N June 13, Nasiruddin Yusuf's Ekatorrer Jishu. based on a short story by Shahriar Kabir, had its premier at the Bangla desh National Museum. Ready for release much earlier, the movie had not been passed by the Censor Board for public release on the grounds that it "distorted history". It was only after an appeal was made to the Appeals Board that the movie was finally released.

Ekattorer Jishu (Jesus 71) opens one early morning in late March-mid April in a village in Bangladesh on the scene of an elderly man busy painting crucifixes. The padre stops beside him. How is Desmond, this morning? The padre asks.

The village slowly starts coming awake. Weavers prepare their looms; fishermen pull in their catch. Desmond rings the church bell, and the villagers, dressed in their Easter best, troop up the slight undulation to church.

Outside the church, life goes on as usual for the villagers of the other communities. The fishmongers gather in the market. Waiting patiently for customers, they sprinkle water on their fish. Suddenly, from nowhere, there is a cry of "Joy Bangla! Joy Bangabandhu!" The cry is lost in a burst of rapid gunfire. The fishmongers flee. One stops only to pick up one fish and run with it cradled in his arms. The attempt is futile. The random spray of bullets catches the fleeing fishmonger and he sprawls dead, his fish beside him.

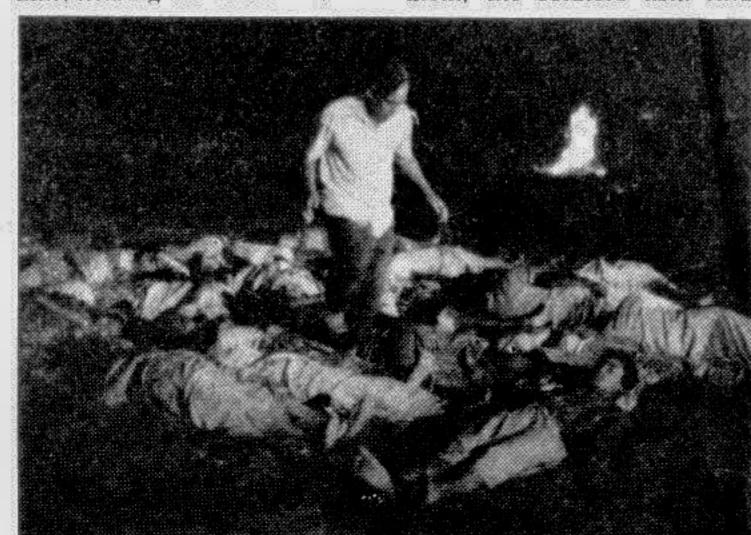
In the church, unaware of the killing outside, the padre reads from the bible. His chosen text for the day is the moving account of Christ's passion, his suffering and death on the cross: "Eli, Eli, Lama, sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Streams of refugees enter the village. Some seek shelter in the churchyard. The padre is reluctant to give them shelter. He explains to Desmond that the fight is a political fight, and the church has always been on good terms with the government. The padre seems adamant, but the night air is rent by the shrill cry of a newborn child and the padre

Reliving the Passion of 1971: A Review of changes his mind.

Next day the villagers leave.

Ekatorrer Jishu With them apparently many of the villagers have left as well, because when Desmond rings very long, however. There are the bell for service, there are others who need shelter : the only a handful of faithful comyoung freedom fighters. Desm ond is only too happy to make pared to the joyous congregation of earlier days. This time tea for them, give them a meal the padre narrates Peter's rejecbefore they go off on a mission. tion of Christ. He tells the Tragedy strikes once again. The sparse, grim-faced congregation young freedom fighters are how Jesus said to Peter, his apprehended by Pakistani faithful disciple, that Peter soldiers. They attempt to hide in would deny Jesus thrice that the church, but are discovered same night before the cock and brought out one by one. crew. Peter, surprised, tells Watching from the barred Jesus that he will die before he window of his hut, Desmond denies Christ. But thrice, Peter sees the young men being does reject Christ. The third dragged out. Do you know time, hearing the eock crow, he them, the soldiers ask. And



realizes what he has done and weeps bitterly.

