

POLITICS

AN INTERVIEW WITH MINOO MASANI

by Farok Contractor

Auto Speeches - The end

"I'm afraid you've hustled me into this," said Masani, with a pained expression on his face. We were sitting in his office one afternoon, after reviewing the contents of the interview held a few evenings before. "I normally give only written answers," he said, agitated to find he had been over-vehement in his attack on Indira and the Congress. "I am not against her personally, only against her Marxist policies," he explained, hoping, apparently, that we would temper his remarks. The interview, as it stands, has a hard-hitting flavour and has Masani's lucid historical analysis on the direction India is going and the fate which awaits us.

Masani's life style, to an outsider, seems to be one of constant agitation. One would imagine that after a full lifetime as a freedom fighter, being the founder-member of both the Socialist and the Swatantra parties, hobnobbing with Nehru and Gandhi, he would have retired into a well-deserved nostalgia. Not so. At 67, Masani is very much a man for the moment, offering himself and the policies he advocates as viable alternatives to the chaos engulfing the country. Today he is writing his memoirs, besides working full-time as a management consultant, "to make ends meet", as he says. A demanding autocrat in the office, his nimble mind issues torrents of words that would leave all but the most dedicated secretaries drowning in confusion. At home, though, it is a quiet life in a posh area of town, surrounded by books and antiques, where Masani dreams perhaps for that fortuitous starboard gust of wind that would propel his ideology to a pre-eminent position after the revolution he predicts.

'Z' : What role are you playing in India today?

Masani : At the moment, I am a student of history. This is only a temporary posture, though. I feel a man with my liberal views and inclinations hasn't got a role to play in party politics today. I can only educate public opinion against the day, when people have learnt the lesson the hard way, that Marxism, collectivism and state capitalism don't pay, do not deliver the goods, do not solve any problems, political or economic.

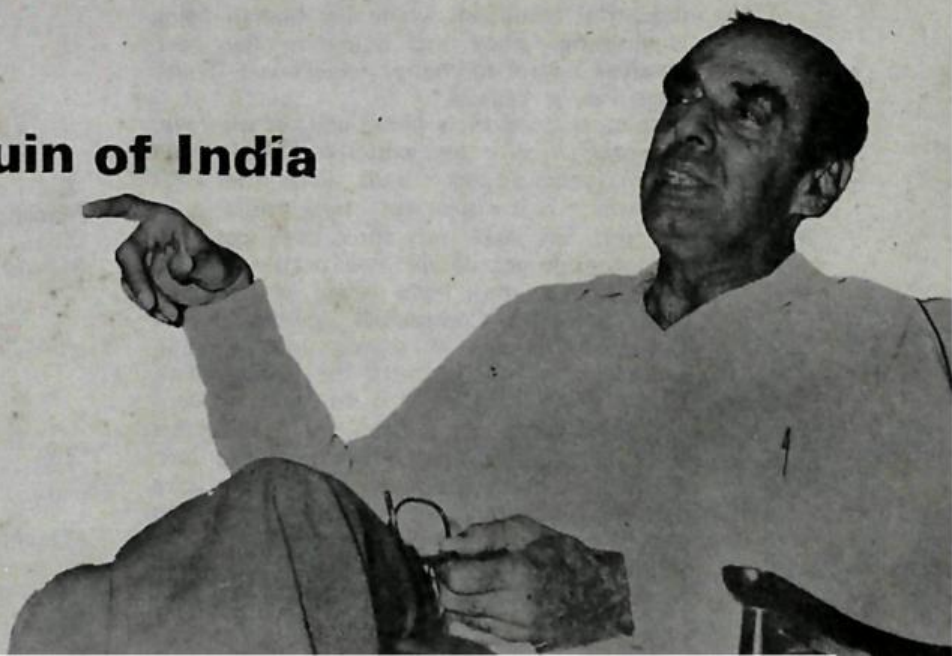
'Z' : What lesson will we learn?

Masani : Now, that lesson was learnt historically in Indonesia, when at last the people turned against Sukarno. It was learnt in Ghana, when the army and the people turned against Nkrumah and, more recently, it was learnt on the 10th of September in Chile. This I feel, is the pattern of history. When an independent country, which has no common frontiers with the Soviet Union, is sought to be taken over for the Communist way of life, then the organism has enough life and patriotism to throw the poison out.

'Z' : Are you depressed about the condition of the country?

