edited by Khushwant Singh



CITY IMPROBABLE

~

writings on

Delhi

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Penguin

EDITED BY
KHUSHWANT SINGH

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PENGUIN BOOKS

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CITY IMPROBABLE

Khushwant Singh is one of India's best-known writers and columnists. He began his career as a journalist with All India Radio in 1951. Since then he has been the editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, the *National Herald* and the *Hindustan Times* for several years. He is also the author of several books, including the novels *Train to Pakistan*, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, *Delhi: A Novel* and *The Company of Women*; the classic two-volume *History of the Sikhs*; as well as numerous translations and non-fiction books on Delhi, nature and current affairs. His autobiography, *Truth, Love and a Little Malice*, was published in 2002.

Khushwant Singh was a member of Parliament from 1980 to 1986. Among other honours, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974 by the President of India, but he returned the decoration in 1984 in protest against the Union Government's siege of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

Introduction: Loving and Loathing Delhi

Some contributors to this anthology, especially the younger writers, wonder if Delhi can ever be anybody's native city. People come here to earn a living, to study, or were born here and so had no option. But if one had a choice, would one really choose to live here? Does this ancient city, once described as 'the mistress of every conqueror', inspire love or loyalty?

Having spent much of my life in Delhi, I can tell you that there is as much to love about the city as there is to loathe. What is loveable makes a long list, but so does all that is loathsome about it. Let us first look at the things that make Delhi unique among the capitals of the world. It has a longer history and more historical monuments than any other metropolis. Relics uncovered in and around Delhi date well beyond the sixth century BC. As for monuments, you will find one in every square kilometre. It has more mosques, mausolea and memorials than any city in a Muslim country. There are few mosques anywhere that can rival Delhi's Jama Masjid in size and grandeur. See it from a distance at sunset on the last day of the month of Ramzan. You will notice people on top of the minarets scouring the gradually darkening sky. If the fine fingernail of the crescent moon is spotted, cries of joy are heard from neighbouring rooftops, a cannon is fired and garlands of white lights frame the perfect outlines of the Royal Mosque. It is a never-to-be-forgotten experience which will even make a non-believer acclaim the glory of God—*Allah-o-Akbar*!

Another mosque that will stay in a visitor's mind is Moti Masjid or Pearl Mosque in the Red Fort. It is as small as the Jama Masjid is big, and very appropriately named—meant for private worship of the Muslim rulers of Delhi who lived in the marble palace alongside it, it is like a jewel-box of virginal white. There are a dozen others of great architectural beauty but we must not overlook the other Muslim monuments for which Delhi is famous. The best

known is the Qutub Minar, raised as a victory tower in the eleventh century AD. It is a slender, tapering edifice of beige and red sandstone, lavishly embellished with verses from the Holy Koran. There are many buildings in the world taller than Delhi's Qutub Minar, but few to match its excellence. Then there is the mausoleum of emperor Humayun, built by his widowed empress. Stand at the entrance gate to gaze at the perfect proportions and you will understand why it was chosen as the model for the world's most beautiful monument, the Taj Mahal in Agra.

Delhi also has many beautiful modern buildings. There is the Rashtrapati Bhawan, the Secretariats, Parliament House, India Gate. You can see them in all their glory in the last week of January, around Republic Day, when they are festooned with lights. For the most splendid view, position yourself at India Gate as the sun goes down over Raisina Hill. It was not the grandeur of the old but the modern city that made Sarojini Naidu exult: 'Imperial City, dowered with sovereign grace!' And it remains grand, though it is no longer imperial, nor has it a sovereign, but a democratic city dowered, hopefully, with secular grace.

More than man's contributions it is nature's bounty that has made Delhi the eternal capital of India. A broad river, the Yamuna, second only to the Ganga in sacredness, marked its eastern boundary, and a rocky ridge, the end of the Aravalli range, its western end. Between the river and the ridge rose several cities, each one the seat of the empire of Hindustan. As its population multiplied, it spilt over the river and rocky ridge till it spread over thirty square miles, to become, after Calcutta and Bombay, the third largest city of India. While the buildings came up, nature and man joined hands to add to the city's treasures: Delhi has more trees per square kilometre than any other big city. Most of them grow wild and are the gifts of nature, but a succession of rulers also laid out gardens and orchards wherever they lived. Little remains of these historical gardens besides their names: Hayat Baksh, Qudsia, Roshanara, Mahaldar Khan and others. The most significant contribution was made by the British. When they made blueprints of New Delhi, they provided for extensive planting of trees. As roads were laid out, saplings were planted. They chose massive, shade-giving trees—banyans, neems, jamuns, Arjuns, mahuas, maulsaris—so that we now have broad, tree-lined avenues in central Delhi. After Independence, our own rulers opted for quick-growing trees: jacarandas, laburnums, gulmohars and

the completely useless eucalypti. However, between the old and the new, there is not a season when one or the other tree is not in full flower. The year starts with the semals (silk cottons) followed by the corals, chorizzias, flame of the forest, jacarandas, amaltas (laburnums), gulmohars and lagerstroenias (jaruls). After a short recess the floral cycle begins to move again.

Delhi's greenery contributes to its rich bird life. The Delhi Bird Watching Society has listed almost five hundred distinct species of birds, resident and migratory, which can be seen in and around the city every year. There is never a moment when you look up and do not see flocks of birds circling and streaming across the sky. In the evenings as they go to roost the loud chorus of mynahs and parakeets drowns the roar of traffic. In Delhi's bazaars and railway stations cheeky bank mynahs sometimes wriggle their way between people's feet.

But you don't see that kind of thing as often as you used to. Delhi has become a very polluted and congested city. It has more cars than Bombay, Calcutta and Madras put together. So there is more poison in the air than in other cities. That and the reckless use of pesticides has taken a heavy toll of insect, amphibian and bird life. In the rainy season, no frogs croak, no fireflies or moths are to be seen. Vultures have disappeared, sparrows have become scarce. The incidence of asthma and bronchial ailments has shown an alarming increase, and if residents of Delhi manage to survive it is because of the greenery around them.

The not-so-loveable aspect of Delhi is entirely manmade. Delhiwalas are about the most inconsiderate of the human species you can encounter. They think nothing of throwing their garbage into their neighbours' homes or on the road. They observe no road rules and are ever eager to overtake others, blow their horns and get into violent arguments. On an average four to six people are killed every day by cars and buses. About the same number are murdered in cold blood. Thefts and burglaries are a daily feature. Molesting women in buses is a common practice.

At one time Dilliwalas were known for their courteous speech and interest in poetry, good food and clothes. They were proud of their poets: Meer Taqi Meer, Ghalib, Zauq and Zafar. Sons of the rich patronized courtesans living in Chawri Bazar to listen to mujras and banter Urdu poetry with them. The paan they chewed was wrapped in gold and silver paper. They wore brocades made by a family of royal dress designers living in Nai Sarak, and they got their sweets

from the Shahi Halwai (Royal Confectioner) in Chandni Chowk. Even when they used bawdy language to address each other, to call a buddy bhosree-kay (cunt-born) or madarchode (motherfucker) or bahenchode (sisterfucker), it was an endearment. When they wanted to put down somebody, they'd say '*Chullu bhar paani mein doob mar* (Go drown yourself in a palmful of water)' or '*Imli ke patte pe hug* (Shit on a tamarind leaf)' (the leaf being smaller than the nail of the little finger).

All that went with the Muslim elite, who migrated to Pakistan in 1947. Their place was taken by a flood of Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Punjab. Understandably, these new entrants were eager to rehabilitate themselves, make a fast buck and show everyone how well they had done for themselves. Hearty eating, good living in a large bungalow with a fleet of cars, an ostentatious display of wealth became the culture of Delhi's rich.

The most loathsome aspect of Delhi is the new caste system that has evolved: the caste hierarchy of the bureaucracy, because Delhi is essentially the city of babus and politicians. You are judged by your status in the civil service: steno, upper division clerk, under secretary, deputy secretary, joint secretary, additional secretary, full secretary. Likewise, politicians have their own hierarchy and means of letting everyone know how important they are: their cars have special number plates, their windscreens proclaim they are MPs, they have red or blue lights flashing on the roofs of their vehicles. The brahmins of this hierarchy, known as VVIPs, have armed escorts and when they drive past, other traffic comes to a deferential halt. In short, they are a bloody nuisance because they make you feel small.

Draw a balance sheet of what is loveable about Delhi and what is not, and you will find that its plus points equal its minus points. So if you happen to be living in Delhi, why uproot yourself and go somewhere else of which you know less, and which may not be worth knowing either?

KHUSHWANT SINGH

The Building of the Hall

VYASA

Dhritarashtra divided his kingdom into two and gave the Pandavas Khandavaprastha, a barren desert. Here the Pandavas built the city of Indraprastha with its forts, moats, encampments and in due course, a brilliant city came into being with a 'wall as high as heaven and as white as silver'. People flocked to the city and songbirds to the parks and gardens. Its palace was built by Maya, the architect of the gods, whom Arjun saved from a devastating fire. Taken from the Mahabharata, this extract tells of the building of the palace in Indraprastha—the capital of the Pandavas and the oldest of all the cities which make up Delhi.

Then Maya said to Arjun, folding his hands, 'You have saved me from the fire that was ready to burn me, son of Kunti. Tell me how I can thank you.'

Arjun said, 'You do not need to do anything, great Asura. Be always friendly to us, and we shall be friendly to you.'

Maya said, 'My lord, I am a great artist, a Visvakarman among the Danavas, and I wish to do something for you in friendship.'

Arjun said, 'Do something for Krishna; that will be reward enough for me.'

Krishna pondered a while on what he would demand. 'Build an assembly hall, such as would be worthy of Yudhishtir, the dharma raj, a hall of such magnificence that people will behold it with wonderment but will not be able to imitate it, an assembly hall where one can see the designs of the Gods laid, and the plans of Asuras and of men.'

Maya was delighted and joyfully agreed.

Thereupon Krishna and Arjun presented Maya to Yudhishtir, who received him graciously.

After he had rested for some time, Maya planned and prepared to build the hall for the great-spirited sons of Pandu. He performed the inauguration on an auspicious day, fed thousands of eminent brahmins and distributed many

presents to them. He selected and measured out ten thousand cubits of the most beautiful land where he would build this hall.

Then Maya said to Arjun, ‘I must go, but I shall return soon. On the northern slope of the Himalayas, by Kailash, close to Lake Bindu, there is a place filled with shining columns bordered with gold and set with jewels. There I have stored my own collection of precious stones, which have been hewn to size for a building. I shall go and fetch these, if they are still there, my lord. With it I shall build a hall for the famous Pandavas, a beautiful hall to delight all hearts.’



Maya began to build his palace, keeping it invisible until he had finished. The hall had solid golden pillars, and measured ten thousand cubits in circumference. Its colour was radiant and divine, like fire or the sun, which it seemed to challenge in its splendour. It covered the sky like a mountain or monsoon cloud, smooth and faultless. Merely looking at it dispelled fatigue. The walls were gem-encrusted walls, filled with precious stones and treasures. Neither the Sudharma hall of the Dasarhas, nor the palace of Brahma possessed the matchless beauty that Maya imparted to it.

Eight thousand armed Kimkaras, terrifying, red-eyed rakshasas with ears of mother-of-pearl, guarded and protected the hall at Maya’s behest.

Within the hall Maya built a peerless lotus pond, covered with beryl leaves and lotuses with gem-studded stalks, filled with lilies and water plants and inhabited by many flocks of fowl, turtles and fish. The water was clear and sparkling, and the pearl-drop flowers that covered it were stirred by a breeze.

Around the hall stood tall trees of many different kinds that were always in bloom and gave cool shade. There were fragrant groves and lotus ponds filled with wild geese, ducks and other birds. The wind carried the fragrance of flowers on land or on water and fanned the Pandavas with it. Such was the palace that Maya built in fourteen months, and when it was finished, he informed the king and removed the illusion, so that the hall was visible.

Said Arjun, ‘It is so beautiful that it does not seem real. Is it not an illusion, Maya?’

Maya said, ‘I don’t know. You have to find out, prince.’ And then he said goodbye, stood up and disappeared.

Yudhishtir made his entrance into the hall. To celebrate he fed ten thousand brahmins, and gave each of them garlands, new clothes and a thousand cows. He worshipped the deities with music and song. There were wrestlers, dancers, boxers, bards and songsters who entertained the crowds for seven days and nights. The Pandava rejoiced in his lovely palace with his brothers, like Indra in heaven.

In that hall seers and princes from many countries sat with the Pandavas, and many barons, hermits, learned in the Vedas, and eminent seers attended on the great king, as the gods wait on Brahma in heaven.



After the rains, Yudhishtir received a message from Duryodhan, saying that he would come and visit Indraprastha. Bhima counselled that they should not let him enter, but Yudhishtir overruled him.

So Duryodhan came to Indraprastha, and at the beginning all seemed well. But in an inner court, Maya had made a pond of water as clear and still as the air, so that the pond seemed empty. Duryodhan walked down the steps, and when his feet touched the water, he was so startled that he slipped and fell.

Some time later, when he was going to find Yudhishtir, he had to cross a stream, filled with fish and water lilies. Duryodhan, already angry, stepped into it carefully, expecting it to be water, and stubbed his toe against the hard crystal of the rivulet and its glass fish.

Incensed, Duryodhan accused Yudhishtir of insulting him, but the Pandava smiled and said, ‘This is not treachery, prince. Tell me, what outwitted you this time?’

Bhima laughed and said, ‘You looked like a young maiden dancing through puddles!’

Even more angry, Duryodhan said, ‘Yudhishtir, I challenge you!’

‘To what?’ asked the Pandava.

‘Do you accept?’ asked his cousin.

‘Yes.’

‘Well then, to a game of dice.’

And it was at this game of dice that Yudhishtir lost all his possessions, his wife Draupadi and finally Indraprastha itself.

A Paradise of Justice

AMIR KHUSRAU

The two poems are from Amir Khusrau's larger narrative poem (masnavî), Qiran al-sa'dain (The Conjunction of Two Auspicious Stars), *which includes praises of Delhi's buildings and inhabitants. These have been translated by Sunil Sharma.*

A Paradise of Justice

Dehli:
  Refuge of religion!
  Refuge and paradise of justice!
Long may it endure!
Since it is a heavenly paradise
in every essential quality,
may God keep it from calamity!

Its circumference was measured out
when the earth's orbit was fixed.
From the time of its founding,
the whole world could not contain its vastness.

Its three citadels unite this world and the next.
One of its breaths offers ten greetings from them both.
Its outer citadel is beyond this world, while
its inner citadel contains the outside universe.
It seems perhaps that the sky lies beneath
the outer citadel while its high fortifications rise above.
Heaven said to the new citadel,
'O new sky. Be kind to the old.'

Every moment, that celestial fortress reduces
the turquoise stones of the sky's ramparts to bricks.
Like the firm heaven, three or four of its towers
are solid and lofty, the sun and moon revolving around them.
Its battlement has become a tongue
conversing with the moon in the sky.
Heaven knows no other structure since
to lean on its walls and doors is sufficient.

The kingdom opens up through its gates:
Thirteen gates and a hundred victories!
Its lofty reputation is on the rise;
by the time it reached Khutan, it took all of Yaghma!
When Mecca hears about this garden
it will become a pale imitation of Hindustan.
I swear by the city of the Prophet that
hearing Delhi's fame has made the city of God deaf.
When I saw heaven's generosity to it, I said,
'It is Rum.' I did not say Khita by mistake.

It has become the shelter of Islam in the world
and its dependencies the cupola of the seven heavens.
Its inhabitants are all notables of the land.
In every corner are pillars of the state.
It is the seat of mighty rulers.
It enjoys the good fortune of kings.

The corner of every home here is a wondrous paradise;
all manner of gold was spent in its design.
In every street there is a row of great people.
In the niches of every house are hidden costly articles.
People of one house with a hundred joys!
Home of one people with a hundred human qualities!

The Fine Lads of Delhi

Delhi and its fine lads
with their turbans and twisted beards
openly drinking lovers' blood
while secretly sipping wine.

Willful and full of airs
they pay no heed to anyone.

So close to the heart, they rob
your soul and tuck it safely away.

When they are out for a stroll
rosebushes bloom in the street.

When the breeze strikes them from behind,
see how the turbans topple from their heads.

When they walk, the lovers follow,
blood gushing from their eyes.

Their heads puffed up with beauty's pride,
their admirers' hearts are gone with the wind.

These cheeky, simple Indian lads have made
Muslims into worshippers of the sun.

Those fair Hindu boys
have led me to drunken ruin.
Trapped in the coils of their curly locks
Khusrau is a dog on a leash.

Qutbuddin Aibak

HASAN NIZAMI

Qutbuddin Aibak, the commandant of the Turkish ruler Muhammad Shihabuddin of Ghur, conquered Delhi in 1192. This extract is taken from Hasan Nizami's Taj-ul-Maasir, *written in the early thirteenth century.*

After setting the affairs of Ajmir, the conqueror marched towards Delhi (may God preserve its prosperity and perpetuate its splendour!) which is among the chief cities of Hind. When he arrived at Delhi, he saw a fortress which in height and strength had not its equal nor second throughout the length and breadth of the seven climes. The army encamped around the fort. A torrent of blood flowed on the field of battle, and it became evident to the chiefs that if they did not seek for safety from the sword of the king of the earth, and if they should deliver into the hands of Satan the time of option and the reins of good counsel, the condition of Delhi would be like that of Ajmir; so from the dread of kingly punishment, the rai and mukaddams of that country placed their heads upon the line of slavery, and their feet within the circle of obedience, and made firm the conditions of tribute and the usages of service.

The Sultan then returned towards the capital of Ghazna (may God preserve it in prosperity!) but the army remained encamped within the boundary of Delhi, at the *mauza* of Indarpat [Indraprastha].

The conqueror entered the city of Delhi, which is the source of wealth and the foundation of blessedness. The city and its vicinity was freed from idols and idol-worship, and in the sanctuaries of the images of the Gods, mosques were raised by the worshippers of one God.

After Qutbuddin had settled affairs in the quarter, the chief Sadr, Kiwam-ul-mulk Ruhuddin Hamza, sent him intelligence from Rantanbor, that Hiraj, the brother of the Rai of Ajmir, had gone into rebellion, and had turned his face

towards the siege of the fort of Rantanbor, and that the son of Pitaura, who had been advanced under the protection of the sublime Court, was in a state of extreme danger. On receiving this intelligence, Qutbuddin appointed the Amir Sabik-ul-mulk Nazruddin to take charge of the affairs of State during his absence, a man in knowledge of the rules and customs of government superior to his contemporaries and in resolution and courage celebrated throughout Hind, far and near, and himself departed for Rantanbor, passing over hill and desert like a wild ass or an antelope.

When Hiraj heard of the arrival of the auspicious standards, knowing he could not contend with the army of Islam, and impelled by necessity, he placed the hands of weakness in the skirts of flight, and for fear of the blade of the scimitar fled like the wind with his resurrectionless army. The conqueror then engaged himself in administering the ways of justice, and received both high and low under the shadow of his benignity, and the people were happy. At this time the son of Rai Pitaura was favoured with a robe of honour and other kindnesses; and in return for this friendship, he sent abundant treasure for the service of the State, together with three golden melons, which with extreme ingenuity had been cast in moulds like the full moon.

About this time they wrote to the heavenly throne, that the Rai who had fled from Delhi had raised an army of idolatrous, turbulent and rebellious tribes, the vapour of pride and conquest having entered his thoughtless brain. Qutbuddin pursued him, and when the wretch was taken, his head was severed from his body and sent to Delhi, which had been his residence and capital. Qutbuddin then himself returned to Delhi, and sent written accounts of his capture of forts and strongholds, and his victories and holy wars to Ghazna, to which capital he was invited to receive thanks in person from Muizzuddin Sam Ghori. The invitation arrived when the sun was in Cancer, and the heat was so great as to prevent travelling, but he set out on his journey at the commencement of the rainy season.

When the fortunate stirrups reached the capital of Ghazna (may God shed splendour on it!), he enjoyed the happiness of kissing hands, and received other marks of special favour before the great throne, and in the degree of his rank was raised above all the other chiefs of the world. A festival was held in celebration

of his arrival, and splendid jewels, and valuable clothes, and costly arms, and slaves of great price were presented to him.

Qutbuddin was accommodated in the garden of the minister Zia-ul-mulk. On the return of the hot season he was taken ill, and removed from the residence of the minister to the palace of the sovereign, which is the seat of prosperity; but on account of his illness and want of strength, he could not rejoice in his heart with the festivities. On his recovery, he took his leave of the king, and received a patent conferring upon him the government of Hindustan and every one of the principal officers of his army was rejoiced exceedingly, at receiving from his Majesty suitable presents and promotion of rank.

On his arrival at Karman from the great capital, Taj-ud-din Yalduz received him with great kindness and honour, and gave him his daughter in marriage, and a fete was held on the occasion.

When he arrived at Dehli, which is the capital of the kingdom, and the centre of God’s aid and victory, the crown and throne of sovereignty received honour and adornment in his kingly person, and the lords of the sword and pen hastened to pay their respects at the magnificent Court, and observed the usages of benediction and praise; while the city and its vicinity rejoiced and were decorated like the garden of Iram, and the gates and walls were adorned with the gold tissues of Chin and the brocades of Rum, and triumphal arches were raised, beautiful to look at, the top of which a strong-winged bird could not surmount, and the glittering of the lightning of the swords and the splendour of the arms, which were suspended on all sides of them, inspired terror in the spirit of the beholder.

Qutbuddin built the Jami Masjid at Delhi, and adorned it with the stones and gold obtained from the temples which had been demolished by elephants, and covered it with inscriptions in Toghra, containing the divine commands.

The Court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq

IBN BATTUTA

The Arab traveller Ibn Battuta came to Delhi in 1334. This extract is taken from his Travels.

We arrived at the city of Delhi, the metropolis of India, a vast and magnificent city, uniting beauty with strength. It is surrounded by a wall that has no equal in the world, and is the largest city in India, nay rather the largest city in the entire Muslim Orient.

The city of Delhi is made up now of four neighbouring and contiguous towns. One of them is Delhi proper, the old city built by the infidels and captured in the year 1188. The second is called Siri, known also as the Abode of the Caliphate; this was the town given by the sultan to Ghiyath ad-Din, the grandson of the Abbasid Caliph Mustansir, when he came to his court. The third is called Tughlaq Abad, after its founder, the Sultan Tughlaq, the father of the sultan of India to whose court we came. The reason why he built it was that one day he said to a former sultan, 'O master of the world, it were fitting that a city should be built here.' The sultan replied to him in jest, 'When you are sultan, build it.' It came about by the decree of God that he became sultan, so he built it and called it by his own name. The fourth is called Jahan Panah, and is set apart for the residence of the reigning sultan, Muhammad Shah. He was the founder of it, and it was his intention to unite these four towns within a single wall, but after building part of it he gave up the rest because of the expense required for its construction.

The cathedral mosque occupies a large area; its walls, roof and paving are all constructed of white stones, admirably squared and firmly cemented with lead. There is no wood in it at all. It has thirteen domes of stone, its pulpit also is made of stone, and it has four courts. In the centre of the mosque is an awe-inspiring column, and nobody knows of what metal it is constructed. One of

their learned men told me that it is called *haft jush*, which means ‘seven metals’ and that it is constructed from these seven. A part of this column, of a finger’s breadth, has been polished, and gives out a brilliant gleam. Iron makes no impression on it. It is thirty cubits high, and we rolled a turban round it, and the portion which encircled it measured eight cubits. At the eastern gate there are two enormous idols of brass prostrate on the ground and held by stones, and everyone entering or leaving the mosque treads on them. The site was formerly occupied by an idol temple, and was converted into a mosque on the conquest of the city. In the northern court is the minaret which has no parallel in the lands of Islam. It is built of red stone, unlike the rest of the edifice, ornamented with sculptures, and of great height. The ball on the top is of glistening white marble and its apples, the small balls surmounting it, are of pure gold. The passage is so wide that elephants could go up by it. A person in whom I have confidence told me that when it was built he saw an elephant climbing with stones to the top. The Sultan Qutb ad-Din wished to build one in the western court even larger, but was cut off by death when only a third of it had been completed. This minaret is one of the wonders of the world for size, and the width of its passage is such that three elephants could mount it abreast. The third of it built equals in height the whole of the other minaret we have mentioned in the northern court, though to one looking at it from below it does not seem so high because of its bulk.

Outside Delhi is a large reservoir named after the Sultan Lalmish, from which the inhabitants draw their drinking water. It is supplied by rain water, and is about two miles in length by half that breadth. In the centre there is a great pavilion built of squared stones, two stories high. When the reservoir is filled with water it can be reached only in boats, but when the water is low the people go into it. Inside it is a mosque, and at most times it is occupied by mendicants devoted to the service of God. When the water dries up at the sides of this reservoir, they sow sugarcanes, cucumbers, green melons and pumpkins there. The melons and pumpkins are very sweet but of small size. Between Delhi and the Abode of the Caliphate is the private reservoir, which is larger than the other. Along its sides there are about forty pavilions, and round about it live the musicians …



This king [Muhammad bin Tughlaq] is of all men the fondest of making gifts and of shedding blood. His gate is never without some poor man enriched or some living man executed, and stories are current amongst the people of his generosity and courage and of his cruelty and violence towards criminals. For all that, he is of all men the most humble and the readiest to show equity and justice. The ceremonies of religion are strictly complied with at his court, and he is severe in the matter of attendance at prayer and in punishing those who neglect it. He is one of those kings whose felicity is unimpaired and surpassing all ordinary experience, but his dominant quality is generosity. We shall relate some stories of this that are marvellous beyond anything ever heard before, and I call God and His Angels and His Prophets to witness that all that I tell of his extraordinary generosity is absolute truth. I know that some of the instances I shall relate will be unacceptable to the minds of many, and that they will regard them as quite impossible, but in a matter which I have seen with my own eyes and of which I know the accuracy and have had a large share, I cannot do otherwise than speak the truth.

The sultan's palace at Delhi is called Dar Sara, and contains many doors. At the first door there are a number of guardians, and beside it trumpeters and flute-players. When any amir or person of note arrives, they sound their instruments and say 'So-and-so has come, so-and-so has come.' The same takes place also at the second and third doors. Outside the first door are platforms on which the executioners sit, for the custom amongst them is that when the sultan orders a man to be executed, the sentence is carried out at the door of the audience hall, and the body lies there over three nights. Between the first and second doors there is a large vestibule with platforms along both sides, on which sit those whose turn of duty it is to guard the doors. Between the second and third doors there is a large platform on which the principal naqib, the keeper of the register, sits; in front of him there is a gold mace, which he holds in his hand, and on his head he wears a jewelled tiara of gold, surmounted by peacock feathers. The second door leads to an extensive audience hall in which the people sit. At the third door there are platforms occupied by the scribes of the door. One of their customs is that none may pass through this door except those whom the sultan has prescribed, and for each person he prescribes a number of his staff to enter along with him. Whenever any person comes to this door the scribes write down

‘So-and-so came at the first hour’ or the second, and so on, and the sultan receives a report of this after the evening prayer. Another of their customs is that anyone who absents himself from the palace for three days or more, with or without excuse, may not enter this door thereafter except by the sultan’s permission. If he has an excuse of illness or otherwise he presents the sultan with a gift suitable to his rank. The third door opens into an immense audience hall called Hazar Ustun, which means ‘a thousand pillars’. The pillars are of wood and support a wooden roof, admirably carved. The people sit under this, and it is in this hall that the sultan holds public audiences.

As a rule his audiences are held in the afternoon, though he often holds them early in the day. He sits crosslegged on a throne placed on a dais carpeted in white, with a large cushion behind him and two others as armrests on his right and left. When he takes his seat, the wazir stands in front of him, the secretaries behind the wazir, then the chamberlains and so on in order of precedence. As the sultan sits down the chamberlains and naqibs say in their loudest voice ‘Bismillah’. A hundred armour-bearers stand on the right and a like number on the left, carrying shields, swords and bows. The other functionaries and notables stand along the hall to right and left. Then they bring in sixty horses with the royal harness, half of which are ranged on the right and half on the left, where the sultan can see them. Next fifty elephants are brought in, which are adorned with silken cloths, and have their tusks shod with iron for greater efficacy in killing criminals. On the neck of each elephant is its mahout, who carries a sort of iron axe with which he punishes it and directs it to do what is required of it. Each elephant has on its back a sort of large chest capable of holding twenty warriors or more or less, according to the size of the beast. These elephants are trained to make obeisance to the sultan and incline their heads, and when they do so the chamberlains cry in a loud voice ‘Bismillah’. They also are arranged half on the right and half on the left behind the persons standing. As each person enters who has an appointed place of standing on the right or left, he makes obeisance on reaching the station of the chamberlains, and the chamberlains say ‘Bismillah’, regulating the loudness of their utterance by the rank of the person concerned, who then retires to his appointed place, beyond which he never passes. If it is one of the infidel Hindus who makes obeisance, the chamberlains say to him ‘God guide thee’.

If there should be anyone at the door who has come to offer the sultan a gift, the chamberlains enter the sultan's presence in order of precedence, make obeisance in three places, and inform the sultan of the person at the door. If he commands them to bring him in, they place the gift in the hands of men who stand with it in front of the sultan where he can see it. He then calls in the donor, who makes obeisance three times before reaching the sultan and makes another obeisance at the station of the chamberlains. The sultan then addresses him in person with the greatest courtesy and bids him welcome. If he is a person who is worthy of honour, the sultan takes him by the hand or embraces him, and asks for some part of his present. It is then placed before him, and if it consists in weapons or fabrics he turns it this way and that with his hand and expresses his approval, to set the donor at ease and encourage him. He gives him a robe of honour and assigns him a sum of money to wash his head, according to their custom in this case, proportioned to his merits.

When the sultan returns from a journey, the elephants are decorated, and on sixteen of them are placed sixteen parasols, some brocaded and some set with jewels. Wooden pavilions are built several storeys high and covered with silk cloths, and in each storey there are singing girls wearing magnificent dresses and ornaments, with dancing girls amongst them. In the centre of each pavilion is a large tank made of skins and filled with syrup-water, from which all the people, natives or strangers, may drink, receiving at the same time betel leaves and areca nuts. The space between the pavilions is carpeted with silk cloths, on which the sultan's horse treads. The walls of the street along which he passes from the gate of the city to the gate of the palace are hung with silk cloths. In front of him march footmen from his own slaves, several thousands in number, and behind come the mob and the soldiers. On one of his entries into the capital I saw three or four small catapults placed on elephants throwing gold and silver coins amongst the people from the moment when he entered the city until he reached the palace …

One of the gravest charges against the sultan is that of compelling the inhabitants of Delhi to leave the town. The reason for this was that they used to write missives reviling and insulting him, seal them and inscribe them, 'By the hand of the Master of the World, none but he may read this.' They then threw them into

the audience hall at night, and when the sultan broke the seal he found them full of insults and abuse. He decided to lay Delhi in ruins, and having bought from all the inhabitants their houses and dwellings and paid them the price of them, he commanded them to move to Dawlat Abad. They refused, and his herald was sent to proclaim that no person should remain in the city after three nights. The majority complied with the order, but some of them hid in the houses. The sultan ordered a search to be made for any persons remaining in the town, and his slaves found two men in the streets, one a cripple and the other blind. They were brought before him and he gave orders that the cripple should be flung from a mangonel and the blind man dragged from Delhi to Dawlat Abad, a distance of forty days' journey. He fell to pieces on the road and all of him that reached Dawlat Abad was his leg. When the sultan did this, every person left the town, abandoning furniture and possessions, and the city remained utterly deserted. A person in whom I have confidence told me that the sultan mounted one night to the roof of his palace and looked out over Delhi, where there was neither fire nor smoke nor lamp, and said 'Now my mind is tranquil and my wrath appeased.' Afterwards he wrote to the inhabitants of the other cities commanding them to move to Delhi to repopulate it. The result was only to ruin their cities and leave Delhi still unpopulated, because of its immensity, for it is one of the greatest cities in the world. It was in this state that we found it on our arrival, empty and unpopulated, save for a few inhabitants.

Conquest of Dehli

TIMUR-I-LANG

Timur-i-Lang captured Delhi—or Dehli, as it was known—in 1398 when he was more than sixty years old. This account is taken from his Malfuzat-i-Timuri.

I gave orders to the princes and amirs, and then held a council about the attack upon Dehli and the operations against Sultan Mahmud.

After much discussion in the Council of War, where everyone had something to say and an opinion to offer, it appeared that the soldiers of my army had heard tales about the strength and prowess of the elephants of Hindustan. They had been told that in the fight one would take up a horseman and his horse with his trunk and hurl them in the air. These stories had been met by suitable answers from some of the bold troopers.

At this Court Amir Jahan Shah and Amir Sulaiman Shah and other amirs of experience brought to my notice that, from the time of entering Hindustan up to the present time, we had taken more than ten thousand infidels and Hindus prisoners, and that they were all in my camp. On the previous day, when the enemy's forces made the attack upon us, the prisoners made signs of rejoicing, uttered imprecations against us, and were ready, as soon as they heard of the enemy's success, to form themselves into a body, break their bonds, plunder our tents, and then to go and join the enemy, and so increase his numbers and strength. I asked their advice about the prisoners, and they said that on the great day of battle these ten thousand prisoners could not be left with the baggage, and that it would be entirely opposed to the rules of war to set these idolaters and foes of Islam at liberty. In fact, no other course remained but that of making them all food for the sword. When I heard these words I found them in accordance with the rules of war, and I directly gave my command for the *tawachis* to proclaim throughout the camp that every man who had infidel

prisoners was to put them to death, and whoever neglected to do so should himself be executed and his property given to the informer. When this order became known to the ghazis of Islam, they drew their swords and put their prisoners to death. Ten thousand infidels, impious idolaters, were on that day slain. Maulana Nasir-ud-din Umar, a counsellor and man of learning, who, in all his life, had never killed a sparrow, now, in execution of my order, slew with his sword fifteen idolatrous Hindus, who were his captives.

After the whole of the vile idolaters had been sent to hell, I gave orders that one man out of every ten should be told off to guard the property, and cattle and horses, which had been captured in the invasion; all the other soldiers were to march with me. At the time of midday prayer the signal was given for the march, and I proceeded to the spot selected for crossing the Jumna, and there encamped. The astrologers who accompanied the army consulted their books and almanacs as to the time propitious for battle, and they represented that the aspects of the stars made a short delay advisable. In all matters, small and great, I placed my reliance on the favour and kindness of God, and I knew that victory and conquest, defeat and flight, are each ordained by Him, so I placed no reliance on the words of the astrologers and star-gazers, but besought the giver of victory to favour my arms.

I did not wish the war to be of long continuance; so as soon as night was over and morning came, I arose to my devotions. I said the morning prayers in the congregation, and I repeated my private prayers, then I took the holy book, which I always carried with me, and sought a *fal* on the subject of the war. The verse which appeared was one in the chapter of the Bee. I immediately sought the interpretation of this verse from those who were present. I received this fal as a propitious indication, and acted in full reliance on its command and on the favour of God.



The whole of Sultan Mahmud’s army was defeated; part was slain, and part had found refuge in the fort, and I, exalted with victory, marched towards the fort. When I reached its gates I carefully reconnoitred its towers and walls, and then returned to the side of the Hauz-i Khass. This is a reservoir, which was constructed by Sultan Firoz Shah, and is faced all round with stone and cement. Each side of that reservoir is more than a bowshot long, and there are buildings

placed around it. This tank is filled by the rains in the rainy season, and it supplies the people of the city with water throughout the year. The tomb of Sultan Firoz Shah stands on its bank. When I had pitched my camp here, the princes and amirs and nuyans, and all the generals and officers, came to wait upon me to pay their respects and offer their congratulations on this great victory. I embraced the princes and amirs, and I praised them all for their exertions and courage which I myself had seen. When I recounted the favours and mercies I had received from the Almighty, my excellent sons, the brave and renowned amirs, who served under me, and the great and glorious victories I had achieved, my heart melted and the tears burst from my eyes. I cast myself upon the ground and poured forth my thanksgivings to the All-beneficent. All who were present raised their voices in prayer, and in wishes for the continuance of my prosperity and the prolongation of my reign.

I called up the heavy baggage and here formed my camp, and I issued orders for my soldiers to be very cautious and watchful. Sultan Mahmud and Mallu Khan, after their defeat, had taken refuge in the fort in a wretched state. They now repented of the course they had taken, and regretted that they had not made submission to me, and so avoided the evil which had befallen them. They saw that if they stayed in the fort they would be captured and made prisoners, so in the middle of that night, 7th Rabi ul akhir, Sultan Mahmud and Mallu Khan left the fort of Jahan-panah and fled towards the mountains and jungles. When I heard of this I immediately sent Amir Said and other officers in pursuit. They followed with all speed, and, coming up with the fugitives, they killed many of them, and obtained great spoil. On the same night, I sent Amir Allah-dad and other officers to watch the gate of Hauz-rani, through which Mahmud had escaped; and that of Baraka, by which Mallu Khan had gone out. I also sent men to all the other gates, with orders to not let the people escape.

I mounted my horse and rode towards the gate of the maidan. I alighted at the id-gah, a lofty and extensive building, and I gave orders for my quarters to be moved there, and for my throne to be set up in the id-gah. I took my seat upon the throne and held a Court. The saiyids, the kazis, the ulama, the shaikhs, and the great men and chiefs of the Muhammadans of the city assembled and came out to attend my Court. I had them introduced one by one, and they made their obeisances, and were admitted to the honour of kissing my throne. I received

every one of them with respect and kindness, and directed them to be seated. Fazlu-ullah Balkhi was vakil and naib of Mallu Khan, and he came out to wait upon me and do homage, accompanied by a party of the officials and clerks of the government of Sultan Mahmud and Mallu Khan. Hereupon all the saiyids, ulama, shaikhs and other leading Musulmans arose, and, making the princes their mediators, they begged that quarter might be given to the people of Dehli, and that their lives might be spared. Out of respect to the saiyids and ulama, whom I always held in great esteem and honour, I granted quarter to the inhabitants of the city. I then ordered my ensign and royal standard to be raised, and the drums to be beaten and music played on the tops of the gates of Dehli. Rejoicing for the victory followed. Some of the clever men and poets that accompanied me worked the date of the victory into a verse, which they presented to me. I rewarded and honourably distinguished the literary men and poets who presented these verses to me.

I sent a party of men into the city to bring out the elephants which Sultan Mahmud had abandoned when he fled. They found 120 enormous elephants and several rhinoceroses, which they brought out to my Court. As the elephants passed by me I was greatly amused to see the tricks which their drivers had taught them. Every elephant, at the sign of the driver, bowed his head to the ground, made his obeisance, and uttered a cry. At the direction of their drivers they picked up any object from the ground with their trunks and placed it in their driver’s hands, or put it into their mouths and kept it. When I saw these mighty animals, so well trained and so obedient to weak man, I was greatly astonished, and I ordered that they should be sent to Turan and Iran, to Fars and Azur, and Rum, so that the princes and nobles throughout my dominions might see these animals. Accordingly I sent five to Samarkand, two to Tabriz, one to Shiraz, five to Hirat, one to Sharwan, and one to Azurbaijan.

When Friday came, I sent Maulana Nasir-ud-din Umar, with some other holy and learned men that accompanied my camp, to the Masjid-i jami, with directions to say the prayers for the Sabbath, and to repeat the *khutba* of my reign in the metropolis of Dehli. Accordingly, the khutba, with my name, was repeated in the pulpits of the mosques in the city of Dehli, and I rewarded the preachers with costly robes and presents.

When the preparations for holding a Court in Dehli were complete I gave orders for the princes, the amirs, the nuyans, and other of my officers, and the saiyids, the ulama, the shaikhs and all the principal men of the city to attend my Court. When they had all arrived I entered and took my seat upon the throne. The Turk and Tajik musicians and singers began to play and sing. Wine and sharbat, and sweetmeats, and all kinds of bread and meat were served; I bestowed rich robes and caps and girdles and swords and daggers and horses upon the princes and amirs and other leading men of my army, especially upon those braves who had distinguished themselves by deeds of valour under my own observation. To some I gave regiments and raised their dignity. Upon the saiyids and ulama of the city I bestowed robes and presents. I ordered my secretaries to draw up despatches announcing my victories in Hindustan, and to circulate them with all speed throughout my dominions. And I ordered my revenue officers to make provision for collecting the ransom money assessed upon the city, excepting the saiyids, ulama and shaikhs. The collectors proceeded about their work, and I remained in the same quarters for several days, holding courts, giving feasts, and partaking of pleasure and enjoyment.