This is the last sermon that the padre will preach, because he too departs. He has heard tales of atrocities committed on missions, and it is not-safe for him or for the holy sisters to stay. Desmond is alone but for a tiny waif left behind by the flood of refugees. Dumb and terrified, the girl seems hardly alive, but then she slowly starts responding to Desmond's warmth. One tragic day, however, Desmond returns to find' the little girl dead, killed by the same brute forces that have mowed down a crowd of vil-

Desmond is not alone for

Desmond, like Peter, denies the young men.

Outside the church is a large crucifix. Seeing the crucifix, the leader of the troop orders a similar punishment for the freedom fighters. Nailed to the cross, the young men re-enact the passion of Christ. Too impatient to let the men die a slow death on the cross, the soldiers fire at them - replicating the lance wound given Christ by the Roman soldier.

After the soldiers leave, Desmond emerges from his hut. Kneeling before the bodies of the crucified freedom fighters, he weeps at his denial of the young martyrs.

Depressed and unhappy,

by Niaz Zaman

Desmond still continues to make crucifixes, only now the crucifixes too have shrunk in size. Suddenly, from outside, there is a triumphant cry. Through his window Desmond sees another band of freedom fighters. These freedom fighters, he knows, will not die.

Shahriar Kabir's short story, brilliantly transformed into a screen play by Selim Al Deen, is ably directed by Nasiruddin Yusuf. Using the analogy of Peter's rejection of Christ and Christ's passion, and by leaving out everything extraneous to this analogy, Ekatorrer Jishu transforms history into cinematic art. Not distorting history, but refusing to be tempted into making a documentary, Nasiruddin Yusuf has succeeded in capturing the trauma of 1971 and the spirit that led to the birth of a new nation.

In his introduction to the English translation of Bhisham Sahni's Tamas, Govind Nihalani explains how historical events affect the creative artist or

usually finds the artistic/literary response twice. Once, during the event or

alam cinema, one often tends to

overlook the fact that in the

seventies and a part of the

eighties, the films emerging

from neighbouring Karnataka

made viewers throughout the

country sit up in disturbed

awe. One Kannada film after

another reflected with skill and

a suppressed anger the

stranglehold of the Brahmin

community and the exploitation

of the "lesser" communities in

the name of religion. On the oc

casion of the sixtieth anniver-

sary of Kannada cinema, one

cannot but feel sad at the pre-

sent rot which has set into what

was till the other day one of the

While Kannada cinema is

most vibrant and relevant re-

gional cinemas in the country.

certainly not without a past,

clarity of thought, conviction in

choice of subject and control

over varying styles of expres-

sion came to it rather late in the

day in fact, it was not till the

likes of Pattabhirama Reddy,

Girish Kasaravalli, Girish Kar

nad, BV Karanth, MS Sathyu, T

S Nagabharana, Chandra

shekhar Kambar, Prema

Karanth and others made their

appearance that Kannada

directors dwelt on individual

traumas and tragedies as in-

deed the occasional triumph at

high personal cost against the

backdrop of economic depriva-

tion and social injustice fre-

quently engineered by the

priestly upper class in con-

nivance with the landed gentry.

a story by the reputed UR

Ananthamurthy and directed

by Pattabhirama Reddy, and

Ghatashraddha (1977) by

Girish Kasaravalli, are most

enthusiastically spoken of in

the context of the New Kannada

Cinema of the seventies and the

eighties, it is simply because

they are among the best-made

films of the period which helped in placing Kannada cinema

among the leading regional cin

emas of the land. Contrary to

the fulminations of the

Karnataka Brahmin Maha

sabha all through 1990 that

these two films had made fund

of the Brahmin community in

the name of fighting social evils

they were in fact made with the

best of intentions, combining

thematic thrust with artistic

excellence in a vigorous neo-

realist style of latter-day

Mahasabha needs a bit of cx

plaining. The telecast of Poojari

Krishna, a film about an errant

Brahmin priest, on Bangalore

Doordarshan on July 14, 1990.