Masani : I think India will survive the current attempt to take it over. I am quite optimistic that within five or six years, or at the most a decade, we should be out of this nightmare of this Sukarno-Nkrumah-Allende complex in which we are caught... this poison in our system. I'm very optimistic. No, I'm not depressed. But Rajaji and I had warned the people for the last ten years and they had not listened. Now they must learn the hard way.

**Nehru started the ruin of India
Indira completed it**



'Z' : You used the term "poison in our system." Are you suggesting it is being injected deliberately from the outside?

Masani : I think Mrs Gandhi is the instrument of it, whether she's conscious of it or not. I think she's playing the Soviet game of preparing the ground for a Communist takeover.

'Z' : So then she's playing the role of a medium?

Masani : I think she's being a deliberate Marxist and I think she's playing the role consciously. Now take Malaviya's appointment. Malaviya's appointment must be understood. Why did it happen? Why, in the whole country, with talent of all kinds, did a Communist, a Moscow man, and a man who was sacked by her father, very reluctantly, for misconduct of a financial nature — why did she choose this man for the very sensitive Ministry of Steel and Mines which was vacated by Kumaramangalam? To me, the answer is clear. This is the price Moscow exacts for keeping her there.

'Z' : But she can survive without Moscow, can't she?

Masani : Yes, but then she would have to eat crow. She would have to admit the tragic mistake of being on the wrong side all these years, since the late thirties. Krishna Menon, who was then in London, worked on her in her student days, and on Feroze Gandhi and other Indian students, to make them fellow travellers. That I recall from my early Socialist days. For her now to eat crow would be difficult. She is too proud.

'Z' : But she can have her own national brand of Socialism?

Masani : No. There is no such thing. You have either liberal capitalism or you have your Marxism. I say there is no middle path.

'Z' : So you are a conservative, a right winger?

Masani : No, I am not. I'm very anti-conservative. I consider myself a radical. The Communists are the reactionaries because they are the ones who stand for the most reactionary, Czarist, oppressive kind of society... for industrial feudalism where the human being is nothing. They are living in the past, whereas I want to change society fast. That's why I'm a radical.

'Z' : You mentioned she's being used as an agent to take over the country, but hasn't Mrs. Gandhi's party split with the CPI? Isn't there a strain in the relationship?

Masani : No, no! She said, only three days ago, that the programmes of the two parties are the same. There may be a strain between her and her non-Communist colleagues in Congress, though. If there's another split, I fear Indira will go with the Communists.

'Z' : So are you saying there is no brake on her?

Masani : It's the Indian people who are holding her back. She knows that if she goes too fast, she will be thrown out. She would not have appointed Malaviya two years ago. She waited till the time was right and then she did it. She could not have signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty two years earlier. In fact,

the treaty was ready much before, but she waited till the country had softened up and Bangla Desh was used as an excuse. She could not have superseded the senior judges two years earlier.

'Z' : Do you think if the Jan Sangh or the Swatantra Party took power today, they could do a better job?



'I've described her (Mrs. Gandhi) as the de Gaulle that failed.'

Masani : I think perhaps we have got past the stage when a political party could do what you want. The people have lost faith in the Parliamentary system. In that sense, Mrs. Gandhi is a kind of de Gaulle who came to power on the wings of the fourth republic, and you cannot now go back to the fourth republic. I have described her as the de Gaulle that failed. I would be inclined to think that we are now entering a revolutionary situation. I fear, though I am a very strong democrat, that for a while extra constitutional forces will take over. We are beginning to see them already. Look at Gujarat. I deplore the methods used. It is terrible to overthrow governments this way, but the people feel there is no other way. The democratic safety valves have been destroyed by Mrs. Gandhi, by her methods.

'Z' : So what would happen after that?

Masani : After what?

'Z' : After the revolution.

Masani : We all know what happens after a Marxist revolution. But if there is an anti-Marxist revolution, we will be liberated. Like in Indonesia, where Suharto has taken the country to the middle of the road, restored her international standing and now the country is going places slowly but steadily. But our army is so large and diverse. Who would take over? There are so many personalities.

Masani : That's not my problem. I'm not advocating it. Look, let's get this clear. The cancer specialist who warns of cancer is not

provoking it. He is not promoting the cancer. All he says is, "Operate—do something!"

'Z': But many army regimes have failed miserably.

Masani: Oh yes, of course, it's a big gamble. Take Pakistan under Ayub. He was welcomed in the beginning, you know. I'm not saying it's a solution. Mind you, I'm not advocating it, but it's the kind of thing that history throws up against insoluble problems.