On the 16th of the month some incidents occurred which led to the sack of the city of Dehli, and to the slaughter of many of the infidel inhabitants. One was this. A party of fierce Turk soldiers had assembled at one of the gates of the city to look about them and enjoy themselves, and some of them laid violent hands upon the goods of the inhabitants. When I heard of this violence, I sent some amirs, who were present in the city, to restrain the Turks. A party of soldiers accompanied these amirs into the city. Another reason was that some of the ladies of my harem expressed a wish to go into the city and see the palace of Hazarsutun (thousand columns) which Malik Jamna built in the fort called Jahan-panah. I granted this request, and I sent a party of soldiers to escort the litters of the ladies. Another reason was that Jalal Islam and other diwans had gone into the city with a party of soldiers to collect the contribution laid upon the city. Another reason was that some thousand troopers with orders for grain, oil, sugar and flour, had gone into the city to collect these supplies. Another reason was that it had come to my knowledge that great number of Hindus and gabrs, with their wives and children and goods and valuables, had come into the city from all the country round, and consequently I had sent some amirs with their

regiments into the city and directed them to pay no attention to the remonstrances of the inhabitants, but to seize and bring out these fugitives. For these several reasons a great number of fierce Turki soldiers were in the city. When the soldiers proceeded to apprehend the Hindus and gabrs who had fled to the city, many of them drew their swords and offered resistance. The flames of strife were thus lighted and spread through the whole city from Jahan-panah and Siri to Old Dehli, burning up all it reached. The savage Turks fell to killing and plundering. The Hindus set fire to their houses with their own hands, burned their wives and children in them, and rushed into the fight and were killed. The Hindus and gabrs of the city showed much alacrity and boldness in fighting. The amirs who were in charge of the gates prevented any more soldiers from going into the place, but the flames of war had risen too high for this precaution to be of any avail in extinguishing them. On that day, Thursday, and all the night of Friday, nearly fifteen thousand Turks were engaged in slaying, plundering and destroying. When morning broke on the Friday, all my army, no longer under control, went off to the city and thought of nothing but killing, plundering and making prisoners. All that day the sack was general. The following day, Saturday, the 17th, all passed in the same way, and the spoil was so great that each man secured from fifty to a hundred prisoners, men, women and children. There was no man who took less than twenty. The other booty was immense in rubies, diamonds, garnets, pearls, and other gems; jewels of gold and silver; ashrafis, tankas of gold and silver of the celebrated Alai coinage; vessels of gold and silver; and brocades and silks of great value. Gold and silver ornaments of the Hindu women were obtained in such quantities as to exceed all account. Excepting the quarter of the saiyids, the ulama and the other Musulmans, the whole city was sacked. The pen of fate had written down this destiny for the people of this city. Although I was desirous of sparing them I could not succeed, for it was the will of God that this calamity should fall upon the city.

On the following day, Sunday, it was brought to my knowledge that a great number of infidel Hindus had assembled in the Masjid-i Jami of Old Dehli, carrying with them arms and provisions, and were preparing to defend themselves. Some of my people who had gone that way on business were wounded by them. I immediately ordered Amir Shah Malik and Ali Sultan Tawachi to take a party of men and proceed to clear the house of God from

infidels and idolaters. They accordingly attacked these infidels and put them to death. Old Dehli then was plundered.

I ordered that all the artisans and clever mechanics, who were masters of their respective crafts, should be picked out from among the prisoners and set aside, and accordingly some thousands of craftsmen were selected to await my command. All these I distributed among the princes and amirs who were present, or who were engaged officially in other parts of my dominions. I had determined to build a Masjid-i Jami in Samarkand, the seat of my empire, which should be without a rival in any country; so I ordered that all builders and stonemasons should be set apart for my own especial service.

By the will of God, and by no wish or direction of mine, all the three cities of Dehli, by name Siri, Jahan-panah and Old Dehli, had been plundered. The khutba of my sovereignty, which is an assurance of safety and protection, had been read in the city. It was therefore my earnest wish that no evil might happen to the people of the place. But it was ordained by God that the city should be ruined. He therefore inspired the infidel inhabitants with a spirit of resistance, so that they brought on themselves that fate which was inevitable.

When my mind was no longer occupied with the destruction of the people of Dehli, I took a ride round the cities. Siri is a round city. Its buildings are lofty. They are surrounded by fortifications, built of stone and brick, and they are very strong. Old Dehli also has a similar strong fort, but it is larger than that of Siri. From the fort of Siri to that of Old Dehli, which is a considerable distance, there runs a strong wall, built of stone and cement. The part called Jahan-panah is situated in the midst of the inhabited city. The fortifications of the three cities have thirty gates. Jahan-panah has thirteen gates, seven on the south side bearing towards the east, and six on the north side bearing towards the west. Siri has seven gates, four towards the outside and three on the inside towards Jahan-panah. The fortifications of Old Dehli have ten gates, some opening to the exterior and some towards the interior of the city. When I was tired of examining the city I went into the Masjid-i Jami, where a congregation was assembled of saiyids, lawyers, shaikhs and other of the principal Musulmans, with the inhabitants of their parts of the city, to whom they had been a protection and defence. I called them to my presence, consoled them, treated them with every respect, and bestowed upon them many presents and honours. I appointed an

officer to protect their quarter of the city, and guard them against annoyance. Then I re-mounted and returned to my quarters.

Entry into Delhi

BABUR

This account, written in 1526, is taken from the Babur Nama, *and has been translated by Annette Beveridge.*

(21 April) We marched next day and when we had gone two miles, dismounted for the sake of the horses on a bank of the Jamuna.

(24 April) On Tuesday, 12 Rajab, after we had halted on two nights and had circumambulated the tomb of Shaikh Nizam Uddin Auliya, we dismounted on a bank of the Jamuna opposite Delhi. That night we made an excursion into the fort of Delhi and spent the night there.

(25 April) I circumambulated the tomb of Khwaja Qutb Uddin [a native of Osh in Fergana] and visited the tombs and residences of Sultan Ghiyas Uddin Balban and Sultan Ala Uddin Khilji and his minaret, the Qutb Minar, and his tanks called Hauz Shamsi and Hauz Khas—and the tombs and gardens of Sultan Buhlul Lodi and Sultan Sikandar Lodi. Having done this, we dismounted at the camp, and there drank araq.

We bestowed the Military Collectorate of Delhi on Wali Qizil, made Dost Beg the finance minister of the Delhi district, sealed the treasuries, and made them over to their charge.

(26 April) We dismounted on a bank of the Jamuna opposite Tughlaqabad.

(27 April) On Friday, Mallah Mahmoud Farabi and Shaikh Zain Khawafi went with a few others into Delhi for the Congregational Prayer, read the qutba (i.e. declaration of the legitimacy of the new ruler) in my name at the Congregational Mosque, Jam-e Masjid, distributed a portion of the treasury money to the poor and needy, and returned to the camp.

The Building of Shahjahanabad

SAMSAM-UD-DAULA

The opulence of the Mughal empire was at its zenith during the reign of Shah Jahan, probably the wealthiest man in the world in his time. Shahjahanabad, the palace complex that he built in Delhi, took over nine years to complete and cost 6.5 million rupees. This extract is taken from the eighteenth-century text Maathir-ul-Umara.

The engineers after extensive search selected a site which was situated close to the Capital, Delhi, and was situated between its outskirts and Nurgarh. On the 25th Dhu'l Hijja of the twelfth year, 1048 AH (19 April 1639), in accordance with the royal orders, building arrangements were assigned to the Governor of Delhi Ghairat Khan, nephew of Abdullah Khan Firuz Jang. And on the 9th Muharram (2 May) of the same year the foundations of that impregnable fortress were laid. And a huge contingent of trained stonemasons, skilled in both plain and decorative work, builders and carpenters were brought from all parts of the kingdom in accordance with royal orders, and building work was started. After only a part of the foundation had been laid, and some necessary materials collected, Ghairat Khan was nominated as the Governor of Thatha, and the governorship of the suba of Delhi and the arrangements for the construction of the lofty building were, therefore, assigned to Ilahawardi Khan. In two years and some days he was able to raise the walls of the fort to a height of ten yards along the river bank. After that the governorship of the said suba and the control of building operations was transferred to Mukramat Khan, who held the high office of the Mir-i-Saman. As a result of his unstinted efforts this huge fort with its heavenly appurtenances was completed in the twentieth year. It had on all corners heavenly palaces, and at every angle gardens and parks; in its layout and beauty it resembled a Chinese picture gallery, but surpassed the latter in its grandeur:

So much skill has been expended in its construction,
That skill itself is busy in its decoration.

One of the prophetic sayings of Amir Khusru, which he had composed earlier in praise of Delhi, was now fulfilled:

Verily if there is a Paradise on earth,
It is this, it is this, it is this.

At a cost of sixty lakhs of rupees [the fort] was completed in nine years, three months and some days.

The lofty fort, which is octagonal according to the Baghdad style, is 1,000 royal yards long, and 300 yards broad. Its walls are built on the red stone of Fathpur. Its height including the battlements, from the foot of the wall, is 12½ yards. Its area is six lakh yards, which is double of the great fort of Akbarabad (Agra) and its perimetre is 1,650 yards. It has twenty-one bastions, seven circular and fourteen octagonal; four gates and two windows. Round it is a moat twenty yards wide and ten yards deep; this is supplied with water from a canal connected on two sides with the river Jumna—except on the east side where the wall of the fort abuts directly on to the river—it was built at a cost of twenty-one lakhs of rupees. The royal mansions, consisting of the Shah Mahal with a silver roof, Imtiyaz Mahal with the bedroom known as the Burj-i-Tala (the Golden Chamber), and the private and public Daulat Khana (Palace), and the Hayat Bakhsh garden cost twenty-eight lakhs of rupees. The palaces of the Begum Sahiba and other chaste inmates of the harem cost seven lakhs, and other buildings, such as the bazaar and the guard houses inside the mighty fort, which were designed to serve for the royal manufactories, were completed at a cost of four lakhs.



On 24th Rabi I, 1058 AH (8 April 1648) in the twenty-first year of the reign, which day had been selected by the royal astrologers for the royal entry, orders were issued for arranging the paraphernalia of a royal feast and a convivial entertainment …

From the date of the auspicious entry of the Emperor into the heavenly building there was a continuous grand feast lasting ten days. Every day hundred people were exalted with the grants of suitable Khil’ats, many were gratified by

increases in their ranks and the grant of titles, while others received grants in cash, horses and elephants.

Mir Yahiya Kashi composed the following chronogram of the date of completion of this great edifice:

Shud Shahjahanabad az Shah Jahanabad (Shahjahanabad was established by Shah Jahan)
1058 AH = 1648 AD.

The Untouchables

KHUSHWANT SINGH

This extract is taken from Delhi: A Novel.

It was a few days before Diwali that news of the Badshah Jahangir's death was heard in Dilli. No one was allowed to light a lamp or kindle a fire in their hearth for some days. Our elders said that anyone seen smiling or heard laughing during the next forty days would have his head cut off. My mother would not let me go out to play with the other boys lest I forgot not to shout or laugh. That is why although I was only a small boy I can never forget that badshah's death.

When I asked my Bapu the name of the badshah who had died, he said 'What will you do with the badshah's name?' None of the sweepers or cobblers in Rikabganj knew his name. Only the Mussalmans who lived in the sarai alongside the mosque and the contractor Lakhi Rai, who lived in a big stone house with his wives, eight sons and their wives, knew the badshah's name. These Mussalmans and Lakhi Rai's family went about with long faces as if their own mother's mother had died. Some people feel very big if they can cry over the deaths of big people.

'What have we poor untouchables to do with kings!' I remember my Bapu saying. 'They are all the same to us. One goes, another comes, *zulum* goes on.'

I did not know who zulum was. When I was a little older my Bapu told me that zulum was not a man but what the rich did to the poor. We untouchables were the poorest of the poor. No one did anything to us except run away if we came near them. That, said my Bapu, was also a kind of zulum. It was in our karma. We had done bad things in our previous births. That is why we were born black and had to do all the dirty work.

My Bapu called every badshah a zalim. This one who had just died, said my Bapu, was a very bad man because he drank more wine than Uncle Reloo who

was drunk most of the time. Uncle Reloo told me that the badshah could drink twenty cups of arrack and eat tolas of opium every day and yet poke his queen and the other women of his harem every night.

It was not so much the badshah's drinking or womanizing that had made my father angry with him as what he had done to our Guru. 'What is it to us how much he drinks and whose mother he fucks,' he used to say. 'But perish the man who raises his hand against our Guru.' Most of us untouchables of Rikabganj had attached ourselves to the lotus feet of the Guru and begun to call ourselves the Sikhs of Nanak. No one had seen Nanak or the Gurus who came after him to save us. The badshah who had just died had killed our fifth Guru Arjun and put his son Hargobind in jail. So there was no reason for us to beat our breasts on this badshah's death.

Some years after he became king [the new] badshah, Shah Jahan, came to Dilli. He liked our city very much and said: 'I am going to live here.' He sent for his chief builder, Mukarram Khan, and told him: 'Make a big fort along the river Jamuna, and inside that fort make palaces for myself and my queens. I also want the biggest mosque in the world.' Mukarram Khan bowed three times before the badshah and replied: 'Badshah, peace be upon you! If Allah wills I will build you as big a fort as at Agra with as many canals and gardens and fountains. You will also have the world's biggest and most beautiful mosque. I will build it on Bhojla Hill so it can be seen from Palam and Qutub.' Then Mukarram Khan asked Ustad Ahmed and Ustad Hira to make maps. When that was done he asked the badshah to come to Dilli. 'Badshah, peace be upon you! Now put down the foundation stone, so we can get on with work.'

What years they were! Everyone got work. We gave up skinning dead cows and buffaloes and carrying other people's shit. Lakhi Rai got a contract to supply labour. As I was now old enough, he gave me a job to carry mud and stones.

Dilli began to change. Every day a new building! Every day the city wall rising higher! Every day new minarets and domes rising into the sky! And so it went for many years. When the work was finished we had nine days of tamasha. Princes showered silver coins on the crowds. The badshah rode through the city on his biggest elephant and scattered gold coins by the palmful. His courtiers said, 'We won't call Dilli Dilli any more. We will rename it Shahjahanabad.' But Dilli is Dilli and no king or nobleman can give it another name.

For some years after the building of Shahjahanabad, the badshah liked Dilli more than Agra. Then he began to like Agra more than Dilli. His visits to our city became less and less frequent. Tradesmen and artisans began to move back to Agra. People began to say that very soon Shahjahanabad would become like the other old cities of Dilli: Mehrauli, Siri, Chiragh, Tughlakabad, Kotla Firozeshah and Kilokheri, the abode of Gujars, jackals, hyenas and owls.

I did not earn very much sweeping drains and cleaning latrines and had to borrow money from the Bania and Lakhi Rai. I had to pay interest on their money and when I was unable to do that, they refused to lend me any more. Because of this I was forced to take employment in the executioner's yard attached to the kotwali in Chandni Chowk. This was really dirty work: first I had to get used to seeing a man's head being hacked off; then see his arms and legs cut off. After this had happened it was my job to put the pieces together and lay them out for the people to see. As I worked I could hear the onlookers avoiding me as if I were a murderer. Every evening there were at least three to four unclaimed corpses to be carted off and dumped in the river or on the garbage mound. What will man not do to fill his belly!

As I said before, I did not like this work. I did not like to shout dom, dom whenever I went out with the cartload of corpses. I did not like people covering their children's eyes against me and blocking their nostrils against the smelly load I carried. Even the sentries at the city gates would draw aside to let me pass. I used to console myself by recalling my Bapu's words: 'Son, only two people can pass through the gates of Shahjahanabad without being questioned: the King and the untouchable!'

It was on one of his visits to Dilli that Badshah Shah Jahan was taken ill. They tried to keep it secret but within a few hours everyone knew about the sultan's ailment, mainly through the badshah's doctor who was a gossip …

My Bapu used to say that when a father hiccups his sons go for his purse. That was certainly true about the badshah's four sons. No sooner had they heard of their old man's illness than their hands were on the hilts of their swords.

The king's sons fought each other as hungry dogs fight over a bone. Dara's son, Sulaiman Shikoh, defeated Shuja. Meanwhile Murad and Aurangzeb defeated Dara, captured Agra and made their old father prisoner. Then this fellow Aurangzeb tricked his brother Murad: he got him drunk, tied him up and

threw him into a dungeon. He then finished off Shuja, Dara and Dara's sons. This was how we had a new badshah—Aurangzeb—while the old badshah Shah Jahan was still alive. The Mussalmans in the sarai were happy. They said that the new badshah was a good man. He did not drink wine; he did not have concubines or courtesans; he did not allow dancing and singing in the palace; he ate little, slept little and prayed a lot. He spent on himself only what he earned by making copies of their holy book and selling them. They said if all kings had been like him, Hindustan would have long ago been rid of kafirs. Alamgir was the name they used for him—'Alamgir, *Zinda Peer*, is a living saint,' they said.

Lakhi Rai was not happy. The new badshah did not give him any contracts. One day many years later when I was eating his leftovers in his courtyard I told him that the Mussalmans said Aurangzeb was a man of God because he did not drink wine or womanize. He lost his temper and said, 'What about that slut Hira Bai?' Then he got frightened and made me swear that I would never tell anyone of what he had said. But I could not get Hira Bai's name out of my mind. I asked the Bania, who also sometimes gave me his leftovers, about her. He made a ring with the thumb and index finger of his left hand and pierced it with a finger of his right hand. 'But that Hira Bai is dead,' he said. The Bania did not like Aurangzeb because he had imposed *jazia* tax on the Hindus. 'Don't tell anyone I told you,' he said in a low voice, 'but a tribe called the Marathas are going to finish him. Their leader Shivaji has stuck a big bamboo pole up the bottoms of these Mughals. Haven't you heard how this Shivaji tore out the bowels of one of the badshah's generals with his hands? In the name of Ram, don't breathe a word about this to anyone or they will slit my throat.'

I couldn't keep secrets. One day I asked the Mussalman cook at the sarai if he had ever heard of Shivaji. He almost spat in my face. 'Where did you pick up the name of that dirty kafir?' he asked angrily. 'He murdered the brave General Afzal Khan who was embracing him as a friend. That is the kind of *moozi* he is. The badshah has sent an army against him. If Allah wills, the rat will be flushed out of his hole and destroyed. Inshallah!'

Some months later the Mussalman cook gave me an extra large portion of leftovers. He looked very happy. 'Have you heard of that Shivaji of yours? He has been captured and brought in chains to Agra. He will be sent to hell.' When I told this to the Bania, he said it was a lie and that Shivaji had come of his own

free will to talk to the king. For many days everyone in Dilli was talking of this man Shivaji. The Mussalmans said he was a great villain and that the king would cut off his head. The Hindus said he was a great hero. Then we heard that he had escaped and returned to his mountain kingdom in the Deccan. ‘Didn’t I tell you so?’ said the Bania to me. ‘They can never catch him. Ramji is his protector.’

The king was very angry. He ordered Hindu temples at Varanasi and Mathura to be destroyed. The Bania who was so frightened of the Mussalmans called the badshah a zalim. ‘Whenever there is too much zulum,’ he said, ‘God sends an avatar to destroy zalims. It is written in the Gita.’ Even Lakhi Rai who kept up with the Mussalmans wagged his head and said, ‘This is Kaliyuga (the dark age), God will send an avatar to save us.’

The zulum went on but no avatar came to stop it. When the Jats and Brahmins of village Tilpat, which is a few kos in the direction of the rising sun, claimed land which belonged to their temple, the badshah sent his army against them and blew up their village. Their leader, Gokula Jat, and all his supporters were brought to Dilli and executed. No avatar came to save them.

Three years later there was a worse zulum at Narnaul. Sadhus of the Satnami sect were slain by the thousand. No avatar came to save them or punish the zalim badshah.

I asked Lakhi Rai about the coming of the avatar. He just shook his head. I asked him whether our Guru could be the avatar. ‘Which Guru?’ he asked. ‘There are so many. And all they do is to send their agents to collect money.’ That was strange talk from Lakhi Rai!

I began to lose faith in the Guru. The Mussalmans in the sarai made fun of him. ‘Who is this robber you worship?’ one fellow asked me. The mullah of the mosque (may his mouth be filled with dung!) said: ‘The badshah will soon bring this Guru of yours to the path of obedience and teach him that the only way of approaching Allah is through His only Messenger, Mohammed—upon Whom be peace.’ Although I knew nothing about this Guru I did not like Mussalmans talking like that about him. When the Guru was captured at Agra and brought to Dilli in chains, the Mussalmans mocked: ‘We told you this Guru of yours is a robber! The entire gang will be hanged.’

I saw the Guru and three Sikhs who had been arrested with him. I said to myself: ‘If he is an avatar he will save himself and destroy the zalims.’ I prayed

that he would fly out of his cell or perform some other miracle so that I could show my face to the Mussalmans of Rikabganj.

But who cares for the prayers of poor untouchables? There was this judge Qazi Abdul Wahab. His Allah had made him so deaf that everyone called him *behra* qazi. He sentenced the Guru and his three followers to death. He ordered their bodies to be displayed in front of the kotwali for everyone to see. For the first time even the timid Lakhi Rai became brave. 'This must not happen,' he said to me. 'The Guru has refused to save his life, but we must not allow them to dishonour his body.' The rich contractor addressed me as Jaitaji. Before this he had always called me 'Jaitoo' or, worse, 'O *choorha* (sweeper).' How was I to know Lakhi Rai was not a spy? I kept quiet. Silence is the best friend of the poor.

Everyone in Dilli was talking about the miracle the Guru would perform. They said anyone who raised his hand against him or his companions would go blind. The kotwal could not find anyone in Dilli to carry out the sentence of death and had to send for one Jalaluddin all the way from Samana in the Punjab. This Jalaluddin hated the Sikhs and their Gurus …

A few days after the Diwali-without-lights, Jalaluddin cut off the heads of the Sikhs captured with the Guru. Jalaluddin did not go blind; nothing happened to him. Now it was the turn of the Guru. The behra qazi said, 'Jalaluddin, we'll cut off the Guru's head on Thursday. His body will be exposed to public gaze after prayer on Friday. Everyone in Dilli will see which is mightier, the sword of Islam or the neck of an infidel!' Everyone in the world knows that whenever the blood of a good man is spilled in Dilli, the Great God who lives in the sky makes his anger known. On Thursday the sun came up like a ball of fire. Everyone said: 'Something terrible is going to happen today.' Even the Mussalmans were anxious and hoped the badshah who was away beyond the Punjab would get to know and would cancel the order of the behra qazi. The kotwal told me that he had prayed all night. 'It will be very bad for the Mussalmans if this Guru is martyred,' he said shaking his head.

The Guru performed no miracle. With the name of God on his lips he permitted the monster Jalaluddin of Samana to sever his head from his body. The town crier went round beating his drum and yelling that 'justice' had been done

and that the Guru's body would be exposed in front of the kotwali for two days and nights for all to see and learn a lesson.

I brought the news to Rikabganj. In the afternoon all the Sikhs and Hindus of Rikabganj gathered under a tree. No one said anything. The men sighed and the women wept. The Mussalmans of the sarai watched us from a distance. Even they seemed to be touched by our grief.

As I sat in that crowd listening to the sighing and whimpering a strange feeling came over me. We had done nothing to save the life of our Guru—and now they were going to expose his naked body to the gaze of crowds and for animals to tear and birds to peck! What kind of devotees were we? My blood boiled within me; I felt very hot and angry with myself. Most of the Guru's disciples were high-born Kshatriyas and Jat peasants who boasted loudly of their bravery. They had done nothing to save their Guru. I, an untouchable, could teach these high-caste fellows how a Guru's Sikh should act. It might cost me my life, but I would win the respect of the world for my untouchable brethren.

I slipped away. Lakhi Rai saw me get up and followed me. 'I have some work for you, Jaitaji,' he said, putting his hand on my shoulder, adding meaningfully, 'if you are man enough to do it.' This was the first time he had touched me. I was not sure of this rich contractor—one can never be sure of rich people. I replied, 'I have to be on duty at the kotwali.' Lakhi Rai said: 'I will come with you. I also have business at the kotwali.' What was his game? I really did not care to find out. However, I felt not Lakhi Rai's but my Guru's hand on my shoulder. I was not afraid of anyone in the world—not of the badshah or the behra qazi or that Jalaluddin; not even of the Mughal soldiers or the kotwal and his constabulary.

Lakhi Rai had several bullock carts lined up on the road. They were loaded with bales of cotton. His eight sons were with him. As he was a government contractor, he and his family were allowed to carry weapons. All the men were armed with swords and spears. Lakhi Rai always guarded his caravans in this way and everyone knew him. We left Rikabganj in the afternoon.

When we reached Paharganj, the sun suddenly disappeared. The wind dropped. Hundreds of kites began circling above us. We could see a dark brown wall come sweeping in from the west. As we came to the city wall, the circle of

kites moved overhead towards the Royal Mosque. Then the storm overtook us with a fury I would not have thought possible.

The guards at Ajmeri Gate had muffled their faces with the ends of their turbans and waved us on. The storm swept us through Qazi-ka-Hauz, through Lal Kuan and past Begum Fatehpuri's mosque into Chandni Chowk. We arrived at the kotwali.

Who knows the inscrutable designs of the Guru? The duststorm had turned the day into night. Every door and window had been shut against the dust. The guards had bolted themselves in their barracks. And the only sound was the howling of the wind.

I had no difficulty in finding the Guru's body. I touched his feet and then slung his body over my shoulders. I took his head in my hands and walked through the blinding duststorm. Lakhi Rai and his sons also touched the Guru's feet. We laid his body and head on one of the bullock carts, piled bales of cotton over it and turned our carts around. The storm that had driven us into Chandni Chowk drove us backwards through the same bazaar, out of Ajmeri Gate to Paharganj. When we arrived at Rikabganj, the wind suddenly dropped and the dust disappeared. The night had come on.

Lakhi Rai's wife and daughters-in-law had made a pyre of sandalwood in the centre of their courtyard. We placed the Guru's body on it. All the family touched his feet. Lakhi Rai said a short prayer and lit the pyre. His wife brought out a shawl and wrapped the Guru's head in it. 'Take this to the Guru's son in Anandpur,' she said, handing me the bundle. 'The Guru will take you there in safety.'

As I went up the ridge, I looked back to make sure no one was following me. In the distance the flames of the funeral pyre in the courtyard of Lakhi Rai's house flickered. The storm had gone as suddenly as it had come and the sky was clear and full of stars. It was a few days after the full moon. I quickened my steps. By the time the moon came up, I was many kos from Dilli on the way to Anandpur.

At last the Guru had performed the great miracle. He had given a carrier of shit and stinking carcasses the privilege of carrying his sacred head in his arms. Hereafter anyone who called me unclean would have his mouth stuffed with dung. I was now Jaita Rangreta, the true son of the Guru.

In the Time of Aurangzeb

NICCOLAO MANUCCI

This extract is taken from Storia do Mogor, *an account of Niccolao Manucci's travels in India between 1653 and 1708. It has been translated by William Irvine.*

After his accession, Aurangzeb observed that chiefly in Dihli, there was great licence among Mohammedans and Hindus in the consumption of wine, although most repugnant to this king, who declared himself a strict follower of the Quran. This licence began in the time of Jahangir, although Akbar was the first to give leave to the Christians to prepare and drink wine; but in his time the Mohammedans did not drink. The evil example of Jahangir established this custom among the Mohammedans. In the days of Shahjahan they drank with full liberty, just as if drinking water, encouraged by Dara's example. Nor did Shahjahan, although not a drinker himself, care to remedy this disorder, but left everyone to live as he pleased, contenting himself with passing his days among women.

It was so common to drink spirits when Aurangzeb ascended the throne, that one day he said in a passion that in all Hindustan no more than two men could be found who did not drink, namely, himself and Abd-ul-wahhab, the chief qazi appointed by him. But with respect to Abd-ul-wahhab he was in error, for I myself sent him every day a bottle of spirits, which he drank in secret, so that the king could not find it out. Aurangzeb wished to repress this disorder, and therefore ordered that all Christains, excepting physicians and surgeons, should leave the city and remove to near the park of artillery, which was beyond the suburbs at one league's distance from the city. There they had leave to prepare and drink spirits on condition they did not sell them.

After the issue of this order he directed the kotwal to search out Mohammedans and Hindus who sold spirits, everyone of whom was to lose one

hand and one foot. Without fail the kotwal went out to search for the vendors, although himself one of the consumers. One day I saw him carry out such a sentence on six Mohammedans and six Hindus; after the punishment he ordered them to be trailed to a dung heap, leaving them there to die discreetly. This penal order was in force for a time, so that no vendors were to be found; for whenever the kotwal suspected that spirits were made in any house, he sent his soldiers to plunder everything in it. The regulations were strict at first, but little by little they were relaxed; and during the period of strictness the nobles, who found it hard to live without spirits, distilled in their houses, there being few who did not drink secretly.

I have said that the Christians had leave to prepare spirits for their own consumption, but were prohibited from selling them. On this account sentinels were kept over them to watch that they did not sell. In spite of this, the gain being great, they did not refrain, by resorting to a thousand expedients, from selling them on the sly, although when the offence was discovered the kotwal used to send and plunder the house, the still being hung round the offender's neck, and then he was taken through the streets chained, and buffeted on his way to the kotwal's house. On arrival there half-dead he was locked up in prison, and only released after many months with a fine and a beating.

So accustomed are the Mohammedans to intoxication that the poor people, who have not enough funds to procure spirits, invented another beverage, called in the language of the country bhang. It is nothing else than leaves of dried hemp ground down, which intoxicate as soon as taken. Aurangzeb also wanted to suppress this disorder. He therefore appointed an official under the title of matucib [muhtasib], whose business it was to prevent the use of this beverage or of others similar to it. Not a day passed that on rising in the morning we did not hear the breaking by blows and strokes of the pots and pans in which these beverages are prepared. But, seeing that the ministers themselves also drank and loved to get drunk, the rigour of prohibition was lightened by degrees.

Aurangzeb did another very ridiculous thing to show himself a scrupulous observer of the faith. This was the issue of an order that no Mohammedan should wear a beard longer than four finger-breadths. Now the Moguls are much concerned with the preservation of their big beards, using for this many unguents. An official was appointed whose business it was, in company with his

attendants and soldiers, to measure beards in the middle of the street, and, if necessary, dock them. This order was not carried out, except against ordinary people, the official not daring to meddle with the nobles or the soldiers for fear of receiving injury to himself. It was, however, amusing to see the official in charge of beards rushing hither and thither, laying hold of wretched men by the beard, in order to measure and cut off the excess, and clipping their moustaches to uncover the lips. This last was done so that, when pronouncing the name, there might be no impediment to the sound ascending straight to heaven. It was equally quaint to see the soldiers and others covering their faces with their shawls when they beheld from afar the said official, for fear of some affront.

Not resting content with the above orders, Aurangzeb took steps against the excessive number of musicians. In Hindustan both Moguls and Hindus are very fond of listening to songs and instrumental music. He therefore ordered the same official to stop music. If in any house or elsewhere he heard the sound of singing and instruments, he should forthwith hasten there and arrest as many as he could, breaking the instruments. Thus was caused a great destruction of musical instruments. Finding themselves in this difficulty, their large earnings likely to cease, without there being any other mode of seeking a livelihood, the musicians took counsel together and tried to appease the king in the following way: About one thousand of them assembled on a Friday when Aurangzeb was going to the mosque. They came out with over twenty highly ornamented biers, as is the custom of the country, crying aloud with great grief and many signs of feeling, as if they were escorting to the grave some distinguished defunct. From afar Aurangzeb saw this multitude and heard their great weeping and lamentation, and, wondering, sent to know the cause of so much sorrow. The musicians redoubled their outcry and their tears, fancying the king would take compassion upon them. Lamenting, they replied with sobs that the king’s orders had killed Music, therefore they were bearing her to the grave. Reports were made to the king, who quite calmly remarked that they should pray for the soul of Music, and see that she was thoroughly well buried. In spite of this, the nobles did not cease to listen to songs in secret.

In the reign of Shahjahan female dancers and public women enjoyed great liberty, and were found in great numbers in the cities. For a time, at the beginning of his reign, Aurangzeb said nothing, but afterwards he ordered that

they must either marry or clear out of the realm. This was the cause that the palaces and great enclosures where they dwelt went to ruin little by little; for some of them married and others went away, or, at least, concealed themselves.

The Early Days of the British

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

This extract is taken from City of Djinns.

The most detailed of the early descriptions [by the first British men to penetrate the city's walls] was that written by Lieutenant William Franklin. Franklin had been sent to Delhi by the directors of the East India Company to survey the then unknown heartlands of the empire of the Great Mughal. Franklin's account of his discoveries, published in Calcutta in the 1795 *Asiatick Researches* (the journal of the newly founded Royal Asiatic Society) painted a melancholy picture of the once-great capital.

Franklin had approached the city on horseback from the northwest. His first glimpse was of a landscape littered with crumbling ruins: 'The environs are crowded with the remains of spacious gardens and the country houses of the nobility,' he wrote in his report. 'The prospect towards Delhi, as far as the eye can reach, is covered with the remains of gardens, pavilions, mosques and burying places. The environs of this once magnificent and celebrated city appear now nothing more than a shapeless heap of ruins …' Inside the city walls, the decay was equally apparent. Shacks had been erected in the middle of the grandest streets of Delhi 'so that it is only with difficulty [that] a person can discover their former situation'. The bazaars were 'indifferently furnished' and their commerce 'very trifling'.

Most dramatic of all were the crumbling remains of the vast palaces of the omrahs (great nobles) of the empire. Though now in ruins and often occupied by squatters, it was still possible to see their extraordinary size and grandeur; that of Qamar-al-Din Khan 'occupied the whole length of one side of a considerable street'. Franklin was impressed:

> All these palaces are surrounded with high walls and take up a considerable space of ground. Their entrances are through lofty arched gateways, at the top of which are the galleries for music; before each is a spacious court for the elephants, horses and attendants … All of the palaces [once] had gardens with stone reservoirs and fountains in the centre … Each palace was likewise provided with a handsome set of baths and a *teh khana* [a set of domed marble cool-rooms] underground …

Franklin published his account of the Mughal capital in 1795. Eight years later, following a British victory at the Battle of Delhi, a permanent British Resident was installed within the ruins of another palace, a little to the north of the Red Fort. Just as Delhi was no longer the focal point of India—like the rest of India, it now looked nervously over its shoulder to British Calcutta—so within the city the focus shifted from the Red Fort to the British Residency. As the first half of the nineteenth century progressed and the power and arrogance of the British grew, so the Resident came to act less and less like ambassador to the Great Mughal, and more and more like the Mughal's paymaster and overlord.

Nevertheless the Emperor continued to hold court as he had always done, and at first the charade of Mughal power was maintained with the express approval of the British residents. These early residents were a series of sympathetic and slightly eccentric Scotsmen, whose love and respect for India was reflected by their adoption of Indian modes of dress and Indian ways of living.

The first, Sir David Ochterlony, set the tone. With his fondness for hookahs and nautch girls and Indian costumes, Ochterlony was decidedly different from the normal run of starch-shirted, stiff-lipped burra sahibs. Although known to the common people as 'Loony Akhtar' (or Crazy Star), when in the capital he liked to be addressed by his proper Mughal title, Nasir-ud-Daula (Defender of the State), and to live the life of a Mughal gentleman. Every evening all thirteen of his Indian wives used to process around Delhi behind their husband, each on the back of her own elephant.

Yet perhaps the most fascinating of all the British in Delhi was not Ochterlony but another Scot, William Fraser, a young Persian scholar from Inverness. In 1805, Fraser was sent up to Delhi from Calcutta where he had just won a gold medal at the Company's Fort William College. He was to be the Resident's Assistant; it was his first job …

William Fraser's grandfather, James Fraser, had worked in India as a young man and on his return had sat in the library of his family home in Moniack, near Inverness, writing the first history in English of the Persian marauder, Nadir

Shah. Forty years later, as the debts at Moniack mounted, Edward Satchwell Fraser was forced to revive his father's Indian connections. One by one William and his four brothers all received postings in the subcontinent; one by one they caught a ship to Edinburgh, where they had their portraits painted by Raeburn, before continuing their journey on to London and the waiting ship in East India Dock. Of the five who left for the subcontinent, only one ever made it back to Moniack.

After leaving Calcutta in June 1805, William's steamer up the Ganges finally terminated at Allahabad, a last British outpost. The remaining stretch of the journey to Delhi was overland through some 400 miles of the most anarchic country in India. 'On the road I passed several parties of armed men whom I knew to be plunderers,' William later wrote to his father. 'I always passed any who I met at a very quick pace … They generally keep about a hundred yards [away] and fire with their matchlocks and are so expert that your only chance is in moving about to avoid their fire or riding straight upon them with your pistol. I talk of them when mounted; footmen robbers never show themselves but fire from some ambush.'

Nights were worse. The servants were kept constantly on the alert until dawn for fear of losing both horses and baggage to footpads and thugs. It was a ragged and exhausted party which, several weeks later, entered the Turkman Gate of Shahjahanabad and headed for the Residency. William rode into the compound, mounted the steps, and breakfasted with Ochterlony, 'six months and a day since I left Calcutta'.

Delhi cannot have been very different from the grand but crumbling slum described by Franklin; yet for all its decay the city soon cast its spell on William. Its remoteness must have been perfectly familiar to anyone brought up in eighteenth-century Inverness, while its literary and historical associations must have appealed to the prize-winning Orientalist. 'My situation is as desirable as any one I could hold,' William wrote in his first letter home, 'nor should I care if I lived here during the whole period of my sojournment in India.'

It was a prophetic letter. In the course of a career lasting thirty years, William refused all appointments which would take him away from the city. Like many other Britons after him, William had become completely hypnotized by the great capital.

His early letters gave detailed descriptions of the court of Shah Alam and the palaces of the preceding dynasties which lay scattered among the ruins to the south of the city. William's duties—attending the Mughal court, hearing petitions at the Residency, establishing the Delhi criminal courts—seem to have been flexible enough to allow him to pursue his growing interest in Delhi's history.

'The business of my situation generally takes up five hours [a day],' he explained to his parents. '[Afterwards] I read and study with pleasure the [local] languages. They are the chief source of my amusement, [although] Delhi affords much [other] food besides. Learned natives there are a few, and in poverty, but those I have met with are real treasures. I am also making a collection of good oriental manuscripts.'

The miniatures William gathered in Delhi are probably the group now known as the Emperor's (or Kevorkian) Album which today forms the core of the oriental manuscript collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The bound book which contained these miniatures was discovered in a Scottish antique shop in 1929 by Jack Rolfe, an American tourist. He bought the book for less than £100 and resold it in Sotheby's a few months later for £10,500. The album is now recognized as one of the finest collections of Imperial Mughal manuscripts in existence and today each leaf from its folios would be worth at least a six-figure sum.

Whether or not the Emperor's Album is his collection, William's artistic interests went far beyond the stockpiling of manuscripts. 'I wish to ascertain historically,' he wrote, 'the account of every remarkable place or monument of antiquity, or building erected in commemoration of singular acts of whatever nature. The traditional accounts I receive from natives are generally absurd or contradictory. I must first know how they obtained credence, and then search for the origins of the story …'

In later years, few would deny that Fraser knew the people and country in and around Delhi better than any other Briton. According to the French botanist Victor Jacquemont, 'his mode of life has made him more familiar, perhaps than any other European, with the customs and ideas of the native inhabitants. He has, I think, a real and profound understanding of their inner life.' Even Fraser's enemy, the resident Charles Metcalfe, admitted that William had no 'difficulty

dealing with the highest order of natives, with some of [whom] he has been more intimate than most Europeans.'

Yet it was less his intellectual and linguistic gifts than his devil-may-care bravery which moulded William's career. A few years after his arrival, Fraser was forced to abandon his sedentary pursuits in the city in favour of a nomadic lifestyle around its periphery. Since Mughal authority had collapsed, the hinterland of the capital had become the refuge of robbers and brigands who occupied the crumbling tombs to the south and the decaying Mughal gardens to the north. They made the city unsafe after dark and travel outside the walls impossible, even in broad daylight, without a large armed escort. Fraser had suffered from the brigands on his ride from Allahabad; now he was given the job of flushing them out from their nests and replacing their terror with his own.

William raised and trained a force of irregular cavalry. There are several pictures of his men in the Fraser Album. They are shown both as recruits fresh from the villages with their naked torsos and homespun dhotis and later as fully equipped cavalrymen in Fraser's service. He dressed them not in contemporary Company red coats, but in a theatrical uniform of old-fashioned Napoleonic inspiration, with gleaming cavalry boots, brocaded doublets, and cummerbunds striped gold and scarlet; the uniform was topped with a tall brown busby. Strapped across the chest of each man is a silver plate bearing a hart's head, the Fraser crest.

