

ARTS, CULTURE & CELEBRITY

THROUGH A CAMERA DARKLY

BY EagleEye™

Column # 38

Various people and activities deviating from or challenging the System marked the last week.

BANG BANG

The Terrorist: No End In Sight

Santosh Sivan's 95 minute-long film *The Terrorist* surrounds the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka's assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Like the Tamils' tragic insurrection, the film gets off to an incendiary start, then sputters. The gunfire and gore will, however, keep your eyes glued to the screen. In addition, the director's fascination with water provides many rare moments of luminescent cinematography.

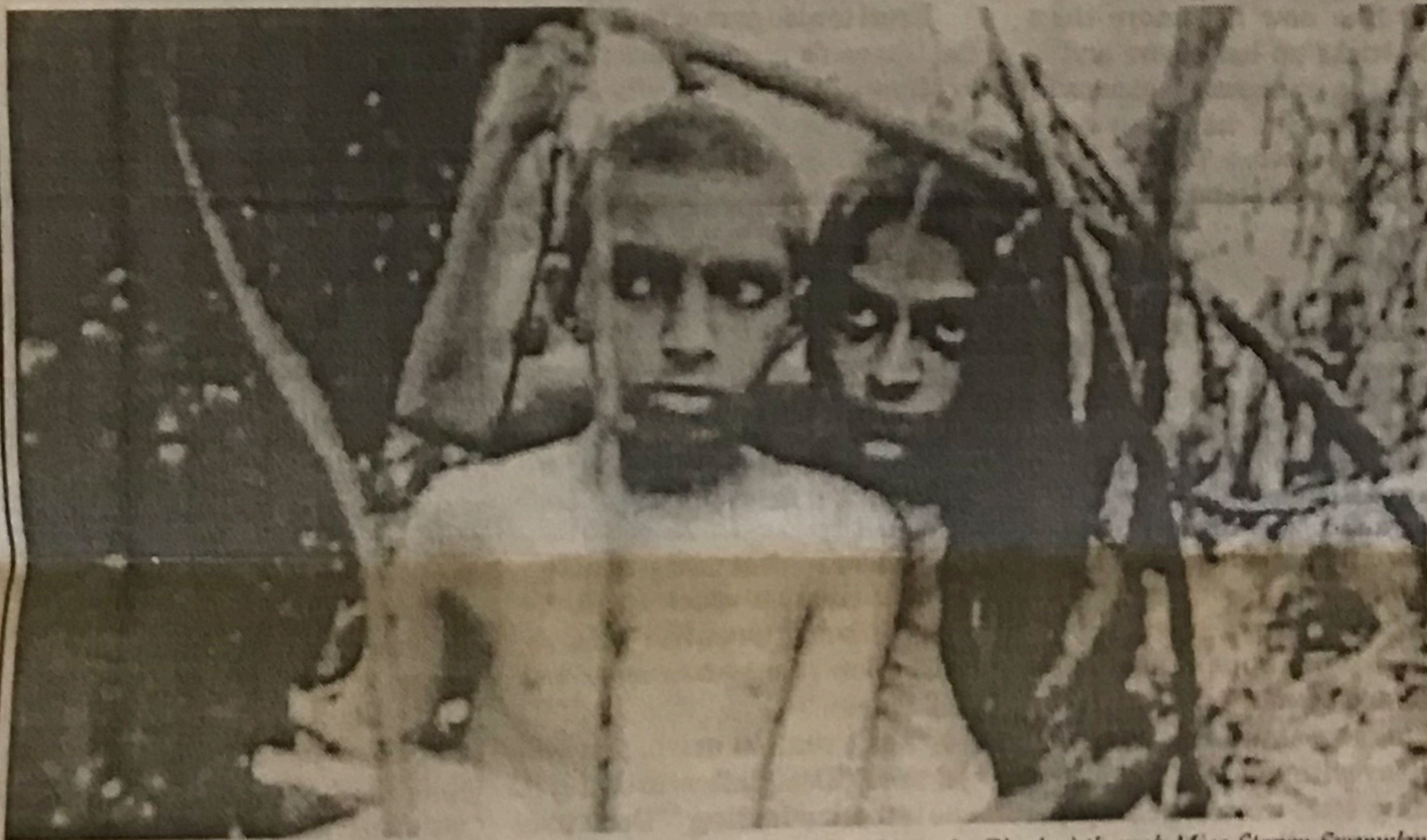
Malli, a young female freedom fighter, has lost her entire family to the cause. In the forest where children and youth are trained in hidden camps, she quickly distinguishes herself as a crack killer. Her mechanical efficiency is matched only by her ruthlessness.

Meanwhile, after a long stalemate, the Government intensifies its process of annihilation. To kill

even a gentle probe into the failures of history, politics, power, and leadership that led to that pass. Globally, we are in for the long haul on terrorism, but this film does as little to enhance our understanding of the psyche of the terrorist as *The Gunfight At The OK Corral* did to reveal the rationale behind the random mayhem that characterized *Dodge City* and *Tombstone*.