'Z': Would you have any role to play in this anti-Marxist rule?

Masani: Quite possibly not, quite possibly yes. Who knows? When the army calls in politicians.... they could call in some prominent people. Suppose they called me to do something, or, say, Jaiprakash.... people of that kind. Sensible people and technocrats who can do a good job. But whether I'm called back to public life or not is of indifference to me and of no importance to the country.

'Z': So you're suggesting an army takeover as an alternative to a Marxist takeover? You would prefer the former?

Masani: I would prefer, temporarily, a patriotic army rule, which takes a pragmatic economic line, gives the people a good life, stops population growth, puts the country on its feet and allows democracy to take over within a stated period. As a student of history, I would say it is a lesser evil to the other path. It is preferable to a treacherous Communist takeover which hands the country over to China or Russia.

'Z': But then the communists would be trying to infiltrate the army.....

Masani: There was an announcement in Delhi only a few days ago, in the newspapers, that the Home Office have revised their circulars to say that the RSS members, CPM and Naxalites are ineligible for public service, but members of the CPI are now perfectly alright.

'Z': So far they were not?

Masani: No, but secretly it's been going on for years. Infiltration in India has been going on under Nehru and it's been accelerated under Indira Gandhi.

'Z': In the army they'd be recruited as officers, you mean?

Masani: Yes. Officers and men. The Communist tactic is to infiltrate in all armed forces in all bourgeois countries. India, as you know, is still rated a bourgeois country.

'Z': So what happens if the army intervenes?

Masani: No, the army never comes in deliberately. The army is sucked in, in a power vacuum against its wishes. No army ever moves in to take power for the fun of it.

'Z': You compared the situation with Chile. But Chile is a small, industrialised country—how can you compare it with us?

Masani: There's a strong parallel. We are moving in the same direction as Allende. Inflation, unemployment and food shortages are three combustible elements that make revolutions in history. The mischief started with the

second Five Year Plan. The framework for that Plan was devised by Professor Mahalanobis, who sat with a group of Russian Communist planners in the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta to prepare it. That is how inflation started. What I feared has come true, since the measure of inflation last year was between 25 and 28%.. I hope it will not reach the Chilean rate of 300%, last year which led to the revolution. I would not be surprised if it reaches as high as 100%, by the time the next budget is introduced.

'Z': Is this what Dr. Minhas is saying?

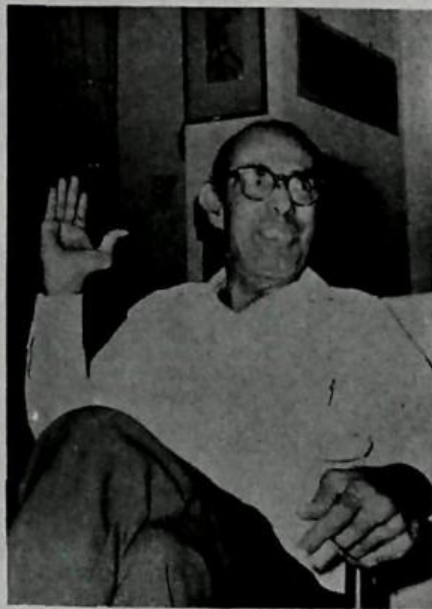
Masani: Dr. Minhas has now documented practically everything that we have been saying, that the figures in the Plans are doctored and calculated to fool the people with rosy pictures.

'Z': Are you still actively involved in politics?

Masani: At the moment, I'm on my second "vacation" from politics and enjoying it. I am now engaged in management consultancy, writing and other extra-curricular interests.

'Z': What made you go back to business?

Masani: Go back to business? I entered business in 1941 when I left the Socialist Party. Then I joined Tatas to earn a living. From 1934, for six years, when Jaiprakash and I started the Socialist Party, I lived on only Rs. 50 a month, scrounging around and starving. I really starved—I used to have one meal a day. You know the Cecil Restaurant on Hughes Road? I used to go there in the evenings to eat half a bun with butter and pouna cup chai—that's all I could afford. I used to go to sleep hungry. I used to travel third, live in torn clothes, torn shoes.



'If I retire today, I'd starve. Literally.

So what life style are you talking about ?'

'Z': You are associated with the Tata companies today?

Masani: In '53 I was appointed advisor on industrial relations for the House of Tatas. Today I'm a consultant of theirs on labour affairs.

'Z': What's your opinion on labour today?

Masani : I'm very pro-labour. I'm called in because I'm able to deal with the staff and put management right.