Fraser's force often faced serious opposition—squadrons of Maratha cavalry were still at large in the Delhi plains—and soon William's letters home had begun to assume a tone of chilling nonchalance. 'I never saw a Mahratta yet whom I would dread to meet single-handed,' he wrote in June 1806:

> The other day I had an opportunity of seeing how they would fight. Two or three rebellious villages within the district of Dehli we were obliged to cut up, and besides storming the villages, we had to disperse parties [of Maratha cavalry] who came to their assistance. They advance gradually, firing their matchlocks till within one hundred yards, when they sling them over their shoulder with a belt and take to the sword and spear. If you have a pistol the matter is easily settled, and you shoot them just when within the length of their spears.

Although such skirmishing earned him 'two fine sabre cuts on the arms, a wound in the back from a pike, and an arrow in the neck which almost killed him' such warfare seems to have greatly excited William. According to his friend Jacquemont, 'to him the most keenly pleasurable emotion is that aroused by

danger: such is the explanation of what people call his madness.' Certainly his letters of 1806-7 are full of remarks about his well-being and contentment: 'My health is robust and uninterruptedly good, which I owe to constant exercise and stout temperance. I seldom have but one meal in the day and never exceed two glasses of Madeira. For occasional recreation I keep horses and hawks and borrow an elephant when I wish to shoot.'

Fraser had taken on the customs and dress of the Indians from the very beginning of his residence in the subcontinent. An early picture shows him sitting in a long Indian robe, a sash around his waist, while on his head he sports a curious Scottish tam o'shanter. One of his first notes home thanks his parents for a letter, using a turn of phrase that could rarely have been heard before on the Beauly Firth—'to use a Persian hyperbole,' he wrote, 'was [your letter] divided into a thousand parts, my double tongued pen could not obey my heart in expressing and writing one of them.' But now, isolated in the wilds of Haryana, controlling an area the size of Wales with only his Mewatti bodyguards for company, Fraser began to 'go native' with a vengeance.

In eighteenth-century India such behaviour was the norm among the more intelligent and open-minded of the Company's servants. But by 1810, the days of the Brahminized Englishmen had long passed and in the more severe and self-righteous atmosphere of nineteenth-century Calcutta such eccentricities had become far from fashionable. When Lady Nugent, the wife of the British Commander-in-Chief, visited Delhi, she was genuinely shocked to discover that Fraser had given up eating pork and beef and had grown a thick Rajput beard. She thought Fraser was as much 'Hindoo as Christian' and felt it necessary to remind him sharply 'of the religion [he] was brought up to'.

According to Jacquemont, Fraser had 'six or seven legitimate wives' who all lived together 'some fifty leagues from Delhi and do as they like'. His children were without number but were all 'Hindus and Muslims according to the religion and caste of their mamas and are shepherds, peasants, mountaineers etc, according to the occupation of their mother's families.'

A picture of William's chief wife survives in the Fraser Album. It shows a tall and exquisite Indian woman, dressed in a slight close-fitting bodice and a long pleated Rajasthani skirt. Her torso is swathed in a jamevar shawl, her hair is worn loose, and her arms are steeled with torcs and tribal bracelets. Her slippers

have upcurled toes. Beside her stands a single boy, aged perhaps six years old. Although he is dressed in Mughal court pyjamas, there is a distinctly European look to his features. The inscription, in Persian, reads simply: ‘Amiban, a Jat woman of Rania, the chosen one of Fraser Sahib, whose delicate beauty was beyond compare …’

The Governor-General’s Visit

EMILY EDEN

This extract is taken from Up the Country, *an account of Emily Eden’s stay in India in the nineteenth century.*

Delhi is one of the few sights, indeed the only one except Lucknow, that has quite equalled my expectations. Four miles round it there is nothing to be seen but gigantic ruins of mosques and palaces, and the actual living city has the finest mosque we have seen yet. It is in such perfect perservation, built entirely of red stone and white marble, with immense flights of marble steps leading up to three sides of it; these, the day we went to it, were entirely covered with people dressed in very bright colours—Sikhs, and Mahrattas, and some of the fair Mogul race, all assembled to see the Governor-General’s suwarree, and I do not think I ever saw so striking a scene. They followed us into the court of the temple, which is surmounted by an open arched gallery, and through every arch there was a view of some fine ruins, or of some part of the King of Delhi’s palace, which is an immense structure two miles round, all built of deep red stone, with buttresses and battlements, and looks like an exaggerated scene of Timour and Tartar, and as if little Agib was to be thrown instantly from the highest tower, and Fatima to be constantly wringing her hands from the top of the battlements. There are hundreds of the Royal family of Delhi who have never been allowed to pass these walls, and never will be. Such a melancholy red stone notion of life as they must have! G [Auckland] went up to the top of one of the largest minarets of the mosque and has been stiff ever since.

From there we went to the black mosque, one of the oldest buildings in India, and came home under the walls of the palace. We passed the building in which Nadir Shah sat for a whole day looking on while he allowed his troops to massacre and plunder the city. These eastern cities are so much more thickly

inhabited than ours, and the people look so defenceless, that a massacre of that sort must be a horrible slaughter; but I own, I think a little simple plunder would be pleasant.

Yesterday we went to the church built by Colonel Skinner. He is a native of this country, a half-caste, but very black, and talks broken English. He has … for the last forty years … done all sorts of gallant things, had seven horses killed under him, and been wounded in proportion; has made several fortunes and lost them; has built himself several fine houses, and has his zenana and heaps of black sons like any other native. He built this church, which is a very curious building, and very magnificent—in some respects; and within sight of it there is a mosque which he has also built, because he said that one way or the other he should be sure to go to heaven. In short, he is one of the people whose lives ought to be written for the particular amusement of succeeding generations. His Protestant church has a dome in the mosque fashion, and I was quite afraid that with the best dispositions to attend to Mr Y, little visions of Mahomet would be creeping in.

G and I took a drive in the evening all round the cantonments, and there is really some pretty scenery about Delhi, and great masses of stone lying about, which looks well after those external sands.

In the afternoon we all (except G, who could not go, from some point of etiquette) went to see the palace. It is a melancholy sight—so magnificent originally, and so poverty-stricken now. The marble hall where the king sits is still very beautiful, all inlaid with garlands and birds of precious stones, and the inscription on the cornice is what Moore would like to see in the original: ‘If there be an Elysium on earth, it is this, it is this!’

The lattices look out on a garden which leads down to the Jumna, and the old king was sitting in the garden with a chowrybadar waving the flies from him; but the garden is all gone to decay too, and ‘the Light of the World’ had a forlorn and darkened look. All our servants were in a state of profound veneration; the natives all look upon the King of Delhi as their rightful lord, and so he is, I suppose. In some of the pavilions belonging to the princes there were such beautiful inlaid floors, any square of which would have made an enviable table for a palace in London, but the stones are constantly stolen; and in some of the finest baths there were dirty charpoys spread, with dirtier guards sleeping on

them. In short, Delhi is a very suggestive and moralizing place—such stupendous remains of power and wealth passed and passing away—and somehow I feel that we horrid English have just ‘gone and done it’, merchandised it, revenued it, and spoiled it all. I am not very fond of Englishmen out of their own country. And Englishwomen did not look pretty at the ball in the evening, and it did not tell well for the beauty of Delhi that the painted ladies of one regiment, who are generally called ‘the little corpses’ (and very hard it is too upon most corpses) were much the prettiest people there, and were besieged with partners.

Well, of all the things I ever saw, I think this is the finest. Did we know about it in England? I mean, did you and I, in our old ancient Briton state, know? Do you know now, without my telling you, what the Kootub is? Don’t be ashamed, there is no harm in not knowing, only I do say it is rather a pity we were so ill taught. I have had so many odd names dinned into me during the countless years I seem to have passed in this country, that I cannot remember the exact degree of purity of mind (which enemies may term ignorance) with which I left home; but after all that had been said, I expected the Kootub would have been rather inferior to the Monument. One has those little prejudices. It happens to be the Monument put at the top of the column in the Place Vendome, and that again placed on a still grander base. It is built of beautiful red granite, is 240 feet high and fifty feet in diameter, and carved all over with sentences from the Koran, each letter a yard high, and the letter again interlaced and ornamented with carved flowers and garlands; it is between six and seven hundred years old, and looks as if it were finished yesterday, and it stands in a wilderness of ruins, carved gateways, and marble tombs, one more beautiful than the other.

They say that the man who built it meant it for one minaret of a mosque—a mosque, you are to understand, always possessing two minarets and three domes. But as some say Kootub himself built this, and others say that a particular Emperor called Alexander II has the merit of it, and as nobody knows whether there ever were a Kootub or an Alexander II, I think it is just possible that we do not know what a man who never was born meant to make of a building that never was built. As it stands it is perfect. We went at six this morning to see a well into which divers are so good as to jump from the height of sixty feet. They seem to fly almost in the air, till they nearly reach the water,

and then they join their feet together and go down straight, and the water closes over them. But they come up again, do not be afraid.

We had dispatched all our sights before seven, and had two hours' good sketching before breakfast, and now it is as hot as ever I felt it in Bengal.

The heir-apparent of Delhi has been coaxed or threatened into waiting on G, so there was a second durbar to be held today, and when it came to the time, the prince had taken to his bed, and had sent for thirteen doctors to say he was too ill to come. However, he changed his mind again and came, and in the meanwhile, half our troops who were out for the durbar were fainting away from the heat. In the afternoon G had to go and return the visits of the rajahs in the neighbourhood, and we went to see Humayun's tomb, about six miles off, where we meant to sketch till G came, but it turned out a failure after all we had heard of it.

However, there were some beautiful white marble tombs in the neighbourhood, carved like lace; and then we went to another well, or rather tank, entirely surrounded by mosques and buildings, on the roofs of which divers were all waiting to jump. We implored and begged they would not take us for the Lord Sahib, and take the fatal plunge in our honour, and the guards went and pushed the crowds off, and declared the Lord Sahib was coming, and we sat down and sketched, and at last, just as we were giving him up, he and all his people arrived, and the divers all bounded off. Some of them jumped from a height of eighty feet, clearing several buildings in their way. It is much the most curious sight I have seen, and I now cannot guess why they did not tumble head over heels twenty times before they reached the water …

In the evening we went to a nautch at Colonel Skinner's. His house is fitted up in the native fashion, and he had all the best singers and dancers in Delhi, and they acted passages out of Vishnu and Brahma's lives, and sang Persian songs which I thought made a very ugly noise; but Mr B, who speaks Persian as fluently as English, kept saying, 'Well, this is really delightful—this I think is equal to any European singing—in fact, there is nothing like it.'

There Once Was a Fair City

MEER TAQI MEER

This poem has been translated by Khushwant Singh.

You men of these eastern regions
Knowing my beggarly state you mock me;
You snigger amongst yourselves and ask me
Where on earth can you have come from?
Let me tell you!
There once was a fair city,
Among cities of the world the first in fame;
It hath been ruined and laid desolate,
To that city I belong, Delhi is its name.

1857

GHALIB

This extract is taken from Ghalib: Life and Letters: 1797–1869, *translated and edited by Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam.*

Smiting the enemy and driving him before them, the victors overran the city in all directions. All whom they found in the streets they cut down. Those distinguished in the city by rank and wisdom, one and all took to their houses and shut the doors, that their honour might be safe. Of the army of scoundrels still in the city many determined upon flight, while a few raged to resist the attackers. These few now grappled with the brave conquerors of the city to spill, as they thought, the blood of the alien enemy, but as I deem, the honour of the capital. For two to three days every road in the city, from the Kashmiri Gate to Chandni Chowk, was battlefield. Three gates—the Ajmeri, the Turcoman and the Delhi—were still held by the rebels. My house … is situated between the Kashmiri and the Delhi Gate, in the centre of the city, so that both are equidistant from my lane. When the raging lionhearts set foot in the city, they held it lawful to slaughter the helpless and burn the houses, and indeed, in every territory taken by force of arms these are the sufferings that people must endure. At the naked spectacle of this vengeful wrath and malevolent hatred the colour fled from men's faces, and a vast concourse of men and women, past all computing, owning much or owning nothing, took to precipitate flight through these three gates. Seeking the little villages and shrines outside the city, they there drew breath to wait until such time as might favour their return. Or if even there they could not feel at ease, they journeyed on day and night to some other place. As for the writer of these words, his heart did not quake, nor did his step falter. I stayed where I was, saying, 'I have committed no crime and need pay no penalty. The English do not slay the innocent, nor is the air of this city uncongenial to

me. Why should I fall a prey to groundless fancies and wander stumbling from place to place? Let me sit in some deserted corner blending my voice with my lamenting pen, while the tears fall from my eyelashes to mingle with the words of blood I write.’

The Capture of the King

W.S.R. HODSON

This extract is taken from Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India.

24 September 1857

I got permission, after much argument and entreaty, to go and bring in the King [Bahadur Shah Zafar], for which (though negotiations for his life had been entertained) no provision had been made and no steps taken, and his favourite wife also, and the young imp (her son) whom he had destined to succeed him on the throne. This was successfully accomplished, at the expense of vast fatigue and no trifling risk. I then set to work to get hold of the villain princes. It was with the greatest difficulty that the General was persuaded to allow them to be interfered with, till even poor Nicholson roused himself to urge that the pursuit should be attempted. The General at length yielded a reluctant consent, adding 'but don't let me be bothered with them.' I assured him it was nothing but his own order which 'bothered' him with the King, as I would much rather have brought him into Delhi dead than living. Glad to have at length obtained even this consent, I prepared for my dangerous expedition. Macdowell accompanied me, and taking one hundred picked men, I started early for the tomb of the Emperor Humayoon, where the villains had taken sanctuary. I laid my plans so as to cut off access to the tomb or escape from it, and then sent in one of the inferior scions of the royal family (purchased for the purpose by the promise of his life) and my one-eyed Moulvie Rujub Alee, to say that I had come to seize the Shahzadahs for punishment, and intended to do so, dead or alive. After two hours of wordy strife and very anxious suspense, they appeared, and asked if their lives had been promised by the Government, to which I answered 'most certainly not', and sent them away from the tomb towards the city, under a

guard. I then went with the rest of the sowars to the tomb, and found it crowded with, I should think, some 6,000 or 7,000 of the servants, hangers-on and scum of the palace and city, taking refuge in the cloisters which lined the walls of the tomb. I saw at a glance that there was nothing for it but determination and a bold front, so I demanded in a voice of authority the instant surrender of their arms etc. They immediately obeyed, with an alacrity I scarcely dared to hope for, and in less than two hours they brought forth from innumerable hiding places some 500 swords, and more than that number of firearms, besides horses, bullocks and covered carts called 'Ruths' used by the women and eunuchs of the palace. I then arranged the arms and animals in the centre, and left an armed guard with them, while I went to look after my prisoners, who, with their guard, had moved on towards Delhi. I came up just in time, as a large mob had collected, and were turning on the guard. I rode in among them at a gallop, and in a few words I appealed to the crowd, saying that these were the butchers who had murdered and brutally used helpless women and children, and that the Government had now sent their punishment: seizing a carabine from one of my men, I deliberately shot them one after another. I then ordered the bodies to be taken into the city, and thrown out on the Chiboutra, in front of the kotwalie, where the blood of their innocent victims still could be distinctly traced. The bodies remained before the kotwalie until this morning, when, for sanitary reasons, they were removed. In twenty-four hours, therefore, I disposed of the principal members of the house of Timur the Tartar. I am not cruel, but I confess I did rejoice at the opportunity of ridding the earth of these wretches. I intended to have had them hung, but when it came to a question of 'they' or 'us', I had no time for deliberation …

28 September 1857, Camp, Humayoon's Tomb

I have been out all day and at work, varied by diverse summonses from the Brigadier and by such *very* amusing duties as packing off the royal family's lower branches into Delhi.

With the column sent out here (to complete with 1,500 men the work of which I had overcome all the difficulties with a hundred), a young civilian was sent to carry on political duties, and take charge of the different members of hangers-on of the royal family. In an hour I had got possession of the persons of seven of the

remaining sons and grandsons of the King who were ‘wanted’; they were made over, according to orders, to this civilian, and, two hours afterwards, all had escaped! In consequence of this we are halted here and parties sent out in all directions to recapture the fugitives.

I confess I am much gratified by the congratulations I receive on all sides regarding the capture of the King and the retribution on the Shahzadahs; but I expect no reward, perhaps not even thanks. The Government will be delighted at the fact, but will perhaps pretend a reluctance to the judgment having been effected, which they certainly do not feel, and will probably throw all the onus on me. To tell the truth (in spite of all the praises and prophecies of the army), I expect nothing by this campaign but my brevet majority, and that was due to me for the Punjaub war.

The execution of the princes could be hardly called one of ‘unresisting’ enemies, since they were surrounded by an armed host, to whom we should have been most unquestionably sacrificed if I had hesitated for an instant. It was ‘they’ or ‘we’, and I recommend those who might cavil at my choice to go and catch the next rebels themselves! The King was very old and infirm, and had long been a mere tool, a name in the hands of the Shahzadahs, Mirza Mogul in particular; moreover, the orders I received were such that I did not dare to act on the dictates of my own judgment to the extent of killing him when he had given himself up; but had he attempted either a flight or a rescue, I should have shot him down like a dog; as it is, he is the lion without his claws. I am now prepared to have all kinds of bad motives attributed to me, for no man ever yet went out of the beaten track without being wondered at and abused; and so marked a success will make me more enemies than friends, so be prepared for abuse rather than reward; for myself I do not care, and I am proud to say that those whose opinion I value most highly think I did well and boldly.

Jat Households

OSWALD WOOD

This extract is taken from The Final Report on the Settlement of Land Revenue in the Delhi District, *carried out in 1872–77 by Oswald Wood and completed in 1878–80 by R. Maconachie.*

There is no great difference in the style of houses of Hindus and Muhammadans. The main thing that causes variations is the pecuniary condition of the householders. The best way of noting the different parts of the zamindar's dwelling will be to give a rough plan of a sample house belonging to a well-to-do Jat.

In the main street its front will be a blank wall some ten or twelve feet high with a door somewhere about the middle. Turn in here and you find yourself in the dahliz (or dahlij) which is a kind of porch, it is also called deorhi as in parts of the Punjab. This is roofed with rough wooden rafters (kari) and opens on the inner side on the courtyard of the house. If it is deep it will have supporting pillars (thamb or situn) supporting the main crossbeam (shatir) which runs along its length. In the dahlij horses and cows are fastened up and the takht, a large seat, is often put there handy for a lounge or a meditative pull at the hukah. In our friend's house if you look round to the left, i.e., the north end of the dahlij, you will see a *khor* or *than* or manger put up in the corner. This is generally a box like erection made of earth. The than for horses is say four feet high, the khor for cattle lower, either solid or hollow underneath, to admit of an arched recess (tak), a convenience which a thrifty zamindar is very fond of and will always get into walls and spare places when he can. At the right-hand end of the khor is the kundi, a hollow made in the top of the manger for the gram of the animal (when he gets any). The rest of the manger is kept for fodder, and on the outside an edge is made either of wood or earth to prevent the food from falling when tossed about in eating. The inner door of the dahliz is not generally exactly

opposite the street door but on one side, so as to make a screen for the chauk where the women and children of the house pass much of their time and in the hot weather sleep—the cattle too stand about in it. Going across the yard we come to an ante-room or veranda roofed like the dahliz and leading to the inner rooms or kothas (also called obaras). In the corner of the dalan or in a corner of the inside room will be the kothi or house granary made of hard earth well mixed with chaff and cowdung and built up very carefully by the womenfolk a span height at a time. It looks white and clean and stands four feet high or more. A good wife will generally adorn her kothi with fantastic representations of peacocks, parrots or other birds, done in chalk or with the red earth (gerhu) which is sold in the bazaar: a big kothi will hold fifty maunds of grain, an average one about thirty. Its lid is called panah. The cooking of the family is done in the dalan or, as is very often the case, the room at the east end of the north dalan will be open to it and the cook room there (rasoi). The rooms which are at the east end are the principal rooms of the house. Their chief furniture will be charpais or kat, one for each member of the family—one or two low stools for the women to sit on (pidha)—the cotton spinning wheel (charkhi) and the women's clothes box, a wicker basket some two feet high (patiar); the men's clothes are kept in a locked box together with ornaments and papers or other property of value. There is generally too a chaj or fan made of reeds and its joints fastened with leather. For getting on to the roof which is used for storing juwar stalks and sleeping in the hot weather, there is the parkala, a rough set of steps built up into the inner side of the dahlij. The water for household drinking is kept in an earthen vessel (painda or matka) kept in the rasoi; it is brought twice daily, morning and evening, by the women from the village well.

Unconquered Still

PERCEVAL LANDON

This extract is taken from Under the Sun.

Delhi, the mistress of every conqueror of India, Aryan or Afghan, Persian, English or Mogul, remains unconquered still. Over twenty square miles of sun-baked plain lie out the debris of her many pasts, relics of her dead and gone masters, some perfect still, some once more crumbling back into the levels of red-yellow marl that have alternately fed and housed, and fed and housed again, forgotten generations of men. Yet Delhi lives. Like some huge crustacean, she has shed behind her her own outgrown habitations, as she has crawled northwards from Tughlakabad and Lalkot, through Dinpana and Ferozabad, till the long, red lizard of the Ridge barred her way, and now she suns herself, a raffle of narrow and congested byways, beneath the crimson walls of Shah Jehan's great palace-fort. But Delhi is more than her streets and temples. You may go round about her and count her towers; you may tramp from the Jumma Masjid to the Fort, from the Fort to the Pillar, from the Pillar to Humaion's Tomb and the great Minar; and when all is seen you will understand that these things do no honour to Delhi; it is Delhi that doubles their significance, and that of all that is found within her wide borders. Inscrutable and undeniable, her claim is different from that of all other towns of India, for she has no rival in greatness from the mountains to the sea, and all men know that whoso holds Delhi holds India. A wide and almost waste plain stretches along the eastern bank of a sandy expanse of river bed. In the far distance low violet hills hem in the horizon, and almost every acre of the plain between the river and the hills bears its own monument of Delhi's bygone days. In among the tangles of thorn bush and mimosa, where no living thing passes by save a wandering buffalo or the shadow of a kite wheeling high up in the sun, the walls and terraces of deserted temples

crumble, and the white datura or the raw yellow acacia flourishes beside the altar stones. Here and there an arch springs forty feet to where a bird-borne pipal-plant slowly threatens a lingering keystone, and an azure-necked peacock scratches among the rotting stumps of last year's self-sown Indian corn.

Beyond the hard white shaded road—the only serviceable and well-kept thing in all the landscape—rises in a garden the dome of an ostentatious tomb. Some servant of an Emperor, some Emperor himself it may be, who sleeps soundly in his grave, all unconscious that the city he believed so abiding and so loyal has drifted far from him and his all-powerful dynasty, and now darkens the northward sky with the smoke of factory chimneys, and of locomotives straining across the iron-bridged Jumna. Far away to the south still stands the shaft raised by the slave-emperor from Turkestan, and underneath it the iron pillar of an earlier 'conqueror of the universe' bears witness yet to its royal maker's foolishness. Tughlakabad, hard by, is given over to the jackal and the cobra and the owl—the very bats have found in it no ceiling for their foul nestings. Lalkot lies a weed-grown fold of scattered half-hewn stone and mud; it needs an antiquarian to guess where here and there a gate may once have pierced the vaunted fortifications of old. Indraprastha is there still, but she has given up the struggle against fate, and her cornices and parapets fall unheeded across her exits and her entrances. Only the Grand Trunk Road endures between and beneath the shadows of the heavy banyans above, whose leaves are whitened daily by the dust-shuffling bullock carts, just as when Shah Jehan's vast equipage trailed slowly in to his new capital from that old one, which had become a burden upon his heart too heavy for him to bear. A few minarets have pierced the skyline for some time, but as one follows along its clear metalled strip, Delhi itself—Delhi, that is, of today—rises flat and uncomely behind her long, low, fortified and battlemented walls.

The Building of New Delhi

SHEELA BAJAJ

Portions of this essay first appeared in Delhi Diary *magazine.*

On 12 December 1911, at the magnificent Coronation Durbar in Delhi, the city found itself raised at one stroke to the capital of the subcontinent: as the new seat of government, Delhi held sway over territory that extended from Kashmir to Colombo and Calcutta to Karachi. This momentous transfer from Calcutta to Delhi was announced by King George V: 'We are pleased to announce to Our people that on the advice of Our ministers, tendered after consultation with Our Governor-General in Council, We have decided upon the transfer of the seat of the Government of India …' When the decision was announced, the assembly was ecstatic and there was a spontaneous burst of joy from the Delhi crowd that moved the King to tears. This historic decision was regarded as one of the best-kept secrets in the history of India. Few were privy to it; even the Queen was unaware of it before the royal party arrived in India.

J. Renton-Denning, editor of the *Morning Post* of India, in an article published in the book *Delhi—The Imperial City*, refers to the elaborate Durbar preparation in Delhi: 'In view of the forthcoming Royal Durbar and the increasing needs of Delhi city, the Municipal Committee had to undertake many large schemes for public works.' Extensions of water works were carried out to secure an adequate and constant supply during the Durbar, for which the Government of India sanctioned Rs 90,000. Civic improvements were done at a furious pace. To make the city worthy of its old 'Imperial' title, and to provide housing for the vast numbers of visitors, was a herculean task. Renton-Denning says, 'The Government of India arrangements for the accommodation of visitors from Home have been carefully made and if one can secure room in one of the

sumptuously furnished “visitor’s camps” he may be congratulated upon having won half the battle.’

The Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, had done everything to ensure that nothing but the mightiest display would welcome his king and queen. The Royal Pavilion, with two thrones on an elevated position, was placed below a shining golden dome. Among the notable events lined up for Durbar Week was a parade of 50,000 British and Indian soldiers where the formation stretched in a line four miles long. It included the Nawab of Bahawalpur’s exotic Camel Corps, and the Maharaja of Jodhpur’s lancers. Expectedly, a large number of people descended on Delhi to witness the events. While the official Durbar camps catered for 300,000 visitors, it was estimated that the city’s population increased by three-quarters of a million. The British government in India spared no expense, nor did the many Indian rajas who came to Delhi for the Durbar. Commenting on the regal event, the *Times of India* wrote: ‘It was probably the most magnificent and dazzling spectacle of its kind that the eye of a mortal has ever beheld.’

Two days after the Durbar, at a special ceremony, foundation stones were laid to inaugurate the restoration of Delhi as the capital of India. The conclusion of festivities, after the royal couple sailed away in the *Medina*, put an end to half a century of discussion and agitation over the shifting of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi.



The selection of the eventual site was not all that simple. Protracted debates were to follow; protagonists would put forward compelling arguments in favour of the northern and southern sites and many egos would clash before the final decision. The activity behind the scenes, relating to the eventual selection of Raisina Hill, made for fascinating drama—the great pulls and pressures that went into the creation of the greatest icon of the empire.

A three-member committee was appointed to plan and build the new city. The initial names recommended by Sir John Jenkins, House Member of the Viceroy’s Council, met with resistance. The inclusion of the Deputy Commissioner of Punjab, the Superintending Engineer of the Jumna Canal and the Consulting Architect to the Government of Bombay was not acceptable to a senior member of the Council, Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson, who dismissed these nominees as ‘nonentities’. Comments such as these were indicative of the wrangling that

went on even for the appointment of members to a crucial committee which would eventually decide the planning of New Delhi. In his note of dissent, Fleetwood Wilson was supported by Harcourt Butler and Carlyle. Other opinions were put forward as well. For instance, the Commander-in Chief suggested that town planning and sanitation experts be brought from England; this was also Syed Ali Imam's view, highlighting the need to get the services of experts from outside India.

And so began Lord Hardinge's task of identifying experts from Britain who would meet the expectations of the Viceroy's Council. John A. Brodie was chosen as the engineer and Captain George Swinton as the non-professional head of the committee. But the selection of a specialist on the committee, who would combine competence both as an architect and as a town planner, was by no means easy.

Among the motley crop of names that came up for final selection were Henry Vaughan Lancaster and Edwin Landseer Lutyens. Of the two, Lutyens eventually made the grade in preference to Lancaster who was considered brusque and irritable! On 12 March the King accorded his seal of approval to the committee's composition as 'excellent' and their fees and departure date were set.

Before leaving for India, Brodie, Lutyens and Swinton were briefed at Buckingham Palace. The King 'instructed them not to consider themselves committed to the site of the foundation stones he and the Queen had laid and to regard the Ridge at Delhi with its historic memories of the Indian Mutiny as sacred.'

The Delhi experts, as the committee was called, sailed eastward on 28 March. Their canvas for planning a splendid new capital in India was the ultimate prize any architect could dream of. But they were not very well prepared. Only Swinton had been to India. The mandate given to them by the Viceroy was to settle on a site as quickly as possible. Two major decisions had to be taken: one, the selection of the site for the future capital and, second, the general planning of the city on the chosen site. The first decision in particular needed a host of considerations to be taken into account. These included health, security, room for expansion, cost, water supply and drainage, electricity and transport as well as 'the relationship of the new city to Old Delhi and the cantonments'. With this massive brief, Lutyens and his compatriots began work.

In his book *Indian Summer*, Robert Grant Irving states that ‘deciding upon the appropriate tract for New Delhi was an agonizing process’. The Delhi experts committee’s schedule was taxing and rigorous. Setting off in Ford Landaulette or De Dion cars or even on elephants, they had to survey the terrain in the gruelling Delhi weather. In between cups of tea at the Maiden’s Hotel or cold baths, days were spent in discussions and correspondence. Much of the country to the north and south of Shahjahanabad and on the east bank of the Jumna was wild and rugged. In the process of selecting a suitable site, they encountered buck, baboons, monkeys, jackals, hare, porcupine. Sometimes the heat became so unbearable that tempers ran high.

Eventually, after weighing the pros and cons of both the northern and southern sites, it was the latter that was chosen. It was suitable in all respects: altitude, water and health. It also had a number of key advantages in the area of good natural drainage, the plain was not too populated or encumbered with ruins, railway communications could easily be effected, the land could be acquired at moderate prices without displacing any business or manufacturing centre, and there was plentiful land for future expansion.

The site had the support of Lord Hardinge. In his book *My Indian Years*, he writes:

> I then (after rejecting the northern site) mounted and asked Hailey, Commissioner of Delhi, to accompany me to choose the site, and we galloped over the plain to a hill some distance away. From the top of the hill there was a magnificent view, embracing Old Delhi and all the principal monuments situated outside the town, the Yamuna winding its way like a silver streak in the foreground at a little distance. I said at once to Hailey: ‘This is the site for Government House’, and he readily agreed.

Lutyens now had to get on with the exciting task of designing a capital that would reflect the glory, might and vastness of the British Empire. He was ably assisted by his friend Herbert Baker. Lutyens designed the Viceroy’s House with its fountains, the waterways and the King’s Way, the Record Office and the general layout of the city streets. Baker designed the Secretariat, Council Chamber and the All India War Memorial. Two landscape architects, Mustoe and Walter George, were appointed for planting trees in the New Delhi area.

Herbert Baker records how one evening he and his two friends stood on the ridge looking down ‘the deserted cities of dreary and disconsolate tombs and

wondering how the new city would rise. The sky was overcast and it rained intermittently. Suddenly, the clouds lifted and the sun broke through. A brilliant rainbow formed a perfect arch on what was destined to be a great vista, where Lutyens' memorial arch now stands. We acclaimed it was a good omen.'

And Delhi was set for yet another transformation.

Ballimaran and the War Fund, 1942

CHAMAN NAHAL

This extract is taken from The Triumph of the Tricolour.

This was the drill. The constable would knock at the door and the British officer make the appeal—in Hindustani. The donation had to be in cash, since back in Whitehall they could understand only money in cash—messy though the Indian coinage system was. By the time the teams came to the mohallas, the men wouldn't be home; they would have left for work. Wavell was not only bypassing the bazaars, he was bypassing the men as well. The men might argue but the Indian women had been for centuries trained only to submit. So it was generally the women who opened the door when the knock was made. If it happened to be a man—another idler sitting at home when he should be at work—the first sentence remained the same. 'Good morning. *Hum chanda ke liye aya hai*.' At Scotland Yard, Griffith was good at languages, and in these months had mastered quite a bit of Hindustani. He was however shocked to see the effect his words produced. This was the first Muslim mohalla in Delhi they were visiting; so far they had been doing the rounds of the Hindu mohallas. And there the women invariably fainted. Griffith wasn't sure what his misdemeanour was. Very often the women would have slumped to the ground before he had quite finished his sentence. Those few who stayed on their feet went into hysterics. 'Chanda? There is no Chanda here, hazoor!' they pleaded before him. Others said: 'Has that scoundrel been up to it again! What's it this time—rape or murder?' And they began to beat their forehead or pull the hair on their head.

Griffith was utterly confounded. What kind of people were these! What had he said or done? 'Good morning. *Hum chanda ke liye aya hai*'—what was mysterious about it? It's the sight of the police, sir, the Indian officials said to him—the women are scared. 'No, no, no,' he explained to those who said,

‘There is no Chanda here.’ ‘*Hum Chanda admi ke liye nahin, chanda rupaya ke liye aya hai* (We are here not for Chanda the man but for chanda meaning donation).’ To those who said, ‘Has that scoundrel been up to it again!’ he said, ‘No, no, no. Your man no scoundrel. He good man. He’s done nothing.’ When the women had understood what Griffith wanted, and that their men or their families were safe from the wrath of the police, in relief they ran inside and returned with whatever money they could muster. Some brought back a lot, some only a heap of coins. The money was put into the cashbox, an entry of the house number and the name of the donor was made in the register, Griffith again raised his cane to his cap, and the team moved on to the next house. By now the urchins—why weren’t they at school?—would have collected around him and started their chorus: ‘Toady, toady, toady.’ Or the women from other houses would be peering down from their windows. There was no reply to his knock from several homes, but the constables kept pounding at them until they were opened. They also tried to shoo away the urchins. ‘Toady, toady, toady,’ the children kept shouting, following the team a few steps behind, and stopping their chorus just for a while to hear Griffith’s Hindustani in a strange accent, ‘Good morning. *Hum chanda ka liye aya hai*,’ and going into peals of laughter at this.

Griffith had been cautioned. Muslim women were not as docile as the Hindu; they could even be aggressive. He shouldn’t underestimate the veils with which they covered themselves. Fiery hearts beat inside those black veils. He should be on guard. And he was—he added a thin smile to his opening sentence.

Mohalla Ballimaran is located in the labyrinth labyrinthorum of the maze that the old Delhi is. Lane after lane after lane of narrow, winding pathways, where everything looks confined, cramped and inhibiting. Most Muslim men don’t go long distances to work. They have factories just around the corner—making tools and sports goods, or ornaments and jewellery, or refinements such as gold and silver leaves to be eaten along with your food. There is a constant music of chiselling implements and small hammers that greets you as you enter such a mohalla. Then there are innumerable peddlers, khoncha-walas, which is a speciality of the Muslim mohallas. Muscular men, their eyes lined with kohl, their sleeves rolled up or with chaders wrapped around them (depending on the weather), would be selling hot puris, hot halwa, hot tea, hot bread, hot eggs (full boiled, no scrambling or omeletting). Charcoal was lit under a wide skillet over

which the food was neatly arranged; smoke from these fires invaded you before you had even entered the mohalla. People would emerge from their houses, buy the stuff from the khoncha-walas, and rush back inside. And they ate hot puris and hot halwa and hot full-boiled eggs even during the burning hot months! Their choice. Who was an outsider like Wayne Griffith to crib about it? He was not here to reform their culinary habits or their lifestyle. He was here for the war fund. And he had been forewarned. About the volatile Muslim temper. The men—my, they were walking detonators. And the women—they were no less.

The burqa-clad woman was elderly and dignified. She showed no panic at the sight of the police, and to Griffith's request, she asked in an even voice: 'Chanda for what?' Ah, thank God, someone was talking, there could now be a dialogue, and warming up to the occasion, Griffith replied in Hindustani: 'For the war, madam. For the great war.' The woman momentarily lifted a part of her veil, which peeled off like banana skin, and Griffith stepped back in shock; he found the ghost of his dead mother peering at him in that harsh look and that deeply lined, stern face. 'Is there a war on?' she asked, opening her compressed lips a little, just to let the words out. 'Madam …!' Griffith exclaimed in disbelief. Were there people in this land who had not heard of the war? The woman shouted out to a nearby khoncha-wala. 'Iftikar mian.' A dark-skinned, hefty man with a massive moustache, who was selling halwa, answered in reply: 'Yes, bibi?' 'Is there a war going on?' the woman asked him, aiming a little saliva red with betel close to Griffith. 'War? What war, bibi?' the man answered, giving a quick shove to his halwa with his skimmer and turning it over several times on the skillet. 'There is cholera on, there is a famine on, but I didn't know there was a war on too.' Griffith would have thrown up but for his good British manners. The red saliva had barely missed him. And here was an oily peddler with oily skin and oily hands disclaiming all knowledge of anything but his halwa. He swallowed twice or thrice and stared blandly at the old woman.

The news about the door-to-door collections had been reported in the vernacular press. When the team comes to your door, Abha doctorni had told them, you offer nothing. By now she had the statistics. Two hundred and thirty people died of cholera in Mohalla Ballimaran, one hundred and seventy-five in Lal Kuan, eighty-six in Hauz Qazi, two hundred and seven in Jama Masjid Bazaar, ninety in Turkman Gate, fifty-five in Kinari Bazaar, fifty in Dariba—

eight hundred and ninety-eight, say nearly a thousand, and all within a radius of one mile from Jama Masjid where the Muslims lived in density, and all within two months—to say nothing of the dead in Bengal. And now they were coming for donations! Slam the door in their face, Abha doctorni had advised them.

Which is what the old burqa-clad woman did. 'No chanda,' she scowled and—bang!—the door was closed.

At each door Griffith knocked, the reply was the same. 'No chanda.' Some even added—'Begone!' And the door was banged shut on Griffith. The children were now running into various alleys of the mohalla, shouting 'Toady, toady, toady!' The mohalla spread into the interior like a huge honeycomb. The honeycomb began to throb with excitement.

Strong, brawny men, with muscular arms and tough workers' hands, came out of their factories and little shops and stood lining the narrow street. They did not interfere with Griffith's team; they just stood menacingly, watching Griffith knock at door after door. Most doors were opened by elderly women. In some cases, younger women too appeared there. They were invariably veiled. Or the face was covered by the muslin dupatta, leaving only the eyes visible …

From their house at the nukkarh, Joseph Daniel and the others watched the government party. This was the first nukkarh of the mohalla, there were many others inside, each a nerve centre, where the narrow lanes joined up and parted again. The Hamdard trust had secured a house for Abha Mustafa to live in and run her dispensary from at this very nukkarh—where Joseph and Dulari had already been living for some time. Joseph Daniel had tried to persuade Abha to go to Imphal and help in the medical relief to the Indian revolutionaries. She had firmly declined, saying she was doing no social work, she was discovering herself; she had to stay here and work amongst the Muslims. Joseph Daniel had then learned of her family background—her connection with Rakesh and the Ajitha family. The proof of her hard work here was before their eyes today. They saw and they heard the doors being slammed before the government team. The party had so far not collected a single paisa from the mohalla.

At the nukkarh, they also watched the anger of the mohalla building up. They saw more men coming out of their workshops, and they saw men streaming back into the mohalla. Abha Mustafa had told the men not to interfere on such

occasions; she wanted the women of the mohalla to handle them on their own. This was her way of understanding not only Islam but Muslim women. They were healthy and uninhibited women. If they could do such effective relief work with her during the cholera epidemic, going from house to house to tend to the sick, even discarding their veils when the occasion so demanded, couldn't they handle a couple of government stooges? The mohalla had come to respect Abha doctorni sahiba. So young and so dedicated. Not only to her profession but to Islamic ethos. Her word was almost law for them now.

Yet the volatile Muslim temper can be held in check only as far and no further. The way they flagellated themselves at Muharram—drawing blood out of their self-inflicted wounds in the memory of the two descendants of the Prophet who had died in the battle of Karbala. They would as easily die and sacrifice themselves today—in the honour of Islam. The men at the nukkarh looked offended and angry. How many more doors would this imbecile knock at? Why didn't he quit and go back the way he had entered the mohalla? The thought had come to Griffith but it went against his grain to depart with no entry against Mohalla Ballimaran in his ledger. Each mohalla in Delhi so far had donated some money, and his clerk had drawn a line across the register after the last mohalla visited, and written in bold letters 'Mohalla Ballimaran' across the page. Would he have to draw a line across it showing a zero contribution? And would Mohalla Ballimaran be setting up an example for the other Muslim mohallas—with more zeros in his register? It was a risky and a tricky situation but he had to go on, which the men in the mohalla came to resent increasingly, their resentment very soon reaching boiling point at the nukkarh.