Every rebel is not a terrorist by definition. Guerillas, unlike NATO troops whose exposure to risk was minimized, take great chances. Moreover, the fallout from failure is usually terminal. In Kandy-land as in Kosovo or Kashmir, the perversely sanitary phrase "collateral damage" could well stand for the razing of a whole village in an ostensible search for rebels sheltering in a single house. Like the pacifist on a fast-unto-death the under-powered revolutionary on a suicide mission is using the last weapon left.

Ayesha Dharker is magnificent



Code-named Lotus, The boy Guerilla leads Malli (Ayesha Dharker) through Mine-Strewn Swampland En route to the assassination site.

a vampire you've got to drive a stake through its heart or, keeping your distance, shoot him with a slug of solid silver. For Peerumal, the leader of the rebellion, the silver bullet, the magical weapon, is the assassination of a major political leader. Malli is chosen for a suicide mission.

As the scene shifts from the forest to a far-away ferry port, the film transmogrifies from docudrama to melodrama. Malli discovers she is with child after intercourse with a hemorrhaging guerrilla while both hid from soldiers in reeds on a riverbank. While she slept it off, he died smiling. Morning sickness follows, and the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

Predictably, Malli fails to press the button. Why is a moot question. In real life she did, he died, they blew up together in pieces.

as Malli. In a previous life (mine), I would watch the baby daughter of poet and videomaker Imtiaz Dharker and former film finance board chair Anil Dharker frolic around the Bombay Gymkhana swimming pool. Did the 3-year-old perhaps go on serve a soldier's apprenticeship? Mothers be forewarned, young girls everywhere will soon be reporting as Dharker clones conscripts in imaginary armies of their choosing.

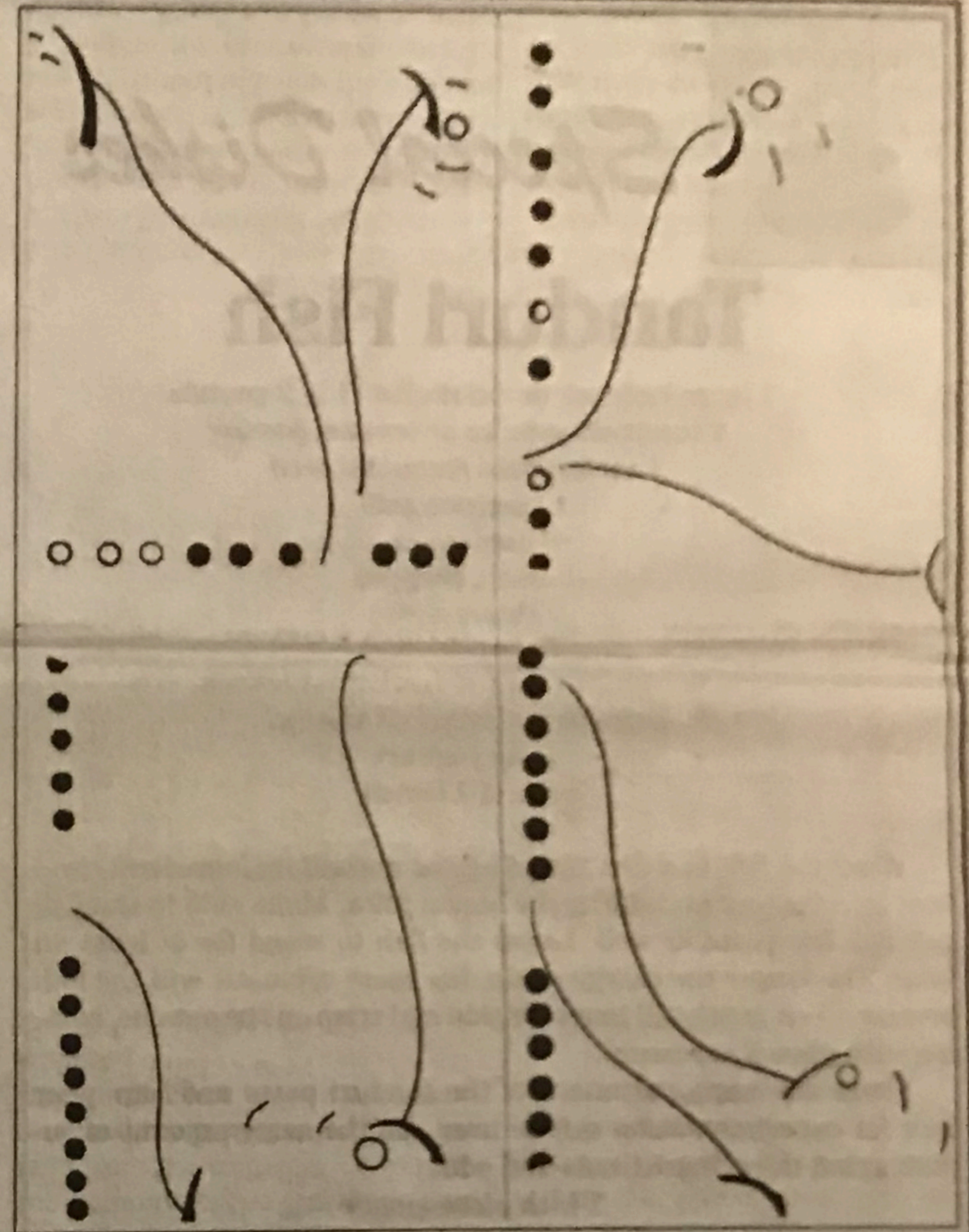
The Terrorist had its New York premiere in the ongoing International Film Festival organized by Human Rights Watch and presented together with the Film Society of Lincoln Center. Three shows including the night I went were sold out. As a prelude to the film, we watched the Cambodian Rithy Panh's documentary "Spotlights on a Massacre" about the devastation caused by land mines.

