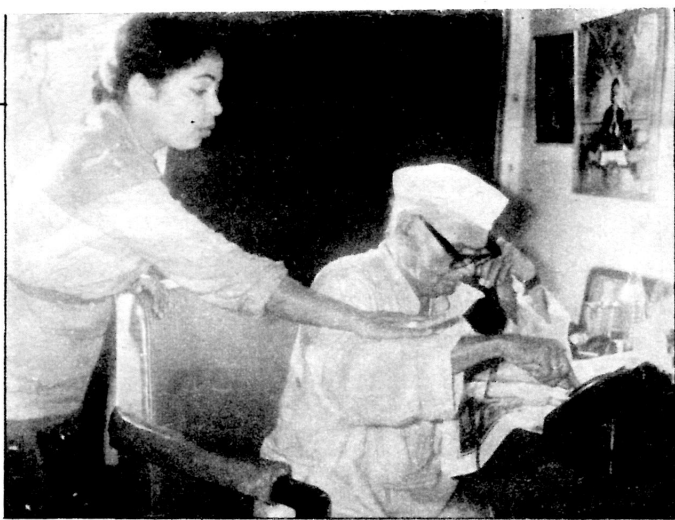


ONE PHOTOGRAPH FIVE STORIES



We showed this photograph to five people from different walks of life and asked them to write a story about it in 10 minutes. Here are their delightfully different versions. Happy reading

DID HE GET THE RIGHT NUMBER?



—Jayant
Narlikar
Astrophysicist,
Tata
Institute of
Fundamental
Research,
Bombay

"Five minutes is all you can have," we said to Prof. Narlikar. And sure enough at the end of the fifth minute, he picked up a pencil and began to write. And with the television news on, wife Mangala in conversation with a friend and one-year-old daughter Leelavati demanding attention, this is what he turned in:

"DADDY, have you decided?"

"About what, my dear?" Seth Govindbhai asked.

"Oh, don't pretend you have forgotten! Do I have your consent to my marriage to Rajendra?" Pallavi blushed while asking this question so directly.

"Oh that space scientist fellow? He has no money."

"You know that scientists in this country do not have money. Besides, don't I have a lot of it? It is the brains that matter." Pallavi was a good advocate.

"Apparently he is clever!" Sethji was deliberately being provocative. Pallavi fell for the bait. She flared up. "What do you mean by 'apparently'?" He **is** clever. He was the brains behind the communications satellite that was put up recently."

"And what does this expensive toy do? Can you educate an ignorant old man?" Govindbhai had a mischievous smile.

"That is the trouble with you, daddy! You count everything in terms of rupees and paise. However, let me disappoint you. This satellite is worth all the money spent on it." And Pallavi started enumerating all the goodies offered by space-technology. But Sethji had made his millions by down-to-earth methods. He suddenly found an answer to his problem.

"Look! This young man, according to you, has improved long-distance telephone service by using this toy. Let me test the system. I will telephone my old school friend Navinbhai, who is in Calcutta. You may marry your young man if I get the right number in my first attempt. Agreed?"

In her first flush of confidence, Pallavi agreed. Govindbhai looked for his personal directory and noted the number. Then he began to dial—and Pallavi began to have agonising second thoughts.

Space technology may be perfect, but a prompt telephone connection required co-operation from Bombay Telephones and Calcutta Telephones. She was taking a lot for granted.

A shudder ran through her and she moved to stop Sethji from dialling. However she was too late. Govindbhai had just finished dialling.

Readers, do you think he got the number he wanted? I leave you to decide whether the outcome of the story is a happy one or not, on the basis of your own experience!