New Delhi at War, 1939–45

NAYANTARA POTHEN

An imperial imagining, the city of New Delhi was originally planned and designed to showcase British imperial power and authority in India; its design, the way it was laid out, was intended to represent the strict hierarchical and segregated (both socially and racially) nature of Raj society. In 1939, this vision remained untarnished. The wide avenues and whitewashed buildings of the imperial capital, the grandeur of the Viceroy's House and the geometric precision of the city remained untouched. When the Second World War broke out, New Delhi was still a quiet city. Lifeless. A little provincial, even. And obsessed with the minutiae of governance. A local witticism about the imperial capital ran that 'nothing could be heard at night, save the grinding of axes.'[1] By the late 1930s, one might safely argue that the city of Lutyens' dreams had been lovingly nurtured. New Delhi had evolved into a model garden suburb inhabited by officials.

The Second World War would change this. The city rapidly filled, and the regimented and formal nature of official social life changed. The traditional summer exodus to Simla wound down as government officials began to remain behind in New Delhi for longer periods of time. The city also became the supply hub for the war in the Pacific, and with that responsibility the capital opened its doors to Britain's wartime allies. In this way the official circle of New Delhi society would expand and its hierarchical nature would be challenged. Viceregal circles might have persisted in retaining a degree of formality (and an unofficial, unspoken social and racial segregation) but a new and equally valid social space now came into existence in which the normally strict regimentation of social life was relaxed.

In its early years, the war was placed on the margins of people's lives. Philip Mason would recall that the response of the Establishment, to the news that France had fallen to the Nazis, was to continue with its frantic activity: 'Everything we had taken for granted was falling to bits—and there was so much we had taken for granted. But in Simla there was to be a viceregal garden-party and the band would play soft music while tea and ices were consumed.'[2] Society events continued unabated and one official was moved to comment: 'One expected the least possible fuss and tamasha in war time, but it seems Delhi is to be spared no iota of officialdom, pompous tamasha and bad taste.'[3] For New Delhi's official society, good works for the war effort were fitted in around garden parties and the annual New Delhi Horse Show rather than the other way around.

Indeed, as late as 1942, there appears little evidence that the war in Europe was having any impact on the social lives of New Delhi's official population. So much so that Charles Amery, the Secretary of State in London, was moved to send an alarmed telegram in April of that year to the Viceroy, the Marquess of Linlithgow, regarding the activities of the European community in India. He asked what steps the Viceroy was taking 'to enjoin greater austerity of living on wealthier classes, Indian and European, as definite contribution to the War effort.'[4] Linlithgow was deeply unimpressed, his response forceful as he defended the behaviour of his compatriots in India, arguing that fundamental differences between the United Kingdom and India, in terms of climate, transport and conditions of social life, were being ignored by the British Parliament. The need for relaxation was greater in India, he insisted, as many Europeans had been working without leave for some time; petrol rationing was a burden in a country of such great distances and inadequate public transport; and the varying dietary requirements of Indians and Europeans made catering appear extravagant. Be that as it may, steps had been taken in the name of wartime austerity:

> Social functions [have been] almost entirely discarded. Late hours in hotels and restaurants are prohibited. Use of cars greatly limited, consumption of liquors very substantially reduced and the only relaxation which Europeans generally permit themselves are occasional visits to early dances or cinema performances. Europeans here keenly resent attempts to malign their War effort …

The European community, he concluded, greatly resented ‘attempts to malign their War effort’.[5]

While some might have wondered at the social gaiety in New Delhi during a time of war, others saw the frivolity as deliberately cultivated. It was a deliberate policy of the stiff upper lip, even if it could look like ‘a complacent indifference to reality’.[6] Despite the concerns of the Secretary of State, and in the face of New Delhi society’s determined gaiety, official functions did decrease. By 1943, it would seem people had noticed that there was a war on. It was acidly noted, by one New Delhi stalwart, that even the women of New Delhi now had wartime jobs to keep them occupied, leaving little spare time for gossip and parties.[7]

Social events and functions, previously a predominant focus in letters written home, were now less frequently discussed. It was often observed that ‘life is quiet’ and, as ICS officer John Tyson would remark in 1941, that the introduction of petrol rationing would surely ‘cut entertaining to a minimum’.[8] Most people were, by this stage, involved in war work of some kind and this, according to Tyson, left little inclination for late nights.[9] And indeed it did. Yet it did more than that. The previous decorum of New Delhi social life was at the same time undermined by the conditions of a city at war.

John Christie, Deputy Private Secretary on the Viceroy’s staff, remembers not seeing many friends in those days, a result of extended work hours and petrol rationing. When they did socialize, they relied on an odd assortment of vehicles, often hiring a bicycle to get around. With his wife sitting on the crossbar, the Christies would make their way somewhat erratically to dinner.[10] Emma Wilson, Chief Lady Superintendent of one of the many nursing services in Delhi at the time, also remembers cycling quite happily to viceregal dinners, the skirt of her long dress tossed over her arm with just enough to cover her ankles for the sake of respectability: ‘The *chaprassis* awaiting the arrival of guests looked horrified at first, then, recognizing the unusual form of transport, broke into broad grins and rushed to my assistance as I tried to dismount with decorum.’[11]

With the use of bicycles becoming one of the few ways for its population to battle petrol rationing, New Delhi became rife with a new sort of criminal activity—bicycle theft. A ‘Lost and Found’ classified from the *Statesman* offered: ‘If the person who borrowed a gent’s Raleigh cycle from Western Court

on the night of February 5, 1943, cares to call at room No. 29, he can have the pump. He will probably need it.'[12]

Domestic staff also became harder to find during the war. Established New Delhi residents would grumble of having nothing but trouble in this respect. Those that might have, in the past, been happy to attach themselves to a household in New Delhi found that the rates of pay were much better with the armed forces that now flooded New Delhi. These 'birds of passage', as John Tyson described the British and American armed force now stationed in Delhi had really upset the status quo and 'spoilt the market'.[13] By 1943, food rationing would make dinner parties and hospitality difficult (though not non-existent). 'Pot luck' suppers rather than 'burra khanas' were preferred as it was considered no small feat to organize a dinner party in these times of food rationing and reduced domestic staff. One such supper saw a spread of fish mayonnaise and mutton, finished with ice cream and tinned grapefruit.[14] The more lavish style of entertaining, popular in the previous decade with its comparative abundance of food, petrol and domestic help, was now re-shaped by the conditions of war. These conditions meant that the overall shape of lifestyle for official society in New Delhi was changing and the once leisurely pace of life, with its strict observance of decorum, was slowly being eroded.

As the war progressed and New Delhi became the supply hub for the war in the Pacific, the imperial capital played host to the various diplomatic and military representatives of the allied war effort. By 1942, the presence of a significant American expatriate community engaged in either military or economic liaison work in New Delhi added a freshness to society, at odds with the entrenched formality and decorum expected of New Delhi's privileged elites. It was a change that some members of the older generation, both Indian and British, struggled with. For these New Delhi inhabitants, there was a feeling that the 'uninhibited ways' of the Americans crowding the capital eroded 'the city's carefully cultivated imperial ambience'.[15] To begin with, they overpaid their domestic help and tipped too generously.[16] Another New Delhi resident demanded an interview with the Viceroy—American troops were whistling at Indian girls and something had to be done about it.[17]

Others embraced the newcomers; friendships were formed and relationships cultivated as many Americans were, generally speaking, sympathetic to Indian political aspirations. Indeed, R.K. Nehru, Jawaharlal's cousin and a high-ranking ICS officer, recalls frequently having invited American journalists to tea and dinner at his residence. These were social occasions which Jawaharlal Nehru would also attend—R.K. Nehru recalled, Jawaharlal 'used to like meeting them for relaxation'.[18] S.K. Kirpalani, Additional Secretary in the Supply Department at the Central Secretariat, remembers making some very good friends among the American officers. One particular friend, a Colonel Henry of the Judge Advocate General Branch, taught Kirpalani how to mix a cocktail dubbed an Old-Fashioned.[19]

Yet, at the same time, hierarchy remained embedded in the way life was lived in New Delhi in this period—the allocation of housing in New Delhi to an ever-growing population and the supplementary provision of petrol continued to be directed by one's rank in the 'Warrant of Precedence'. For a dinner party held at home, strict social ranking based on one's official position was observed even when all parties knew each other and were, as ICS official John Tyson observed, friendly. The obsession of New Delhi's privileged classes with rank was wryly acknowledged: 'These things still count for something in India where so much of "society" is "official" …'[20] At face value, the war made little difference to the importance placed on the hierarchical nature of social life in New Delhi.

One could argue that it offered—much like that determined frivolity of New Delhi's privileged population in the early years of the war—some sort of order in a world that was rapidly getting more disordered and chaotic. It was another way of articulating 'the stiff upper lip' so important to Raj prestige. The continued use of the 'Warrant of Precedence' in official society helped retain the perception of exclusivity, through which imperial authority was articulated, when the political reality of the time was challenging it. Perhaps in view of this, it is understandable that the importance of position and the maintenance of a rigid social structure through the medium of the 'Warrant of Precedence', though complained about, were never seriously questioned by the privileged inhabitants of New Delhi.

The strict racial segregation that so characterized both New Delhi society specifically, and Raj society more generally, was challenged in this period. As increasing numbers of Britons left to serve in the armed forces, Indian ICS officers moved up to fill their positions. In theory at least, this meant that there now existed the potential for a greater number of Indian guests at official functions and a greater degree of social interaction between the races than in previous decades. However, the Viceroy's unilateral decision in 1939 to declare war on Germany on India's behalf, without ascertaining Indian public opinion, made British–Indian relations in the official sphere even more awkward than they had been previously. It is hardly surprising, then, that in the early years of the war, the lives of the Indian and British officials remained separate, intersecting only when the occasion and propriety demanded it.

From the official side, the hierarchical nature of official life made clear the existence of the unspoken social convention in which Indians were considered socially subordinate to their European counterparts. Yet a counter-segregation was also practised by the Western-educated Indians who were a part of the official world. As the calls for Indian self-government grew more vociferous, this group had little time for those with little or no understanding and sympathy for Indian ambitions for self-government. They wanted only to be friends with Britons of a 'certain sort'.[21] India's role in the Pacific war and an increasing international interest in Indian domestic politics meant that New Delhi now played host to a greater number of people considered socially acceptable by the standards of the Western-educated elites of New Delhi. Khushwant Singh remembers that:

> Many of [the newcomers] were young Communists or socialists, and they were appalled. They wouldn't join these whites-only clubs, and they wanted to be invited to Indian homes … And I remember boys who had been in college with me in England, absolutely going out of their way to be with Indians. Even some of them attending political meetings … much to the disgust of the *pukka sahib* of the old type.[22]

The 'right sort of Englishman', in short, was the type of person, whether a government official or not, who was not imbued with old colonial prejudices.

It is interesting to note that while there was little patience amongst Western-educated Indians for 'old empire-builders', there was just as little patience for the type of person who wanted to ask endless questions about Hindu philosophy

and the Indian soul.[23] It was the politically aware person that was preferred by the Westernized Indian elites who, themselves, had become increasingly politicized.

These political desires and activities, previously kept separate from official life infiltrated the Season's parties and other social gatherings which many Western-educated Indians continued to attend. It was a careful breaching of official boundaries and there could be moments of awkwardness tinged with humour at any social event where politics and the official mixed.

The experiences of Santha Rama Rau, daughter of an Indian official and herself a supporter of Indian independence, appear as a seamless blend of being a part of India's nationalist struggle and embassy cocktail parties and midnight picnics at the Qutub Minar, '… our high heels clicking on the marble, our foreign furs held tightly over our Indian silks and chiffons …'[24] At the same time, there were occasions when politics infused her social life. In her memoirs, she relates the story of an active radical friend of hers, Krishna, who was wanted by the police for encouraging acts of sedition. At a reception given by the Japanese Legation in New Delhi, she was warned by a young and slightly uncomfortable British official to get rid of the Communist papers lent to her by Krishna or risk having her house searched. When the conversation ended, however, they simply returned to making polite small talk and sipping champagne.[25] For many of the participants who occupied the upper echelons of society, the political intrigue and national struggle in New Delhi was played out against a backdrop of civility. At least at this stage.

The process of greater meaningful social interaction between Indian and Briton, however, took place outside the public sphere of official functions. This process accelerated during the war, and that once troubled area of ballroom dancing, fraught with the possibility of social ruin, now became an acceptable form of and expression for interracial relations. Raj Chatterjee, manager of the Imperial Tobacco Company, recalls the growing social relaxation between the Europeans and the Western-educated Indians during the war:

> You had these tea-rooms, like Wenger's and Davico's, [fashionable restaurants] which were very popular. They had tea-dances, and you could get a very good meal there … By that time [the war], there were many Indian ICS men whose wives danced, smoked, drank the odd sherry. They were

there, so there was mixed dancing. Normally, you would see separate tables. I'd say it wasn't until the war that things opened up and you could see mixed parties.[26]

Similarly, both John Tyson and Badr-ud-din Tyabji fondly recalled the hospitality at the Liaquat Ali Khans' where one's race or religion did not matter, but an appreciation of good food, drink, conversation and bridge, did.[27]

Yet, despite this relaxation in New Delhi society, for Indian women a modicum of social restraint was still required. Certain social rituals and codes of behaviour were to be avoided as young Indian women negotiated a path between being Indian and being modern. As a young girl, Santha Rama Rau remembers being allowed by her mother to drink champagne at parties. She was not, however, allowed to drink hard liquor—this was considered 'fast'.[28] Smoking was still a guilty pleasure, more often than not pursued in private, away from the prying eyes of more traditional family members.[29] Slacks could be worn—and they were by the younger generation—but never dresses. Saris were worn to receptions and balls, not the easiest thing to travel backwards across a dance floor in, but certainly the more socially acceptable option if you were an Indian woman who enjoyed ballroom dancing.

An equally significant contributor to the erosion of New Delhi's formality and embedded segregation was the emergence of a new form of social interaction in a new social space in which the 'Warrant of Precedence' had little place—the buffet or the 'fork lunch'. It played a considerable role in the easing of social and race relations outside the sphere of the official function and in the emergence of a separate, yet equally valid, social space outside that sanctioned by officialdom. Hosted by official and non-official members of New Delhi's society, these functions were not held by or on behalf of the Government of India and the Viceroy. Rank played little part at these unofficial functions. One would, thus, invite people to dinner parties because they had something interesting to say, rather than because they shared a social rank. It was a much more suitable approach to entertaining in a social space that was more socially egalitarian than its official counterpart. The shifts in New Delhi's social codes and mores were taking place, not so much within the leaves of the 'Warrant of Precedence' but more so in shifts in the nature of social ritual and interaction of this period.

The viceregal function was slower to embrace the informality of social conduct and entertainment that was being played out in the unofficial private parties of the privileged New Delhi homes. The buffet or the ‘fork lunch’ that had been so readily adopted as the ‘party of choice’ for private functions would take a little longer to infiltrate viceregal ranks. By 1944, however, Hume would write to his parents that one good thing circumstances had done: ‘It had cut away the last remnants of that frightful, snobbish, artificial social existence which poisoned Delhi before the war’.[30] The ‘loosening’ of New Delhi’s hierarchical sense of identity, a shift towards a greater degree of social relaxation than had previously existed, had finally penetrated viceregal circles. The Establishment rules of the 1930s, learned by young women with fathers and husbands in high-ranking positions, which decreed that she should speak first to the gentleman on her right and then the gentleman on her left, had little place in the more egalitarian world of buffets and ‘fork lunches’.

New Delhi was certainly a city in transformation; the formality of the social rituals and the forms of social behaviour and interaction considered appropriate were shifting. Previously consisting of a (comparatively) small group of Government of India officials, New Delhi’s role as wartime administrative hub for the war in the Pacific ensured that the resulting influx of armed personnel affected the make-up and shaped the behaviour of its official population, undermining the exclusivity previously associated with the city. Despite the continued significance of the ‘Warrant of Precedence’ in official life, the modes of social behaviour and interaction could not help but be affected by the growth and diversity in the city’s population. By the end of the war, New Delhi had lost its title of ‘the city of civilians’. Instead, it was a city in transition as India stood on the cusp of independence.

Delhi, 1947

YASHPAL

This extract is taken from the second volume of the novel Jhootha Sach, *and has been translated by Sunny Singh.*

Pandit Girdharilalji fled from Lahore with his wife and reached Delhi on 13 August. He found that the entire nation's populace had flooded Delhi. He had no particular acquaintances in Delhi. He couldn't bring himself to stay in the camp; hotels had no space. After much wandering, a Multani family agreed to let him stay—for five rupees a day—in a corner of their room in a newly built hotel on Faiz Road.

Panditji would leave his wife sitting in the room the whole day to guard their baggage while he searched for a place. This was impossible to find. Delhi had been filled with many times more people than it could house during the war itself, when people had come lured by business prospects. On top of that, since March, the rich people fleeing from the large cities of western Punjab also found Delhi to be the nearest and safest place of all. They were willing to pay any price to get a place. After 14 August, unable to cope with the torrent of people coming in from Punjab, the UP government stopped the entry of refugees into the state but Delhi, with arms generously spread, went on accepting everyone.

Panditji met his business acquaintances to see if any of them could help him find a room somewhere. He even went to meet Professor S.N. Mathur. Mithai, tea, lemonade and paan greeted him everywhere. People were ready to extend every kind of hospitality—except for finding a house. Some even hinted, 'You Punjabi people don't go around asking for houses, do you? Those who want them are taking them. Look in Paharganj, Sabzi Mandi, Pataudi House, Matiyamal or Bairam Khan Road.'

After eight days of tireless searching, having received no help from anyone, Panditji finally found a room on the third floor of a house on Sayed Ahmad Road, in Faiz Bazaar, behind Golcha. It was a barsaati with a tin roof but it had doors that could be locked. For water and the bathroom, he and his wife had to come downstairs to the aangan. But what a room! Finally they had a place to put down their belongings, to cook food and take shelter from the rain. Now he could afford to look for a house in a more leisurely fashion.

He learnt that though his landlord Rajaram Agarwal had lived here for a while, the rest of the people in the basti were new. Before 14 August, Koonchachela and Dilli Gate Bazaar had been predominantly Muslim. Now, Hindu refugees from the west were coming and settling here. Some areas around were still largely Muslim—Pataudi House, Chitli Kanwar Bazaar and the Bairam Khan junction. There were murmurs that preparations for a very big battle were on; rumours that Muslims had gathered lots of guns from Paharganj and other neighbourhoods and barricaded themselves in. There was also talk of some Hindus being killed. But what Panditji saw every day was many frightened Muslim families leaving with their belongings, and Punjabi Hindu families, carrying their possessions on their heads and shoulders, coming into the neighbourhoods in their place. Twice he saw people who had come from the west going into the inner streets with swords, spears and axes. Soldiers with bayoneted rifles stood or sat in the bazaars and on street corners, but there were murders inside the alleys and even bombings. Before his eyes, the population was openly being transformed. In the neighbourhood behind Faiz Bazaar, Muslims were pleading for protection. Armed soldiers had been posted for their safety, but they only hampered their movements.

In the afternoons, the tin roof would get very hot. Panditji could not bear to stay there. Thirty-five years ago, when he had been imprisoned in the cause of the nation, he had been young and his heart had been filled with passion. Now, all he could do was to endure it with quiet forbearance.

He thought about finding another place. He had no objection to living amongst Muslims. He just wanted a house that would have space, air and water. Where, if he could not return to Lahore, he could at least get his press from home and install it. For this, he was willing to spend the necessary money. And so it was among the Muslim alleys that he started looking.

The Muslims who still remained usually lurked, frightened and watchful, on the thresholds of their homes. Panditji, so as not to frighten them, would address them as ‘bhai jaan’, and ask, ‘Is there a house that has been vacated in this street?’ In response there would usually be silence. One day a very sad-looking man sighed and told him, ‘Bhai jaan, kill us and remove us, everything will be vacated. Where can we go? We will be buried here. We were born from this soil, and we will return to it.’

Upon hearing this another Muslim man, seemingly a maulana, wearing a khadi sherwani and a high Gandhi topi, paused on his way through the alley. The man who had spoken stopped upon catching his eye. Seeing everyone bow and greet him, Panditji also greeted him with an ‘adaab arz’ and softly spoke up, ‘Bhai jaan, why should you leave! It is your house, you must stay. If there is a place empty in your neighbourhood, keep us there. We think of you as brothers, the same people, one nation. It is our misfortune that we have had to leave our houses and our work but it is not your fault. We want to return to our land but it is all His (Panditji pointed towards the sky) will.’ Panditji too was wearing his usual Congress clothes: a khadi turban, a bandhgala coat and a loose turban.

The maulana spoke for the others: ‘Bhai jaan, this communal hatred is destroying the nation. It is the duty of every nationalist—you and I—to stop this savagery. Bapu has been willing to lay down his life for this. I wish Maulana Muhammad Ali-Shaukat Ali were still alive; I wish Dr Ansari were still here. Oh! Calcutta saw such awful things. At this time, God willing, only Bapu can save the nation.’

Panditji expressed his complete agreement with the maulana’s views and prepared to leave. Before he left he requested the maulana to look out for an empty house in the neighbourhood for him.

‘Ahem … there is a request.’

Panditji turned to see. The maulana was walking behind him.

‘You are looking for a house?’ the maulana asked. ‘You must be needing a nice large place—I have such a place. Would you like to buy my house? This division is permanent. You have come here; those people who are leaving—what is the possibility of their return? Why don’t you just buy?’

Panditji knocked his cane against the ground of the alley and thought before responding: ‘Maulana, buying or trading property is a matter that needs thinking

… Right now, I was just planning to rent. But if it is not too much trouble, there is no harm in having a look at the house.'

They walked back into the street. At the junction of two alleys, in a little opening, was a small gate. On the gate, underneath the large numbers placed for the census, was written: 'Sultan-pasand Zarda Factory. Owner: Sayyad Abdul Samad, Durrani Gali, Dilli Gate.



Abdul Sayyad did not want to trade, but wanted the price in cash. He was willing to accept fifteen instead of twenty, even a mere ten thousand. Panditji requested him to show him his property papers, and promised to come the following day to see them.

The next day, 4 September, was Janamasthami. Panditji's wife, despite her poor health, wanted to fast. After much cajoling and argument, she agreed to have some fruit and milk. But the Muslim fruit shops in Faiz Bazaar and Dilli Gate bazaar had been destroyed. Some refugees had begun selling cucumbers, corn, guavas and bananas from small shops and pushcarts. But Panditji could not let his wife eat such things in her fragile state of health. He walked towards Fatehpuri, looking for good fruit.

When he reached Fatehpuri, the shops were being shut down. There were rumours that Muslim policemen had taken up arms and rebelled. Frightened people were saying that beyond Sir Sayyad Road there were riots in the Muslim neighbourhoods of Dilli Gate bazaar and Pataudi House. There was talk of Muslims firing machineguns from their rooftops, and sounds of gunfire. The siren for curfew went off. Within minutes, as Panditji watched, armed soldiers went towards the area. The gunfire continued until evening.

In such a situation, how could Panditji go to Abdul Sayyad's house? He walked back towards his house and joined the people sitting outside the Hindu shops, which were still open, and sat there till evening. Passersby would stop with further news. There was talk of a great battle in Paharganj.

Panditji sat in Khubchand's shop and heard the news. Someone would say, 'Garhwalis have finished the Muslims in Hauz Kazi.' 'Everything till the Ajmeri Gate has been burned.' The Muslims had attacked Karol Bagh, he heard, and everyone had been shot. 'Two thousand Muslims have been killed in Paharganj.' One man said that at many places soldiers and members of the civil guard had

fired on the Hindus. Some spoke of sixteen Hindus killed, another of twenty-four Hindus killed. There was anger and excitement about this. People were abusing the Congress government and Pandit Nehru: ‘These people will get Hindus killed even in Delhi, then where will we go!’

On 6 September, the curfew was made more rigid. Even Hindus were restricted from movement. The military was carrying out corpses from the inner alleys. Panditji sat in Khubchand’s shop.

On 7 September, people began going out to buy aata-daal and for other chores. On that day too, Panditji decided not to go into Durrani Gali.

8 September: Panditji’s little room under the tin roof was boiling under the sun by ten o’clock. His wife was busy making phulke on the stove placed in the shadow of the barsaati’s wall. Panditji could not bear to remain sitting under the hot roof. Nor could he bear to sit idly at Khubchand’s shop. He began walking towards Sayyad Abdul Samad’s house. Soldiers with bayonets stood at the corners of the streets. In the Silwali Gali, where Panditji had first met the maulana, there were cots in front of many doors. Seated on these cots, Punjabi women were going through their bundles of clothes and their tin trunks. Panditji was surprised; where did these people come from during curfew? Outside Sayyad’s door in Durrani Gali, four armed soldiers sat on the small platforms next to the gate.

Panditji knocked on the door. ‘Sayyad bhai! … Bhai Bijang.’

The soldiers standing near by looked at Panditji. As he was alone and unarmed, they did not object. Panditji again called out to Bijang and Sayyad sahib.

‘Who is it … Who are you?’ a scared voice called from inside.

Panditji gave his name. The gate opened slightly. He entered and asked Sayyad how he was. The sun was bright in the courtyard. Leaving Panditji on the threshold, Sayyad fetched a low stool. He called Kareem to get a second stool.

As Sayyad picked up the stool, Panditji objected with embarrassment: ‘What are you doing, Sayyad sahib! Leave it! I will myself …! Isn’t Bijang here? Why are you troubling yourself?’

Sayyad spoke sadly, ‘Bijang has gone to the bazaar for some things … What can I tell you, there is no flour in the house. I cannot even get milk for the child. Oh, what savagery!’

Panditji expressed great sorrow at the madness spreading through the city, the whole country. ‘Sayyad sahib, humans have turned into animals. Exactly the same thing was happening in Lahore. On 11 August, the procession that came out with bared swords, axes, spears … At least here the government is punishing the rioters, they are trying to restore peace. There the government itself confiscated weapons from the Hindus, and the Mussalmans were walking about openly with all kinds of arms. The same sickness has reached here. What will happen to the nation, Sayyad sahib?’

Sayyad spoke with great sadness: ‘Should we be made to pay for their crimes?’

‘Of course not! This is madness, savagery!’

‘Where is the question of religion in this? This is hooliganism. We have always been nationalists, Panditji. For me, Ram-Raheem are one, but here people are just determined to kill. They kill the faces they see, no one can see the hearts …’

The Girl from Delhi

SADAAT HASAN MANTO

This story has been translated by Khalid Hasan.

The religious killings had shown no sign of abating. India had been partitioned, but the bloodletting continued: Hindus killing Muslims, Muslims killing Hindus.

So one day, Nasim Akhtar, the young and much-sought-after nautch girl from Delhi's 'red light' quarter, said to her old mother, 'Let's get out of here.'

The old woman carefully placed a betel leaf in her toothless mouth and asked, 'But where will we go, sweetheart?'

'Pakistan,' Nasim Akhtar replied, and looked at her music teacher, old Ustad Achhan Khan. 'Khan sahib, what do you think? Is it any longer safe for us Muslims to live in Delhi?'

Achhan Khan had perhaps been thinking along the same lines, because he immediately said, 'You are quite right, but we must have your mother's—our burri baiji's—permission.'

But that was the difficult bit. Despite Nasim Akhtar's fervent pleading, the old woman would not go along. One day, the young woman told her mother, 'It is going to be Hindu raj; they don't want any Muslims around.'

'So what,' her mother replied. 'We are in business because of our Hindu patrons and clients. All your admirers and regulars are Hindus, don't you forget that. There's nothing the Muslims can do for us or that we want from them, I am telling you.'

'Don't say that, mother,' Nasim Akhtar reacted sharply. 'The Quaid-e-Azam, Jinnah sahib, has worked so hard and got us our own country, Pakistan, and that's where we should go and live.'

In his opium-saturated voice, Mando the musician chipped in, 'Chotti bai, may God protect you, what a wonderful thing you have said! I am prepared to go

to Pakistan this very minute. If I die there and my bones are placed in its earth, my soul will rest in eternal peace.'

The other musicians were also equally enthusiastic about moving to Pakistan, but since the burri bai was against the idea, no more was said about it.

The burri bai, herself the toast of Delhi in her youth, sent a message to Seth Gobind Prakash, one of Nasim Akhtar's ardent and rich admirers and a frequent visitor to the kotha. The message conveyed that her daughter was terrified of all this Hindu–Muslim business and would he kindly come and set her mind at rest?

He came the next morning and Nasim Akhtar's mother said to him, 'Please talk to her. This girl wants us all to move to Pakistan, but I have been trying to reason with her. With such kind and generous friends as yourself, why should we leave Delhi? In fact, I have no doubt that in Pakistan we will be reduced to sweeping the streets. Sethji, I need a favour from you.'

The seth who was only half-listening to the burri bai, as his mind was elsewhere, asked, 'Ah, yes, what is that?'

'Could you have two or three armed guards posted outside our kotha for a few days so that this girl can feel safe?'

'No trouble at all. I can speak to the chief of police right away, so don't you worry. He will post a special police guard for your place, by this very evening, I promise,' the seth said expansively.

'May God bless you!' said the burri bai, much moved.

'Perhaps I will drop in myself this evening. Wouldn't it be nice to see our Nasim Akhtar's mujra?'

The old courtesan rose. 'Yes, indeed, this is your own place and this girl is always here at your service. Also, you must dine here tonight, seth sahib.'

'Unfortunately, I am on a diet these days,' he said, running his hands over his big belly.

After the seth's departure, the house was given a thorough cleaning. The big floor cushions, on which the clients reclined as they sat and watched Nasim Akhtar perform, had their covers changed, new lights were installed and a special tin of scarce cigarettes was ordered for Seth Gobind Prakash.

While the final touches were still being given to these elaborate preparations, the servant burst into the room, his face white with fear. He even had difficulty speaking, but finally managed to tell them that he had seen five Sikhs pounce on

a Muslim street vendor just around the corner and stab him to death in the most gruesome manner.

Nasim Akhtar nearly fainted when she heard what had happened. Ustad Achhan Khan made gallant efforts to reassure her but she was just too shaken by what she had heard. Finally her mother said, ‘This is not the first time a man has been killed in the street; these things are always going on. Now, child, don’t you think it is time you got ready for the evening? Seth sahib could be here any minute.’

Although that was the last thing she felt like doing, Nasim Akhtar put on her silks and brocades, her peshwaz, painted her face, did her hair and took her customary place in the room where all the entertaining was done. But she couldn’t get over that poor Muslim street vendor lying dead in a pool of blood. She wanted to throw off her ornaments, get out of her shimmering clothes, put on something plain and beg her mother to listen to her because she was sure something terrible was going to happen to them.

Finally she told her mother what had been going through her mind, but the old woman merely replied, ‘Why should anything happen to us? We haven’t offended anybody.’

‘And who had that poor vendor offended? They killed him nevertheless, didn’t they?’ Nasim Akhtar said gravely. ‘They cut him into pieces. It is the bad ones who escape and the innocent who get killed.’

‘You don’t know what you are saying,’ her mother retorted irately.

‘Who *does*, these days? All I know is that blood is flowing in the streets of Delhi,’ the young woman said. Then she rose, walked to the balcony and surveyed the street below. She saw four men with guns. She waved to Ustad Achhan Khan to come and take a look. ‘Are they the armed policemen seth sahib had promised to arrange?’ she asked him.

‘They don’t look like police to me; they are not wearing uniforms. They look like goondas to me,’ the old man whispered.

‘Goondas!’ Nasim Akhtar nearly screamed.

‘God only knows. They are coming towards the kotha. Nasim, I think you should take the stairs and go to the rooftop and I’ll follow you in a few minutes. There is definitely something very wrong here.’

Nasim Akhtar slunk out of the room. The old woman had not noticed. Ustad Achhan Khan came soon after. Nasim Akhtar's heart was sinking. 'What is going on?' she asked the old man.

'Just what I had feared. The four men came up as soon as you had left the room. They said they had been sent by Seth Gobind Prakash to fetch you to his residence since he couldn't make it himself. Your mother was pleased and said it was very kind of him. She thought you were in the bathroom. She told the men she would have to come along too, but one of them said, "We don't want you, you old hag. We have come for the young one." 'When I heard that, I slipped out and rushed here to warn you,' the old man said breathlessly.

'What should we do?' Nasim Akhtar asked desperately.

Ustad Achhan Khan scratched his head. 'Let me think of something. Perhaps we should get out of here as fast as we can.'

'And my mother?' she asked.

'God will protect her, but we should escape while there is time,' he replied after a pause.

The adjoining roof, a few feet lower, was that of the local laundry. Without much difficulty, they jumped on to it. Luckily, there were stairs leading from the roof to the street and in a few minutes they were safely out. They walked a block or two and found a tonga owned by a Muslim who agreed to take them to the railway station.

On their way, they saw an army truck with Muslim soldiers who were evacuating people from Hindu areas and taking them to the station where special refugee trains for Pakistan were being run. They got a ride and were in time to board a train going to Lahore in Pakistan, where they arrived the next morning.

They were taken to a refugee camp in a place outside the city called Walton. They lived there for a few weeks and then Ustad Achhan Khan sold some of Nasim Akhtar's jewellery and they moved to a small, inexpensive hotel. After a few days, the old man rented a kotha in Hira Mandi, Lahore's famous 'red light' courtesan district.

One day Ustad Achhan Khan said to her, 'I think we need to invest in some purchases, I mean musical instruments, floor cushions, that sort of thing and, with God's blessings, we can take up where we left off in Delhi.'

But to his surprise, Nasim Akhtar replied, ‘No, Khan sahib, my heart is not in that sort of thing any more. I don’t even want to live in this neighbourhood. Please find me a small place in some nice, normal locality. Delhi is behind me. That life for me is finished. I just want to live like a normal woman.’

‘What are you talking about, girl?’ Achhan Khan asked.

‘That was all a long time ago. I don’t even want to think about those days. Please pray for me; may God give me the strength to make a break from my past.’ Nasim Akhtar’s eyes were full of tears.

Over the next few days, Ustad Achhan Khan tried his best to talk her out of her strange resolve but her mind really seemed to be made up. One day she said to him, ‘I would like to get married, that is, if someone would have me; otherwise I will remain a spinster.’

Achhan Khan could not understand what had happened to her.

Was it the partition of the country that had unhinged her? Women in this profession were not like this. But he soon gave up on her. She really had changed. He found her a small house in a quiet locality, far away from Hira Mandi; but he moved back to the area himself, where he felt at home, and was hired by a rich and popular courtesan as her music teacher.

Nasim Akhtar was happy. It was a hard life, but that was what she wanted. A young boy-servant did her shopping and helped her around the house. The money from the sale of the rest of her ornaments was enough to keep her going for some time yet. She had become very religious, praying five times a day, and abstaining from food and drink during Ramadan.

Over the last couple of months, an old woman called Jannatey had begun to visit her off and on. Nasim Akhtar was grateful for her company; what she did not know was that this woman was a procuress who enticed young girls and sold them into prostitution. If they had a talent for song and dance, they became rich courtesans; otherwise they became part of Hira Mandi’s infamous flesh trade.

One day, while Jannatey was out in the courtyard, she heard Nasim Akhtar singing most beautifully as she washed her hair. She had not sung for a long time and even now was not conscious of the fact that she was singing. By instinct and experience the old woman knew the moment she heard the singing that this strange girl from Delhi who never talked and lived alone could find a place in

Hira Mandi, where she could become one of Lahore's leading singing girls. The question was how to go about it.

She tried a number of ruses, made some indirect, some direct references to the possibility, but none of them worked. Finally, one day, she threw her arms around Nasim Akhtar and kissed her on the forehead affectionately. 'Daughter, I beg of you, don't misunderstand me. I was only testing you, but you are a young woman of great piety and virtue, and not for you those things. I am sorry.'

Nasim Akhtar was taken in; she even told the old woman that she wanted to get married to a nice and simple man as it was not safe or advisable for a young woman to be living all alone without anyone to look after her.

This was just the opening Jannatey had been looking for. 'You leave that to me; I will find you the perfect husband, a man who will worship you.'

In the next few days, the old procuress brought Nasim Akhtar a number of fake proposals, making none of them sound too good, until one day she burst into the house announcing that she had found the man she was looking for. He was not too old, had a lot of property, was of a fine, upright moral character, and if Nasim Akhtar would trust her, she would go right ahead with the arrangements.

Nasim Akhtar was mentally prepared for any proposal that sounded good, more so because she had complete faith in the old woman. So she said Jannatey could proceed with the arranged marriage. She did not need to see or meet the man.

A date was set and a simple ceremony took place and Nasim Akhtar was married. She was happy that she had found a good husband who would look after her. However, her happiness was not to last beyond twenty-four hours, because the very next day she overheard her husband talking to two old courtesans from Hira Mandi. They were haggling over her price. She was being sold off. Jannatey was the mediator.

Nasim Akhtar rushed into her bedroom, tears running down her cheeks. She cried for a long time, then she dried her eyes and unpacked the clothes she had brought with her from Delhi, the ones she had been wearing that last evening, and quietly walked out of the house, making straight for the kotha where Ustad Achhan Khan was employed.

Winter Morning

KAMLESHWAR

This is an extract from the short story ‘Dilli Mein Ek Maut’, translated by Gordon C. Roadarmel.

A shroud of fog covers everything. It is past nine in the morning, but all of Delhi is enmeshed in the haze. The streets are damp. The trees are wet. Nothing is clearly visible. The bustle of life reveals itself in sounds, sounds which fill the ears. Sounds are coming from every part of the house. As on other days, Vaswani’s servant has lit the stove, and it can be heard sizzling beyond the wall. In the adjoining room, Atul Mavani is polishing his shoes. Upstairs the Sardarji is putting Fixo on his moustache. Behind the curtain on his window a bulb gleams like an immense pearl. All the doors are closed and all the windows are draped, but throughout the building there is the clamour of life. On the third floor, Vaswani has closed the bathroom door and turned on the tap.

Buses are rushing through the fog, the whine of their heavy tyres approaching and then fading into the distance. Motor rickshaws are dashing along recklessly. Someone has just flipped down a taxi meter. The phone is ringing at the doctor’s place next door, and some girls heading for work are passing through the rear alley.

The cold is intense. On the shivering streets, cars and buses, their horns blaring, slash through the clouds of fog. The sidewalks are crowded but each person, wrapped in fog, seems like a drifting wisp of cotton.

Those wisps of cotton advance silently into the sea of haze. The buses are crowded. People huddle on the cold seats amidst figures hanging almost like Jesus from the cross—arms outstretched, with not nails in their hands but the icy shining rods of the bus.

In the distance a funeral procession is coming down the street.

This must be the funeral I just read about in the newspaper: ‘The death occurred this evening at Irwin Hospital of Seth Diwanchand, the renowned and beloved Karol Bagh business magnate. His body has been taken to his home. Tomorrow morning at nine o’clock the funeral will proceed by way of Arya Samaj road to the Panchkuin cremation ground for the last rites.’

This must be his bier coming up the street now. Walking silently and slowly behind it are some people wrapped in mufflers and wearing hats. Nothing can be seen very clearly.

There is a knock at my door. I put the paper aside and open the door. Atul Mavani is standing there.

‘I have a problem, friend. No one showed up today to do the ironing. Could I use your iron?’ Atul’s words are a relief. I was afraid he might raise the question of joining the funeral procession. I immediately give him the iron, satisfied that he plans to iron his pants and then set off on a round of the embassies.

Bhabiji’s House

RUSKIN BOND

This extract is taken from The Lamp Is Lit, *Ruskin Bond’s autobiography.*

My neighbours in Rajouri Garden back in the 1960s were my Punjabi friend Kamal and his family. This entry from my journal, which I wrote on one of my visits in 1970, after I had moved to Mussoorie, describes a typical day in that household.



At first light there is a tremendous burst of birdsong from the guava tree in the little garden. Over a hundred sparrows wake up all at once and give tongue to whatever it is that sparrows have to say to each other at five o’clock on a foggy winter’s morning in Delhi.

In the small house, people sleep on; that is, everyone except Bhabiji—Granny—the head of the lively Punjabi middle-class family with whom I nearly always stay when I am in Delhi.

She coughs, stirs, groans, grumbles and gets out of bed. The fire has to be lit, and food prepared for two of her sons to take to work. There is a daughter-in-law, Shobha, to help her; but the girl is not very bright at getting up in the morning. Actually, it is this way: Bhabiji wants to show up her daughter-in-law; so, no matter how hard Shobha tries to be up first, Bhabiji forestalls her. The old lady does not sleep well, anyway; her eyes are open long before the first sparrow chirps, and as soon as she sees her daughter-in-law stirring, she scrambles out of bed and hurries to the kitchen. This gives her the opportunity to say: ‘What good is a daughter-in-law when I have to get up to prepare her husband’s food?’

The truth is that Bhabiji does not like anyone else preparing her sons’ food.

