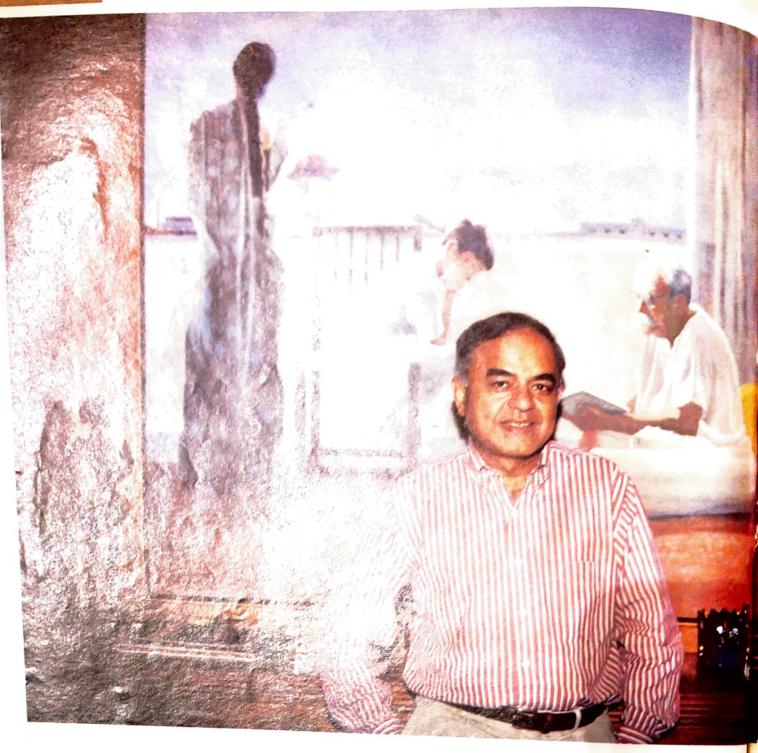
Man



ou would think he is mad. Tell him this and he will probably grin disarmingly and quote Shakespeare: "Though this be madness there is a method to it!" Indeed. Yet it takes guts to throw everything to the winds and pursue a dream.

"A dream?" he asks incredulously, and then dismisses the statement with a wave of his hand. "My girl, I knew I was going to write a book as soon as I graduated!" He beams at you, his short stature by no means a disadvantage, and hustles you into his library. The ambience is classically English and these confines couldn't possibly house anybody else but a writer.

But there is more to Gurucharan Das than just

writing. Born in 1946 at Lyallpur (now Faislabad in Pakistan), Gurucharan Das spent the better half of his childhood in New York where his father Barkat Ram, who worked for the Punjab government, was posted. A graduate in philosophy from the University of New York, Gurucharan was offered the prestigious Harvard Scholarship to pursue his masters in philosophy. "But I did not want to become a philosopher," he informs, "and although I did go to Harvard for a while, I eventually left and came to India where I joined Procter and Gamble as a trainee. I loved the rough and tumble of business," and adds, grinning, "like the man who came to dinner, I stayed on."

He went on to become the managing director

of the company and later was appointed manager, world wide strategic planning. And now at the peak of his career as vice president and managing director, thealth care), Procter & Gamble International, he has decided to quit. "I'd promised myself that when I turned tity. I'd retire and concentrate on another career — writing. I have worked for thirty years and am financially independent. I don't need to work for anybody and I feel that this is the right time to concentrate full time on writing." Now that's what we mean by methodical madness!

However, the tremendous success of his recently staged play '9 Jalchoo Hill' confirms that his experimentation with words has been

frustrations of a woman. Vindicating this insight is the fact that the woman plays the pivotal role in almost all his plays and solo novel.

"The woman," he confirms, "according to me, is the focal point of existence." Ask him why and he goes into a deep trance, emerges a while later, tiredly rubs his face as if still baffled by something and finally exclaims, "I don't know. Frankly, I just don't know. It's just the way it is." Then attempting an explanation he tells you about the women in his works.

