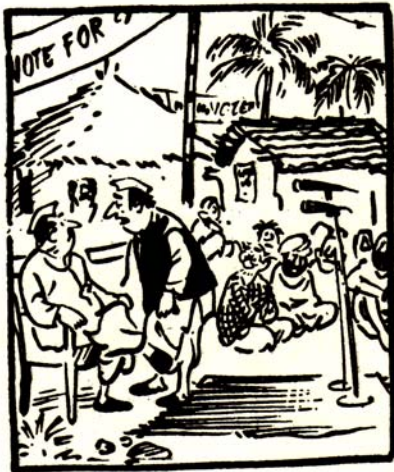


3 From 'Underdevelopment' to IT Specialization

Sandhya Gupta



I wouldn't advise you to promise drinking water. Promise something simple.



I can't understand these people. Not a soul here knows how to read or write and yet they want a school.

Until recently, Germany's image of India was simple: It had mainly to do with political and socio-economic 'underdevelopment', poverty and illiteracy. Religion was believed to be the dominant influence on Indian society. India was condescendingly and humorously looked down upon as 'the land of the holy cow'. 5

To many Germans, India remained mostly concealed behind a veil of mystery and mysticism. Indian women along with their *sari* and their *bindi* (the dot on the forehead) formed a part of this mysterious image. 10

Recently, however, in addition to this lopsided image of India, yet another stereotype has emerged: the notion that every second Indian is an IT specialist. This cliché is so common that any dark-haired person in the German IT business is automatically considered to be of Indian origin! The extent of such stereotypical views is summed up in a photograph published in Germany's *Frankfurter Allgemeine* showing an Indian woman now wearing an @-symbol instead of a *bindi* on her forehead. 15 20

What is new and different about this Indian face produced by the West is the fact that now Indians are actually considered to be serious competitors, if not a threat, to German IT professionals. In this context we, of course, remember the infamous campaign of *Kinder statt Inder* which intended to openly counter the German government's intention to cover the shortage of IT specialists by bringing more Indians to Germany. 25 30

Let us look beyond such clichés and take a critical view of the development and status of information technology in India. How could a country such as India, where illiteracy and poverty are known to be predominant, become so advanced in the IT business? How is it that today numerous Indians occupy senior positions in American, or in other rich countries' IT companies? And: what impact does this development really have on India? 35 40