

Reel Life meets Real People by Manohar Khushalani

Reel Life meets Real Life

Producer of films & TV series, Raja Bundeia, now intends to produce a new state - Bundelkhand



Manohar Khushalani Mumbai

I actor, director and producer Raja Bundeia and the Bundelkhand Mukta Morcha, are to have their way, a new state will appear on the map of India-Bundelkhand-carved out from one just one but two states: Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Recently elected president of the Bundelkhand Mukta Morcha, Bundeia took over from Shambhu Lal Mishra. He was on his way to Bundelkhand when I met him, with the intention of backing only those candidates who were willing to lead support to his movement, irrespective of which parties they belonged to. At present, only the BJP and BSP have included the formation of new states in their manifestos.

According to Bundeia, Mayawati had won the greatest number of seats from Bundelkhand precisely because she had promised to support the formation of the proposed state. Unlike

Utterah, however, the two parties fell out in Uttar Pradesh and Mayawati was unable to deliver on any of her promises. Although Bundeia has little hope from the Congress, he recalls that Lakshmi Narain Malik, a former Congress MP, was one of the early presidents of the movement. Back from Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP had recorded a thumping win in the recent assembly polls, Bundeia claimed that at least two MLAs had won because of the support of the Bundelkhand Mukta Morcha. He admits that although the BJP is not looking to fight elections at present, it intends to do so once it can gather enough momentum.

HN: What is the present status of the movement for a separate state?

Bundeia: The movement has been going on for at least 20-40 years, but in the last five to seven years, when Shambhu Lal Mishra took on the leadership, the movement gathered steam.

HN: How did a person from the entertainment industry get involved in a people's movement?

Bundeia: Shambhu Lal Mishra asked me to visit Bundelkhand and see what they were doing. Admittedly, I went out of curiosity. But, on reaching the area, I realised that there was a need to create awareness among the people. Eighty per cent of the population in the region was illiterate. Also, there were no banks at the government level for taking up their cases.

HN: Now that you have been elected president of the Morcha, are you considering a career in politics?

Bundeia: Not at all. I was very reluctant to accept the post. I did know that my commitment was for the cause, not for any organisation. There's been going there for about a week every month over the last seven or eight years. But they felt that my involvement would be even greater if I took on some responsibility. That movie was made. Once I return to Mumbai, I get involved in my productions.

1 | Hindustan

Taking on its official responsibility means giving more thought to Bundelkhand.

HN: What made you think you could make a difference?

Bundeia: My connections with the media were a big help. Some came out of curiosity, but at the end of the day they found me real, at least. I was also able to garner support from the film industry. Javed Akbar and Akshay Rana fell from this region. I have been urging them to do something for Bundelkhand. I just happen to work in Mumbai. Maharashtra is not my land, it's my home because I can do something for my region, there's nothing like it.

HN: What do you tell the people when you meet them?

Bundeia: That the Congress, Samajwadi Party, BJP and BSP are doing all the thinking for them. They have stopped thinking for themselves. Sometimes, you may have other things to offer but at least don't surrender your minds. It is worse than slavery. Eighty per cent of Bundelkhand's population lives below the poverty line. According to an India Today survey in 2002, every third person in Bundelkhand either died of starvation or committed suicide. Isn't that shocking?

HN: Do you really think a separate state will solve the region's problems?

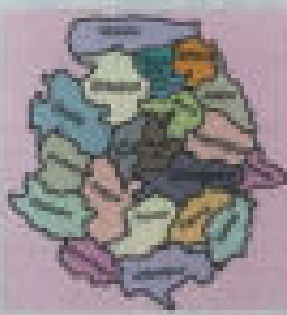
Bundeia: Not just a separate state won't solve our problems. It is a question of identity and self-respect. We have seven rivers but do not get water from them. All the electricity goes to Lucknow, Kanpur and Allahabad. We have power cuts for 8-10 hours every day. Yet another survey has revealed that the Bundelkhand region is more backward than other backward states like Assam. The maximum number of prime ministers and senior politicians have come from this region. Even Aurangzeb Bakshian comes from here. But nobody is willing to take any initiative for her or his.