sparked off a major controversy

spearheaded by the Mahasabha

which roped in the support of

such unlikely bedfellows as R

Gundu Rao of the Congress []

and Ramakrishna Hegde of the

Janata Dal, both former Chief

Ministers. The Mahasabha

claimed that the film telecast

was aimed at humiliating the

Brahmins and organised a

Perhaps the anger of the

If Samskara [1970], based on

Many of the films by these

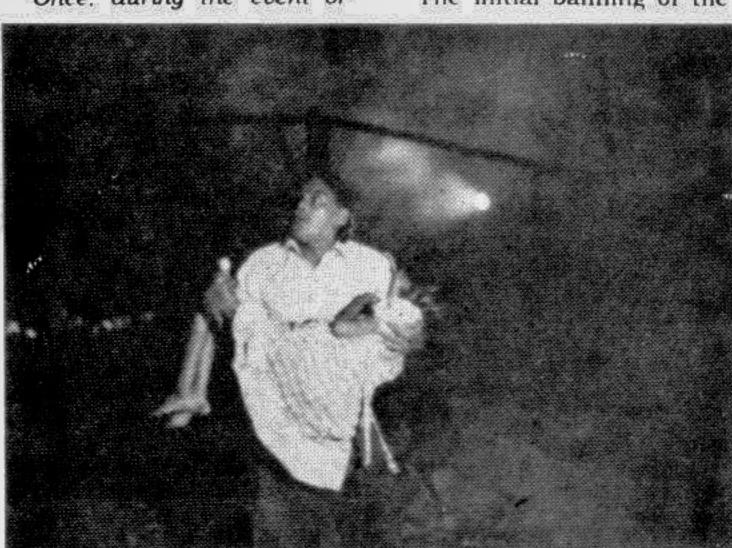
cinema came into its own.

immediately following it and again after a lapse of time, when the event has found its corner in the collective memory of the generation that has witnessed it. The initial response tends to be emotionally intense and personal in character, even melodramatic. On the other hand, when the event is reflected upon with emotional detachment and objectivity, a clearer pattern of the various forces that shaped it is likely to emerge.

Nihalani was writing about the impact of Partition on creative writers, but his comments are equally true with reference to the Bangladesh War of Liberation and the events of

There is, of course, one great difference. The events of 1971 have not yet found their corner in the collective memory of our nation. Depending on other loyalties, 1971 means different things to different Bangladeshis. And that is why controversies continue to flare A traumatic historic event up. It was just this difficulty that prevented Ekattorer Jishu from being released.

The initial banning of the



movie had led me to believe that the movie would "distort history" by presenting a partisan view of it. When I saw the movie, I wondered what it was that had made it so objectionable. Was it the full-throated cry of "Joy Bangla! Joy Bangabandhu!" raised by a band of freedom-fighters? Was it the ruthless mowing down of unarmed people by a wellequipped army? But these are not distortions. Or was it because the movie leaves out many things? That it does not show the first declarer of inde-

portrayal of the character of Desmond. Perhaps the padre's action could be construed by a few to mean criticism of the role of established religion during 1971. But the Christian analogy was so precise that it would be no easy task to read the movie as a criticism of the majority religion. Ekatorrer Jishu is an artistic

a peace-loving minority. But

this minority should be molli-

fied by the sensitive portrayal

of the Christian community in

the film, particularly by the

reading of the sacrifices of 1971 based on that immortal story which forms the core of western tragedy - even the irreligious



pendence? That there is no reference to 30 lakh people being killed? That there are no images of mutilated, tortured bodies? No images of violated women being rescued form bunkers? No incidents of bearded men plotting the murder of "heretics" and "renegades"? No incidents of the formation of Peace Committees? There are many things that the movie leaves out - in the interest of artistic and thematic unity. Ekatorrer Jishu is not purporting to be history, carefully documenting all the atrocities that

True, the failure of a Christian padre to stand by his flock could be misconstrued by

took place.

derelicts in Beckett's Waiting for Godot refer to the Christian story. It is a paean to the freedom fighters who laid down their lives in 1971. It is also an elegy for the innocent bystanders who were gunned down just because they happened to be there. Above all, it is a moving tribute to those many, not always very brave, who did not fight or die, but did lend moral strength and provided physical succour to those who did.