She looks no older than when I first saw her, ten years ago. She still has complete control over a large family and, with tremendous confidence and enthusiasm, presides over the lives of three sons, a daughter, two daughters-in-law and fourteen grandchildren. This is a joint family (there are not many left in a big city like Delhi), in which the sons and their families all live together as one unit under their mother's benevolent (and sometimes slightly malevolent) autocracy. Even when her husband was alive, Bhabiji dominated the household.

The eldest son, Shiv, has a separate kitchen, but his wife and children participate in all the family celebrations and quarrels. It is a small miracle how everyone (including myself when I visit) manages to fit into the house; and a stranger might be forgiven for wondering where everyone sleeps, for no beds are visible during the day. That is because the beds—light wooden frames with rough string across—are brought in only at night, and are taken out first thing in the morning and kept in the garden shed.

As Bhabiji lights the kitchen fire, the household begins to stir, and Shobha joins her mother-in-law in the kitchen. As a guest I am privileged and may get up last. But my bed soon becomes an island battered by waves of scurrying, shouting children, eager to bathe, dress, eat and find their school books. Before I can get up, someone brings me a tumbler of hot sweet tea. It is a brass tumbler and burns my fingers; I have yet to learn how to hold one properly. Punjabis like their tea with lots of milk and sugar—so much so that I often wonder why they bother to add any tea.

Ten years ago, 'bed tea' was unheard of in Bhabiji's house. Then, the first time I came to stay, Kamal, the youngest son, told Bhabiji: 'My friend is angrez. He must have tea in bed.' He forgot to mention that I usually took my morning cup at seven; they gave it to me at five. I gulped it down and went to sleep again. Then, slowly, others in the household began indulging in morning cups of tea. Now everyone, including the older children, has 'bed tea'. They bless my English forebears for instituting the custom; I bless the Punjabis for perpetuating it.

Breakfast is by rota, in the kitchen. It is a tiny room and accommodates only four adults at a time. The children have eaten first; but the smallest children, Shobha's toddlers, keep coming in and climbing over us. Says Bhabiji of the

youngest and most mischievous: ‘He lives only because God keeps a special eye on him.’

Kamal, his elder brother Arun and I sit cross-legged and barefooted on the floor while Bhabiji serves us hot parathas stuffed with potatoes and onions, along with omelettes, an excellent dish. Arun then goes to work on his scooter, while Kamal catches a bus for the city, where he attends an art college. After they have gone, Bhabiji and Shobha have their breakfast.

By nine o’clock everyone who is still in the house is busy doing something. Shobha is washing clothes. Bhabiji has settled down on a cot with a huge pile of spinach, which she methodically cleans and chops up. Madhu, her fourteen-year-old granddaughter, who attends school only in the afternoons, is washing down the sitting room floor. Madhu’s mother is a teacher in a primary school in Delhi, and earns a pittance of Rs 150 a month. Her husband went to England ten years ago, and never returned; he does not send any money home.

Madhu is made attractive by the gravity of her countenance. She is always thoughtful, reflective; seldom speaks, smiles rarely (but looks very pretty when she does). I wonder what she thinks about as she scrubs floors, prepares meals with Bhabiji, washes dishes and even finds a few hard-pressed moments for her school work. She is the Cinderella of the house. Not that she has to put up with anything like a cruel stepmother. Madhu is Bhabiji’s favourite. She has made herself so useful that she is above all reproach. Apart from that, there is a certain measure of aloofness about her—she does not get involved in domestic squabbles—and this is foreign to a household in which everyone has something to say for himself or herself. Her two young brothers are constantly being reprimanded, but no one says anything to Madhu. Only yesterday morning, when clothes were being washed and Madhu was scrubbing the floor, the following dialogue took place.

Madhu’s mother (picking up a school book left in the courtyard): ‘Where’s that boy Popat? See how careless he is with his books! Popat! He’s run off. Just wait till he gets back. I’ll give him a good beating.’

Vinod’s mother: ‘It’s not Popat’s book. It’s Vinod’s. Where’s Vinod?’

Vinod (grumpily): ‘It’s Madhu’s book.’

Silence for a minute or two. Madhu continues scrubbing the floor; she does not bother to look up. Vinod picks up the book and takes it indoors. The women

return to their chores.

Manju, daughter of Shiv and sister of Vinod, is averse to housework and, as a result, is always being scolded—by her parents, grandmother, uncles and aunts.

Now, she is engaged in the unwelcome chore of sweeping the front yard. She does this with a sulky look, ignoring my cheerful remarks. I have been sitting under the guava tree, but Manju soon sweeps me away from this spot. She creates a drifting cloud of dust, and seems satisfied only when the dust settles on the clothes that have just been hung up to dry. Manju is a sensuous creature and, like most sensuous people, is lazy by nature. She does not like sweeping because the boy next door can see her at it, and she wants to appear before him in a more glamorous light. Her first action every morning is to turn to the cinema advertisements in the newspaper. Bombay's movie moguls cater for girls like Manju who long to be tragic heroines. Life is so very dull for middle-class teenagers in Delhi that it is only natural that they should lean so heavily on escapist entertainment. Every residential area has a cinema. But there is not a single bookshop in this particular suburb, although it has a population of over twenty thousand literate people. Few children read books but they are adept at swotting up examination 'guides', and students of, say, Hardy or Dickens read the guides and not the novels.

Bhabiji is now grinding onions and chillies in a mortar. Her eyes are watering but she is in a good mood. Shobha sits quietly in the kitchen. A little while ago she was complaining to me of a backache. I am the only one who lends a sympathetic ear to complaints of aches and pains. But since last night, my sympathies have been under severe strain. When I got into bed at about ten o'clock, I found the sheets wet. Apparently Shobha had put her baby to sleep in my bed during the afternoon.

While the housework is still in progress, cousin Kishore arrives. He is an itinerant musician who makes a living by arranging performances at marriages. He visits Bhabiji's house frequently and at odd hours, often a little tipsy, always brimming over with goodwill and grandiose plans for the future. It was once his ambition to be a film producer, and some years back he lost a lot of Bhabiji's money in producing a film that was never completed. He still talks of finishing it.

‘Brother,’ he says, taking me into his confidence for the hundredth time, ‘do you know anyone who has a movie camera?’

‘No,’ I say, knowing only too well how these admissions can lead me into a morass of complicated manoeuvres. But Kishore is not easily put off, especially when he has been fortified with country liquor.

‘But you knew someone with a movie camera?’ he asks.

‘That was long ago.’

‘How long ago?’ (I have got him going now.)

‘About five years back.’

‘Only five years? Find him, find him!’

‘It’s no use. He doesn’t have the movie camera any more. He sold it.’

‘Sold it!’ Kishore looks at me as though I have done him an injury. ‘But why didn’t you buy it? All we need is a movie camera, and our fortune is made. I will produce the film, I will direct it, I will write the music. Two in one, Charlie Chaplin and Raj Kapoor. Why didn’t you buy the camera?’

‘Because I didn’t have the money.’

‘But we could have borrowed the money.’

‘If you are in a position to borrow money, you can go out and buy another movie camera.’

‘We could have borrowed the camera. Do you know anyone else who has one?’

‘Not a soul.’ I am firm this time; I will not be led into another maze.

‘Very sad, very sad,’ mutters Kishore. And with a dejected, hangdog expression designed to make me feel that I am responsible for all his failures, he moves off.

Bhabiji had expressed some annoyance at his arrival, but he softens her up by leaving behind an invitation to a marriage party this evening. No one in the house knows the bride’s or bridegroom’s family, but that does not matter; knowing one of the musicians is just as good. Almost everyone will go.

While Bhabiji, Shobha and Madhu are preparing lunch, Bhabiji engages in one of her favourite subjects of conversation, Kamal’s marriage, which she hopes she will be able to arrange in the near future. She freely acknowledges that she made grave blunders in selecting wives for her other sons—this is meant to be heard by Shobha—and promises not to repeat her mistakes. According to

Bhabiji, Kamal's bride should be both educated and domesticated, and of course she must be fair.

'What if he likes a dark girl?' I ask teasingly.

Bhabiji looks horrified. 'He cannot marry a dark girl,' she declares.

'But dark girls are beautiful,' I tell her.

'Impossible!'

'Do you want him to marry a European girl?'

'No foreigners! I know them, they'll take my son away. He shall have a good Punjabi girl, with a complexion the colour of wheat.'

Noon. The shadows shift and cross the road. I sit beneath the guava tree and watch the women at work. They will not let me do anything, but they like talking to me and they love to hear my broken Punjabi. Sparrows flit about at their feet, snapping up the gram that runs away from their busy fingers. A crow looks speculatively at the empty kitchen, sidles towards the open door; but Bhabiji has only to glance up and the experienced crow flies away. He knows he will not be able to make off with anything from this house.

One by one the children come home, demanding food. Now it is Madhu's turn to go to school. Her younger brother Popat, an intelligent but undersized boy of thirteen, appears in the doorway and asks for lunch.

'Be off!' says Bhabiji. 'It isn't ready yet.'

Actually the food is ready and only the chapatis remain to be made. Shobha will attend to them. Bhabiji lies down on her cot in the sun, complaining of a pain in her back and ringing noises in her ears.

'I'll press your back,' says Popat. He has been out of Bhabiji's favour lately, and is looking for an opportunity to be rehabilitated.

Barefooted he stands on Bhabiji's back and treads her weary flesh and bones with a gentle walking-in-one-spot movement. Bhabiji grunts with relief. Every day she has new pains in new places. Her age, and the daily business of feeding the family and running everyone's affairs, are beginning to tell on her. But she would sooner die than give up her position of dominance in the house. Her working sons still hand over their pay to her, and she dispenses the money as she sees fit.

The pummelling she gets from Popat puts her in a better mood, and she holds forth on another favourite subject, the respective merits of various dowries.

Shiv's wife (according to Bhabiji) brought nothing with her but a string cot; Kishore's wife brought only a sharp and clever tongue; Shobha brought a wonderful steel cupboard, fully expecting that it would do all the housework for her.

This last observation upsets Shobha, and a little later I find her under the guava tree, weeping profusely. I give her the comforting words she obviously expects, but it is her husband Arun who will have to bear the brunt of her outraged feelings when he comes home this evening. He is rather nervous of his wife. Last night he wanted to eat out, at a restaurant, but did not want to be accused of wasting money. So he stuffed fifteen rupees into my pocket and asked me to invite both him and Shobha to dinner, which I did. We had a good dinner. Such unexpected hospitality on my part has further improved my standing with Shobha. Now, in spite of other chores, she sees that I get cups of tea and coffee at odd hours of the day.

Bhabiji knows Arun is soft with his wife, and taunts him about it. She was saying this morning that whenever there is any work to be done Shobha retires to bed with a headache (partly true). She says even Manju does more housework (not true). Bhabiji has certain talents as an actress, and does a good take-off of Shobha sulking and grumbling at having too much to do.

While Bhabiji talks, Popat sneaks off and goes for a ride on the bicycle. It is a very old bicycle and is constantly undergoing repairs. 'The soul has gone out of it,' says Vinod philosophically and makes his way on to the roof, where he keeps a store of pornographic literature. Up there, he cannot be seen and cannot be remembered, and so avoids being sent out on errands.

One of the boys is bathing at the hand-pump. Manju, who should have gone to school with Madhu, is stretched out on a cot, complaining of fever. But she will be up in time to attend the marriage party …

Towards evening, as the birds return to roost in the guava tree, their chatter is challenged by the tumult of people in the house getting ready for the marriage party.

Manju presses her tight pyjamas but neglects to darn them. She wears a loose-fitting, diaphanous shirt. She keeps flitting in and out of the front room so that I can admire the way she glitters. Shobha has used too much powder and lipstick in an effort to look like the femme fatale which she indubitably is not. Shiv's

more conservative wife floats around in loose, old-fashioned pyjamas. Bhabiji is sober and austere in a white sari. Madhu looks neat. The men wear their suits.

Popat is holding up a mirror for his Uncle Kishore, who is combing his long hair. (Kishore kept his hair long, like a court musician at the time of Akbar, before the hippies had been heard of.) He is nodding benevolently, having fortified himself from a bottle labelled ‘Som Ras’ (Nectar of the Gods), obtained cheaply from an illicit still.

Kishore: ‘Don’t shake the mirror, boy!’

Popat: ‘Uncle, it’s your head that’s shaking.’

Shobha is happy. She loves going out, especially to marriages, and she always takes her two small boys with her, although they invariably spoil the carpets.

Only Kamal, Popat and I remain behind. I have had more than my share of marriage parties.

The house is strangely quiet. It does not seem so small now, with only three people left in it. The kitchen has been locked (Bhabiji will not leave it open while Popat is still in the house), so we visit the dhaba, the wayside restaurant near the main road, and this time I pay the bill with my own money. We have kababs and chicken curry.

Yesterday Kamal and I took our lunch on the grass of the Buddha Jayanti Gardens (Buddha’s Birthday Gardens). There was no college for Kamal, as the majority of Delhi’s students had hijacked a number of corporation buses and headed for the Pakistan High Commission, with every intention of levelling it to the ground if possible, as a protest against the hijacking of an Indian plane from Srinagar to Lahore. The students were met by the Delhi police in full strength, and a pitched battle took place, in which stones from the students and tear gas shells from the police were the favoured missiles. There were two shells fired every minute, according to a newspaper report. And this went on all day. A number of students and policemen were injured, but by some miracle no one was killed. The police held their ground, and the Pakistan High Commission remained inviolate. But the Australian High Commission, situated to the rear of the student brigade, received most of the tear gas shells, and had to close down for the day.

Kamal and I attended the siege for about an hour, before retiring to the Gardens with our ham sandwiches. A couple of friendly squirrels came up to

investigate, and were soon taking bread from our hands. We could hear the chanting of the students in the distance. I lay back on the grass and opened my copy of *Barchester Towers*. Whenever life in Delhi, or in Bhabiji's house (or anywhere, for that matter) becomes too tumultuous, I turn to Trollope. Nothing could be further removed from the turmoil of our times than an English cathedral town in the nineteenth century. But I think Jane Austen would have appreciated life in Bhabiji's house.

By ten o'clock, everyone is back from the marriage. (They had gone for the feast, and not for the ceremonies, which continue into the early hours of the morning.) Shobha is full of praise for the bridegroom's good looks and fair complexion. She describes him as being '*gorachitta*'—very white! She does not have a high opinion of the bride.

Shiv, in a happy and reflective mood, extols the qualities of his own wife, referring to her as the Barrel. He tells us how, shortly after their marriage, she had threatened to throw a brick at the next-door girl. This little incident remains fresh in Shiv's mind, after eighteen years of marriage.

He says: 'When the neighbours came and complained, I told them, "It is quite possible that my wife will throw a brick at your daughter. She is in the habit of throwing bricks." The neighbours held their peace.'

I think Shiv is rather proud of his wife's militancy when it comes to taking on neighbours; recently she vanquished the woman next door (a formidable Sikh lady) after a verbal battle that lasted three hours. But in arguments or quarrels with Bhabiji, Shiv's wife always loses, because Shiv takes his mother's side.

Arun, on the other hand, is afraid of both wife and mother, and simply makes himself scarce when a quarrel develops. Or he tells his mother she is right, and then, to placate Shobha, takes her to the pictures.

Kishore turns up just as everyone is about to go to bed. Bhabiji is annoyed at first, because he has been drinking too much, but when he produces a bunch of cinema tickets she is mollified and asks him to stay the night. Not even Bhabiji likes missing a new picture.

Kishore is urging me to write his life story.

'Your life would make a most interesting story,' I tell him. 'But it will be interesting only if I put in everything—your successes *and* your failures.'

‘No, no, only successes,’ exhorts Kishore. ‘I want you to describe me as a popular music director.’

‘But you have yet to become popular.’

‘I will be popular if you write about me.’

Fortunately we are interrupted by the cots being brought in. Then Bhabiji and Shiv go into a huddle, discussing plans for building an extra room. After all, Kamal may be married soon.

One by one, the children get under their quilts. Popat starts massaging Bhabiji’s back. She gives him her favourite blessing: ‘God protect you and give you lots of children.’ If God listens to all Bhabiji’s prayers and blessings, there will never be a fall in the population.

The lights are off and Bhabiji settles down for the night. She is almost asleep when a small voice pipes up: ‘Bhabiji, tell us a story.’

At first Bhabiji pretends not to hear. Then, when the request is repeated, she says: ‘You’ll keep Aunty Shobha awake, and then she’ll have an excuse for getting up late in the morning.’ But the children know Bhabiji’s one great weakness, and they renew their demand.

‘Your grandmother is tired,’ says Arun. ‘Let her sleep.’

But Bhabiji’s eyes are open. Her mind is going back over the crowded years, and she remembers something very interesting that happened when her younger brother’s wife’s sister married the eldest son of her third cousin …

Before long, the children are asleep, and I am wondering if I will ever sleep, for Bhabiji’s voice drones on, into the darker reaches of the night.



Some thirty years have passed since this account was written, but Bhabiji and her family have been very much on my mind of late, for it was just a few days ago that I received news that Kamal had succumbed to a paralytic stroke. He was only fifty-six. Thus ended my last link with Rajouri Gardens. Bhabiji had passed on in the late 1970s, and with her passing this closely-knit joint family began to break up, for she was the bond that held together those very disparate elements. The brothers went their different ways, the grandchildren also being dispersed. There were disputes over property. Popat and his brothers ended up in the UK. Arun and his family moved to another part of Delhi. Kishore died too, without realizing his ambition of becoming a famous musician. In Delhi today it

is rare to find large families living together. The younger lot keep in touch by telephone or email. They seldom meet.

A World of Words

RENUKA SINGH

My family used to live in Preet Nagar, situated at the midpoint between Lahore and Amritsar, which was then a vibrant centre of Punjabi culture. My father Pritam Singh worked with Gurbaksh Singh, the editor of a Punjabi literary magazine, *Preet Lari*. Soon after Partition, my parents along with my elder sister had to abandon their home. They arrived in Delhi as refugees and stayed at the Yog Maya Temple right opposite the Qutub Minar. Within a few months, they moved to the top floor of a yellow mansion nearby. The Muslim family who owned this house—some of them had fled to Pakistan—had so designed the house that there was a panoramic view of the surrounding area of Qutub from our floor. I was born in a room that overlooked the minar.

My father had to start from scratch. His friend Dr M.S. Randhawa, Deputy Commissioner of Delhi, helped him to acquire office premises in Chandni Chowk, where he set up the first Punjabi printing press. Later, he established his publishing house, Navyug Publishers, which continues to produce an impressive list of books in Punjabi. In 1958 he launched what would become one of the most prestigious Punjabi literary magazines, *Arsee* (Mirror). This monthly magazine became a symbol of Punjabi self-reflection.

As a result of the work my father did, what I grew up in was the epicentre of the Punjabi literary world in Delhi. Many of the Punjabi writers in Delhi at that time had moved to the city only after Partition. Since then Punjabi literature has become largely urban and Delhi-based.

Arsee was a powerful forum for the Punjabi community in Delhi and Punjab, and published the works of many who later became stalwart literary figures. Many of the authors of the day knew my father from his Preet Nagar days. Along with short fiction, poetry and reviews, the magazine also published the

occasional political commentary. It first published writers like Devender Sathyarthi, Amrita Pritam, Kulwant Singh Virk and K.S. Duggal. Other established writers included Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, Gurbaksh Singh, Nanak Singh, Mohan Singh, Sant Singh Sekhon and Dhani Ram Chatrak. There were some who were unknown then but are now household names, like Balwant Gargi, Sukhbir, P.S. Sehrai, Gulzar Sandhu, Mohinder Singh Sarna, Dr Neki, Balraj Sahni, Dr Harbhajan Singh, Gurdial Singh, Ajeet Cour and Dr Sutinder Noor.

My father closed down Arsee in 2000. He was eighty-six and fatigue had set in. But the tradition started by Arsee was so strong that now there are many other Punjabi literary journals published in the city, such as *Samdarshi*, *Nagmani*, *Punjabi Digest* and *Aks*. There are also daily newspapers which have a core literary section, including serialized novels. In spite of that, people still tell my father how much they miss his journal.

Among the books Navyug published in the initial days were Nanak Singh's *Chitta Lahu*, critically acclaimed for its idealized characters, Devender Sathyarthi's *Gidda*, Amrita Pritam's two famous collections of poetry *Sunehre* and *Kagaz te Kanvas*, K.S. Duggal's *Gauraj* and *Phul Torna Mana Hai*, which both deal with the trauma of Partition, Mohan Singh's *Save Pather*, Balwant Gargi's famous play *Loha Kut* and Shiv Kumar's *Atte Diyan Chirian*. Year after year, not only did my father's authors bag the coveted Sahitya Akademi and Gyanpeeth awards, but he too was showered with prizes from the state and central government for excellence in printing and publishing from amongst all the Indian languages. I grew up hearing about his legendary role in the development of Punjabi publishing and promotion of the language and literature.

Our house was a meeting place for many generations of poets, novelists, journalists, actors, filmmakers, bureaucrats, ideologues, politicians and artists. I learnt different things from each of them, not merely about literature but also about life and living. Devender Sathyarthi, in his nineties now, collected folklore from all the nooks and corners of India. He would make endless revisions of his manuscripts. He showed me how he wrote and rewrote on slips of paper and then pasted them on top of each other until he managed to produce a manuscript that flowed to his satisfaction. He was an ardent admirer of Rabindranath Tagore and I once asked him about his encounter with him in Shantiniketan. Gurudev

had advised him, he said, to write for four hours every day. Such an offering to Saraswati would take care of his future and guarantee success in life.

The people who came to our house were memorable not merely for their writing but also for their lifestyles which were radically different. Amrita Pritam, the queen of Punjabi literature, now in her eighties, used to live with her partner, the artist Inderjeet or Imroz. They seemed like Sartre and Simone Beauvoir to me. Her sonorous voice still resounds in my ears. She would hold literary evenings at her place. We were family friends and backdoor neighbours, and so we kids, especially my elder sister, were often summoned to help her with the cooking and drinks as she did not relish having domestic help around. She possessed the ability to both attract and repel people depending on her whims and fancies. I eventually learned to contend with her vacillations between deep affection and complete indifference. Imroz, a caring and devoted person, was known for the softness of his brush strokes, and did most of the designing work for my father till my younger sister, inspired by Imroz, started working on it. Imroz encouraged me to paint as well but after a while I changed tracks.

The artist Sobha Singh, famous for his paintings of Sikh gurus and the legendary lovers Sohini Mahiwal, finished one of his paintings in our house. For want of suitable lighting, he actually converted one of our bathrooms into his studio. It is difficult to forget his gentleness and sense of humour. One day he brought *The Pleasures of Philosophy* by Will Durant and said, ‘This is for wise Rane, to make her still wiser.’ For me, it was the beginning of a lifelong love of the subject.

Dr M.S. Randhawa, author-bureaucrat, known for his books on Kangra art, was an epitome of efficiency and discipline. He was an instant decision-maker, who really knew how to exercise his authority. He came to our new house one day and planned our garden for us. Before we knew, the roses were in full bloom and the garden perfectly manicured. The superior man, he once told me, always excels in whatever he undertakes.

Another person I remember vividly is Shiv Kumar, creator of *Luna* and the beloved poet of Punjabis, who died in the prime of his life. *Luna* is based on history, on the story of Puran, son of King Salwan, and how his fate unfolds when he refuses to respond to the advances of his beautiful stepmother, Queen Luna. Shiv Kumar was very lyrical, sang beautifully and brought out the pathos

of human suffering. His emotional intensity, born of the pain of unrequited love, and his exquisite expressions reminded me of Goethe's *Sufferings of Young Werther*.

The renowned Punjabi playwright Balwant Gargi led a colourful and dramatic life both in India and abroad. Even the process of writing was a drama being enacted. Others were indispensable for his creativity. Like Dostoyevsky, he never wrote but always dictated to his secretary or assistants. Whenever he picked up conversations with his friends over endless cups of tea, he would suddenly appear younger. With my father, his sole publisher, he enjoyed a very meaningful relationship.

The sense of community was so strong that after some years, my father and some of his writers all moved into Hauz Khas Enclave to be closer to one another. When I was ten we moved into our newly constructed house. This household was to my youthful mind a little Delphi in Delhi, difficult to sustain and yet very fruitful as a creative crucible.

My mother was a social worker and the first Indian woman to receive the World Peace Prize for her signature campaign for the peace movement after World War II. She provided a warm and stimulating home for friends and relatives. She succeeded in containing the constantly changing circumstances of our household. The Punjabi emotional world was like the Delhi weather—rushing torrents of rain and the sun scorching with the heat. My mother's work for the downtrodden and, in particular, distressed women who came to our house with their problems, resulted in my own interest and research in the area of gender studies.

The greatest gift I received from my father's world of words was to experience the mystery of language, the power of the word and coming in contact with the energy of the writer/speaker.

One of the things which gave unity to this group of writers was the recurrent theme of loss and suffering. It was as if the division of Punjab had permanently affected their psyche. In the 1950s, my father published works that dealt with Partition. The books of the 1960s and '70s dealt more with the pangs of development and human relationships in the context of social and cultural constraints. The impact of western thought was clearly discernable in these works. During the 1980s and '90s, a new phenomenon was the expatriate

Punjabi writer—such as Sati Kumar, Dev, Amarjit Chandan, Kailash Puri, Avtar Johal, Ranjit Dhir, Iqbal Mahal, Iqbal Ramoowalia and Veena Verma—who highlighted his alienation in the capitalist world and wrote about his search for roots and identity. The urban context has contributed to the development of the language in the sense that it has produced literature written in standardized and sophisticated Punjabi, whereas in Punjab the local dialect and vocabulary, for instance, in the Malwa region distinguishes if from the rest.

The genres favoured have also changed over the decades. Earlier, poetry was the main form of expression. Now short stories too are very popular. Also, there are more women writers now—Amrita Pritam was followed by Prabhjot Kaur, Ajeet Cour, Dilip Kaur Tiwana, Bachint Kaur, Manjit Tiwana, Chandan Negi, Mohinder Kaur, Sheila Gujral and Vinita. The prominent writers have been easily accessible to the lay reader and are distinguished by their elegant and crisp style.

But it is not that Punjabi literature has none of the problems that other regional literatures face. Lack of serious readership, an unsatisfactory distribution system and sales, and only an occasional arising of younger stars has not deterred my father from pursuing this love and carrying out the task of resurrecting the realm of Punjabi literature. It seems that this literature helps the community strengthen their identity in terms of being an aesthetic response to socio-cultural crises and also because it generates unconventional images of the community with regional variations.

Punjabis are by nature brave, hard working, generous, compassionate and religious, yet this-worldly people who like to live well. A reflection of the increasingly global outlook of the Punjabi community in Delhi is that translations sell better than original Punjabi works. My father commissioned translations of many world classics into Punjabi: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Hardy, Hugo, Balzac, Emerson, Marx and Freud. Even Khushwant Singh’s work had to be translated. My father’s interaction with the cultural sections of various embassies encouraged him to undertake these translations. Generally, a thousand copies of a popular translation would sell over a period of three years, whereas for other books, it usually took five to ten years.

Today, Punjabi is being taught as the third language in Delhi schools. In fact, the government has funded this project and the Punjabi Academy actually

provides teachers for promotion of the language in various institutions. But Punjabi children in Delhi seem to have adopted Hindi or English rather than Punjabi as the language of choice. Their familiarity with Punjabi ironically comes from Hindi film songs which are often based on Punjabi folk tunes or are replete with Punjabi phrases.

My father is now the Chairman of the Punjabi Sahit Sabha (PSS) and brings out a quarterly magazine of contemporary literature that disseminates the regional literature of India in Punjabi. Punjabi Bhavan that houses PSS at Rouse Avenue is an active centre for art and literature. Perhaps there's still hope; something of the Delhi that I knew might yet survive.

Number Seven, Civil Lines

SHEILA DHAR

This extract is taken from Raga’n Josh: Stories from a Musical Life.

The family dining room was the place where the final judgement on the state of the universe was available to both the adults and children of our family. It was the centre of the real world and there was no question that this real world was in the absolute control of my grandfather. He habitually surveyed his brood of sixty-odd people from his exalted position at the head of the table with a sharp but benevolent eye. If he smiled everyone knew that all was well with the world and life would soon shower exciting gifts on us. When he frowned, the women looked funereal and the children apprehensive. The cue on how one should feel and what one should think came from him and was received with the utmost respect and willingness, at least for the entire period of my childhood.

We were used to incredulous exclamations about the size of our joint family from schoolmates and prided ourselves on both our numbers and our closeness. My grandfather had three sons whose wives and children were his responsibility as head of the household, and five daughters who though suitably married kept returning to the ancestral home on extended stays for one reason or another. Life was undoubtedly easier and pleasanter in their father’s comfortable house in Delhi than in the smaller towns and humbler circumstances in which their husbands were placed. But the overwhelming official reason why Delhi tended to become their family headquarters was that the schools were much better in the capital city. In addition to the families of my aunts and uncles, we always had house guests and three or four children of distant relatives or friends living with us. This is how our household came to have more than sixty members at any given time, including the children whose number usually exceeded thirty.

Any visitor to the house was welcomed with great warmth and cheer by all. This came to be talked about as a wonderful trait of our family. We were very pleased with such praise and deliberately tried to outdo ourselves in devising little attentions and services for the comfort of our guests as this was sure to win the approval of all the adults. Another reason why we loved having people from outside was that even the smallest difference in dress, look or intonation was an interesting novelty that lit up the comfortable sameness of our lives.

In the nineteen-twenties, my grandfather, a barrister-at-law, spearheaded the move of three main branches of the extended family from the congested lanes of Chailpuri in the old city of Delhi to the Civil Lines, where a sizeable piece of land had been gifted by the British government to an ancestor, presumably for services rendered. There were subsequent family partitions and about twenty-four colonial-style houses surrounded by lawns and gardens came up in the spacious and elegant area, where highly-placed civil servants of the British government lived. Almost all the houses nestled among tall trees and were connected by winding lanes. It was an imposing and attractive neighbourhood. The relatives who still lived in the walled city and visited these houses occasionally were awed by the new Anglicized life style that was the ideal of each of these units, and talked amongst themselves for weeks afterwards about the grandeur of the life they had seen.

It was noted with envy and admiration that breakfast in these households consisted of eggs, toast and jam, instead of vegetable bhujia with paratha, and that even the women had begun to use spoons, though only little ones, to eat. There were many other amazing things. Guests to tea were served cakes and sandwiches instead of samosas and barfi. In the evenings there was Scotch whisky and soda in the living rooms instead of keora sharbat. The men played tennis, billiards and bridge in clubs instead of chess and ganjufa in the courtyard. These were big changes and intimidating ones, specially for the women who lived there. They had been grappling with their improved, Westernized style of life for almost ten years when I was born.

We came of a long line of British loyalists. The title of Rai Bahadur conferred on my grandfather was a highly prized possession of the family and was used even more than his real name, Raj Narain, to identify him. His first son, born before this elevation could have been foreseen, was named Brij Narain, but the

younger two had ‘Bahadur’ attached to their names, undoubtedly so that the advantage of the association could travel with them through life and ensure preferential treatment at every stage.

The refined but somewhat high-strung middle son was my father who remained a forbidding figure to me for most of my life. As a child I was much more comfortable with his elder brother, my uncle whom we called Tauji. Through my school years, Tauji had been a steady source of love and warmth, even though he did not live in Delhi for most of his working life. He was an engineer in government service and in his prime occupied various elevated positions in Bihar and Orissa but he and his family spent every vacation visiting the family headquarters in Delhi. This time was like a joyful celebration that went on for the entire duration of his stay. It was understood by all that, of his three sons, my grandfather loved him the most and considered him more upright, generous and able than all his other children. My grandparents dotingly called him Chaand. Strangely, none of my grandfather’s other children seemed to qualify for a pet name. Sometimes I felt that he was the one with whom they had the strongest bond. It was almost something visceral that did not seem to enter their relationships with my other aunts and uncles. Tauji was like an extension of my grandfather and his very presence commanded the same kind of authority.

He always came loaded with gifts for everyone in the large joint family, specially the children. More than anyone else, he made us feel like individuals by trying to communicate with each child separately. This was a rare treat. The other grownups regarded all the children of the house as a collective entity, layered into several age groups. Tauji’s personal and imaginative gifts were sharply aimed and did much to propel each child towards a sense of identity.

As a teenager, I was notorious for my lack of grace and beauty and therefore became a natural target for snide remarks from my father’s sisters and my cousins. ‘Whenever there is a loud bang and crash, it means that she has collided with something’, they would say of me; or ‘She should really have been a boy’, or ‘Who will ever marry this ragamuffin?’, or ‘Can anyone believe she is a daughter of this house!’ When I was going through this stage, Tauji brought me a pair of extremely delicate silver filigree earrings from Orissa. I had never seen, let alone owned, anything so exquisite. It awakened something within me which helped me to cope with my physical awkwardness. My older brother got a train

engine which his enquiring mind could study, take apart and put together again. My younger brother who wanted to be a strong man got a toy gun that went ‘bang bang’ and sent the younger children scurrying away to his great delight. For each one of us, such reminders of Tauji’s visits became landmarks which we associated with some important phase of growing up.

In those days it used to be a slow and hot twenty-four-hour train journey from Patna to Delhi, but Tauji and his wife Taiji always looked fresh and radiant as they got out of the old family Ford that brought them from the railway station. They used to bring several trunks, suitcases, attache cases, canvas bedrolls and dozens of assorted packages with them. These were first stacked on one side in the veranda while we danced and shouted with joy at their coming. Sometimes Taiji would bring along her khansamah Naggu as a special treat for the Delhi household as they considered him a wizard of a cook who could turn out cakes, puddings and other ‘English’ delicacies quite outside the beat of the Delhi kitchen, where the skills were limited to more homely fare.

Taiji had a clear, ringing laugh which to me was a most reassuring sound. We would crowd round her as she gleefully unpacked, waiting for her to pull out her delightful surprises. There were always cartons of home-made biscuits and lozenge-shaped chocolates, undoubtedly the product of Naggu’s skills and her forethought, imported tins of lemon drops and toffees specially chosen for the coloured pictures on them; golden-haired girls in pink, lacy frocks and pretty ribbons, fluffy puppies and beautiful but unrecognizable flowers. We cherished these tins long after the sweets were gone and they became the natural resting places for all our precious trinkets and mementos.

My grandfather expected each of his daughters-in-law to treat every child in the joint family as her own. This was the traditional ideal.

Therefore he thoroughly approved of Taiji’s attitude. So far as the world outside was concerned, he was a firm believer in being on the right side of the powers that be. He had studied law in England and the entire Mathur Kayastha community to which we belonged was awestruck by his knowledge of the ways of the British upper classes and secretly envious of his station in life.

I heard from my grandmother that his journey to England in his youth had become the subject matter of many ballads in the repertoire of professional folk singers of the old city who performed at weddings and festivals. From her

demeanour I understood that some of the themes of these songs were satirical and highly improper. For instance there was one that referred to how he had learnt to ease himself standing up instead of squatting on the roadside like the other natives. According to the sarcastic refrain of the song, this was indeed a lesson worth crossing the seven seas for! I was amazed to learn that the song got permanently deposited in the local folk music repertoire of naughty material and was performed mechanically over the years by singers who had no idea who it was about. My aunts once got very flustered when they heard and recognized it at a wedding in the down-town area. The cleverest of them tried to divert the attention of the assemblage by babbling pleasantries in an unnecessarily loud voice. The strategy probably worked, but nobody could be absolutely sure.

My grandfather Westernized himself and his family to a moderate extent for the benefit of his own career and that of his sons. He even employed an Englishwoman to come to the house and teach my grandmother some English. Her lessons seemed to be limited to practising some polite phrases which would enable her to be a suitable hostess at the garden party my grandfather might one day arrange in honour of the Chief Commissioner of Delhi. She went along with whatever her husband wished her to do, but the linguistic contortions she was engaging in so late in life were a source of great amusement to her. ‘When Lady so-and-so collects her furs after the reception and prepares to leave, she will offer me her paw to shake and say “tank yoo” and I must answer “manshan not”’, she once told us, rocking with laughter at her own predicament. The English teacher also left her imprint on grandmother’s style of dressing. Victorian ruffles gradually appeared on the neckline and cuffs of the blouses she wore with her traditional starched white voile sari and were recognized in the Mathur Kayastha community as a mark of the stylishly dressed woman.

Another revolutionary achievement of my grandfather was providing an English education for his two younger daughters who graduated from college, once again making headlines in the Mathur Kayastha community. However, enlightenment and modern ways of thinking did not help in getting them suitably married. This is not to say that matches were not found. They were, but the most stable tree of life for my aunts still remained the old family homestead presided over by their father. All my aunts, English-knowing or not, felt superior to their

husbands and managed to tame their spouses to defer to their paternal home in all matters of style, taste and values.

The house we lived in was a sprawling colonial bungalow that my grandfather designed and planned himself, without help from any architect, incredible though this may seem. His chief aide in the building project was an illiterate, wizened old master mason called Mangal, who turned out to be perfectly adequate for what he had in mind. Their partnership in the daily construction activity was an enjoyable sport, for my grandfather relied more on spontaneous common sense than any professional architectural skills. As a result, every door and window in the house was of a different width and height. The intended symmetries and finish of many features were just roughly workable. This was because the focus of my grandfather's life was the convenience and well being of his family. The design of the house had to echo the life style of the family as well as the specific needs of individual members. Apart from the huge living quarters in the main house where most of the family were expected to herd together in loving harmony, there was a prayer room where my grandmother could put up a little temple of her own. My father who was romantic and artistic and liked his own private space away from everybody else was provided with an annexe. He was the only one who was indulged in this respect. For the rest, my grandparents considered privacy an alien and undesirable notion. There was a huge kitchen area with a pantry and storehouse and the longest dining room anybody could ever imagine. Its tubular shape was disproportionate but it adequately served its purpose which was to accommodate all sixty-two members of the household at the same time. However, we all thought the façade of the house extremely graceful. The colonial-style pillars were perfectly fashioned and successfully masked the crudities and arbitrariness of the internal structure. The house was surrounded by generous verandas, balconies and terraces on all sides. There were many outhouses which were used as offices, guest rooms, servants quarters and cattle sheds. Masonry stairways led down to a spacious cellar which always smelt of wet earth and mystery. Similar stairways led to many levels of the roof from where we got a clear view of the old bridge over the river Jamuna. Most of us children thought our home the most interesting playground we had ever been in.

The road on which our house was located was named after my grandfather, and we were all very proud of this. He was an eminent and respected citizen, titled by the government and obviously worthy of official trust. He served on a very large number of civic bodies and his voice carried weight. He arbitrarily chose the number seven for the family house because he liked the sound of it. The municipal authority never dreamed of questioning the decision. There was no number six at all and the house next to ours was called number sixteen because the occupants had followed my grandfather's example and chosen the number as though it were a name.

Our house opened in front to vast grounds which had two lawns separated by a hedge of sweetpeas. On both sides of the curving driveway that led up to the front veranda, there were fruit trees and flowering shrubs. Some of these trees were like special people in our lives and we loved to be near them and touch them. There was an old ber tree in the front lawn around which the family gathered on holiday afternoons in the winter and on summer evenings. This tree was definitely a member of the family for everybody. There was an enormous tamarind tree near the garages on one side of the grounds and several tall mango trees the top branches of which were accessible to the more daring of us from the roof. The unripe fruit of these trees was the most coveted delicacy there could be, especially as we were told it would make us ill and ruin our throats.

There were so many interesting things to do and so many exciting places to play in that to be at home was always the best prospect. The house bustled with activity and rang with happy sounds. One could almost choose one's entertainment The prize thing to do was to trail grandfather on his rounds and see the cows and buffaloes, the horse and the coachman, examine the fodder, listen to him instruct the gardeners and other retainers. If this was not happening one could go to the kitchen area and watch grandfather's valet Ishri churning the butter, which only he was privileged to do, or see my mother making pickles or supervising the cooking. My eldest brother would often be on the roof with his home-made telescope after dinner. The night watchman Bhola, who was supposed to have wonderful eyesight and knew something about stars, acted as his assistant and pointed out planets to whoever was interested. Grandmother's pooja room was yet another focus of fascinating activity. Besides her daily morning prayers which were heartily but somewhat tunelessly sung to the

accompaniment of votive bells and castanets, she observed numerous other cheerful and homely rituals which involved bathing, dressing, feeding and decorating the deity. In addition there were frequent major or minor festivals which were observed with community singing of hymns, the serving of special food and social get-togethers afterwards. It was permissible for the women of the household to shed their routine chores on these occasions. They would dress up, wear shiny bindis on their foreheads and gather in the pooja room, smelling of sandalwood and looking festive. The children were welcome to come in and watch as a treat though the main participants were my grandmother, her daughters-in-law and her married daughters.