"Tans, the mother, plays the most important role in 'A Pine Family'. She is the binding force between two generations." Pointing to a life-sized painting of the cover of the novel that adorns his library wall, he continues, "If you look at that painting, the woman has her back towards us, yet it is she who gives a certain completeness and congruity to the whole picture." '9, Jakhoo Hill' also centres around Ansuya, a girl who is trying to grapple with not just the conflicts of a generation gap caused essentially by a change

Writing sustained him through his corporate years and now at fifty, he's turned it into a full time job. Meet Gurucharan Das, the enigmatic ex-bigwig of P&G-cum-novelist-cum-playwright.

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worth everything. "But I have always been writing, so a switch over was, I guess, only natural. In fact, I have survived in business because of my writing. Besides, I feel that we all have different facets to ourselves and we must explore and look for that sort of fichness in our lives. Also, I firmly believe that in life, action is more important than thought. Thought too is important but it must be proceeded by action. I always wanted to write and I did, so what if I did it at fifty?"

Experimentation, exploration and the quest for answers has characterised Das making him a man of many dimensions. For a corporate whiz turned playwright and author, he displays tremendous and often startling insight into the needs, aspirations and in the social order but also with upheavals in her private life.

His play 'Meera' which was first dramatised off Broadway and then later brought to India by Alyque Padamsee, is one of the few works of literature that talk of Meera not as a saint but as a woman. "We must understand," emphasises Das, "that Meera was a play about a woman who had tremendous energy. She was simply a woman too much for her husband. She was so full of life and energy that her husband could not satisfy her. So she turned to God. It was a play about a woman who belonged to the royal family. She was a Rajput and was married to the Raja of Mewar who was the most distinguished prince of his time. She had all the trappings but then she was a woman who was full of this vivacious

"But !

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1996



■ Poddar: leaning towards the occult

Balancing Act

NO ONE can say she's out of touch with the lairest trends. Last year, at the height of the 'green' revolution, Smita Poddar introduced the Tree range of eco-finedity shirs from her company — Bruno Sante International. Now her eyes are trained on more mysterious subjects. Varu Shazira, pranic healing, alternative medicine, palmistry... the works. "I have a learning toward the occult," admits the 32-year-old executive director of the Rs. 7 crore shirt manufacturing company.

Poddar says that her interest goes hack many years. I was staying at the Hyati in Singapore and someone memioned how the doors in the hotel had been repositioned on the advice of a long shui (the Chimese equivalent of a kear expert). That's it: I was shooked, was expert). That's it: I was shooked, where beyond book knowledge. She instructs therefore the poddar has taken their interest beyond book knowledge. She instructs therefore on where to place the post and paris in their houses to place the post and paris in their houses to maximuse the "good energies", present there, of course, all advice is strictly on a taken-to-releave-it basis. "Right now, lean is a taken-to-releave-it basis." Right now, lean is a dadent-or-leave-it basis. "Right now, lean is a dadent-or-leave-it basis." All the notes, it would be a dadent or influence of such practices is very localised, "she notes."

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That's not the only advice she offers.
Says Rodair "Our body is the perfect.
Van Mandal: if we want to balance our lines, we should begin with that."

The Write Stuff

mbusing to the country's ongoing reform process," say-the prollfic Das w is all through the reform process. "Writing is my real passion and movie by Shyam Benegal, the 52-year-old Das's scond has a more contemporary from pre-partition days to the late seventies, and is currently being made into tobiographical A Fine Family, traced the fortunes and travally of a Punjabi family published by Penguin on completion next year. While his first book, the servi-d and three plays, Gurcharan Das is now at work on his second book which will be speeches and annual reports. Columnist with The Time of India. 3 athor of one no-HE'S one corporate chiefrain who doesn't need any ghost-writers for his AGM and education taught him that "writing is all about gl /ing back" anvas. In this he hopes to capture the zeigenror spirit of the country as it was slore