'Z' : You describe yourself as a Gandhian and a radical. Yet your life style today doesn't at all appear to be so.

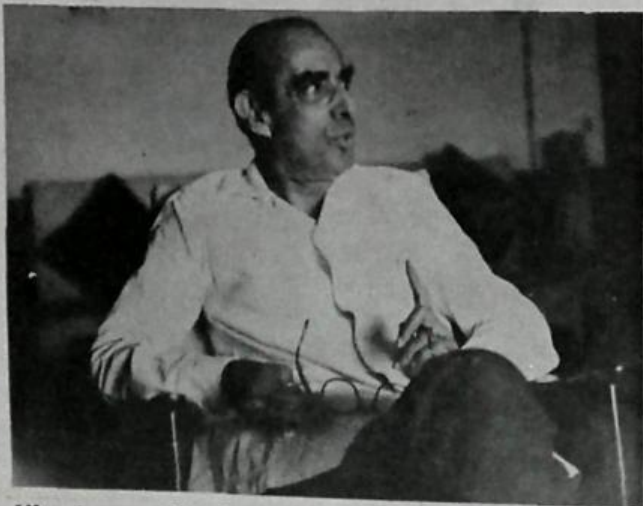
Masani : No? I think it does. I think I live much more poorly than many Marxists and people in power — I need not mention names. I have no capital at all. Every month I have to worry about how to pay my bills. Yesterday I tried to draw a cheque — I wanted Rs. 300 for the weekend — but my secretary said, "Mr. Masani, your balance is Rs 85." I drive my own car. I don't have a driver. At my age, which is 67, I don't know many of my own class who drive themselves. You see, I can't afford that. I have to work till I die. If I retire today, I'd starve. Literally. So what life style are you talking about?

'Z' : Well, the outward appearances — your flat —

Masani : Oh, this flat, you mean? This flat is rented at Rs. 300. My clothes are quite shabby. My women friends always complain that I look shabby. I say I'm sorry, I can't help it. I can't afford smart clothes. They say, we must modernise you. No, no, quite seriously, I'm not joking. I'm a poor man. The tragedy is, if I stop working tomorrow I'd literally starve. As long as I have my income I get along. Incidentally, as a small token of my acceptance of the Gandhian concept of 'trusteeship' I have, since 1955, despite my lack of affluence, been contributing 10% of my net income as *sampattidaan* to the *Bhoodan* movement.

'Z' : You started out by being a Gandhian?

Masani : No, no. I started out being a Socialist, and I ended up being a Gandhian liberal. I started as a very aggressive Socialist. I was very starry-eyed about the Soviet Revolution then, and I wrote a book called *Soviet Sidelights* in 1935, which was my second visit to the Soviet Union. But you know, by 1944 I had recanted and published *Socialism Reconsidered*, in which I renounced Marxism forever.



'I've been a bit of a Cassandra; I have warned against disasters. My misfortune is that I see things before they come.'

'Z' : What made you disillusioned with Russia?

Masani : Two things. The failure of the Soviet Revolution to deliver the goods. Today, after fifty years, there's no country in the world which has got more class distinctions, more economic inequality, less individual liberty than the Soviet Union. The rate of growth in terms of a good life — providing consumer goods — has been slower in the Soviet Union than in decadent countries like Spain and Portugal. This was one. And the other was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji's influence was a big one on both Jaiprakash and me. Gandhiji had no illusions about Communism. His words were, "There is nothing good that can come out of a system based on force and threat. Therefore nothing can come out of the Soviet Revolution." Q.E.D.

'Z' : Does that mean the ruling party has completely renounced Gandhian principles?

Masani : Of course. Oh, yes. I would say that today's ruling Congress is anti-Gandhian in every major way. In every single aspect. They are spitting at his memory.

'Z' : In what way? Can you —

Masani : Truth. The massacre of truth. And the centralised state capitalist monopoly which is the enemy of Gandhism.

'Z' : People say that if you had stuck on with Nehru, you would have been high up — a minister —

Masani : Oh yes, of course I would've been a minister under Nehru. He was very fond of me. But I was not prepared to go along with him. I was being tipped as Food Minister in the newspapers. Through private channels I had let Nehru know that I was not prepared to be his stooge. If I had wanted to, I could have been in office — one of those comfortable people, you know, but on Nehru's terms, which I would have found extremely revolting. I would have had to support collective farming, a pro-Soviet policy, the liquidation of Tibet by stopping the U.N. from intervening, and support for the Soviet tanks entering Budapest. Take Morarji Desai and Patil as two examples of people who did not believe in what Nehru did; who, against all my private pleadings, went along with him and were destroyed in the end.