My grandfather had cast himself in the role of a Westernized gentleman, a sahib who pooh-poohed such observances as benighted superstition and never lost an opportunity to needle my grandmother about the hocus pocus she engaged in. He let it be known that he disapproved. But we all knew that this was only his official stance. In his heart of hearts he was relieved that his wife asserted the old tradition. This gave him a kind of safety insurance and enabled him to indulge in the luxury of denouncing all grandmother's fussy rituals as an enlightened modern Indian educated in English ways of thinking should. Only at one stage did this superior and distant attitude undergo a change.

My grandmother had adopted a religious guru whose centre of activity used to be a neighbouring temple on the banks of the river Jamuna. She would invite him frequently to the house, to give discourses, lead kirtan singing, or read the *Ramayana* to the assembled ladies. Apart from the dozen or so women of the household in attendance, my grandmother invited women from the extended family, distant relatives and neighbours. These invitations were greatly prized. Each such occasion, which was invariably arranged in the middle of a working day so that it did not disturb the hardworking men of the house, ended with an elegant vegetarian feast which was an exciting social high point for all the women present.

This guru, Swami Satyanand, was an extremely attractive personality. He was tall and had a smooth, serene pink and white face with penetrating brown eyes under gold-rimmed glasses. He looked quite spectacular in his flowing saffron robes. When he propounded some philosophical truth in his deep voice, the ladies would melt and sigh and almost fall into a trance. Once my grandfather

unexpectedly came home in the middle of the day and ran into Swami Satyanand by accident. That day something changed. The Swami stopped being just a name that could be casually dismissed and became a person of whom my grandfather was distinctly jealous. I did not understand the psychology of my grandparents at the time but looking back I am sure that my grandfather was unprepared for the physical attractiveness of the Swami. The day he met him in person, he knew that this was someone who was used to commanding attention, just like himself. The issue, though not really a serious one, was my grandfather's exclusive right to his wife's attention.

His protest took the form of a pointed refusal to speak to my grandmother directly. This was particularly noticeable at the dining table. But she was a very self-possessed and confident matriarch and was not in the least fazed by his sulking in this fashion. She simply carried on her usual polite ministrations to him as though nothing had happened. This situation continued for about three days and then my grandfather began to break down. He started by announcing in a peeved voice to no one in particular that he was not feeling well. 'Oh I'm so sorry. What's the matter?' grandmother said, turning towards him with the utmost solicitude. 'Constipation' he replied, but he pronounced the word as though it was plague or worse, and still addressed the monosyllable to the middle distance. 'Oh really? How strange that I hear you flush the toilet many times each day as usual', she said sweetly. My grandfather's face became red like that of a little boy caught in a lie. And that was the end of that. The religious festivities presided over by the charismatic Swami continued as before and everyone's life was the richer for it.

The way the dining table was laid for dinner, when all the sixty-odd members of the household sat down to eat together, reflected the family's hierarchical attitudes. Grandfather, at the head of the table, was honoured with the most elaborate place-setting the household could rise to. There was a gleaming dinner plate and a side plate from an expensive set we owned, polished silver cutlery, a drinking glass of crystal and a starched white napkin. Grandmother who sat to his left on the long end had a dinner plate and side plate from the same set but no cutlery and no starched white napkin as this was somehow considered unfeminine from the Indian end of things. However, she had small Indian-style metal bowls to serve herself daal or curds and ate with her fingers. Next came

the sons, daughters and daughters-in-law. Their places at the table depended on their age and seniority. The eldest sat nearest to what was literally the seat of power. The other adult members of the household deployed themselves according to their own polite, self-denying interpretation of their status in the hierarchical structure. Frequently there were extra people who were persuaded to stay on for a meal and on these occasions it was not uncommon at the humbler end of the table for two family members to double up on one chair. Each place was marked by a dinner plate, but only the men seemed to be entitled to additional side plates as well. They also had forks and spoons but no knives or napkins. The only cutlery the women were entitled to was for some mysterious reason the versatile and low-profile teaspoon which could serve many unforeseeable purposes. In addition they had the optional use of the kind of metal bowls provided for my grandmother, except that at this distance from the head of the table these were stacked in the middle of the table and had to be reached for if desired.

In general, the services and trappings at the dining table declined sharply as the eye travelled to the far end of the long eating surface. This surface was made up of three structures placed end to end; the first was a fine piece of furniture, a regular dining table of polished teak wood. The second table was a much cheaper, rougher affair, bought from the local market by my grandfather's clerk, along with serviceable wooden chairs with crude cane seats to match. The third consisted of wooden planks on sturdy legs, the kind one could hire in any Indian town for large wedding feasts. This last structure was the joyous children's area and was flanked on both sides by long, smooth benches to sit on. This kind of seating arrangement was a wonderful, free and flexible idea and gave us the opportunity to have fun and eat at the same time. We would play at horse-riding, invent ways of weaving our legs into the runners of the benches and slide along their surfaces to make room for others to get in or out. The children's end of the dining surface had no resemblance to the elegant starting point at grandfather's end and did not even merit a table cloth. Here the basic food was plonked in the middle by a sweaty junior kitchen aide along with a stack of wet plates and everyone had to scramble for whatever else they needed. We loved the picnic atmosphere and considered it a treat to coexist with the grown-ups at mealtimes and listen to their 'real life' conversation. This was the only time when things

were at rest, when every pillar of our lives was stationary and visible, and we could bask in the reassuring glow that radiated from the other end of the table.

Grandfather's benign but piercing eye never failed to detect an absence even from the gaggle of children at the far end of the table thirty feet away. He thoroughly disapproved of any member of his household going out for entertainment or pleasure and quite justifiably saw no need for it. 'A friend's house? What on earth for?' was a familiar and much feared expostulation. On the other hand we were free, in fact encouraged, to bring our friends to the dining table benches and present them to the family over a meal. As we moved into adolescence, there were more and more lapses and nervous explanations about birthday parties of friends, or special functions at school or college from erring absentees became more common. But everybody's best friends were inducted into the dining room at some point of time. Some continued to appear off and on for years and almost grew up with us on the benches. One of these was my elder brother's friend who brought his bride to dinner so that she could be introduced to the adults of the family. Two years later he got divorced and remarried and the new incumbent also ended up on the benches one Sunday at lunch. On this occasion, my grandparents were sharp enough to register that this person looked different from what they had seen in the same grid three years earlier. My grandmother could not help expressing her confusion and asked my brother directly and loudly for a clarification just in case she was mistaken. 'What I remember was tall and fair, not short and dark like this one', she said, tracing the remembered figure in the air with her hands, to the great embarrassment of the adolescents. She subsided only when one of her daughters repeatedly nudged her under the table.

My grandfather was both masterful and benevolent. His passage through the house was always significant for whoever he encountered. Whether it was a servant, a daughter-in-law, a house guest or a child, he would always greet them, ask them what they were doing and invariably offer suggestions on how whatever it was could be done better. In general, the household was divided into those who welcomed these encounters and were flattered by his attention, and those who shrank from the prospect of facing his well-intentioned scrutiny. For the first fourteen years of my life I was definitely in the first category. He had always had a special tenderness for me and my two brothers. I heard it

whispered among my aunts that this was because he wanted to compensate for my father's much flaunted distaste for my mother and her offspring. Whatever the reason, I have a wealth of warm memories of times when I was given special treatment by my grandfather although no one including me and my mother thought I deserved it. I remember sitting on his lap and sharing with him a bowl of grapes which were meant only for him, while a number of hostile adult eyes glared at me for the impertinence. To this day the sight of fresh green grapes brings back to me the smell of grandfather's hookah, the feel of his not so silky white beard, and the reassuring sensation of a dependable and protective love. In later years when I discovered a world of my own through the windows of school, our relationship suffered somewhat.

I can trace the beginning of the deterioration to a particular incident. I had avidly started collecting photographs of filmstars and in the course of this activity fell hopelessly in love with Ashok Kumar, the popular screen hero. I saw his famous film Bandhan nine times along with similarly smitten school friends and we sent off an ardent fan letter requesting an autographed photograph, in the approved fashion of hero-worshipping teenagers. We didn't really expect a response and soon forgot the whole thing. One afternoon, as my cousin and I were getting off the horse carriage that used to take us to our Christian mission school in the Tis Hazari area, grandfather's clerk Chhail Behari came up to me and said that I was wanted in the legal office that had been set up in one of the annexes of the big house.

This was most unusual. Chhail Behari never spoke to us and we never visited grandfather's office when he was working there. Anyhow, when I tiptoed in on this occasion, he said in the voice of a stranger, 'Show it to her'. Chhail Behari silently held up a large photograph of my idol from the silver screen, with the words 'Best Wishes to Sheila from Ashok Kumar' scrawled across the bottom in green ink. He also held up the manila envelope in which it had arrived with my name in large type on it. From outside it looked like a serious official communication and they had been most intrigued that I was the addressee. 'Who is this young man?' grandfather asked sternly. 'Why is he writing to you directly? Are you by any chance under the impression that you are old enough to arrange such matters without consulting your elders?'

It was clear from his withering tone that he was truly outraged. No explanation on earth could change that. I realized in panic that neither he nor Chhail Behari had any inkling of such innocent pastimes as collecting mementos of famous personalities. It took several interventions from Tauji, who happened to be in Delhi at the time, to calm grandfather down. But after this incident he viewed all my projects and activities with scepticism and at least mild distrust. Though he continued to receive the greatest respect from everybody in the family, his control and energy began to wane during my adolescence. The fast pace of change in the lives of his growing grandchildren wore him down and a point came when he could no longer recognize the map of their world.

Mrs Gupta Never Rang

JAN MORRIS

Indira Gandhi was in power in Delhi in 1975, but though she had clamped the country under a State of Emergency, harshly limiting the press and imprisoning much of the Opposition, to the stranger the Indian capital felt much the same as ever. In this extract from Among the Cities, *there is not much to reveal which particular regime governed India at the time of its writing: Delhi is one of those cities whose age, manner and disposition easily absorb the styles of its successive rulers.*

‘You see,’ said the government spokesman, ‘you may liken Delhi to the River Ganges, it twists and turns, many other streams join it, it divides into many parts, and it flows into the sea in so many channels that nobody may know which is the true river. You follow my train of thought? It is a metaphysical matter, perhaps. You will do best to burrow under the surface of things and discover what is not revealed to us ordinary mortals! In the meantime, you will take a cup of tea, I hope?’ I took a cup of tea, milkless, very sweet, brought by a shuffling messenger in a high-buttoned jacket with a scarf around his neck, and between pleasantries I pondered the spokesman’s advice. Indians, of course, love to reduce the prosaic to the mystic. It is part of their Timeless Wisdom. For several centuries the tendency has variously baffled, infuriated, amused and entranced travellers from the west, and India is full of pilgrims still, come from afar to worship at the shrines of insight.

But Delhi? Delhi is not just a national capital, it is one of the political ultimates, one of the prime movers. It was born to power, war and glory. It rose to greatness not because holy men saw visions there but because it commanded the strategic routes from the northwest, where the conquerors came from, into the rich flatlands of the Ganges delta. Delhi is a soldiers’ town, a politicians’ town, journalists’, diplomats’ town. It is Asia’s Washington, though not so picturesque, and lives by ambition, rivalry and opportunism.

‘Ah yes,’ he said, ‘what you are thinking is quite true, but that is the surface of Delhi. You are an artist, I know, you should look beyond! And if there is anything we can do to help your inquiries,’ he added with an engaging waggle of his head, ‘you have only to let us know. You may telephone us at any time and we will ring you back with the requisite information in a moment or two. We are here to help! That is why we are here! No, no, that is our duty!’



Certainly Delhi is unimaginably antique, and age is a metaphysic, I suppose. Illustrations of mortality are inescapable there, and do give the place a sort of nagging symbolism. Tombs of emperors stand beside traffic junctions, forgotten fortresses command suburbs, the titles of lost dynasties are woven into the vernacular, if only as street names.

One of the oldest and deadest places I know, for a start, is the crumbled fortress-capital of Tughluqabad in the city’s southern outskirts. For a single decade it was a place of terrific consequence, for nearly seven centuries since it has been a grey wasteland of piled stones and ruined alleyways, a memento mori by any standard, inhabited only by the disagreeable monkeys which are the familiars of Delhi, and by a melancholy watchman who, recently transferred by the Archaeological Survey from some more frequented historical monument, now sees nobody but the apes from one day to the next.

Or consider, in another kind of allegory, the Lodi Gardens. These are popular promenades, but they are also the cemetery of the Lodi kings who thrived in the early sixteenth century. Here death and life consort on familiar terms, and especially in the early morning, when Delhi people go out for some fresh air before the sun comes up, they offer some piquant juxtapositions. All among the memorials the citizens besport themselves, pursuing their yogic meditations in the tomb of Sikander Lodi, jog-trotting among the funerary domes, exercising their pampered dachshunds beside the Bara Gumbad Mosque or pissing, in the inescapable Delhi manner, behind the mausoleum of Mohammed Shah.

They used to say, to express the marvellous continuity of Delhi, that seven successive capitals existed here, each superimposed upon the last. Nowadays they are always finding new ones, and the latest tally seems to be fourteen. Few foreigners and still fewer Indians have ever heard of most of the dynasties represented, but here and there across the capital some of them have left not

merely tombs or ruins but living remnants of themselves. Embedded, for instance, in one of Delhi's smarter quarters, almost within sight of the Oberoi Intercontinental, is the Muslim village shrine of Nizamuddin, built in the time of the fourteen-century Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq and still as holy as ever.

Through tortuous mucky lanes one approaches it from the busy highway, past the statutory Indian lines of beggars, crones and saddhus, through the spittle-stained portals where the old men stare, and into the intricate jumble of courts, tombs and arcades that surrounds the mosque of Nizamuddin and its sacred pool. Here mendicants lope around on knobbly staves, saintly scholars are at their books, sweet old ladies sit outside tombs (they are not allowed in, being female), and in the mosque there hustles and brushes the muezzin, an indefatigable goblin figure with white eyebrows and dainty tread. Nothing here is unpremeditated. All moves, though you might not guess it, to an immemorial schedule: the prayer call comes precisely to time, the rituals are meticulously ordered, even the whining beggars have their appointed place in the hierarchy, and when I left the precincts the imam gave me his visiting card—his name is Al Haj Hazrat Peer Qazi Syed Safdar Ali Nizami, and his cable address is Headpriest Delhi.

Even more a living relic, so to speak, is the Begum Timur Jehan Shahzadi of Daryaganj, in the old walled city of Delhi. This lady is a Moghul princess of the dynasty which made Delhi its capital in the seventeenth century and built the very city, Shahjehanabad, in whose labyrinthine recesses she lives now. Just go to the Old City, her son-in-law had assured me, and ask for the Begum Jehan's house; and though in the event this proved insufficient advice, and I spent half an afternoon stumbling through the high-walled maze of Shahjehanabad, vainly presenting the inquiry, still I relished the form of it, and thought it was rather like knocking on the door of the Great Pyramid, asking for Cheops.

I found her in the end anyway, ensconced in her front sitting room between portraits of her imperial forebears: a short, decisive old lady with a brief mischievous smile and an air of totally liberated self-possession. There is no pretending that this princess lives much like a princess. Her old house, into which her family moved when they were ejected by later conquerors from their imperial palace, is a beguiling shambles in the old Islamic style: a couple of rooms in the Western manner for the convenience of visitors, the rest more or less medieval—a wide decrepit courtyard, a dusty trellised vine, thickly

populated chambers all around. There are granddaughters and sons-in-law and undefined connections; there are skivvies and laundrymen and assorted sweepers; there are children and dogs and unexplained loiterers in doorways. Forty or fifty souls constitute the tumbled court of the Begum Timur Jehan, and through it she moves commandingly in green trousers, issuing instructions, reminiscing about emperors, traitors or ladies of the harem, and frequently consulting her highly organized notebook, all asterisks and cross-references, for addresses or reminders.

Like Headpriest Delhi she lives very near the earth, close to the muck and the spittle, close to the mangy dogs and the deformed indigents in the street outside. Delhi is scarcely an innocent city, for on every layer it is riddled with graft and intrigue, but it is distinctly organic, to an atavistic degree. An apposite introduction to the city, I think, is provided by Map Eight of the Delhi City Atlas, which marks a substantial slab of the municipal area as being Dense Jungle: though this is now a city of a million inhabitants, it feels near the bush still. From many parts of it the open plain is in sight, and the country trees of India, the feathery tamarisks and ubiquitous acacias, invade every part of it—the animals too, for squirrels are everywhere and monkeys, buffaloes, cows, goats and a million pye-dogs roam the city streets peremptorily.

There is simplicity everywhere, too, for rural people from all India flock into Delhi for jobs, for help, to see the sights. There are Sikhs and sleek Bengalis, Rajputs ablaze with jewellery, smart Gujaratis from the western coast, beautiful Tamils from the south, cloaked Tibetans smelling of untanned leather, clerks from Bombay smelling of aftershave, students, wandering sages, clumping soldiers in ammunition boots, black-veiled Muslim women, peasants in for the day from the scorched and desiccated Punjab plains. Endearingly they trail through their national monuments, awestruck, and the attendants intone their monologues hoping for tips, and the tourist buses line up outside the Presidential palace, and the magicians prepare their levitations and inexplicable disappearances in the dusty ditch below the ramparts of the Red Fort.

This is the Gandhian truth of India, expressed in Delhi chiefly by such reminders of an earthier world beyond the city limits. Though I fear I might not give up my electric typewriter without a struggle, still I am a Gandhian myself in principle, and respond easily to this suggestion of a vast Indian naïveté,

stretching away from Delhi like a limitless reservoir, muddled perhaps but deeply wholesome. The Gandhian ethic is rather outmoded in India, in fact, and the Mahatma himself seems to be losing his charismatic appeal, but still I liked the inscriptions in the visitors' book at Birla House, where he died in 1948 (his body was displayed to the public on the roof, illuminated by searchlight), and where many a country pilgrim reverently pauses. 'My heart heaving with emotion,' wrote P.H. Kalaskar. 'Moving indeed,' thought A.K. Barat. Several people wrote 'Felt happy'. One said, 'Most worth seeing place in Delhi', and when, quoting from the master himself, I contributed 'Truth is God', the inevitable onlookers murmured, 'Very good, very good,' nodded approvingly to each other and touched my hand in sympathy.

Delhi is a city of basic, spontaneous emotions: greed, hate, revenge, love, pity, kindness, the murderous shot, the touch of the hand. Its very subtleties are crude: even its poverty is black and white. On the one side are the organized beggar children who, taught to murmur a few evocative words of despair like 'hungry', 'baby' or 'mummy', succeed all too often in snaring the susceptible stranger. On the other are the courtly thousands of the jhuggis, the shantytowns of matting, tentage and old packing cases which cling like black growths to the presence of Delhi.

There are beggars in Delhi who are comfortably off, and people too proud to beg who possess nothing at all, not a pot or a pan, not a pair of shoes. I saw one such man, almost naked, shivering with the morning cold and obviously very ill, huddled against a lamppost in Janpath early one morning. He asked for nothing, but I felt so sorry for him, and for a moment so loved him for his suffering, that I gave him a ten-rupee note, an inconceivable amount by the standards of Indian indigence. He looked at it first in disbelief, then in ecstasy and then in a wild gratitude, and I left him throwing his hands to heaven, singing, praying and crying, still clinging to this lamppost, and sending me away, slightly weeping myself, to coffee, toast and orange juice ('You'll be sure it's chilled, won't you?') at my hotel.

The voice of the people, Gandhi used to say, is the voice of God. I doubt it, but I do recognize a divine element to the Indian poverty, ennobled as it is by age and sacrifice. Indians rationalize it by the concept of reincarnation, and I see it too as a halfway condition, a station of the cross. 'In the next world,' I suggested

to my driver after a long and exhausting journey into the country, ‘I’ll be driving and you’ll be lying on the back seat,’ but he answered me with a more elemental philosophy. ‘In the next world,’ he replied, ‘we’ll both be lying on the back seat!’ For even the inegality of Delhi, even the pathos, often has something robust to it, a patient fatalism that infuriates many modernists but is a solace to people like me. It is disguised often in Eastern mumbo-jumbo, preached about in ashrams to gullible Californians and exploited by swamis from the divine to the absurd: but it is really no more than a kindly acceptance of things as they are, supported by the sensible thesis that things are not always what they appear to be.

But pathos, yes. Delhi is the capital of the losing streak. It is the metropolis of the crossed wire, the missed appointment, the puncture, the wrong number. Every day’s paper in Delhi brings news of some new failure, in diplomacy, in economics, in sport: when India’s women entered the world tabletennis tournament during my stay in Delhi, not only were they all beaten but one actually failed to turn up for the match. I was pursued in the city by a persistent and not unattractive Rajput businessman. I thought him rather suave as I fended him off, in his well-cut check suit and his trendy ties, confident of manner, worldly of discourse: but one day I caught sight of him hors de combat, so to speak, muffled in a threadbare overcoat and riding a battered motor scooter back to his suburban home—and suddenly saw him, far more endearingly if he did but know it, as he really was, smallish, poorish, struggling and true.

He dropped me in the end anyway, perhaps because I developed an unsightly boil in my nose—men seldom send roses to girls with red noses. The side of my face swelled up like a huge bunion, and I was half red and half white, and sniffly and sad and sorry for myself. In this condition, self-consciously, I continued my investigations, and at first I was touched by the tact with which Indians in the streets pretended not to notice. After a day or two, though, I realized that the truth was more affecting still. They really did not notice. They thought my face quite normal. For what is a passing grotesquerie, in a land of deformities?



‘Certainly,’ said the government spokesman, perusing my list of questions, ‘by all means, these are all very simple matters. We can attend to them for you at once. As I told you, it is our duty! It is what we are paid for! I myself have to attend an important meeting this afternoon—you will excuse me I hope?—but I

will leave all these little matters with our good Mrs Gupta and all will be taken care of. I will telephone you with the answers myself without fail—or if not I myself, then Mrs Gupta will be sure to telephone you either today or tomorrow morning. Did you sign our register? A duplicate signature here if you would not mind, and the lady at the door will issue you with the requisite application form for a pass—it will make everything easier for you, you see. Have no fear, Mrs Gupta will take care of everything. But mark my words, you will find the spiritual aspects of our city the most rewarding. Remember the River Ganges! As a student of history, you will find that I am right! Ha ha! Another cup of tea? You have time?'

Even he would agree, though, that the spiritual aspect is hardly predominant in New Delhi, the headquarters of the Indian government and the seat of Indian sovereignty—the newest and largest of Delhi's successive capitals. This was built by the British, and despite one or two sententious symbolisms and nauseating texts—'Liberty Will Not Descend to a People, A People Must Raise Themselves to Liberty'—it is a frank and indeed noble memorial to their own imperial Raj. It is not anomalous even now. For one thing it was built in a hybrid style of east and west, to take care of all historical contingencies, and for another, Britishness is far from dead in Delhi. Delhi gentlemen, especially of the sporting classes, are stupendously British still. Delhi social events can be infinitely more English than Ascot or Lords. The following scrambled-names puzzle appeared recently in a Delhi magazine: LIWL EFFEY (a comedian); UALNIJ YHLXEU (a zoologist); ARMY SHES (a pianist); HHPPLL LLEGAADU (a historian). Only two classes of people on earth could solve this riddle without reference books: Britons of a certain age, Indians of a certain class.

Besides, the grand ensemble of New Delhi, the Presidential palace flanked by the two wings of the Secretariat, has adapted easily to the republican style. It was the greatest single artefact of the British Empire, perhaps its principal work of art, and there are men still alive in Delhi who spent all their working lives building it. I met one, a rich and venerable Sikh contractor, and he recalled the great work with immense pride, and spoke affectionately of its English architects, and said it never once occurred to him to suppose, during all the years he worked upon it, that an Indian would ever be sitting in the halls of the Viceroy's Lodge.

Seen early on a misty morning from far down the ceremonial mall, Rajpath, New Delhi is undeniably majestic—neither Roman, its architects said, nor British, nor Indian, but imperial. Then its self-consciousness (for its mixture of styles is very contrived) is blurred by haze and distance and by the stir of awakening Delhi—the civil servants with their bulging briefcases, the multitudinous peons, the pompous early-morning policemen, the women sweepers elegant in primary colours, the minister perhaps (if it is not too early) in his chauffeur-driven, Indian-built limousine, the stocky Gurkha sentries at the palace gates, the first eager tourists from the Oberoi Intercontinental, the entertainer with his dancing monkeys, the snake charmer with his acolyte children, the public barber on the pavement outside Parliament, the women preparing their washing beside the ornamental pools, the man in khaki who, approaching you fiercely across the formal gardens, asks if you would care for a cold drink.

Then the power of India, looming above these dusty complexities, is unmistakable: not only created but instinctive, sensed by its foreign rulers as by its indigenous, and aloof to history's permutations. Of all the world's countries, India is the most truly prodigious, and this quality of astonishment displays itself afresh every day as the sun comes up in Delhi. Five hundred and eighty million people, three hundred languages, provinces from the Himalayan to the equatorial, cities as vast as Bombay and Calcutta, villages so lost in time that no map marks them, nuclear scientists and aboriginal hillmen, industrialists of incalculable wealth and dying beggars sprawled on railway platforms, three or four great cultures, myriad religions, pilgrims from across the world, politicians sunk in graft, the Grand Trunk Road marching to Peshawar, the temples of Madras gleaming in the sun, an inexhaustible history, an incomprehensible social system, an unfathomable repository of human resource, misery, ambiguity, vitality and confusion—all this, the colossal corpus of India, invests, sprawls around, infuses, elevates, inspires and very nearly overwhelms New Delhi.

Searching for a corrective to such cosmic visions, I thought I would investigate the roots or guts of New Delhi, instead of contemplating its tremendous aura, so I inveigled my way not into the State Hallroom or the Durbar Hall but into the kitchens of the Presidential Palace, by way of an obliging aide-de-camp and a compliant housekeeper (for as dubious flunkies

repeatedly murmured as I made my way downstairs, ‘It is not allowed to visitors’). At first I thought I had succeeded in finding humanity among that majesty, for the way to the kitchens passed through a labyrinth of homely offices, workshops and storerooms and cupboards, supervised by smiling and apparently contented domestics. Here were the Pot Cleaners, scouring their big copper pans. Here were the Linen Keepers, standing guard on their pillowslips. Here were the Washing Up Men, ankle deep in suds themselves, and here the Bakers invited me to taste the morning’s loaf. I felt I was passing through some living exhibition of Indian Crafts, diligent, chaste and obliging.

But even before I entered the kitchen proper, a clanking and grand aroma brought me back to the realities of New Delhi, for in the palace of Rastrapati Bhavan, Downstairs is scarcely less consequential than Up. These kitchens are imperial institutions themselves, half western, half eastern, colossal in scale, lordly in pretension. Armies of cooks seemed to be labouring there. Foods of a dozen cuisines seemed to be in preparation. Batteries of aged electric ovens hummed and whirred. There were squadrons of deep freezers and battalions of chopping boards and armouries of steel choppers. The cooks and their underlings bowed to me as I passed, but not obsequiously. It was with condescension that they greeted me, one by one along the preparation tables, and when at last I reached the sizzling centre of that underworld, I felt myself to be more truly at a crossroad of the empire than anywhere else in Delhi—for there, just around the corner from the English ovens of the viceroys, they were smoking over charcoal braziers, scented with wheat grain, the aromatic yellow pomfrets that were a grand delicacy of the Moghuls.

So even in the kitchen power presides, in a traditional, ample sense. Delhi is full of it, for this republic, which came to office in a loincloth, rules in a gaudier uniform. Nehru said that modern western civilization was ersatz, living by ersatz values, eating erstaz food: but the ruling classes of Delhi, the politicians, the businessmen, the military, have mostly adopted those values without shame. Gandhi said that his India would have ‘the smallest possible army’, but Delhi is one of the most military of all capitals: when I looked up some friends in the Delhi telephone book, I found that under the name Khanna there were four generals, an air commodore, twelve colonels, a group captain, twelve majors,

three wing commanders, four captains, one commander, three lieutenant commanders and a lieutenant.

Nor is Delhi's display just a facade or a bluff. India often seems to outsiders a crippled country, emaciated by poverty and emasculated by philosophy, but it is only a half-truth. We are told that half India's population is undernourished and three-quarters illiterate: that leaves nearly 180 million people who are well fed and literate. The Indian gross national product is the tenth largest on earth. The armies of India are very strong and are largely equipped from Indian factories. I went one day to the Delhi Industrial Fair, housed in a series of modernist ziggurats directly across the street from the gateway of the ruined city Purana Qila, and there I discovered that India makes not only warships, railway engines and aircraft, but Carbicle Grinders too, Lapping Machines and Micro-Fog Lubricators ('I'll take that one,' said I flippantly, pointing to an electric transformer as big as a cottage, 'please send it to my hotel'—and diligently the salesman took out his order form).

Power corrupts, of course, and in India it corrupts on a grand scale. At the top, the whisper of nepotism or opportunism repeatedly approaches the central government itself. At the bottom, graft harasses the street hawkers of the city, who can scarcely afford the protection money demanded by the police. Even the stranger to Delhi feels the rot: in the arrogant petty official declining to look up from his newspaper, in the stifling addiction to red tape and precedent, in the affections and snobberies which, as they thrive in Washington's Georgetown, flourish here too in the districts south of Rajpath.

As it happens, I am rather an addict of power. I do not much enjoy submitting to it or even exerting it, but I do like observing it. I like the aesthetics of it, coloured as they so often are by pageantry and history. I am everybody's patriot, and love to see the flags flying over palace or parliament, Westminster or Quai d'Orsay. I am very ready to be moved by the emanations of power in Delhi—the sun setting behind the Red Fort, the grand mass of New Delhi seen across the dun plateau or the ceremony of Beating Retreat on Vijay Chowk, when a dozen military bands pluck at the heart with the Last Post and 'Abide with Me'.

Nobody cries more easily than I do, when the bugle sounds or the flag comes down, but somehow I do not respond to the old magic in India. The British, rationalizing their own love of imperial pomp, used to claim that it was

necessary to retain the respect of Asiatics. It availed them nothing, though, against the ‘half-naked fakir’, as Churchill called Gandhi, and now too the magnificence of Delhi seems paradoxically detached from India. How remote the great ensigns which, enormously billowing above their embassies in the diplomatic enclave, testify to the presence of the plenipotentiaries! How irrelevant the posturings of the grandees, hosts and guests alike, the Polish defence minister greeted by epauletted generals, the Prince of Wales inevitably winning his polo match, the resident Congress party spokesman puffed up at one press conference, the visiting minister of national reorientation condescending at the next.

And most detached of all seems the unimaginable bureaucracy of Delhi, battening upon the capital—a power sucker, feeding upon its own consequence or sustained intravenously by interdepartmental memoranda, triplicate applications, copies and comments and addenda and references to precedent—a monstrous behemoth of authority, slumped immovable among its files and tea trays. Much of it is concerned not with practical reality at all but with hypotheses or dogma. Forty government editors are engaged in producing the collected works of Gandhi, down to the last pensée—they have got to volume fifty-four. Hundreds more are concerned with plans, for there were never a capital like Delhi for planners—the Multi-level Planning Section, the Plan Coordination Division, the Plan Information Unit, the Social Planning Unit, the Project Appraisal Unit, the Socio-Economic Research Unit, the Programme Evaluation Organization, the National Sample Survey Organization, the National Survey Organization, the Central Statistical Organization. Big Brother is everywhere, with a slide rule, a clipboard and a warning in small print. ‘This map,’ says one Delhi tourist publication severely, ‘is published for tourists as a master guide and not as legal tender’—and there, in its mixture of the interfering, the pedantic, the unnecessary and the absurd, speaks the true voice of Indian officialdom.

But this is an essential part of the Indian mystery, always has been, probably always will be. Delhi is too old to care anyway, and takes the system as it comes. Which viceroy or president had he most enjoyed serving, I asked one antediluvian retainer at Rashtrapati Bhavan. He shrugged his shoulders with an almost perceptible creak. ‘I serve the government,’ he said. ‘It is all the same to me.’ With this indifference in mind I went that afternoon to a murder trial which,

to much publicity, was proceeding then in the New District Court, a kind of permanent bad dream in concrete in the northern part of the city—filthy, cramped, dark and suffocatingly overcrowded. Here authority was at its most immediate and most awful. The case concerned the alleged murder of a well-known south-of-Rajpath lady by her husband, a fashionable eye surgeon, assisted by his mistress and an assortment of vagabond accomplices. It was a true crime passionel with thuggish overtones, and at least five people faced, there and then, the ultimate penalty. The judge was a grave and clever Sikh, turbaned and spectacled. The court was jammed with a festering, jostling audience, hungry for the salacious, the macabre and the terrible. The white-tabbed attorneys droned and argued, the watchmen barred the door with staves, the accused sat in chains along the side of the court, shackled to their guards.

Yet fearful though their predicament was, they did not seem awe-struck nor even alarmed. They were like sightseers themselves, of their own tragedy. They yawned occasionally. They exchanged comments. They laughed at the legal jokes. And sometimes, feeling the strain of the long day, they raised their manacled wrists to their warders' shoulders and, placing their cheeks upon their hands like sleepy children, dozed through destiny for a while.



'I will find that out for you, of course,' said the government spokesman. 'It will be no problem at all. You see, it is something I am not exactly sure of myself, but we have many sources of information. Do we have your telephone number? Ah yes. I have temporarily mislaid it. Would you give it to me again? Rest assured, dear lady, I shall find out this information, together with the answers to your earlier questions, and shall telephone you for certain, if not this afternoon, then tomorrow morning first thing.

'I don't know if you are familiar, you see, with the Bhagavad Gita? As a student of the Gandhian philosophy you would find it very beautiful: and you would find it exceedingly relevant to your article about Delhi. It is self-awareness, you see, that is the key. Oh madam, you are laughing at me! You are very wicked! But never mind, you will see, you will see! And in the meantime you may be quite sure,' he concluded with his usual charming smile and reassuring shake of the head, 'that I will be telephoning you with this

information, or if not I myself, then our good Mrs Gupta is sure to. It is not spiritual but we must do our duty!'



There is a species of telephone operators' English, often heard in Delhi, which is not exactly an articulated language at all, but a sort of elongated blur. Indian English proper, of course, is one of India's cruellest handicaps, for it is so often imperfect of nuance and makes for an unreal relationship between host and visitor, besides often making highly intelligent people look foolish ('CHINESE GENERALS FLY BACK TO FRONT' said a celebrated Indian headline long ago). But the elliptical, slithery kind is something else again, and has another effect on its hearers. It makes one feel oddly opaque or amorphous oneself, and seems to clothe the day's arrangements in a veil of uncertainty.

One should not go fighting into Delhi, chin up and clear eyed. Here hopes are meant to wither and conceptions adjust. A single brush with a noseless beggar is enough to change your social values. Just one application for an import licence will alter your standards of efficiency. After a while graver mutations may occur, and you will find yourself questioning the Meaning of It All, the Reality of Time and other old Indian specialties. 'You will see, you will see!' Most disconcerting of all, you may well come to feel that the pomp and circumstance of Delhi, which struck you at first as illusory display, is in fact the only reality of the place! All the rest is mirage. Everything else in the Indian presence, north, east, south, west, across the Rajasthani deserts, down to the Coromandel beaches, far away to the frontiers of Tibet, everything else is suggestion, never to be substance.

I pick a Delhi newspaper at random. Crowd Loots Colliery. Police Kill Dacoits. Dacoits Loot Pilgrims. Students Raid Cinema. Farmers Arrested during Agitation. Teachers Boycott Examination. Police Fire on Crowd. Mizo Rebels Spotted. Peace Feelers for Naga Rebels. A state of Emergency exists in India, but one is hardly aware of it, for this is a country always in emergency, crossed perpetually by dim figures of faith and violence, prophets of revolution, priests of reaction, saints and spies and fanatics, moving here and there through a haze of hatred, idealism and despair. Experts Visit Bomb Blast Site. Police Charge Crowd. Six Hundred Arrested. Government Minister Has Asthma.

Sometimes these shadows reach into Delhi itself, and chaos feels uncomfortably close. While I was there the hereditary Imam of the Jama Masjid, the greatest mosque in India, was engaged in a quarrel with the government. He was even heard inciting his congregation to political dissent over the loudspeakers of his minaret during a visit to the neighbourhood by Mrs Gandhi herself. His family have been incumbents of the Imamate since the mosque was founded by Shah Jehan in 1650, and are great figures in the Muslim community: nevertheless he was arrested, and in the ensuing riots at least six people were killed (always add a zero, an Indian acquaintance nonchalantly told me, if you want the true figure) and at least six hundred locked away for safety's sake.

It happened that I was wandering around the purlieus of the mosque on the day of the arrest, and bleak was the sensation of déjà vu with which I watched the riot police, brandishing their guns and batons, heavily clambering out of their trucks. But more ominous still, I thought, was the spectacle of the mosque itself a few days later. They slapped a curfew on the area, and when I next passed its outskirts, along the crammed and filthy pavements of Netaji Subhash Marg, where the beggar families crouch day and night beneath their sacking shelters and the teeming junk bazaars crowd around the Chandni Chowk—when I looked across to the Jama Masjid, I saw its great shape there silent and eerily deserted—gone the milling figures of the faithful on its steps, gone the stir of commerce and devotion that habitually surrounds it, empty all the stalls and shops, the kebab restaurants, the fortune-tellers, the silversmiths, the tanners and the cobblers. All were empty, and the mosque looked like some immense captive champion, brooding there in solitary confinement.

Yet even this all-too-real reality seemed a deception upon the composure of Delhi. I never feel insecure there, even when the riot police are storming by. The only citizens who frighten me are those damned monkeys, so beguiling of motion, so threatening of grimace. Delhi people treat these beasts with distinct circumspection, crossing roads to avoid them or bribing them with peanuts to go away, and in this, it seemed to me, poor Indians behave towards monkeys much as Europeans behave towards poor Indians—especially as, the monkey god Hanuman being an important figure of the Hindu pantheon, some element of conscience is presumably involved. This disconcerting parallel gave me an unexpected sense of membership, and every time a monkey bared its teeth at me

I felt like saying, ‘Wait, friend, wait—I’m the European, it’s the poor Indian you want!’

For the Indian sense of hierarchy, which so contributes to the bafflement of India, provides for each rank of society a kind of comradeship; and in Delhi especially, which is like a shadow play of India, one senses the hidden force of it. The Untouchables of the capital—Harijans, Children of God, as Gandhi called them—live in well-defined colonies on the edge of the city. Though I knew better intellectually, emotionally I somehow expected, when I drove out there one afternoon, to find them a people made morose and hangdog by their status. In fact they turned out to be a very jolly lot, welcoming and wreathed in smiles, and looking at least as cheerful as the average member of the Socio-Economic Research Unit, say. Why not? They might be Harijans to the world outside, but they were doubtless Brahmins to each other.

In the same way Delhi, preoccupied with its own diurnal round of consequence and command, is paradoxically protected against the dust storm of controversy, threat and misfortune which hangs always, dark and ill-defined, over the Indian horizons. That blur or slither of Delhi, which begins as a mystery and develops into an irritation, becomes in the end a kind of reassurance. After trying three times, you give up gratefully. After expostulating once or twice, it is a pleasure to accede. You think you can change the system? Try it, try it, and when the elaborations of Delhi have caught up with you, when you realize the tortuous significances of the old method, when it has been explained to you that only Mrs Gupta is qualified to take the money, that Mr Mukherjee is prevented by custom from working beside Mr Mukhtar Singh and that Mr Mohammed will not of course be at work on Fridays, when it dawns upon you gradually that it has been done more or less this way, come conqueror, come liberation, since the early Middle Ages, with a relieved and affectionate smile you will probably agree that perhaps it had better be left as it is.

As it is! India is always as it is! I never despair in Delhi, for I feel always all around me the fortification of a profound apathy. The capital is essentially apathetic to the nation: the nation is aloof to the capital. By the end of the century there will be, at the present rate of increase, nearly 1,000 million people in India, and I think it is very likely that there will have been a revolution of one complexion or another. But the traveller who returns to Delhi then will find the

city much the same, I swear, will respond to much the same emotions, indulge in just the same conjectures, bog down in just the same philosophical quagmires, and reach, if he is anything like me, about the same affectionate and inconclusive conclusions.



‘You see? You see? Did I not say so? You are thinking metaphysically, as I foretold!’ Well, perhaps. But the government spokesman proved his point better himself, for neither he nor Mrs Gupta ever did ring.

Delhi During Emergency

PRAN SABHARWAL

‘Prime Minister Indira Gandhi faces a court judgement Thursday that could turn the political situation in India upside down.’

