice a few people in exchange for Bhawani's life?

Meanwhile, when the women of the town burst into the cabaret hall, a silence fell on the crowd. The band started to play the tune, 'Come September'. Far away on a distant street, Bullet heard the call. Rearing up in the air, he neighed, and galloped towards the music.

At the same moment, Gayatri cut loose her husband's ropes and Samba on the mountaintop, caught off-guard, was shot through the heart. The deities on the parapet walls of the fortress were mowed down like grass. Orders were issued to shoot Bhawani at sight.

Dismounting from Bullet, Bhawani entered the cabaret hall. He moved towards Pahnolive.

Incredulously, she whispered:
'My God! Bhawani!'

Bhawani looked up, and recognized the face of his love, at last. In their first and last embrace, she touched her lips to his. Chaste Bhawani swooned in her arms, killed by a kiss. A policeman took aim, and fired, the bullet missed Bhawani's broad back and entered the 'O My God! Bhawani!'

The picture froze.

Chutki arrived the next morning from Bombay. At the hotel she was told of Pahnolive's death. Numb with shock, refusing to believe the truth, she set out to look for her mistress

on the streets of the town. She wandered down a road littered with trappings of wrappers of firecrackers from Sivakasi, and finally, dwindled away.

MAJOR CHARACTERS -

BHAWANI SINGH

A baby faced man of forty released a year earlier from his short service commission in the Army, now runs a tonga service between the town and a neighbouring village. Kills a man in an argument and spends the rest of his life on the run, but finds time to become a supermodel for Sitaram Biscuits, a Superhit ad campaign. Renowned for his high moral fibre, lofty sense of purpose and total celibacy, he falls in love with Miss Palmolive, a cabaret dancer in a small town.

THAKUR SANGRAM SINGH a.k.a. DINKELBIJA

A high class land owner who now runs the largest dairy firm in collaboration with Iniegn luilliiinttoimil i-<iiii|viiuc.s. Iki has* hynothtfented IUHWHIU'S laud in fviltntiiu* I*« unpolled buffalo seed under the CIATI' treaty.

MISS PALMOLIVE

A child woman, giggly, neurotic and sexy. Madonnaesque virgin.

CHIANP

A petty thief who runs a cabaret network from the moon, he is the anti-gentleman. Not only is he a thug with a concealed blade in his walking stick, but he also utterly rejects honour among thieves and the most primitive duties of friendship. He seems to half enjoy corrupting Palmolive, and in fact sets her feet on the primrose path to the roses and raptures of vice.

CHUTKI

Palmolive's young assistant, a girl of eight made up to look like a woman of eighty. She unwittingly starts the process of linking Bhawani's name romantically with Palmolive's.

PARVATI

A gypsy girl who trades new stainless steel vessels for old clothes. Palmolive's friend and sole confidante. She's the only one who knows that Palmolive is also Sheronwati Mata when she gives her old overcoat to Chanel. she gives him both a gun and her heart.

OVERCOAT ANTHONY

The 100 year old legend of the good hearted Dada, an ageless beauty of a man, frozen *in* time.

The Police Photographer whose ambition in life is to photograph the legendary Overcoat Anthony at least once as a gift for his father-in-law.

GAYATRI

Jagdish's wife who's always threatening to leave him. Overcoat Anthony is an absolute presence *in* her life, first because of her father's obsession with him and then because of her husband's. By giving Anthony's overcoat away to Parvati *in* exchange for new vessels, she hopes to lay bis ghost.

MINOR CHARACTERS

PUNKET'SCRONIES

Carrying imported arms and ammunition, they dress *in* safari suits and ride like a motorcycle gang.

LADY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE

She's a police officer who sings like Suraiyya and her obsession is Bhawani's tionech Bhawani, the daku who killed her husband in combat.

THE POLICE PARTY

All of them either too thin or too fat.

LITTLE GIRL MILKING A BUFFALO

Like any village belle.

THE TONGAWALA FUGITIVES AND ASSORTED GROUPIES

Represented by their costumes - second hand, but trendy and tough and from all over the world.

Thither characters following Bhawani on his journey, trying either to convert him or to make ad films and reportage's, and language interpreters are typically dressed according to their roles.

MISS PALMOLIVE ALL NIGHT CABARET

OR

THE KISS A MUSICAL

FANTASY TREATMENT

This is a love story between a Don Quixote kind of bandit, cnivalrous and hungry for love, who has never touched a woman in his life, and an actress who waits to break free from her contract of one role in one lifetime. Thus, she becomes a fresh initiate intp a satellite cabaret network run from the moon.

The kiss is a parody of today's cultural ethos of commercials, media hype, small town morality, come face to face with the visual onslaught of MTV. It is an original story that has been woven around the formats of popular television programs for example, the serial opens with Daku Bhawani and his tongawala fugitives disguised as a bridegroom and his baraatis on their way to participate as special guests in the popular show, "Musical Aap Ki Adaiat". It's a major scoop for the television channel, arid the ballad of Bhawani becomes the song of the lumpen masses. ;

As a complete story it is structured in 13 episodes with each situation having the potential to create an infinite number of gags. This serial aspires to create a galaxy of archetypal comicbook heroes.

Since we are shooting on Betacam, we would like to use all its features to best advantage to create multi-layered visual constructs/chromas, in the tradition of pop art.

Also, since the climax is set against the backdrop of Diwali d&zzzle and festivity, we ought to be ready to shoot by that time.