I'm not busy venture-capital funding or doing justice to my directorships favourite pastime is to retreat to my Ali Bogh abode near Mumbai to wille nati, US, which he quit in 1995 to return to India. Says Das: "These director for worldwide strategic planning at P8-C3 global beadquarters in C avalar of RHT following an overseas takeover. In 1992 he became vice president 6 in 1980 at the age of 36, he became CMD of Proster is Carable (finds). Hichas plenty to return. Managing director of Richardson Hindusco 11d (RE)

Indian advisory board of Citibank from Jagdish Sapro where he's "working if he doesn't need help writing. Das could certainly use juggling lessons to help Indian companies achieve high performance levels and to globalise celerating its credit cards business". Plus, he started his own consultanry la That isn't as often as he'd like. Lastmonth he's aiso taken over as chairman of the

Das: juggling his roles of writer, director, chairman and consultant successfully



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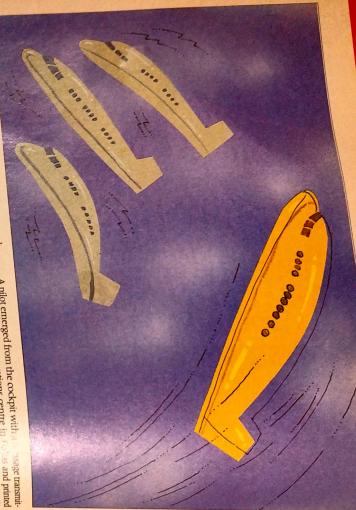
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I'm not busy venture-capital funding or doing justice to my directorships." favourite pastime is to retreat to my Ali Bagh abode near Mumba nati, US, which he quit in 1995 to return to India Says Base Those days my director for worldwide strategic planning as F5 G8 global headquataen. in Chelin avatar of RHL following an overseas takes see in 1992 he became vice president 6 in 1980 at the age of 36, he became CMO of Proctor & Gamble (1703), the new He has plenty to return. Managing office to of the lardson Hinder ALIC GROSS

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Das: juggling his roles of writer, director, chairman and consultant successfully





slight fees to American's Sabre. The two other leading systems, the major computer reservations systems, other than certain Southwest had refused to pay fees for any bookings through apollo and System One, finally announced that they were

kicking Southwest out.

fling in comparison to the tens of millions of dollars that the netagency computers. The fact was, passengers didn't particularly works wanted to charge to preserve his visibility in the travel dients) for \$19 flights. The computers were part of the full-serneed travel agents (and travel agents didn't particularly want vice airline industry Kelleher said fine. Any lost sales, he estimated, would be tri--the equivalent of cable television. Kelle-

her only needed rabbit ears.

to worry, Kelleher sighed. Being a millionaire ain t what it was million, and the price would soon plunge even further, as the bloody California price battle raged with Shuttle by United. Not One unwelcome effect of the computer fracas was a plunge in the price of Southwest stock, which hurt the company's emin the 1890s. \$20, causing Kelleher's net worth to deflate by better than \$40 course of several months the price would tumble from \$40 to holdings had ballooned to well over a million shares. Over the ployees and none among them more than Kelleher, whose

with his macadamia nut cookie. "I'm coating my stomach for Kelleher asked a flight attendant for a glass of milk to go

but he had arranged another piece of business while he was there. People had been telling him for years that he should this evening," he explained. Kelleher was flying to New York for an industry conference, meet Richard Branson of Virgin Atlantic Airways. Kelleher meet Richard Branson of the flight memorising the lyrics of the spent a few minutes of the flight memorising the lyrics of the Sex Pistols' God Save the Queen so he would be able to impress

> out by the on-board computer. It read: "5 ted from American's operations centre A pilot emerged from the cockpit with