The Terrorist's commercial release in India is scheduled in or around September.

**ALL I REALLY WANT TO DO
Avantika Bawa Celebrates
New York**

A valedictory air pervaded the opening reception last week for visual artist Avantika Bawa and 13 artists like her at the diversity-focused Lindenberg gallery. The 5-foot something Bawa flew up from Chicago to meet 'n' greet and plug her art over a three-day weekend in the city. Her fans included friends from college and turban-clad men, and she spent a little quality time with each well-wisher.

With Indian artist equaling Indian art, Bawa's abstract drawings were hard to spot. They were a triptych of dull white cardboard sections with barely visible pencil lines that roughly traced a careening roller coaster. Titled *Whoop*, ("a loud yell expressive of eagerness, exuberance or jubilation" per Webster's), the windy city artist's rough shaded lines evoked the exuberance of the Coney Island roller coaster. "I like to take images out of their usual context," Avantika explained in an artist's statement. We also thumbed through a 3-ring binder containing computer-generated drawings. They were engaging for their plas-



Quartet of abstract drawings by Avantika Bawa

gorged on book readings by two Indian diaspora writers and oft-replenished bhajiyas and chicken wings. The net proceeds benefited *Diasporadics*, a two-day festival focusing on arts and activism in South Asian communities and scheduled for Fall. Is organizing a book reading in keeping with activism? Yes, when it provides a platform for unheard voices and stories.

Both the featured female authors are receiving increased recognition. The West Indian Marina Budhos read first. She has received the Rona Jaffe Award for Women Writers, the Kenyon Review's Emerging Writer Award and a Fulbright. At the 1997 launch of the *Contours of the Heart* she had read from her contribution to that compendium of literature from the Indian diaspora. When we "reintroduced ourselves" to her she explained, "That was the work in progress stage". Budhos' drafts have shaped nicely into *Professor of Light*, her recently published novel.

With Jhumpa Lahiri's statuesque looks, it would have been easy to take the title of her short story, *Sexy*, for a self-portrait. However, the sandal was on the other foot. The tale's central character is a white woman whose dalliance with a married Bengali man is complicated by a (Bengali) boy. The latter's own problems have been created by his (Bengali) father's excess of libido. In the fertile Lahiri imagination rice eating rice doth make lotharios of us all.

What will *Diasporadics* do other than cavort and dine with authors? According to Sunaina Maira, a prime organizer, "This groundbreaking event will bring together artists and activists who are interested in using the arts as a vehicle for progressive social change". Don't run for cover just yet, though. Not till September, at least.

HEY JOE

Afterwords

The following "shockingly true anecdote of the month" is reproduced courtesy the May 99 posting at www.pifmagazine.com:

"I saw Wink Martindale shopping at a local Mall a few years ago. He's quite short. I recognized him, but he didn't recognize me, which is comforting, since he doesn't know me."

(Whew! That was certainly exciting! I felt like I was there.)
Michael, Commentary Editor

We've Got Mail
From ELUSIVE BUTTERFLY

I've Been At several of the events mentioned in *News India-Times*, but I have never seen my picture in *EagleEye's* Column. Are you playing favorites?

Unsnapped in Rego Park
Via Scanned Image

Your problems will end with our upcoming Column, "Misleading The News India-Times Photographer Into Thinking That You (Too) Are A Celebrity". — EE.

And NEEDLES AND PINS
You Go To many interesting events, but never invite me. I would love to party with the Glitterati. Can you slip me in?

Wilting Wallflower in Wallingford
By Priority Mail

Send \$3 shipping and handling for a copy of Column 24. It contains numerous tips for gatecrashing if you aren't on the Guest List. Looking forward to running into you soon. — EE.

Epilogue
Dat Wuz De Weak Dat Wuz.

Credit Line: We disclaim responsibility for the relevance of any and all capitalized headings seeing how they were taken from song titles on Cher's "Bang Bang & Other Hits" CD, guaranteed.

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