This was the lead paragraph of a front-page story I wrote that appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* on 10 June 1975, two days before the judgement that changed the course of Independent India’s history was delivered. The story ended: ‘If the court decides that Mrs Gandhi has transgressed any of the electoral laws, she would automatically cease to be Prime Minister from the time of the judgement and would be disqualified from any elective post for the next six years.’

The court judgement came on 12 June. It was a Thursday. I was at Delhi’s GB Pant Hospital; Mrs Gandhi’s colleague and India’s Ambassador to Moscow, Durga P. Dhar, had suffered a heart attack and I’d rushed there with Chandrashekhar when it was still dawn. I had carried my transistor with me to keep track of the news of the judgement. As many others and I had anticipated, Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court found that Mrs Gandhi had committed breaches that amounted to corrupt practice during her election campaign in 1971.

Back at home in Pandara Park, we discussed how Mrs Gandhi would react, and what the fallout of her actions would be. In many ways, in the months that followed, political decision-making would effect my daily personal and professional life. The first thing I did on reaching home was to cancel the lunch outing celebrating my son’s birthday, lest someone think I was revelling in the judgement.

What bothered me and others, both political and press friends, was how anyone was going to ensure that Mrs Gandhi would abide by the court’s decision. The impression we got was that she was conscious of the decision and

its gravity but she didn't want to accept the verdict. Her first reaction was to put up a brave front and declare that she would not step down. She asked for a stay on the execution of the Allahabad High Court judgement and summoned senior lawyers and Cabinet colleagues for a strategy session. She decided to appeal her case to the Supreme Court.

There was near unanimity among her followers that sticking to power was hurting the party. The consensus among the members of Parliament was that she should nominate the defence minister, Swaran Singh, as her stop-gap successor. But Mrs Gandhi really believed that the Supreme Court would bail her out and continued to project a business-as-usual image: four days after the Allahabad court had declared her 1971 election to Parliament as void, she was at her office, presiding over the Cabinet's weekly meeting. Meanwhile there were rallies of support outside her residence. And lawyer-advisers in her party said there was no moral, legal or constitutional reason for her to give up her job. They argued that she had been disqualified only on technical grounds, in contrast to any moral turpitude, hence even if the Supreme Court were to uphold the Allahabad High Court judgement, she should stay.

The story I filed for 23 June began: 'On the eve of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's day in the Supreme Court this nation of 600 million seemed to be polarized between her supporters and detractors …' There was a serious sense of foreboding in the air—at least among the politicians and journalists I knew, even if it wasn't yet apparent on the streets of Delhi. In my report for 25 June I wrote: 'Prime Minister Indira Gandhi yesterday was refused an absolute stay of the Allahabad court judgement. Instead Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer [of the Supreme Court] deprived Mrs Gandhi of the right to speak, vote or draw remuneration as a Member of Parliament until the case is finally decided. However, Justice Iyer said she had the right to function as Prime Minister under the constitutional provisions.' The Opposition, led by Jayaprakash Narayan, now intensified its campaign demanding Mrs Gandhi's resignation. Addressing a crowd of 10,000 or more at Delhi's Ramlila Grounds on the evening of 25 June, JP delivered a blistering attack against the Prime Minister, and called upon the police, armed forces and government servants to disobey any 'immoral orders passed by the government'.

Late that night, President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed proclaimed internal Emergency on the advice of the Prime Minister, citing a threat to India's democracy due to internal disturbances. And almost immediately afterwards Indira Gandhi's government launched a severe crackdown on political opponents, ordering the arrests of more than one hundred people.

I was woken up at 3 a.m. on the 26th by the telephone ringing and it kept ringing almost non-stop for the rest of the night and into early morning. Friends who were being arrested called to say goodbye. Some were desperate, some jovial, some nervous and scared about how long this would last. Others regarded their arrest as a badge of courage and hoped I would join them in jail so we could get to spend long hours together. Some political leaders, including disgruntled young Turks of the Congress like Krishen Kant and Mohan Dharia, thought it was safer to take refuge in my house that morning. They brought news of arrests and I told them what little I knew.

The declaration of Emergency was signed by the President, but it did not have Cabinet approval. That evening there were only thirteen people in Mrs Gandhi's house: her son Sanjay, at whose behest the Emergency was declared, Bansi Lal, Om Mehta, R.K. Dhawan, some officials, and Jagannath Kaushal, who provided the legal and constitutional inputs (he later became Minister of Law in Mrs Gandhi's cabinet). The Cabinet approved the declaration subsequently and the next morning Mrs Gandhi went on air to inform the nation of her decision. Strict censorship was clamped down on both the Indian and foreign news media.

I had left my house—with my transistor, and this was soon to become one of the few sources of any worthwhile news—even before Mrs Gandhi's broadcast to the nation. I did not return for over sixteen hours. I thought it safe to stay out. During this period my family received several calls informing them of my arrest. One caller said I'd been arrested 'outside the Press Club', another said it had happened 'on the way to Chandrashekhar's house'. My wife rang up friends to ask where I had been taken as I had gone out without any extra clothes, though I had asked the family to pack a small attache case with essential needs and a couple of sets of kurta pyjamas.



The move against the Opposition was unprecedented in twenty-eight years of independence. The arrests were made under the Internal Security Act. One of the

first persons to be arrested was seventy-two-year-old Jayaprakash Narayan. Among the several others arrested were Chandrashekhar, the dissident Congressman from Mrs Gandhi's own party, Jyotirmoy Bosu, the CPI(M) leader of West Bengal, the Swatantra Party leader Piloo Mody, Ashok Mehta of the opposition Congress, Raj Narain, the Socialist leader who had challenged Mrs Gandhi's election, and the leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Morarji Desai. Those who could escape flew out, some to America, others elsewhere.

Morarji was put in a Haryana state guest house, courtesy Bansi Lal who was considered a Sanjay man. Most of the other people detained were also locked up in jails not in Delhi but in Haryana. By the 26th evening there was concern about Jayaprakash Narayan's condition. I went looking for him with a group of young reporters and discovered that he was on the sixth floor of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. I sneaked up quietly and spoke to Dr Gopinath, who assured me that JP was well. Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was then an MP, had also got himself admitted into AIIMS on account of a kidney complaint and he stayed there most of the course of the Emergency.

Mrs Gandhi's surprise decision to declare Emergency and detain people nationwide shocked the country. Fear and a mild terror of an impending police raj ran through the mind of every thinking Indian. Streets in Delhi were quite empty. Most people came home to try and catch some news from whatever source. It was an unnerving time. There was, more than anything else, a constant fear of the unknown, an almost crippling uncertainty, because for most people there was no precedent in their lives of a dictatorship. What markers existed? How were people to gauge, especially in the first few days of the Emergency, the extent of the damage done to their daily lives?

With censorship, the press was no help either. On 28 June, justifying strict press censorship, Mrs Gandhi said she was 'for the freedom of the press' but that lately the press had reported events in an irresponsible manner that had aggravated the problems for the government and the people. Newspapermen had very little to do because of the censorship. A few papers left large blank spaces on their front pages, and others like the *Hindustan Times*, which reappeared after a two-day power failure engineered by the Delhi administration, left their editorials blank.

I could still go and talk to Dr A.R. Baji, the official spokesman, at his offices at the Press Information Bureau in Shastri Bhavan. He was a friend. But we spoke only about official news. All copy had to be submitted to the Chief Censor Harry D'Penha, who again was a friend, but he had a job to perform and I had to agree to send truncated versions of my stories via the Overseas Communication Office. All stories had to be accompanied by a censor certificate. For a long time I'd preserved some of my typewritten stories that came back with entire paragraphs scored out with thick blue lines. Two- or three-page stories were reduced to a couple of paragraphs that said nothing at all and sometimes I tore them up in disgust. The sight of those mutilated pages and the memory of the humiliation would agitate me even years after the Emergency, till my family insisted on taking them off the walls of my room and putting them away.

Yet news did get around. When the demolitions at Turkman Gate took place, we first got the news from our tailor Abdul Gaffar who used to stay at Nizamuddin. He told us at nine in the morning, within a few hours of the demolitions. Muslims all over India also got the news. Maybe some of the news got exaggerated in the telling, but the fact was that hundred-year-old houses, largely owned by Muslims, were demolished in the guise of clearance of slums and unauthorized constructions. Many Muslims felt the Emergency was an onslaught against them, especially after Sanjay launched his brainless campaign of forced sterilizations, and the bigger mosques in Delhi became centres where news and rumours were exchanged and spread. The Akalis courted arrest throughout the Emergency in Punjab, so gurudwaras like Rikab Gunj, Sis Gunj and Bangla Sahib also became places to visit for information suppressed by the government.

The Hindi and Urdu services of BBC had somehow managed to get their voice broadcasts going. Though guarded, their news had more substance, and a transistor became a necessary appendage wherever I went. In fact most people in Delhi and elsewhere who possessed radios tuned into BBC in their homes, and the enviable reputation that BBC news already had in India was further strengthened during the Emergency.

In the Indian press there was only one man, A.D. Gorwala, a retired ICS officer respected for his honesty, who did not submit to any kind of censorship. His weekly, *Opinion*, published from Bombay, had a small but devoted

readership. When censorship finally hit him, Gorwala stopped mailing the weekly by book post—which was usually intercepted—and mailed it like ordinary mail in white envelopes. This he continued to do till ill health overtook him.

Journalists were debarred even from the Central Hall of Parliament, so the only haunt was the Press Club on Raisina Road where a lot of drinking went on. Any discussion of news was very hush-hush. Rumours too were floated very cautiously. One was never sure who would get reported back to the authorities. One was never sure even among fellow journalists. Caution became the keyword. I was careful of running foul of the establishment.

Mrs Gandhi arrested or detained very few intellectuals or newspapermen. More than the government's repression, what worked against the freedom of the press was that people who wished to survive shunned others and stayed away from potential enemies of Indira Gandhi. People like me who ought to have been arrested but were not were apprehensive, not knowing what to expect. I continued to write stories on food and the state of the economy and referred only obliquely to politics. Even for these I had to obtain a censor certificate. Most of the major newspapers in India surrendered much more than even Mrs Gandhi had demanded. I would go around to newspaper offices in Connaught Place and Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg with news, and the same people who earlier called to ask about JP's next move now refused to see me.

The first action against the press was in March 1976 when the accreditation of twenty-six newspersons was not renewed. I was one of them. This meant I could no longer go to government offices. For all intents and purposes I was a non-person till 22 March 1977 when my accreditation was given back.

Ironically, in this atmosphere of censorship a new magazine was launched in Delhi—*India Today*, sponsored by the Congress party and under the editorship of Uma Vasudev. It was released by Mrs Gandhi.

Life in Delhi was very quiet. Schools and colleges functioned normally. Buses and trains ran on time. People did not loiter by the roadside. Offices had no late arrivals after a few episodes of ministers making surprise visits to offices. On the surface it was a world made to order for the urban middle class. But evidence of a police state was more than apparent in the capital.

For one, the police was invisible, which heightened the sense of fear; there certainly were some plain-clothes policemen around, but people saw them everywhere. And with Sanjay at the helm, young goons had become law enforcers in certain areas of Delhi. Otherwise perfectly sensible public messages —exhorting people to plant trees or fight illiteracy ('Each One Teach One')— also assumed a kind of menace painted blandly on large signboards that suddenly all looked similar—standard size and standard colours. Austerity measures introduced before the Emergency due to food shortages were now taken to absurd limits, so that at any function with more than fifty people only potatoes could be served.

There was also, of course, the infamous sterilization drive. Tents were put up in several places throughout the city with loudspeakers blaring messages promising a tin of ghee and fifty rupees or a transistor to all men who would come and get themselves sterilized. Rumours, not all of them untrue, were afloat all the time about forced sterilizations. Most of these happened in slums and lower middle-class localities. Our jamadarni would report incidents to us. '*Ladkon ko utha ke le gaye, zabardasti nasbandi kara di* (They've taken young boys away and forcibly sterilized them),' she'd tell us. '*Pandrah-solah saal ke bacchon ko pakad rahe hain … buddhon ko bhi nahin chhoda* (They're picking up fifteen-sixteen-year-old kids … even old men aren't spared).'

Book post was often intercepted. George Fernandes, who was underground, sent us cyclostyled letters with news and his views (embellished with bits from his favourite poems) in ordinary envelopes and from different post offices all over the country. A few times when he came to Delhi I met him under cover of darkness on deserted side streets. Phones too were tapped. A very senior bureaucrat close to Mrs Gandhi once remarked that his favourite evening entertainment was going into the control room and listening to taped conversations.

All India Radio and Doordarshan, never known for their impartiality, became absolute tools for propaganda. Sanjay and his men organized rallies in support of the government at India Gate and they wanted these telecast live. When I.K. Gujral, the Information and Broadcasting Minister at the time, objected, he was shunted off to the Planning Commission and then to Moscow as ambassador.

In February 1977, after elections were announced, Mrs Gandhi sent me a copy through an emissary of Mohan Dharia's letter pleading reconciliation. Mohan Dharia and Chandrashekhar were brought to Delhi and detained in neighbouring houses on Rouse Avenue in the hope that Chandrashekhar and Mrs Gandhi would begin a process of reconciliation. That was not to be. The March 1977 elections became a contest between Sanjay Gandhi's followers and the old Congressmen like Jagjivan Ram, Morarji Desai, Brahmanand Reddy and D.K. Barooah.

On the day votes were being counted in Delhi, I drove with my family and friends to all the seven centres. Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg was packed with people watching the results on the huge boards put up by the *Times of India*, *Indian Express* and other newspapers, and as it became clear that Indira Gandhi's Congress had been routed, there was jubilation. I can never forget the sight of Ayub Syed, the editor of *Current* and one-time favourite of Mrs Gandhi, dancing in the street. As we drove through Delhi we saw crowds out on the streets overcome with a sense of liberation. To me that reaction best expressed what the Emergency had been all about.

There can't be too many people who lived in Delhi during the mid-1970s without some story to tell about the Emergency. There certainly can't be a single politician from the time who will ever forget it. Twenty-six years after the Emergency, politicians in this country still relate to where they were in 1975-77, and biographical sketches of many MPs and MLAs still have a line saying, 'Jailed during Emergency'.

31 October 1984

JARNAIL SINGH

Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh security guards in the compound of her residence on 31 October 1984. Over the next two weeks mobs attacked and killed Sikhs all over northern India. It is estimated that over 1,200 people were murdered in the riots. Delhi saw the worst of the rioting. The following extract is taken from I Accuse …: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984*, and has been translated by Vaishali Mathur.*

Before Partition my grandfather used to live in a village close to Lahore. When he came to India, he came empty-handed and was allotted a house in Lajpat Nagar that had a tin roof which made it very cold in winter and very hot in summer. But my parents felt that at least it was a home. The roof abutted the neighbouring house and it was possible to reach every house nearby by simply climbing on to it.

My father got a job as a carpenter, and with that a regular income started to come in. As time went by, we improved the house and it felt like a home. Our family was a large one—I have five brothers and three sisters. When we were growing up, we would roam around Lajpat Nagar the whole day and it never worried my mother.

Lajpat Nagar was a refugee colony for the Hindus and Sikhs who had come from Pakistan after Partition. They all shared the same experiences of pain and separation which gave a sense of common purpose—no one felt alienated here. One of our neighbours was an elderly lady called ‘Bhabhiji’ by everyone. She was from Multan and was especially close to my mother. In fact, after Bhabhiji died, her daughter-in-law treated my mother like her motherin-law, as that is what Bhabhiji would have wanted. Some years ago when Bhabhiji’s grandchildren got married, my mother took on the role of the grandmother-in-law though Bhabhiji had been a Hindu and my mother was a Sikh.

It had never mattered. But on this day, 31 October 1984, there were those who wanted all such relationships to be severed. Bhabhiji came to the house several times that day. ‘Don’t worry,’ she said in Multani, but she clearly didn’t believe her own words. Rumours were rife in the neighbourhood that after Mrs Gandhi’s assassination at the hands of her Sikh bodyguards, mobs were attacking Sikhs in several areas of the city. But in quiet Lajpat Nagar on the afternoon of 31 October, that seemed distant, even if worrying. Nonetheless, Mother removed our father’s nameplate from outside the house and warned Bhabhiji not to come too often for her own safety. Ours was the only Sikh house in the entire lane, though there were others across the nallah.

At home the worry lines on Papa’s face were apparent. In the evening my aunt, who lived in Arjun Nagar near Safdarjung Enclave, called and related an incident about her Sikh neighbour. He had been crossing the road at the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) when he saw an angry mob pulling Sikhs out of their vehicles and beating them up; their pagris were being torn off. He himself had escaped by a whisker. We heard that President Giani Zail Singh had gone to AIIMS to pay his respects to the slain prime minister and the mob threw stones at his cavalcade. When Mother came back after taking my aunt’s call in the neighbouring house of Kabul Singh (we did not have a telephone), she looked very uneasy. However, no one could imagine then what was to take place the next day. Since Indira Gandhi was the prime minister, national mourning had been declared. Radio and television (only AIR and Doordarshan in those days) were only broadcasting mournful veena music. We kids were not happy with this at all. Mourning was for grown-ups; as far as we children were concerned it was a holiday and we wanted to see the normal programmes on television.

On 1 November, early in the morning, we went out to play cricket in the nearby Shiv Vatika park with our friends from the neighbourhood. This park was to one side of the colony and we would play for hours—unchecked and unaware. It was only when we got tired that we would remember we had homes. This was entirely usual—we would be so engrossed in the game that we would forgot that we had not eaten and would return only to be scolded by our mothers who would say, ‘Why! You didn’t find a mother in the park to feed you? Stay there!’ We knew they weren’t really angry. But today was different.

We had just reached the Sindhi school when we heard shouts and raised voices. A crowd was screaming. We looked at each other and decided that we would investigate further—I suppose all kids would have the same reaction. We were curious—and till then we'd had nothing to fear. However, just then my elder brother, who was thirteen years old at that time, said, 'Do you want to get scolded by Mother? Let's go straight home, we haven't even had breakfast this morning.' He was the strongest amongst us and generally no one opposed him. We had just reached our lane when we saw that Mother was standing outside the house, looking frantic with worry. I still remember the scolding that we got that day. She even slapped us once or twice. Mother was extremely worked up and the relief of seeing the three of us safe and sound somehow made her angrier. A neighbour's son, Raju, had actually been sent to look for us. He had searched the parks nearby but could not find us as the Shiv Vatika park was a little distance away. When we could not be traced for a long time, Mother became frantic. Even so, my brothers and I could not understand why she was so scared.

Before we could ask any questions, my two brothers and I were locked up in a room right in the back of the house. Its door had not been closed in a long time so it was difficult to lock. Father used all his force and shut it tight. We could not understand was happening, but we realized that whatever it was, it was serious. Satvinder Kaur, my eldest sister, told us that there was some looting and Sikhs were being beaten up. This was the first time I had heard the word 'loot'. Curious, I watched from the window: Mother was now washing clothes but clearly also keeping a watch on events in the street.

When the noise of the mob began to get louder, Mother told us to climb up to the 'oltee', the small space at the head of the staircase, and hide there. Usually we only went up there while playing hide-and-seek—and we were always scolded for it; but today we were actually being told to do so. For a long time my two brothers and I—we were then thirteen, eleven and ten years old—crouched in that dark, cramped place. My elder brother, Jasbir Singh, had been sent off to a neighbour's house—Mother had heard that adolescent boys were being especially targeted and she felt he'd be safer out of our house. It was suffocating up in the attic. Mother had been too distracted to give us any food and we had not even had our breakfast that morning—we'd run off to play cricket without eating anything. We were famished till we found a large tin box full of wheat

flour biscuits from Chander bakery. Mother had got them made planning to give us a couple every day on winter mornings as atta was said to keep you warm. This tin was stored in the oltee. We finished almost the whole box—I can still remember how good they tasted. We were so young, so unscarred then. It never occurred to us to wonder why we had to hide like criminals in our own house inside a colony we had lived in all our lives, surrounded by neighbours with whom we'd always had good relations. How could this have happened? Even today, I don't know. While we were still locked up there, Bhabhiji had turned up again. She told Mother that the gurdwara had been set on fire and Sikh shops in the nearby Krishna Market were being looted and set ablaze. Bhabhiji had just seen a neighbour's son carrying boxes of shoes out of the looted shops. He had picked up twenty pairs for himself from the Central Market shop Volga which belonged to a Sardar. It is a different thing that he found he had stolen twenty pairs of the same type of shoe. He was an exception. Most of our neighbours in the colony did not participate in the mob frenzy; but they did not do anything to stop it. Nor did they actively get together with the looters and plunderers, though some boys seized the opportunity to pick up things.

We were taken out of the room late in the night. Then our eldest brother, Gurcharan, who had a bad leg due to a childhood attack of polio, decided to go to Niwaspuri. Our father had recently been allotted a government quarter in Niwaspuri as he was in the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and Gurcharan was staying there as it was near his college. Despite being plagued by polio he had been studying hard and after completing his B.Com. he was planning to study further to become a company secretary. People at home told him not to leave the house because the situation was not good. He dismissed their warnings: 'I am disabled and going on a tricycle, who will say anything to me?' His confidence in the kindness of strangers was misplaced that day: 1 November 1984. He was attacked a short distance from the house. His three-wheeled cycle was overturned. His pagri was pulled off and the mob started beating him, heedless of his cries of pain. His disability made it impossible for him to run. He was lying in the dust, while the blows rained down on him. The mob left him bleeding and shaken on the road. A few shopkeepers, who knew him but hadn't intervened when he was actually being beaten up, came forward once the mob had left. They put the cycle straight and helped him back on it. He

came home somehow but for a long time he was in a state of shock. He had always been treated with consideration. That day he learnt that the only thing that mattered was that he was a Sikh.

We spent the entire day taking God's name. The next day, 2 November, Mother looked even more worried. Our aunt had called up with some shocking news. Mother's younger brother, our uncle, Gulzar Singh, and other Sikh drivers had been attacked by the mob at the Hyatt Regency hotel's taxi stand. Mama, our uncle, used to run his taxi there, a taxi bought with the money saved by our maternal grandfather when he had worked in Baluchistan before Partition. The mob had beaten up all the Sikh taxi drivers at the rank very badly, leaving them bleeding and bruised, their clothes covered with blood. They had been left for dead. Uncle was a strapping young man. If there had been only five or even ten against him, he could have tackled them alone. But the attackers ran into hundreds.

Despite his severe injuries, we had learnt that it was useless to take him to a government hospital. AIIMS was the nearest hospital, but news had spread that President Zail Singh's motor cavalcade had been attacked by angry mobs when he had come to the hospital to pay his respects to the slain prime minister. If that was the treatment meted out to the head of state, what hope did ordinary Sikhs have. Government hospitals were not admitting injured Sikhs; we heard that such hospitals had actually closed their burns unit—so that the many Sikhs who had been set ablaze by the mobs were unable to get the treatment that they so desperately needed.

One of the most inhuman acts of the mobs was to fit car tyres over their victims' heads and then set the tyres alight. There were many Sikhs with burn injuries, but even if a victim managed to reach a government hospital, he would have been turned back. In fact, several Sikhs who were turned away from hospitals fell victim to mobs on their way home. My uncle, despite his injuries, had to be kept at home. My aunt could not find a doctor to treat him—many were too scared to go to the house of a Sikh, fearing retribution from the mobs. A private nurse—a Christian—who lived nearby, agreed to come every day and dress the wounds. It was such gestures—the courage and compassion of strangers—that no one who has been through those days can forget.

That day, 2 November, a police jeep went around the colony announcing that a curfew would be imposed within half an hour. They advised everyone to stay home.

Mother was relieved. ‘Everything will be okay now,’ she said; after all, the mobs could not gather to attack during a curfew. But the curfew was not implemented. Anyone who breaks a curfew is liable to be shot at sight, or at least apprehended. But from what I saw on 2 November, no sooner had the jeep announcing curfew passed by than more and more people would spill out of their homes. People told me later that local Congressmen were responsible for the attacks on the Sikhs of Lajpat Nagar. Some even alleged that the two sons of a local leader were seen brandishing the voters’ list, so that the mobs could be directed to Sikh houses. The Hindus in our neighbourhood decided to set up patrols at night so that they could protect their lives and property.

This patrol was set up close to our house and all the people on it were from our neighbourhood, so I knew them all. Escaping from my mother, I reached the spot where they had gathered. That is when I came to know that our non-Sikh neighbours were also scared. Rumours were rife that to avenge Sikh killings a trainload of Sikhs were coming from Punjab ready to attack innocent Hindus and that many Hindus were being killed in Punjab. Another rumour, also widespread, was that the Sikhs had mixed poison in the city’s drinking water supply. I actually asked someone how he thought this was possible and he pointed to the reservoir which supplied water to Lajpat Nagar. But even I, a child at the time, knew immediately this was ridiculous. In the first place, who could climb such a huge tank? And if they had managed to poison the water, wouldn’t the water flow to Sikh houses too? But it was such a strong rumour that I half believed it too. I had just drunk some water at home and I was scared—this is how the disinformation was working. The purpose of the rumour was to make everyone believe that the Sikhs were on a rampage, to incite public opinion against them, to quell any sympathy that might be developing for them because of the mobs’ killing spree.

We didn’t know then the extent of the horror that had taken place. Reports in the newspapers were few; but our family and friends would hear about the violence from their families and friends. The stories we heard were unbelievable; but we had to believe them. We had seen the spires of black smoke from burning

taxi stands from our roof; we had heard about innocent Sikhs being brutally beaten; accounts of the massacres in Kalyanpuri and Trilokpuri were beginning to come out. All this was frightening, because no one knew why this had happened; who was behind it. Shock and worry had gripped my parents; my brothers and I were scared as well, but we were children and we did not really understand the full extent of the violence.

After ten days when life began returning to normal we were allowed to go and play in the park again. We were tired of staying home. The park was our life. All three of us went to play and we found the other kids in the park were in the middle of a game of touchball—where you have to hit the other players with the ball. The ball used to cost just fifty paise but the hits really hurt. The three of us took a while to realize that we were being hit the hardest and most often. It dawned on us that the other boys were making us targets. It was not a game; it was a form of making us scapegoats. None of the other children were being treated that way. The balls thrown at them were ones they could catch easily; the ball wasn't being thrown at them with the intention to hurt. Perhaps we should have just stopped playing—but we were children too. We were not in the habit of running away. Swiftly, the three of us targeted the others, one by one. It was a war, not a game. The hits were painful, but we three pretended they didn't hurt. We didn't stop playing with the kids in the park—we had played with them all our lives. But that day we all realized that the question of being a Hindu or a Sikh had entered even children's games.

We were all in the same age group and went to the same school. We spent our free time together and plucked Ramchandra Aunty's and Roshini Aunty's guavas together. We used to fight earlier too but now we became the objects of taunts, '*Sardaron ke barah baj gaye*,' they would shout. They'd said this to us before, but this was different; this was not a joke, but a taunt. One of the boys, Titu we called him, said, 'If you fight too much, I will call the same people who killed Sikhs on 31 October and 1 November. Your house got saved in the riots but this time I will tell them the correct address.' Titu was in my class, his mother and my mother were friends. Children have fights, it's natural; but it was also natural that we started reacting aggressively too. Today I am still friends with many of those boys; we don't speak of that time. When I was younger, I thought I would forget. I know now that things will never be the same again.

Now the Tears Have Dried Up

DHIREN BHAGAT

This was first published as an article in the Sunday Observer *on 25 November 1984.*

On 9 November when a senior minister's wife turned up with two hundred blankets at the refugee relief camp set up by Sardar Mehtab Singh by his house in Karol Bagh's Ajmal Khan Park, things weren't quite as smooth as she would have liked. 'We accorded her whatever reception was required,' Jaspal Singh, the organizer's son, recalled, with what I took to be a faint touch of irony, 'but the volunteers who had been working here since the camp was started, they were all agreed that no government assistance should be accepted.' This seems to have been a fairly standard response: all over Delhi volunteers and residents of camps have reacted this way to what they perceive to be the government's callousness in delaying aid. One volunteer made a similar point about the Congress party: 'The Congress says we haven't organized the riots. Okay. But then tell me, when a calamity like this occurs all workers of all parties come to help. Where have the Congress party men gone?'

The minister's wife, it appears, 'felt a bit bad and small'. Understanding the reaction of the volunteers she asked the organizers if she could do anything. Would they like to meet her husband? Could he be of help? They went to see him the next day. To their surprise, perhaps, she confirmed their stories of Congress involvement. She had been visiting various camps and had picked up enough information. 'If we had one name, the minister's wife and PA confirmed many others.' The minister seemed convinced.

Later, at the same meeting, the camp organizers asked the minister to do something to restore Sikh confidence in the government and the ruling party. It was important, they said, that those who had incited and led the mobs be punished, both in the courts and with expulsion from the party. Now it was the

minister's turn to plead his woes. 'Confidentially,' he is reported to have said, 'in this government my own position is not clear. Till I get close enough to Rajiv, how can I put your case to him?'

For political Delhi the riots might never have occurred. As speculation over who would be favoured with Congress tickets grew this past week, no other concern was manifest. I dined at the home of one such Congress hopeful and the chatter of party district presidents and city presidents graced the table. At one point a guest who had nothing to do with the Congress party mentioned the riots. The host rose to the occasion, '*Haan, woh jo Jan Sanghiyon ne kiya, haan* (Yes, that which the Jan Sanghis did)' and the sentence trailed off. I protested and my protest was carried—but only because a joint secretary of the party who was present came up with the most guilty hangdog expression I have ever seen. I may be naïve but I am convinced that this was the first time since 31 October that our host had begun to understand the complicity of his party in the riots. (If you read only the *Times of India*, the *National Herald* and the *Patriot* and mix with the right people, such blessed ignorance is only to be expected.) After dinner, and after the assistant inspector of police who had read the party hopeful's hand had left, we asked what predictions the palmist had made. '*Kehta hai ke chance bees percent badh gaya hai* (He says chances have increased twenty per cent).' '*Pehle kya kehta tha, kya chance tha* (What did he say your chances were earlier)?' the district president inquired. And the serious reply: '*Pehle kehta tha sau percent chance tha ticket ka, ab kehta hai sava sau percent chance hai* (He said first that I had a hundred per cent chance of winning a ticket, now he says I have a 125 per cent chance).'

Earlier that day I had spoken to a friend of mine in the Opposition, a fairly important party aide. I had sympathized with him about the new situation and then (in my innocence) said that at least they now had a proper issue to fight the election on: who had started the Delhi riots? His reply made perfect sense: 'Fight the election on this issue?' he said. 'Are you crazy? Go to the villages and they are saying *aur kyoon nahin maara Sikhon ko* (Why didn't they kill more Sikhs)? In Bombay and Delhi, if we are lucky, this will count; in the press, amongst the intellectuals. In the rest of India, no way. It will backfire and people will say *achha kiya Congress ne* (the Congress did well). What can we do in such a

country?' So at last I knew why the Congress party hopeful didn't need to know about the riots.

'The tears have dried up,' Jaspal Singh said to me at his father's camp at Ajmal Khan Park. After 12 November the government representatives who used to come by regularly stopped coming. Even the response of the Indian press they had found disappointing. With very few exceptions, most of the reporting had been slanted and had tried to play down the impact of the riots. 'Many reporters used to come here and take down details of cases, but after a few days when the people in the camp saw that none of their stories were appearing in the papers they stopped talking to the press. "What's the use?" they said.'

The administration, however, has begun to throw its weight. Class I officers from all public sector undertakings have been deputed to report on what can be done. There are many suggestions in the air. Since the residents of colonies like Trilokpuri do not wish to go back ('Do you want us to go back and live among those who killed our fathers and raped our sisters?'), it was suggested to the government that it exchange those plots for others of the same size in other colonies, preferably colonies where several Sikhs could live together in comparative safety. The government's first response to this suggestion was: right, surrender your land first. The residents of the camps were willing to do so but the organizers intervened and said they would only countenance exchange of plots, not immediate surrender. Another suggestion that has been made is that the government allocate alternative plots and free cement to those whose houses have been damaged and get the able-bodied among the refugees to start building their own dwellings. 'That will keep the men busy,' said a Sikh camp organizer to me. 'When the men are idle who can say what their minds will turn to? So far we have forbidden them from any slogan-shouting, not even *Bole so nihaal* within the camp, but if they are unemployed for long who can say?'

Young Sikhs have begun comparing the position of their co-religionists with that of the Jews and have begun thinking in terms of kibbutz-style dwellings. But kibbutz-style protection works both ways. Certainly those within the kibbutzes will be more protected in the even, of another such carnage but those who choose to live apart will be even more vulnerable.

Several Sikhs have begun contemplating building a new colony to resettle the refugees. Tilaknagar and Fatehnagar have been discussed as possible sites. But it

is not enough to build houses; many of the people who have fled from their homes have lost their means of survival as well. So there is talk of setting up small-scale industries in the new colonies, knitting and papad-making. But for any such industry to succeed marketing institutions are required.

The horrors of the riots remain, a permanent legacy. Resettlement can only be a partial reparation. Those who are involved in the resettlement are constantly reminded of this. 'Yesterday Mr Seth, an assistant labour commissioner who has been attached to us,' Jaspal Singh recalled, 'came with us to the Trans-Yamuna area for a survey to identify loss of life and loss of dwelling units. He had three colonies to visit. He could only go to three houses and then he broke down and cried. He said: "It is not possible, I can't go on. Just fill in the forms, you confirm them and I'll sign them." We were in a house where the women were going about their work and there were ashes and bones all around. You see, the men had not yet returned and there was no one to clear the *phul*.'

April in Delhi

KHUSHWANT SINGH

This extract is taken from Nature Watch.

Delhi's short spring is over; summer is yet to come. Mornings and evenings are cool, the day at times unpleasantly warm. March flowers begin to wilt under the heat of the sun, summer blossoms are ready to take their place.

April inherits some of its unpredictability from the preceding month. All Fools Day is almost twelve hours long; to be precise, 12.26 hours. Baisakhi, thirteen days later, is twenty-two minutes longer. Both days can be equally unpredictable. I have known them to be as chilly as some in winter and I have known Baisakhi to be uncomfortably hot outdoors. I have also recorded Baisakhi celebrations at Majnoon da Tilla Gurdwara along the upper reaches of the Yamuna in north Delhi being washed out by unseasonal rain. The Bard was correct in comparing the vagaries of a new love affair with the eccentric weather of April.

O! how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day

However, Delhi in April is indeed 'well-apparelled' and 'proud-pied'. Gardens continue to look like painters' easels. Flower shows in different parts of the city exhibit new strains of roses and bougainvillaes.

One year, early in April, I happened to drive out of the city towards Jaipur. It was rugged country typical of the Aravalli range which extends across the Rajasthan desert and ends in the northern suburbs of Delhi; keekar (camel thorn), cactus, wild thorny ber (jujube) and other scrubby flora manage to survive in this waterless wasteland. However, flame trees lit up the countryside. And as I drove back in the evening the bitter-sweet perfume of keekar flowers

wafted across the road. How well the poet Avimaraka caught the breath of a summer evening!

How enchanting is the great variety of the world!
Gone is the heat of the day as the earth dresses for night;
The evening breeze of this strange world gently the body touches
Slowly she removes the sun from her forehead
Quietly puts around her neck a garland of stars.
Scatters the brave throughout the sleeping city
And joins together the bodies of young lovers.

—Avimaraka, *Love's Enchanted World,*
translated by J.L. Masson & D.D. Kosambi

I must have muddled my calendar of flowering trees in believing that the flame tree and the coral come into flower at the same time as the semul. They do not; the semul comes first. The coral and the flame blossom almost a month later. By Baisakhi (13th April) silk semuls have almost entirely shed their blossoms while the flame and the coral are in their best finery. By then bauhinia beans are ready for plucking. Trees that flower at the same time as flames and corals are jacarandas (their Indian name 'neelam'—sapphire—is an apt description of their colouring), widely planted in New Delhi. You have to see them in a cluster to catch the lapis-lazuli blue of their tiny bell-shaped flowers. They are a few in the roundabout facing Parliament House on Sansad Marg, avenues of them along the Safdarjung flyover, on Siri Fort Road and in new residential areas. They can be seen at their best between the first and third weeks of the month.

People often confuse the coral and the flame, since they are both the same colour. Coral's Latin name *Erythrina* means 'red', but there the resemblance ends. The flowers of the coral (Gul-e-Nastareen or Pangra in Hindi) stand erect; flame petals are curved like scimitars and resemble a parrot's beak. Their boles and leaves are also quite dissimilar. The coral tree can be seen in abundance in most of Delhi's parks. It has many uses, its wood being made into stakes to support betel (paan) and pepper vines. The flame is still largely wild. There are many flame trees on the Ridge and a whole forest of them beyond Surajkund. People don't care to grow this tree in their gardens because its glory lasts barely seven days; the rest of the year it is just a mass of leaves that make a clattering noise in the wind. In north India they sew flame leaves together to make donas (cups) and pattals (plates to eat out of). A variety of astringent gum known as the

Bengal Kino is extracted from its bark. For some reason the lac insect which breeds on flames is not cultivated on Delhi's trees. The tree, *Butea frondosa*, derives its Latin name from an eighteenth century botanist, the Earl of Bute. It has many Indian names: dhak, palas and tesoo. My friend the poet Jaseemuddin in Dhaka had many in his garden, so he named his house Palas Baari. It is said that the famous battle of Plassey (AD 1757) came to be so known because it took place in a jungle of flame (palas) trees.

One morning on the way to the Club I saw a whirl of kites dive-bombing an injured bat which had fallen on the road. It managed to elude them by dragging itself into a drain. Since the poor bat could not fly, it would almost certainly be eaten up by dogs.

How had the bat come to grief? What makes bats choose certain trees in preference to others? In New Delhi their favourite perches are arjuna trees growing between Motilal Nehru Place and the roundabout where Janpath meets Maulana Azad Road. They can be seen and heard squabbling amongst themselves every morning. I used to see lots of them in my father's garden on Janpath. Their favourite trees were the fragrant maulsaris. When these were in fruit, bats were as thick as bees in a hive. There are other varieties of bats (or are they flying foxes?) which inhabit old monuments. They have many nests in the ancient seminary at Hauz Khas.

By more than trebling its population in the last forty years, Delhi has lost a great deal of its bird life that I lived with in my school days. A weekend in Kurukshetra made me aware of nature's sights and sounds now rarely heard or seen in the Delhi of today. At the University guest house I was shaken out of my slumber by the trumpet call of a peafowl by my window: *paon, paon, paon*—very much like the way its name is pronounced in French. As I opened the window, it scuttled away. The eastern horizon had turned grey and it was drizzling. All at once a papeeha (hawk cuckoo) perched on a neighbouring tree, wound itself up and began to call 'brain-fever, brain-fever.' Besides peacocks and papeehas there were lapwings screaming as they flew about in the grey dawn, as also koels and drongos. No sooner had these birds fallen silent than the doves took over and the 'voice of the turtle' was heard over the campus. An hour later when the clouds lifted to reveal a deep blue sky, flocks of swallows chittered as they wheeled about in the high heavens.

Soon after Baisakhi, the first crop of mangoes grown around Delhi appear in the market. They are seldom very sweet or succulent. It takes the searing heat of summer to bring them to their full richness of taste and colour.

More trees are in the process of shedding old leaves and donning new ones, coming to flower and being deflowered. What could have induced New Delhi's master-gardener, Lancaster, to import sausage trees (*Kigelia pinata*) from East Africa and plant them in Delhi? Sausage trees can be seen along Amrita Shergill Marg and many other avenues. It is a singularly ugly tree with scraggy red flowers which exude a malodorous oil and bear solid sausage fruit for which neither man nor bird nor beast have any use. Its flowers are said to open up at night and begin to close up by mid-morning. Apparently fruit-bats relish their taste. Some rural folk make a paste out of its fruit and use it against skin eruptions.

How different is the siris! It is quick-growing but short-lived. It is leafless still spring. Then suddenly fresh, light green leaves appear, and soon its pale powder-puff flowers spread their fragrance far and wide. The dual highway running from the airport to the city is divided by beds of bougainvillaeas and has siris growing on either side. There are two varieties of siris to be seen in Delhi: *Albizia lebbek*, the fragrant variety, and the much taller white *Albizia procera* (safed siris). The second variety has a pale, smooth bole with branches well above the ground. There are a few lining Man Singh Road on either side of its intersection with Rajpath.

By the last week of April the days are distinctly warmer and the afternoon sun unbearable. It is time to put on air-coolers. As long as the air outside is dry, which it usually is through April, May and June, they effectively cool rooms blowing in dry air through wet khas screens. But beware! Damp air is the mother of body aches and pains and an invitation to mosquitoes and cockroaches. If you can afford it, use air-conditioners rather than coolers.