The part of Desmond is beautifully portrayed by Humayun Faridi, who proves once again his artistic excellence, his ability to become completely the character he portrays. The stoop of his 'shoulders, the slight hint of bandy legs and splayed feet as he walks, the mannerism of moving his mouth - Faridi is always and completely in character. The little waif is feelingly portrayed by Sharmilee Gomes. If in the part of the padre, Pijush is slightly wooden, his priestly gait and his resonant voice more than make up for what his acting lacks. The use of music, ranging

from Amar Ekushey tunes to the songs of 1971, reinforces the visual impact of the movie. recalling not just the terror and the trauma of 1971, but also the indomitable spirit that had led an unarmed nation to dare the might of a well-equipped army.

If there are any false moments in the movie, they are when, without any preparation for the volte-face, the priest informs Desmond of atrocities committed by the Pakistan army. Even more jarring than this perhaps is the portrayal of the soldier who decides to nail the freedom fighters to wooden crosses. All the other scenes of a marauding army are executed very skilfully. The faces of the soldiers are always shaded so that on never sees their faces. The soldiers thus become the forces of evil, of terror in the night. In the crucifixion scene, however, the soldiers are shown full-face, and the faces are typi cally, unmistakably Bengali. The full impact of this scene is, therefore, lost, and perhaps even distorted. A careful casting would have easily avoided this jarring note.

As one of the audience, fortunate to have seen Ekatorrer Jishu on its first "public" screening, I thank all those connected with the film. I would like to think that every Bangladeshi will see the movie. It is a must for those who lived through 1971 as well as for those who were not there. Though much has been omitted, as it must be in any artistic portrayal of a historical event, there is more than enough in the movie to convey the spirit that inspired and sustained Bangladeshis through the dark nights of 1971.

orthodox Brahmin elements

who were sercely opposed to the

Kannad films of the seventies

and eighties. Kasaravalli was

not the only director who

Reptiles Strike Back

Continued from page 9 repression of the dream state in reptiles. They were, as Aschylus described. "dreaming", in their waking state. I wonder, whether the under developed left hemisphere in "Romulas" and its absence in the "wolf mother", that repressed the dream state, fused the two different species in a mother-child bond! Otherwise, they should have feared each other.

reptiles and mammals both. In the daytime repression of the

R-complex and in the nighttime stirring of the dream dragons, we may, each of us, be replaying the hundred millien year old warfare between the reptiles and the mammals. Only the daytime's vampiric hunt have been reversed. Our inaccessible dreams that more often turn into nightmares, and in turn, awake us to feel that "it's just a dream", perhaps caused from the memories of the haunted past of our

We are descended from ancestors stamped in the pre-



Man ponders himself. By Vasalius, the founder of modern

dreams of humans: the dragons can be heard, hissing and rasping, and the dinosaurs thunder it is of no exaggeration to

sketch the killers on the rampage" as the hunting dragons exhibiting a chilling fixity of purpose; of stalking and slashing the prey which bleeds to death, while the hissing forked tongue flicks over the blood. If we gave full rein to the reptilian aspects of our nature, we would obviously have a low survival potential. But the function of R-complex cannot be entirely avoided for long. Perhaps the dream state permits, in our fantasy and its reality, the R-complex to function regularly, as if it were still in control! Human beings clearly ex-

hibit enough reptilian behavior even in their conscious state of mind: the haunted eyes of the worldwide refugees; the universal blood-baths of the civilwar victims; the racist-sexistreligious inferno; the everlasting hunger for material satisfaction; and the commercial success of crime-violence-sex based movies, certainly count as the ready evidence of the beast like aspects of human nature. The facts of Bible revealed that at the beginning of the civilization there was fratricide. Indeed, The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."