HN: Bundelkhand has a majority of Dalits, which is why Mayawati won so comfortably from this region. You are a Thakur, how did you become a mass leader of Dalits?

Bundeia: The meaning of Thakur has changed in this region. Now Thakurs are those who carry guns. I have always been against the kind of culture and my people know it. That's why I went to Mumbai. I am a self-made man. I came without any background from Bundelkhand.

HN: Will you give up your film and TV career if Bundelkhand becomes a separate state?

Bundeia: The two are independent of each other. At the same time, my work in films has remained connected with my soul. My first big, 10-episode TV serial for Zee, *Mahe Chand Chakravarti*, was made totally in this belt - Jhansi, Lalitpur, Jhija. Even the locations that I have made, Pruthi and Kiser Bhainswari Affairs



Lalitpur, etc, were shot here and were based on local stories. I shot my films here because nobody else was shooting in this belt. I wanted my people to see how films are made. I wanted to give them some employment. Even if it was just a film getting it to my way of returning the love that I have received from them.

Terrorism Revisited by Manohar Khushalani



Heritage, Humour at Habitat by Manohar Khushalani



10 **VARIETY**

Heritage, humour at Habitat

CULTURE COCKTAIL
Manohar Khushalani

Habitat World is one of the most happening places in town; with live performances of theatre and dance, art and photo exhibitions, seminars, talks and celebrations. However, the basic mandate of the Habitat India is, as its very name suggests, to preserve the heritage of Delhi. In synergy with its objectives Habitat World took an initiative for beginning a movement to involve 'concerned' corporate citizens in restoration and conservation efforts by inviting eminent artists to sketch some of these prominent but depleted structures.

This initiative, launched in April 2000 by Chief Minister Sheila Dixit, is being taken forward each year with a host of talks, seminars and workshops by people who have been closely involved with preservation in one way or the other.

Artists such as Shamshad Hussain, Naresh Kapuria and Gopi Gajwani were commissioned to contribute towards this cause: Amongst the monuments that have already been sketched are: Subz Burz, Purana Quila and Lal Quila.

As part of the ongoing World Heritage Day celebrations, Habitat Heritage Initiative launched Vision Impossible - Photographic 'Delhiscapes', an exhibition of panorama prints of Delhi's monuments by photographer Amit Pasricha, last week. The name sounds familiar? Yes he is the son of the well-known photographer Avinash Pasricha. The exhibition displayed a cycloramic fish eye view — ranging from 180 to 360 degrees of Qutab Minar, Lodhi Tomb and Safdarjung Tomb. This was achieved by stitching together a series of pictures taken continuously using a Nikon Digital Camera with a 6 mega pixel resolution. Since the pictures are in digital format it becomes easy to merge the edges using a host of computer software such as Photoshop. Pasricha has perfected the technique while working with the Aga Khan Foundation on the Humayun's Tomb Restoration Project. This technique, with added innovations, has been used to photograph Delhi's other monuments.

While it may not be possible to judge the versatility of the photographer or the range of this format, since all the pictures were taken in daylight, there was a remarkable clarity of details in the pictures which perhaps appear to be superior to even the analog format of silveroxide prints. Amit cleverly used an ideal time to take the pictures - at sunrise or sunset — when the light is naturally soft.

One difficulty that comes up with such panoramic photographs is that they can be viewed only at an exhibition, but are cannot be used for publishing since they have an odd aspect ratio; as low as 1:8.

Another event at the Habitat was the readings of short stories of the late Navtej Singh, who was the former editor of the progressive Punjabi magazine, *Preet Lari*, founded in 1933.

Four of his short stories were read out by Madan Gopal Singh, Sumita Didi, Navtej Singh Johar and Poonam Singh, the present editor of the magazine.

They were accompanied by musical compositions of Amrit Kent.

Madan regaled the audience with *Sufi* songs, Navtej Singh Johar with a classical dance and Poonam with a solo performance of *Dil Di Than Jandiya*. However, it was Sumita Didi who stole the show through a dramatic presentation of an old Punjabi woman trying to get into a bus.

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Heritage, Humour at Habitat

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