> > h ride whole

stowed away the paperwork, his latest reading material slipped ter of 1993, traffic to Chicago totalled 150,4 successful," he said. The figures showed that dubiety as to whether our coming to the Ea viewing traffic figures from the company's way. Tell Herb we said hi." out, betraying Kelleher's plans for new service in Salt Lake City Washington, opened a year earlier. "There washington, opened a year earlier." Kelleher opened his briefcase and spen "Just a preliminary indication, noted. an increase e fourth quarw minutes reine expressed at Baltimore ast would be As he

attendants leaned over to Kelleher with an extra macadamia nut cookie wrapped in a napkin. He lunged for the cookie but stopped short. "I'm not taking this from you, am ??" he asked It was a history of the Mormons As the plane turned into its final approach, one of the flight

drivers and walked outdoors to light up and stand in line for a bearing a suitcase and briefcase, Kelleher angled past the limo sengers. Huffing and puffing like any four-pack-a-day limousine drivers holding signs with the names of arriving paslong, uphill concourse, Kelleher approached a small throng of fantasising about his first agarette in four hours. At the end of a cab into the city. He left the plane and entered the gate area at LaGuardia When she said no, Kelleher practically inhaled the dessen

HARD LANDING

Times Business By THOMAS PETZINGER JR

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for her and she turned to God." as she was expected to. Finally it all got too much energy. She just could not behave like a queen

and forgotten about it. She came back late with being staged. My friend had invited me to dinner friend's place in New York when my play was with obvious relish about how he first met his facet to his personality. "We met at a common and refuses to talk about it although he tells you marriage, he feels, "is two personal a subject," mouthed about the women in his life. His the female psyche. he is surprisingly close For a man with such passionate insight into revealing a not-se-surprising remantic

> me, is the focal "The woman, according to

don't know why. Frankly, existence point of

It's just the way

precious green cards to return to India

disgust. 'People here are unable to tolerate they talk to their juniors?" one else is losing. Have you ever observed how another person's success. There is just so much situation. The bureaucrats can win only if some feudal. Here in Delhi it is more of a win-lose win situation that applies to business applies to consultant, he spends a lot of time in Mumbai On the board of many companies and an activi "There are less barriers in Mumbai as the win And some of his best works were written there Writing is what occupies most of Das' time in Mumbai are less hierarchic also. As compared to Delhittes, he asks in obvious ж 200

is such negative energy which a waste

firel a burden. Origina STITIOGE see people was a sexualist h ese off than a a-CHESTRAN D Sometimes, when I CALK

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be launched in India and abroad and is timed to coincide with the 'A Pine Family' is to be converted into a film by none other than fiftieth anniversary of the country in 1997. Meanwhile, his nower Penguin approached him to expand it into a book. The book was the article in his own words was "surprising". Consequ reforms." He travelled extensively for the same and the impact World'. "The article captured the 'Zeitgrest' of India the better things. It all began with a cover story he wrote for Bo building on people's strengths it would be hit the self-confidence in a person. And if we can inhas to create an atmosphere of trust which in a nuclines and are suspicious of people who act people rely so much on computes of These days Gurucharan Das is concentrating to bigger P 28 wdl go 'Ny thunk - unio :

City com-

important thing," as he says, "is to go on." conflicts and it most certainly could not have been easy. But, refuses to talk about them, there must obviously have been succeeded in combining all of them into one person. Although he Guracharan Das — a man of many talents, many facets ď,

the noted filmmaker Shyam Benegal

PHOTOGRAPHS ATLL CHOUGHAS



they eventually came round." married. Although her parents and mine did oppose the marriage finally she relented. A couple of months after we met we were go out with me and she just would not. But I did not give up and potatoes and omelette for me. After that I kept asking Punno to found me waiting. I was hungry and so Bunne rusdoot op some Talk of the way to a man's heart being through his stoutacht

mother too has influenced me a lot. In fact she is the model for comments on them. She feels that might inhibit my writing. My accomodating. She does read all my work but she never especially when I am writing and she has always been very

temendous influence in his life. "I am a very difficult person He laughs. "Oh I liked everything about her — her looks, the way She talks, thinks... everything." He admits to her having been a

sprang from, man too is also reoted to his land. I've come back Tara in 'A Fine Family. because of the rich and warm human support system that one tusses abroad." In fact Das and his wife have turned in their of the world. But like the blade of grass that has its life where it A widely travelled person, Das believes that he is, "a citizen is something that draws me back to this place primarily