The "Tales of Dim Eden" revealed scrpent's trickery over Adam and Eve - that offers the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Does the metaphor of the sérpent refer to the use of the aggressive and ritualistic reptilian component of our brain in the further evolution of the neocortex

 the abstract and moral neocortical functions? Nevertheless, a sad-eyed sage of human tragedy, Albert Einstein, forewarned and thereby closed the cycle of evolution, thermodynamics, nuclear fusion, the prides of modern civilization in a single sentence: "Man grows cold faster than the planet he inhabits." One way or another, reptiles strike back!

once worked as a watchman there, had told him that former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was born in Weihai and Johnston was her grandfa-

"After retirement, she

Like Weihai in 1930, Hong Kong too will become a part of China after 1997, says Xu, the retired constable. "Our people are different from the past China is strong and no Western country can bully it anymore".

THEN one rightly goes KANNADA CINEMA into raptures speaking of contemporary Malay-

Mirroring A Feudal Order

by Vidyarthy Chatterjee Exclusive to The Daily Star

protest march to the Bangalore Doordarshan. Among other things they demanded the sacking of the screening com-

Poojari Krishna is about two priests, one of whom is shown stealing a temple idol in broad daylight. The Mahasabha's contention was that the mis deed by the priest had been deliberately used to denigrate the entire Brahmin community. The secretary of the Mahasabha angrily alleged that this was not the first time that a Brahmin character had been shown in poor light in a Kannada film. The organisation's complaint to the Press in this regard made somewhat naive reading. It said that "things have come to such a pass that Brahmins are beginning to feel like outcastes today". While the tone of injured

adopt a cheap populist posture.

The trend started by Samskara spawned a steady stream of films that shed revealing light on a feudal society which made a mockery of humanity as the upper classes used rituals and archaic customs to keep the 'lower peoples in a state of permanent bondage. Among these films those that readily come to mind are BV Karanth's Chomana Dudi, Nagabharana's Grahana, and Prema Karanth's Phaniya-

Prema Karanth's film took its name from that of a Brahmin child widow who suffered deprivation and discrimination to live to a ripe old age, destined to side with the forces of change against Brahmin orthodoxy. Each of these films

films of Akira Kurosawa. The film launched the late Shankar Nag (who later directed the highly successful television serial, Malgudi Days) on an acting career of considerable worth.

The other is Girish Kasaravalli's Tabarane Kathe (Tabara's Story), a tale of individual tragedy as indeed of the erosion of faith in the world of officials and clerks. A story of modern India, reflecting callousness and cruelty towards the poor and powerless, the film was a fresh triumph in mood and matter, style and treatment, for the brilliant young Kasaravalli who must, however, rank as the most neglected among the handful of truly gifted film-makers this country can boast of. It speaks volumes about the institutionalisation of

néeded to be blacklisted, one openly partisan spokesman To return to the beginning,

what the Karnataka Brahmin Mahasabha -did by its ill-advised tirade against films like Samskara or Ghalashraddha was to set the clock back in matters of popular understanding of past and present history: of conditions and situations that moulded that history. Besides, it is not as if these

films are mindlessly critical of

the individual/collective Brahmin persona. In many of them there is - as there must be if they are not to be one dimensional and hence removed from reality - at least one 'minority' Brahmin character who does not conform to the set pattern of community conduct. thereby quite rightly enabling the viewer to judge a situation in its totality. Think of Phaniyamma or the young girl she encourages to re-marry in defiance of fierce orthodox opposition; or the fearless Brahmin who proves his point in Grahana, even at the cost of his life; and the role of the new Kannada directors starts to shine. No amount of canards or disinformation spread by vested interests can take away from New Kannada Cinema its gifts of courage and commitment combined with the ability to tell a story with simplicity and strength. In conclusion, the action of