'Z' : Are you suggesting that Nehru was also a Communist?

Masani : Well, he was certainly a half-baked Marxist. Now Indira is completing Nehru's work of ruining free India — she is successfully completing her father's work of destroying India.

'Z' : But he would never have envisaged a Communist takeover.

Masani : I had private information on Nehru's contacts with the CPI. Let's not go into that now. It will come in my memoirs a year or two later. Nehru was very much a Soviet sympathiser. His speech at the Presidential Address at the 1935 Lucknow session of the Congress was a 100% Com-

munist speech. He quite frankly made his confession in '35. At that time, I was not hostile to him, but we parted ways afterwards.

'Z': Do you think you've done better — from your own conscience point of view?

Masani: Oh God, I'm so glad I am not in either Indira's government or Nehru's. I have got my hands clean! I grant I have been a bit of a Cassandra; I have warned against disasters. I have had no scruples in telling the truth. That is my weakness. I started by warning India against Nehru from 1950. The attack on Tibet started my criticism of him. Before that, I used to argue with him privately. My misfortune is that I see things before they come.

'Z': But again, Indira may continue —

Masani: I hope she will continue for a little while. Until the lesson is learnt. I am against this "Indira Hatao" slogan. You must give the Indian people a viable alternative, not slogans. A hodgepodge without a slogan cannot win. And they lost in 1971 with this.

'Z': What do you think happened in U.P.?

Masani: I don't think elections are relevant any more except as trends. I don't think the future of India will be decided at the polls. It has gone beyond that.

'Z': That's a very fatalistic outlook —

Masani: No, it's not. It's a historical outlook. Why is it fatalistic? I say that India will survive.

'Z': Well, of course India will survive —

Masani: No, I mean India will survive as a free society after an interregnum. India will not go the way of China and Russia.

'Z': In this turmoil, what is the role of the intellectual, the intelligentsia?

Masani: The intellectuals have betrayed the country. There I agree with my friend Nirad Chaudhuri, that the role of the intellectual in India is like a jackal following the political tiger, picking up the leftovers from the table. The business class is the biggest betrayer of the lot, with a few notable exceptions.

'Z': Why, because they have gone along?

Masani: They have gone along and they have made a quick rupee and sold out. Indira's success in '71 was due to Indian capitalist money, and other money which I will not talk about.

'Z': But if you don't have faith in the intelligentsia, the upper classes, why do you publish your monthly, *Freedom First*? Why is its circulation so low?

Masani: Even if two thousand people read *Freedom First*, it is worth circulating. The fact that more people read *Blitz* shows the intellectual class has defected and is not standing up to their values. Many of our readers say that our journal is a voice of sanity in a sea of false information.

'Z': What do you think of the Indian Press?

Masani: I think a part of the Indian Press has sold out. Not that they have been bullied. It's cowardice. It's money, patronage, advertisements or respectability. For every one man who speaks the truth, there are ten cowards

who toe the government line because they want advertisements or patronage or respectability. But so long as there is freedom, there will be courageous people who are able to talk.

'Z': In the early days, what were your dreams, your hopes of what India would become?

Masani: My early hopes are the subject of my book, *Our India*. It was published in 1940, only seven years before independence. There are some touching sentences in that about how we'll be masters in our own home and how everything will be so beautiful after that and so on.

'Z': Wasn't that naive?

Masani: It was naive, but that's why it was such a success. This book sold like nothing else. You know, it's been India's all-time best seller. I think over a million copies were sold in about fifteen languages. It sold because it appealed to the basic patriotism. But at that time I didn't know that we would be such bad managers of our country.



'Z': Is India too big to manage? Can India's problems be solved quicker by economic autonomy for the states?

Masani: I'm for it. I'm for the States' rights. The Swatantra Party was always for it.

'Z': People called the Swatantra Party a capitalist party, a party of Princes.

Masani: The Swatantra Party was an agrarian party. It was not an urban party at all. The fact that some of us were town rats had nothing to do with it. Its whole structure was rural. Every single Swatantra M.P., including myself, was elected by peasant voters. No big city and no elite and no middle class has ever elected a Swatantra member of parliament. They are either too stupid or too Marxist.

'Z': But the men who were voted in had the public image of being reactionaries — princes

Masani: If the public were stupid enough to swallow Mr. Nehru's smear tactics, there's nothing I can say about it.