the Mahasabha as indeed that

of the Karnataka Film Chamber was, in truth, only a reaction. The helpless, pathetic reaction of a once-powerful community - powerful in money, learning and social eminence - but not in lasting human resources. Each of these slipped out of its grasp due to diverse reasons, most of which were of the community's own making. The reaction betrayed the community's refusal or inability to counter the changing times with a straight face. Taking recourse to fundamentalism, as practised by other beleaguered communities, cannot compensate for the absence of a sense of vision. New Kannada Cinema, in a sense, eloquently emphasizes these facts. It is about time, especially since the platinum jubilee of Kannada cinema is being observed with fanfare in Karnataka, that the riches created in the seventies and the eighties are unearthed from the debris of indifference and negleet, and exhibited afresh for popular and critical re-examination. That legacy of high art wedded with grace to a quiet but stout ideology of protest cannot be allowed to gather dust and droppings as the industry and its friends in the government, the bureaucracy and the media go about singing

paeans to thrillers and mytho-

logicals and high-pitched social

dramas that are the staple of

present-day Kannada cinema.



A still from Girish Kasaravalli's most recent film "Mane" (The House) 1989, Kannada.

innocence made for a certain justifiably enrage those at the receiving end of Brahmin double standards and worse for centuries together.

However, even more curious

than the strident reaction of the community leaders was the active role played by Hegde and Gundu Rao in fanning the flames of bigotry and obscuran tism. If anything, the role of the two so-called leaders underlined the close connections between cinema and politics in Karnataka as indeed in all the southern States with the honourable exception of Kerala. Gundu Rao had always declared himself a leader of the Brahmin community, which makes his performance understandable if not pardonable, but this was the first time that an otherwise level-headed Hegde chose to

portrayed with varying degrees amount of amusement, it would of effectiveness the stultifying role of caste and the moral degeneration that often followed from the cruelty and cowardice inherent in it, harming the Brahmin 'victors' no less seriously than the lower-caste vic-

However, it would be a mis take to think that New Kannada Cinema solely concentrated on the application of caste and its tragic fall-out. Mention of at least two important films on subjects other than caste (although oblique references to it are to be found even here) would rightly give a more rounded look to this important body of work. Girish Karnad's Odadaondu Kaladalli (Once Upon A Time), a war saga recalling the exploits of heroes in turbulent times, was meant to be a tribute to the samurai

mediocrity in present-day India that a director like Kasaravalli seems to have no place in the hearts of film-goers or film administrators in Karnataka, what to speak of other parts of the country.

It startled more than one serious viewer at the Bangalore international film festival in 1992 to find that none of Kasaravaili's films figured in a package of Kannada films shown as a separate section to critics and delegates. When the director of the festival was asked to explain this glaring omission at a press conference, she quickly passed on the buck to the Karnataka Chamber of Commerce which, she said, had done the selection. On enquiring, it was discovered that the Chamber is largely composed of and led by

1989 pro-democracy rallies see Hong Kong not as an issue of democracy but to Chinese na-Patten has over reacted.

tionalist pride says a Shandong businessman who was jatled after the 1989. army crackdown. "If Britain. puts too much pressure. China will become angry about outside interference Then (Britain) won't get anywhere

Continued from page 10

resurgent nationalism among

the Chinese who see their

country as an emerging global.

Even sympathisers of the

military and economic power.

anatomy.

A Glimpse of Post - 1997 Hong Kong?

In Weihai, such anti British scritiments contrast sharply to romantic memories of the past Nostalgia seems to have given local residents an almost proprictary view of their former

History and fiction mingle in anecdotes handed down through generations by resi-

Xu Yuxin, a local fisherman watches with pride the renovation of an old British hotel building formerly owned by a wealthy optum dealer from Shanghai

He says his grandfather, who

wanted to come and have a look at her birthplace, but she changed her mind because Weihai is small and does not have facilities, to accommodate an ex-prime minister. he said.