'Z': What about Mrs. Gandhi — is she honest?

Masani: Yes. Mrs. Gandhi is an honest Marxist, an honest fellow traveller. I don't doubt her honesty, but she's bad for India. Now people say that she's an opportunist. I don't agree with that. I think she's a dedicated woman, but because she's a dedicated Marxist it's our job to see that she loses power.

The Gentleman's ALPHABET BOOK

By Harvey Kornberg Limericks by Donald Hall

B ESTIALITY

A juvenile bugger named Sam
Had a fondness for mutton and lamb.
He declared, "Though I fear
That it may mean I'm queer,
I don't care if it's ewe or it's ram."

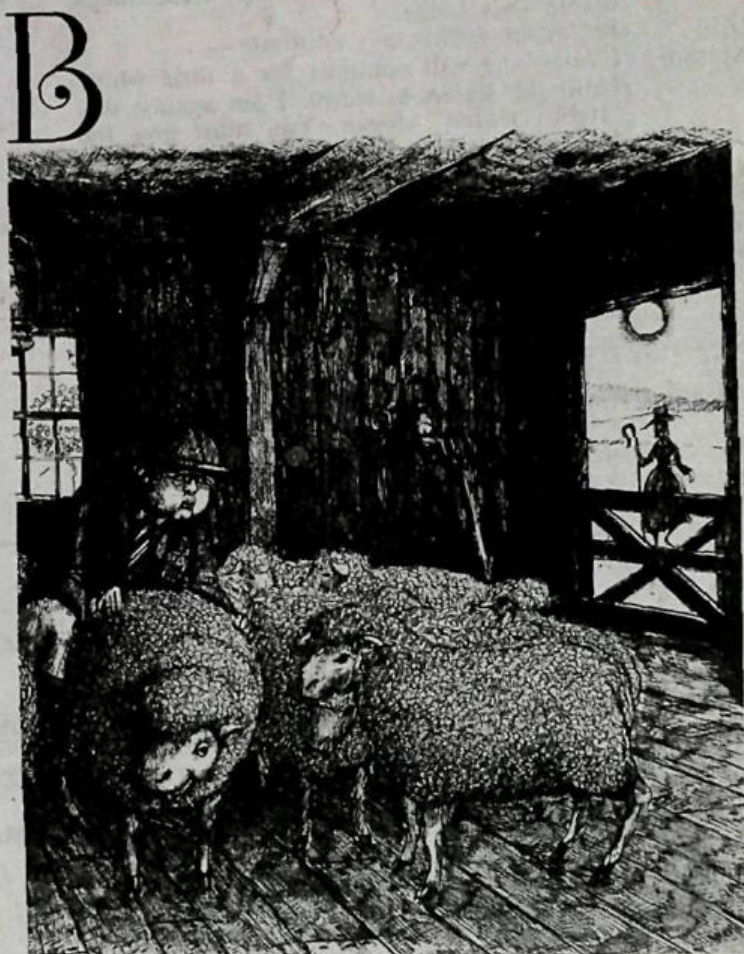
Covert Lustfulness

IN these days of explicit sexuality, when the flesh has been bared and the ultimate profanities have all been uttered, one often longs for the return to the more complex times when flounces and ruffles and the exposure of ankles brought a flush to many a voyeur's countenance.

Titillation as an art form has almost disappeared from modern society. What was delightful about Victorian morality was its covert lustfulness, cloaked by the placid mark of British urbanity with its

innuendos and double entendres. The "dirty old man" and the "cocquette" are, alas, no longer valid symbols of our day.

Illustrator Harvey Kornberg has indulged himself in a delightful bit of Victorian revival in a series of 26 pen sketches, coyly entitled *The Gentleman's Alphabet Book*. Each sketch in the album, starting from A (for Aphrodisiac) to Z (for Zoophilia) is accompanied by some excellent limericks by Donald Hall. Both the sketches and limericks succeed admirably in capturing that peculiar atmosphere of lurking lust masked by British under-statement.



The book is expensive. Forty-eight rupees is a high price to pay for half an hour's titillation. The publishers have obviously intended it to be used as a present for lecherous bachelor uncles at Christmas time. But when we consider the number of times the reader is likely to return to the album for fresh inspiration, the expenditure appears worthwhile. And, at least, after one has peered long and hard at Kornberg's exquisite sketches, one comes away with a deeper insight into the Victorian lifestyle and interior-decor, which the artist has depicted so well.