In the last days of the month the first gulmohar blooms begin to peep out of their green casings (my diary records some appearing as early as 15th April). The Gul ('gold') mohar derives its Latin name *Ponciana regia* from M. de Poinci, a governor of the French Antilles in the mid-seventeenth century. The tree is a native of Madagascar. It has become the great favourite amongst flowering trees because of its flamboyant display of fiery red and orange.

Connaught Place has a cluster of these trees and they are now grown extensively in most new residential colonies.

Another flowering tree which resembles the gulmohar in colouring and is grown extensively in Delhi is the peacock tree, also known as the dwarf ponciana or Barbados pride. Why peacock? There is nothing of the peacock's blue about it. It's Latin name *Caesalpina pulcherrima* (most beautiful) is well-matched by its Indian ones, Krishna chura or Radha chura, the crest of Krishna or Radha.

Pink cassias, cherry-red and white are now in full bloom. So also are yellow elders and oleanders, both pink and white. At the same time neems shed their flowers like sawdust about their boles. Semul pods burst and scatter their fluff which lies like snowflakes on the ground.

The summer heat and damp rouse serpents from their hibernation. Delhi has all three species of the most venomous snakes: cobras, vipers and kraits. It also has others which are quite harmless to humans but prey on man's worst enemies —rats and mice. One warm afternoon I went to see Arpana Caur, a young painter working in the artists' colony at Garhi. The studios are built along the walls of this ancient robber fortress. In between is an open space, now lush with grass and cannas. As I entered I saw a gang of urchins hurling stones, brandishing sticks and yelling as they ran towards a snake basking on the lawn. Before I could stop them they had beaten the poor reptile into a bloody mess. 'Saanp ka bachha (a baby snake),' they cried triumphantly. It was a small orange-coloured snake with diamond-shaped black spots—a full grown diadem (rajat). It was too late to tell the children that like many other snakes of Delhi it was not only harmless but also a well-meaning reptile.

Delhi by Season

NAMITA GOKHALE

Delhi as we were taught in school, has an ‘extreme climate’. And if Delhi is in every other respect also a city of extremes, it is the sharp and sudden variations in temperature that explain its personality. Temperatures accelerate from 0 to 48 on the Celsius scale in the span of a few months, and the power situation being miserable any which way you approach it, Delhiwalas are in direct contact with their environment. The rhythm of the seasons rules and dictates the realities of life. There is beauty and brutality in almost equal measure.

Like all of northern India, Delhi has four distinct seasons: a brief vasant or spring, a long, sweltering summer, an erratic and moody monsoon, and a winter that ranges from chill to balmy. There is no autumn, and the fall, or fiza, occurs quite contrarily during springtime, when the trees shed their leaves. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that Delhi is really four distinct cities. Delhi in the spring is radically distinct from the manifestation of hell it assumes in the summer months; Delhi in the monsoon looks, sounds and feels quite different from its other avatars, and as for Delhi in December, margashisha in the Hindu calendar is known as the king of seasons.

Let us begin in the beginning, with spring and renewal. Officially, Basant Panchami in the Hindu almanac heralds the arrival of the mythological figure who represents this season. Vasanta is a winged Cupid figure who doubles as the God of Love, aiming his floral arrows at seditious hearts. When I was young it was traditional to wear only yellow on Basant Panchami, for yellow is the colour sacred to spring. Delhi in the springtime boasts blue skies and green lawns, and an incredible profusion of flowers: roses, lilies, tulips, gladioli, larkspur. In the fields and villages that surround Delhi, acres and acres of bright mustard fields announce the spring.

Meanwhile, the leaves are falling and tender green buds are groping out from the old weathered magnificence of pipal and neem trees which have seen the passage of time, of Mughal pomp and Raj regalia. The Rashtrapati Bhawan, Delhi's presidential palace, lets open its famed Mughal gardens to the public in March, and young women from the outreaches of Dakshinpuri and Mongolpuri, courting couples from Khayala and Narayana, old men from New Rajinder Nagar, come via the choked, spluttering public buses to pause from the delirium and dreariness of their existence to stare at the invincible beauty of the spring.

Everybody celebrates spring differently. The clerks and babus in the government offices abandon all calls of duty and crowd to the pretty parks that are a central feature of the city's roundabouts. They joke and play cards and lie on the grass staring at the hawks and kites keetering in the glass-blue sky, and when they are well contented they eat roasted groundnuts and sometimes smile at nothing at all. They snarl less at their wives than they usually do, and at night they dream of the time when they were children. They still have to catch their share of water before their neighbours do, they still have to deal with power cuts and transport strikes, but they do it with the joy and certainty that life has its redeeming moments.

As is the way with good things, spring is invariably the shortest of the seasons. Delhiwalas have a short, glorious reprieve from the rigours of winter, and then April is upon us and a cruel, merciless summer begins its annual subjugation of the spirit. If you can shelter in an air-conditioned home or office, and if you glimpse the gracious streets of Lutyens' Delhi from the inside of a cool, purring, air-conditioned car, then summer in Delhi is nice. The streets are alive with yellow and purple laburnum, and the flaming gulmohar is abloom on avenues and side lanes. This is a time to sip lemonade, or gin and tonic if you so please, and enjoy the pleasures of softly starched cottons, of chikan and mulmul fabrics that crumple elegantly in minutes. You can swim in clubs and farmhouses or your own private pool if you have one, and then ritually, by the middle of May, you leave for some mysterious destination, in a mass migration that leaves the city denuded of the glitteratti, the power-brokers, and the merely affluent.

Otherwise you have a horrible time. June in Delhi illustrates the common belief that a Delhiwala, like a cockroach, can survive anything, for such are the vicissitudes of weather, conditioning and deprivation that the human spirit here

has soared to new heights of indomitability to survive. It is quite common in summer for landlords to murder their tenants, or the other way around, over water disputes regarding storage tanks or the use of pumps and tubewells. It is common in summer for roadrage to manifest itself in murder and manslaughter; for families to fight, for postmen and cyclists to fume, for generators and inverters to work overtime while we the people nurture homicidal daydreams about the government and the Delhi Vidyut Board. In summer Delhi's beggars bake in the asphalt, while ice-cream vendors smile and triple their takings. In summer it is rumoured that the ice in the dhabas and lesser refreshment stalls is stolen from the mortuary, though the possible economics of such a transaction have always mystified me. Every evening, until late into the night, families move en masse to the lawns around India Gate. These celebratory night-picnics are an assertion against the weather, a few hours of respite from the torture of the long hot day. India Gate is full of laughter and happiness. It is a paradise of bumpy camel rides and slushy golgappas with panipuri in earthen pots balanced on the heads of itinerant chaat-vendors, heads which bear the indelible fragrance of Chameli-ka-tel from Jaunpur. Lutyens' Delhi regards these intruders from its outskirts with benign interest. Even as the primitive bioscopes grind out nostalgic Hindi film tunes, young lovers hold hands and sniff at braided garlands of fragrant night flowers: chameli and mogra and raat-ki-rani. What more is there to say about Delhi in the summer, except that the extreme heat keeps disease at bay, and people die only of sunstroke and dehydration. Then the westerlies, the Purabias, start blowing, bringing a gentle hint of rain in their wake, until finally the monsoons arrive.

In Kerala, Mumbai, and many other coastal areas there is a sense of drama and expectancy associated with the onset of the monsoons. In Delhi, the rains arrive not with a bang but with a whimper. There is a sort of indecision, a feeling of afterthought, of let-down associated with their arrival. What was in my misspent youth called a sense of KLPD, an untranslatable and esoteric metaphor which the less educated of my readers will readily comprehend, best describes the advent of the monsoon in Delhi. The monsoon mystique has been built up through millennia: Raag Megh Malhaar, romantic songs, peacocks drying their damp plumes in an extravagant and erotic dance. While Delhi laps up these

stereotypes, we know that monsoons are also about clogged drainage, traffic jams, choked traffic, power breakdowns, cholera, hepatitis and acid rain.

As a sense of dank dissatisfaction depletes the already denuded spirits of the capital's citizens, as damp towels flutter forlornly in shabby balconies, seeking amnesty from the city's rigours, as the roads turn into waterways and the side lanes into rivers and the magnificent gardens in the roundabouts into splendid islands, as cyclists and scooterists and motorcyclists brave the moody rainfall, they console themselves, as Delhiwalas always do, with food. They buy succulent purple jamun-fruits just-plucked-from-the-trees from the roadside shops that materialize right there on the footpath every year in July and August. Their smiles stained strangely maroon from the jamuns, they negotiate their way home, where they dry their soaked and exhausted selves with the damp towels which await them in their shabby balconies. The beggars and streetpersons, however, are content in the rainy weather, and they know, as all of Delhi does, that the good months are approaching.

As the rains dry up and the grey skies turn blue again, it is festival time, with Dussehra and Diwali and Christmas all piling up on each other. There are exhibitions and sales and special discounts and everybody is buying something for someone or the other. Delhi's elite, the people who count, make the important sartorial shift from cotton to silk. Silk saris and kurtas are retrieved from layers of neem or clove or mothballs, and pashminas and jamavars and shahtoosh shawls are anxiously examined for damage. Delhi comes into its own in winter; washed clean with the rains, it copes with fatalistic patience with the annual bouts of viral fever, flu and pnuemonia which are suffered understandingly as 'change of weather'. It's another matter, of course, that in Delhi the weather is always changing. We Delhiwalas love our winter, when vegetables are cheap and plentiful, when 'warming' winter sweets of sesame and jaggery are sold at every nukkad and street corner, when the soft glow of braziers illuminates the late-night darkness, as chowkidars and street dogs sit in sympathetic silence and watch a shower of sparks arise from an errant log.

All too soon, the cycle of the seasons begins again, as the city changes and observes itself change. In every change there are always constants, and it is these constants which are really the indices and deeper metaphors of change. What are Delhi's constants? There is the river, the Yamuna, roiling between Delhi and

Noida, a mess of pollutants and sewage, dissatisfied, degraded, depressed. The river flows with it all, absorbing the best and worst of the strange city that it nurtures. And then there are Delhi's madmen, the emblem-bearers of its excesses, absorbing and maintaining its aberrations and eccentricities. Let me introduce you to some. The blank-faced idiot-savant of Shanker Market, who looks as young today as he did forty years ago, when, as now, he sold safety pins and rubber bands from a tray slung from his shoulders. The sad and angry Sikh who stands always at the gol-chakkar outside the Ashoka Hotel, next to the rear entrance of the American Embassy, expounding on some lonely grief, perhaps bewailing the fluid fate of a city of eternal immigrants. The madwoman of south Delhi, often starkers as nature made her, planning but never executing her terrible and compulsive revenge on Delhi's complacent privileged. This trio, and another ten million like them, try to survive the city which has spawned and bred them, but gives them very little else in the way of succour.

I Never Knew His Name

ANEES JUNG

Delhi was one of the leading centres of the Sufi movement in India. The most famous Sufi saint who lived here was Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, in the early fourteenth century, whose dargah still attracts thousands of devotees of different faiths. Besides the prominent shrines, there are a number of other smaller, lesser-known dargahs in and around Delhi like Pattey-wali dargah, described in this piece, where the faithful go to pray and have their wishes fulfilled.

It was the month of Ramzan and I was on my way to my favourite Sufi shrine that nestles virtually unknown behind the massive and pampered Humayun's Tomb. It is known as Pattey-wali Dargah, where as the story goes a sufi saint lived and meditated under a tree. His grave rests under the same tree, its trunk old and gnarled, its leaves still green. Devotees who come to pray at the saint's grave eat a leaf or two, make a wish and come back to offer a silver leaf if their wish is fulfilled.

I too have eaten the green leaves, and through the years I befriended the old caretaker whom I just called Baba. He had become a friend without ever revealing his name or asking mine. Every year, come Ramzan, I would take fruits for him. This time it was the end of the holy month already and I was in a hurry to reach him, in time for the breaking of the fast. The taxi I chose was battered. The driver, a half-town urbanite, had pasted garish pictures of gods and film stars on the windshield and at the back of the car. He also had the radio on, blaring a Bappi Lahiri song. He tapped his fingers on the wheel to its beat. He and his car seemed out of sync with my mission, I brooded. But I was wrong as I soon found out.

'To Humayun's Tomb,' I said settling down in his musty back seat. 'I'm in a hurry to reach there before sunset, in time for Iftaar—and I also need to buy some fruits on the way.' He nodded and speeded the car, then screeched to a halt in front of a fruit shop in Nizamuddin where a burly sardar sat looking one with

the small mounds of oranges, apples, sweet limes and bananas around him. ‘Will you arrange a basket for a rozedar?’ I asked. ‘Certainly,’ he beamed, setting aside two other baskets which were perhaps meant for less sacred occasions. ‘And these are from me,’ he said, adding a couple of extra oranges. The thought of a person fasting in a holy month aroused in him a fervour that is perhaps natural to all Indians, whatever their faith. It seemed even the driver had finally sensed the sanctity of my mission. For he had switched off the radio and was silently watching the basket being arranged. The colours of dusk changed and darkened around us as we whizzed past the receding domes of the emperor’s tomb and reached the shrine with the leaf-green door.

‘This is the Pattey-wali Dargah,’ I told the driver. ‘May I come too?’ he asked, and carrying the basket of fruits he followed me inside the shrine, taking off his sandals at the entrance. Once inside, facing the grave decked by a green sheet with rose petals scattered on it, he needed no further cue from me. He covered his head with his kerchief, and like a penitent child rubbed his nose on the cold stone, seeming small and vulnerable beside the revered grave. Out in the courtyard a peacock danced and the old caretaker sat in a circle of men, breaking his fast. The taxi driver was invited to join in. What his religion was did not seem to matter. It was sharing the fruits of the earth that mattered in the holy month. If harmony such as this was an aspect not merely of a place but of human beings, then there would be no room for fear or distrust. On an ordinary day in noisy, chaotic Delhi it was this matter-of-fact harmony that I sensed with the sardar fruitwala, with the taxi driver, with the Baba of the shrine …

I would see him framed in the archway of the green door that led into his sacred space, Pattey-wali dargah, that he had served for over thirty-five years, probably half his life. For he was an old man with soft white hair that fell thinly over his shoulders despite the round embroidered white topi sitting squarely on his head.

The topi, embroidered simply with leaves and buds, made of white cotton, sewn probably by a woman in the courtyard of a village home, was as much a part of him as was the huqqa, made of old metal that had lost its sheen with overuse. As old as him perhaps, the huqqa was his loyal friend. Late in the evenings, at the hour of dusk, I would see him seated on the stone bench beneath the shade of an old banyan, pulling leisurely at his huqqa. That was perhaps his

only indulgence. Everything else about him was spare, almost spartan. He lived in a tiny room with a green door and no window. In it was a wooden takht covered by a thick mattress, and spread over that was a violet floral quilt. Under the bed rested a large tin trunk that carried the necessities of his simple life—some clothes, utensils to cook and eat in, and bundles of cloth tied up with knots (stuffed probably with dry rose petals gathered from the shrine). In one corner was a kerosene stove where he cooked his meals oblivious to the smoke that filled the room and his eyes. Watching him cook gave me a sense that he enjoyed good food. It seemed to matter to him more than the clothes he wore—a checked lungi, blue or grey, and over it a white kurta discoloured by daily washing. But one never really saw his clothes, just his face which was permanently lit by a smile that invited one to sit down beside him, stay silent or chat.

'How are you?' I would ask him, and always he'd reply, 'Very, very well,' even if the sky above him glared in the white heat of Delhi summer. Sun or rain he never cursed the weather. For he lived in an internal weather that remained consistent. His frail frame withstood the seasons without trying to command them. He braved the winters wearing a quilted vest but no shoes. Barefooted he would walk in the marble courtyard of the shrine, sweeping away the dead leaves, watering the plants, feeding the two cats that had made a home with him in the dargah. He never told me his name. 'I am always here,' he would say. I never felt the need to know more. Effortlessly, in a quiet corner of the big city, we became friends. He often told me Sufi stories, those that he had probably heard as a young boy. One that endures in my heart is a love story. It begins like any other: there was a man, a woman, and then there was love. In this case the man was poor, the woman privileged, the love doomed. He was a dhobi, and she a beautiful princess who lived in a palace on a high hill. Objects of desire, even the gods that one aspires to reach, are always resident on top of hills. I never asked him where the palace was located—perhaps it was on the banks of the Yamuna, not far from where we sat; perhaps it never existed. The place did not matter. The story did.

A strange love story, streaked with unspoken Sufi tones. The young man was the son of a dhoban, a washerwoman, and his love was as deep as a bottomless well. His mother would go to the palace and bring the clothes of the princess down the hill to wash by the lake. He would wash them, marvelling at their

beauty and delicacy, imagining how the one who wore them must be. Tenderly he would wash and dry them, fold them caressingly, sprinkling jasmines in their folds. His mother would then carry the treasure on her head and receive praise for a job so well done. Each week the clothes turned new with the love of the young man. The dhoban got worried. What if the king discovered her son's passion? His head would be chopped off. 'Before that happens I will end my life,' the young man said. And he did. A distraught mother washed the princess's clothes and returned weeks later to the palace. 'Who has washed these clothes?' asked the princess looking at them. They were not what they used to be. 'I did myself,' said the dhoban. 'Then who was washing them before?' queried the princess. She felt the difference. These clothes had just been cleaned. No eyes of love had gazed at them. No hands had touched them with tenderness. The dhoban finally revealed her son's secret love. 'Take me to his grave,' the princess commanded. Together they went in the dark of a winter night, down the steep hill beside the lake, and stopped in an abandoned yard where the lover lay under a mound of fresh earth. 'What kind of a lover are you to leave this world without even setting eyes on the object of your love?' the princess said. The earth split open, the princess stepped in, the earth closed over her. 'In love there is no death nor borders,' said the old man. His story sang on that winter evening as the sun turned rose behind a sad emperor's tomb.



Last Ramzan the Baba was not around in the courtyard to receive me. 'He has had an accident,' said one of the men who shared his huqqa. 'A Maruti car roaring down the street hit him and fled, fracturing Baba's back.' It was no ordinary accident, said the man. It would be a while before Baba could walk again. Baba was laid up in bed for days. He never did stand up again. He could not give the azaan, sweep the courtyard readying it for visitors, feed the cats and the peacocks. He could not go to the bathroom, he could not pray, he could not fast. 'How are you?' I asked him as he made an effort to sit up and greet me. 'Very, very well,' he replied. The answer was the same but the voice was not. Reed-like, it seemed to flow out of a tired frame. 'I am being looked after,' he said, refusing any assistance. His only sadness was that he could not fast for the thirty days of Ramzan.

When I returned at the end of the month to greet him on the day of Eid, he was not in the archway of the green door where I often found him. He was not on the stone bench smoking his huqqa, but he had stopped sitting there some time ago, even before his accident, since the banyan that shaded it had been chopped down by the new authorities of the dargah. ‘Whatever God wills must happen,’ he had said without any bitterness in his voice. I knew he had planted the tree himself when he first arrived in the dargah. It had grown old with him and was his friend. But he showed no signs of mourning or despair. He had planted saplings of flowering bushes on the spot where the great tree had stood. When I arrived that Eid, I saw the saplings bursting with spring flowers. But no one was around. No one was in the hall praying. No peacocks danced. The door of his room bore a small brass lock.

‘Where is Baba?’ I asked the man who would share with him the huqqa. ‘He’s gone back home to his village,’ the man said, betraying a certain glee. ‘I live in his room now.’ ‘But Baba’s home was this dargah,’ I said, but the man did not seem concerned. Even he should have known that Baba had no other home. He had lived much of his life at the shrine and wanted to be buried here, beside the grave of his saint. As I stood in the courtyard and watched the sun disappear behind the tomb, I felt desolate. ‘What is Baba’s address?’ I asked. ‘And his name?’ ‘You can send a card to Sipalai village in district Gajroula, Moradabad,’ the man replied. ‘Is there a house number, a street name? And his own name—what is Baba’s name?’ The man shuffled uncomfortably. ‘Just write Baba,’ he suggested.

But what would I write? Not the regular queries that people exchange with each other. My friendship had nothing to do with his life or mine. Our bond was not the kind that demands an exchange of social pleasantries. It was forged almost out of air, a fragrant one that we both breathed when we met, alone in a city of thirteen million. That air, I told myself, will continue to bind us. Distances for a Sufi, as Baba would say, do not exist. Nor does a name. He was a dear friend. And I never knew his name.

Lodi Garden

BULBUL SHARMA

The crows are always the first to wake up. The moment a shaft of grey dusty sunlight touches the main dome of the Lodi Tomb, they begin to call. Their early morning voices are quite gentle with no hint of the raucous and rude notes which come later as the day wears on and the gardens change their colours. Lodi Garden, spread like a soft green carpet in the heart of New Delhi, constantly changes its mood as hundreds of birds, schoolchildren, lovers, morning walkers and power-walkers troop through its vast lawns.

The parade of people, some of them from far-flung corners of the city, begins as soon as dawn breaks over Delhi. The early morning walkers are a dedicated lot. Dressed in the combat gear of the health freaks, armed with walking sticks, water bottles and small towels, they stride with a purposeful air. They never stop to admire the flowers which line the walking paths though they may stop for a few seconds to do some deep breathing under the shade of an old neem or acacia. Like an orderly troop of victorious soldiers, the walkers, mostly elderly people, march on blissfully, fixing everyone who comes in their path to health and happiness with a polite but distant look. They do not want to disturb their breathing pattern by talking. Some spread out mats and practise complicated yoga asanas oblivious of the cheeky chattering mynas, while others stand and swing their arms about dangerously like lethal windmills.

Once the morning walkers have inhaled their daily dose of oxygen and left, the Lodi Garden suddenly falls silent as if taking a short rest after all this energetic breathing and walking on its grounds. The trees stand quietly, their green, ochre and brown leaves painting a background of soft watercolour strokes beyond the rolling lawns and dark monuments. In winter the trees wear mostly brown and green shades, letting the flower-filled borders infuse the park with a

range of colours, but as soon as spring arrives the flowering trees bring out their flashy blossoms. The silk cotton, coral, jacaranda, kanak-champa, kachnar and gulmohar are all here along with many handsome old neem, pepal, keekar, mango and jamun trees which were here long before many of the morning walkers were born.

The Lodi Garden was once known as Lady Willingdon Park and its old trees have given shelter to many a solar topee-clad Raj official and his gently perspiring lady wife. The park was much smaller then with a road cutting across, and every evening ayahs would bring their charges to ‘eat the air’. An elderly friend remembers how she was not allowed to mingle with the babies with golden hair and had to keep to her side of the park. ‘It was the ayahs who were great snobs, who formed these rules and divided the park into *gora* and *kala*. On the rare days when the English mothers came along with their babies we all played together quite happily,’ she recalls. Those days the park bordered on vast acres of wilderness where foxes played hide-and-seek and grey partridges came out at dusk to call their mates home. There was nothing beyond the Lodi Road except for a tree-lined narrow road leading to Safdarjung’s tomb. The South End Road in those days meant what it said.

The ruler of the Lodi dynasty who is buried here could have never imagined how popular this garden in the wilderness would become one day. The gardens are dotted with monuments which echo the rugged, no-frills style of Lodis like the Bara Gumbad Mosque with its calligraphic motifs, the unusual octagonal tomb of Sikander Lodi and the somewhat forlorn monument where Muhamad Shah—a ruler of the short-lived Sayyed dynasty—is buried. An old Mughal bridge built during the sixteenth century is my favourite. Called Athpula—eight piers—the bridge overlooks a shallow pond which is filled with tadpoles and tiny fishes during the monsoon. This cool area shaded by willows is also the favourite hunting ground of many birds. A paddy bird lurks amongst the foliage on the banks, its pointed beak ready for a kill, the white-breasted kingfisher is here too on most mornings searching for tadpoles and crickets. It perches on the edge of the stone bridge assuming an unconcerned stance but the minute it sights a potential quarry, it swoops down with a flash of brilliant blue. This shallow pond, which gets quite muddy when the summer dust covers its surface, sometimes has a few little green bee-eaters hunting from the treetops. These

jewel-like birds have sharp beaks and wear tiny black masks like miniature bandits. They are restless creatures who cannot wait for their meals to arrive. With a quick, graceful turn of wings they fly out repeatedly from their vantage point on top of a branch to catch any insect that flies past. They hunt all day long, from sunrise to sunset, devouring countless winged insects despite their tiny size. Sometimes I think the bee-eaters hunt so relentlessly because they love the thrill of hunting and cannot resist a chase.

During the winter afternoons the Lodi Garden gets no respite as crowds arrive from faraway areas of Delhi. Besides the dedicated walkers who claim the right of way in these gardens, there are families with hordes of children and giant picnic baskets. Weary servants and sullen children are made to carry huge tiffin carriers, two-feet-high thermos flasks, hampers, durries and wailing babies. Loaded like ants food-gathering for a rainy day, the picnic groups walk in single file, never venturing far from the gates. Their appetites whetted by all this weight lifting, they usually fall upon their food at once. For a short while a delicious aroma floats in the air around these groups but soon the elders fall asleep under the trees. The younger lot play cards or squabble with each other silently, afraid of waking up their parents, till it is time for tea and more food.

Winter afternoons which bring crowds of people to Lodi Garden cause great grief to the courting couples who long for the quiet, sultry days of summer when they can sit safely under the shade of the neem tree and whisper sweet nothings to each other, watched only by a sympathetic pair of cooing doves. In winter the loving couples have to walk around the park looking for safe nooks and corners there they will not be disturbed by squabbling children, hawkers, walkers or a swiftly flying cricket ball. That is why in winter a major part of the population of courting couples migrates to less congested parks and returns only when the quiet days of summer do.

The migrant birds do just the opposite, arriving in the beginning of winter in Lodi Garden and leaving as soon as the afternoon sun begins to get hot. There are not many migrants here since most of then are water birds, but one can meet a few wagtails along with the cheerful black redstart out hunting on a winter morning. A flock of starlings may stop for a short break on their way to Sultanpur Lake but that is rare since they usually prefer the rocky landscape of Nehru Park.

Many years ago, on 1 January 1982, I saw a dozen scarlet minivets on the keekar trees. According to my notes, the flock stayed there for half an hour and then flew away. I have never seen these birds or starlings in Lodi Garden again and I feel they have been chased away not by the picnicking crowds or the fierce exercising men but by their own kind—the mynas. These aggressive birds have made up their minds that they own Lodi Garden and do not give the right of way to even the most senior civil-servant-rank jogger. They know every bit of the park and gather to bathe, feed and fight in these chosen areas.

The mynas like the evening mood of the garden when it wears a festive air as if a carnival were on. Hundreds of cars line the road outside as smartly dressed men and women step out and trot up the paths, their white Reebok or Nike shoes startling the parakeets about to roost for the evening. These walkers are as different from the early morning crowd as a starling is from a humble crow. They may wear similar tracksuits but the look in their eyes is totally different. These power-walkers who come to the gardens in the evenings believe they are very committed health-conscious people, and make sure everyone, including the mynas, know it. They look down upon the morning walkers who they think treat exercising somewhat lightly. The power-walkers have very little time and make the best use of it by planning their every move by the watch. The minute they enter the park they begin to count their pulse rate, taking care at the same time to fix their cellphones to their belts. Thus prepared, they hurl themselves headlong like raging bulls as everyone moves out of their path. They may wave occasionally, with a slight lift of their right hand, like the Queen, to another power-walker but everyone else they ignore. Like programmed robots they walk very fast, looking straight ahead, with a fanatic’s crazed look on their sweaty faces.

As the day ends, the gardens empty out and only a few lonely strollers are left on the paths. The squirrels, bold and brash, retire for the night underneath the shrubs or bed down in their untidy nests. The sparrows have one collective round of chatter before settling down while above them the sky turns dark with huge flocks of homing parakeets. These long-time resident birds of Lodi tombs fly off to feed on the outskirts of Delhi and return at dusk to their shelters deep inside the broken stone walls. They match their green-blue feathers with the few remaining blue glazed tiles of the Shish Gumbad which was built sometime

during Sikandar Lodi's reign (1489-1517). It is not known who lies buried here in this tomb but it must have been an important person since the tomb was originally decorated with beautiful blue tiles that were rare in those turbulent times. The tiles which must have shone an intense blue in the sunlight now survive only in fragments to remind us of the glitter and glory of a forgotten personage.

The Lodi Garden has seen many dynasties of Delhi rulers rise and fall, and the park can match its ever-changing light to suit its audience. Broken blue tiles for old parakeet families to roost on, pretty borders of annuals for gardeners to admire, neatly marked jogging tracks for power-walkers, shady groves of trees for truant schoolboys and secret lovers, sweet and bitter fruits for fastidious coppersmiths and vast green lawns for happy picnickers. This park where people come to rest their eyes, to quicken their pulse rate, to network with important people, to play with their children, to soothe their lovesick hearts, is one of the last remaining symbols of what Delhi once was when it was at its best.

Dilli ka Dastarkhwan

SADIA DEHLVI

It was in the late 1950s that my grandfather, Abba, moved from our ancestral home in the gali kuchas of the walled city to a sprawling bungalow in the plush Diplomatic Enclave in New Delhi. The house had large lawns and fountains and came to be known as the Shama Kothi—Abba had by then made a tremendous success of *Shama*, the Urdu literary and film magazine which he edited and published. To his first name Yusuf, he added Dehlvi, meaning ‘from Delhi’, which stuck on as the family name. As was the tradition with the Dilli nobility, Abba hosted mushairas, qawwalis, and dance and music mehfils at the bungalow. Mahmannawasi—hospitality—was almost a religious virtue with Dilliwalas, and Abba was known to have the finest cuisine of all Dilli in his house.

Abba did not interfere with his architect Kanvinde, who was renowned among his contemporaries, except when it came to the kitchen or bawarchikhana. He was convinced that no one but a true Dilliwala could ever understand what was required for the Dilli style of cooking. Like all Dilliwalas, he believed that the kitchen is the soul of the house, especially for the womenfolk. That is not to say that the kitchen was beautiful, in fact it was perhaps the shoddiest part of the house. The walls were made of pindole, a yellowish substance made from kuchi mutti, and looked patchy against the marble floor. It was always filled with smoke and under my grandmother’s supervision, the old bearded khansama Badruddin would be blowing away with a heavy iron pipe called phukni at the wood shavings over the coal in the earthen stoves to raise the flames. Food was cooked in silver-plated copper utensils and asli ghee was used for all cooking. The lawns were perpetually dotted with large round seems filled with washed

spices drying in the sun before being ground or with earthenware jars in which fresh pickles were being sunned.

In the dining room, the twelve-feet-long table was pushed to the side of the room and only pulled out for parties. Usually we sat around a long rectangular tablecloth called dastarkhwan, placed on sheets which covered most of the floor.

The usual lunch or dinner consisted of at least five or six main dishes. Like most Muslim homes, all of these were meat-based. Vegetables were rarely served on their own: seasonal vegetables were usually made into salans, cooked with mutton. Some fruits like bananas, pears and apples were occasionally also prepared with mutton. Amma cooked karelas and capsicums stuffed with mince and sewed together with needle and thread. These dishes were called dulma. With karelas, the test lay in completely getting rid of their bitterness. Pasandas—chunks of lean meat, flattened and cooked—was another speciality. All varieties of kababs, especially shammi, were popular, and tikkas were made from the heart of a goat and the tongue of an ox. Occasionally there was rice with lal masor, chana or yellow moong daal. Other daals never entered our kitchen, nor did vegetables like parval, brinjal, cabbage and pumpkin. Among the elite, barbecuing whole dumbas, hill goats from Khorasan in Afghanistan, was common till their disappearance in the late 1940s. The dumbas with their high proportion of fat needed no cooking oils and the aroma of the melted fat was supposedly addictive. Meals concluded with paan made by Amma from her silver-plated paandaan which was always beside her.

We were taught that different parts of the goat had distinctive properties. Eating the neck cured fever, and the trotters helped bone fractures to heal. Kapoora and gurda (kidney and testicles) were known for their aphrodisiac properties and fed to the bridegroom at weddings. The men of the house purchased the raw meat from the qasal shops. Dilliwalas were finicky about the cuts of the meats and prefer adla (upper back), dast (forelegs), put (lower back) and raan (thigh). Lamb meat was never used as it is hard and turns blackish after cooking. If someone served tough meat, people would comment with derision: ‘*Bhed ka gosht khila diya* (They have fed us lamb).’

Favoured birds on our dastarkhwans were chicken, partridge, quail and pigeon. Murg musalam, a whole chicken stuffed with dry fruits, was prepared on

special occasions. The broth of choosas (young chicks) was drunk to regain strength after any illness.

As a child I loved to visit relatives in the old city as it meant access to eats unavailable elsewhere. My favourites were daulat ki chaat, the froth of lassi served on leaves, and malai ki baraf, layers of frozen cream carried in a quaint wooden box filled with ice. After dinner we would go to buy milk warmed in large kadhais and garnished with pistachio and almonds. The milk was served in terracotta abkhoras, which added the delectable fragrance of clay. I always looked forward to tasting the dahibadas, kachoris, halwas, paranthas and other famous vegetarian delights of the old city, reminders of the composite culture—the *ganga jamuni tehzeeb*—of Dilli.

Dilliwalas were extremely particular about taaseer, the effects and properties of each food. Spices like cardamoms, cloves, cinnamon and peppercorns were garam taseer and believed to have warming effects. Dishes where these are used extensively were cooked in winter. Unmarried girls were prohibited from having egg yolk or large quantities of heavily spiced dishes lest the garam taseer put their hormones into overdrive.

Shabdegh, nihari and haleem were dishes cooked exclusively in winter. Haleem was made with mutton, whole wheat and chana daal. Making it was a lengthy procedure: washing and drying the wheat, cooking all the ingredients separately, and then deboning the mixture and pounding it to a sticky paste. Shabdegh (literally, night-cauldron) was made of mutton, koftas and chunks of carrot or turnip, and simmered all night over a low fire. Nihari, traditionally a beef curry, was also cooked all through the night and eaten just after dawn. The meat used was from the hip joint, and the brain, marrow and tongue were also put into the pot. It was garnished with slices of lemon, finely sliced ginger pieces, chopped coriander, chopped green chillies and freshly ground garam masala. A few kilos from each day’s leftovers were added to the next day’s cooking. This was called taar, and gave the unique flavour. There are still some nihari shops in old Delhi which boast of unbroken taar going back more than a century. Other winter favourites were biryani, qormas and siri paya (head and trotters).

Nihari and shabdegh were not cooked at home, but ordered from professional cooks. We ate nihari every winter Sunday morning with great fanfare. The

utensils were sent to the shop the previous night. All members of the family were expected to come at eight o'clock to have brunch on the sun-soaked veranda where the dastarkhwan was laid out. Each plateful was topped with a bhagar of asli ghee and crisp brown onions. Khamiri rotis were warmed on a coal stove kept nearby and food was served piping hot. To neutralize the effect of the hot spices, we ate gajarbhata, a porridge made with grated carrots and malai, and plenty of oranges. When Abba died fifteen years ago, so did this family tradition.

The array of breads was also dazzling. Festive occasions were never complete without baqarkhani and qulchas rotis. The baquerkhani was patented by its creator, Baquerkhan, who lived during the days of Bahadur Shah Zafar. Cooks needed to get a licence from the fort to be allowed to duplicate it. Both these breads are made with wheat kneaded in milk and ghee with sugar. Qulchas also contain egg, which is why they cannot be kept too long, but the baquerkhani can be kept for many days.

Warqi (layered) paranthas, ghee ki rotis and chapatis were for daily consumption. What we knew as chapatis are now called roomali rotis, a name recently given by immigrant Punjabis, because the rotis are as thin as handkerchiefs. Dilliwalas find this name rather obscene as roomali is the term used for the small piece of cloth cut in a diamond shape, used in the crotch area to attach the seams of the two legs of pajamas and shalwars—a unique innovation by Muslim tailors which allows free movement.

Each season brought with it new colours and aromas that filled our homes. In early summer, a small onion would be strung around every child's neck to protect us from the loo, the searing winds of summer. Chutneys made from raw mango were forced upon us for the same reason. Sherbets from bel and falsa, known for their cooling effect, were distributed to all the family members.

In late summer, the mango season, heaps of mangoes would be put in a tub with ice for a few hours before being brought to the dastarkhwan. The preferred varieties were ratol and chausas, the other kinds were looked down upon. The delicious fruit was devoured by the kilo and bets were laid as to who could eat the most. Doodhaam, mango shake, was made with saroli mangoes to neutralize its garam taseer. Another favourite was a chutney made from the pulp of saroli mangoes, which was eaten with besani rotis.

With the first rains, every family would head for picnics to the Mehrauli grounds. We would carry ropes and wooden planks to put up swings on the mango trees. Along with food for the day, carrying a gramophone and records was an absolute must. Monsoons meant daal bhari rotis, to be eaten with mince cooked with green chillies. Pakoras and gul gule, made of wheat and sugar, were fried at the picnic spot.

For every festive occasion sweets had to be distributed to friends and relatives. Many old Delhi confectionary shops, which were founded in the early nineteenth century, like Ghantewala, are still to be found in Chandni Chowk. Favourite sweets included qalaqands, imartis, balushahis, jalebis, gulabjamuns, barfis and halwasohan. Halwasohan was of two kinds, one dark brown and shaped like a tennis ball, and the other flat and golden in colour. Revdis and gajak, made of jaggery and sesame seeds, were available in winter. Sweets like shahi tukda, kheer, firni, sivaiyyan and shir khurmas were made at home. Nursing mothers and bridegrooms were fed nourishing sweets like panjjiri and satora, made from dry fruits, asli ghee and semolina, to build up their strength.

Food was an integral part of social ritual. Women were housebound and for them housekeeping was not merely cooking and feeding but was all about hospitality, a refined lifestyle and keeping the extended family together. Girls were taught culinary skills before marriage and were told that this was an important criterion in their assessment by potential in-laws. When new brides arrived in the house, they had to first cook kheer. It was assumed that the husbands of women who could not cook would go astray. Robust looking girls were considered attractive, as thin girls were thought to be suffering from tuberculosis or poorly fed due to penury. (I remember hearing hushed whispers that Muslim courtesans had an edge in their profession as the food they ate made them more passionate lovers than their Hindu counterparts.)

There were dishes associated with each occasion. At family weddings, qormas, biryani, baquerkhanis and kheer would always be served. On occasions of mourning it was always aloo gosht, a curry of meat and potatoes, which was served with khamiri roti. In the last decade aloo gosht seems to have gained acceptability and is now sometimes served at weddings, whereas in the past the baraat would have taken immediate offence and turned back. There were also different ways of serving food depending on the nature of the gathering. At the

tukda todna, where you break bread with the grieved ones, it was customary to bring the bread to the table first, whereas on festive occasions, food would be served first.

We lived in a joint family and there were always festivities accompanying some ceremony or another. When a baby was born, he was fed honey by the paternal aunt and given the breast only after the aunt was endowed with gifts. Then on the seventh day was aqeeqa, where the child's head was shaved. Goats had to be slaughtered as the barber placed the razor on the child's head, two goats for a boy, one for a girl. Some of the meat was distributed to the poor and the rest cooked and a feast organized. There were also festivities for the doodh bharai, when the baby was weaned, the khatna or circumcision ceremony, the khir chatai when the baby was first given solid food, and the bismillah ceremony, when the child was first taught to read, generally at about four years of age.

We were a god-fearing family and almost everyone fasted at Ramzan. Those who did not pretended to and ate behind closed doors. Almost every Ramzan there was a roza kushai ceremony for some cousin or the other who had reached the age of ten or eleven and was fasting for the first time. Fasting was accompanied with a distinctive kind of feasting, where friends and relatives would be invited to break the fast with us. A few days before Ramzan, the kitchen would be stocked with ingredients. Sehri, the pre-dawn meal which was supposed to sustain us through the day, consisted of heavy paranthas, qeema, and khajla and pheniyaan—kinds of vermicilli—and thick unsweetened jalebis soaked overnight in milk. At Iftar, the fast was traditionally broken with dates. Our dastarkhwans in Ramzan were more lavish than on any other occasion, filled with varieties of sweets and snacks in addition to the main meals. Eid ul fitr, marking the end of Ramzan, is the meethi eid, when sweets like sivaiyyan, musafar and sheer khurma were a must. The core of the three-day festivities for Id ul zuha was feasting on the meat of the sacrificed goats. The first dish to be prepared was always kaleji (liver) which cooks rapidly; eating this is a tradition begun by the Prophet Mohammad. Every religious congregation would be accompanied by a langar where biryani and zarda, sweet rice cooked with saffron, sugar and dry fruits, would be distributed.

On joyous occasions, hissas or gifts of food were sent to relatives and friends. A long interval between the engagement and the wedding was the norm, and

during this period hissas were regularly exchanged between the two families, especially samaal or seasonal fruit. Although this was supposedly sent for the bride to taste, the samaal came in tonnes. If Eid ul zuha fell during this period, the sacrificial goat for the bride was sent from the groom's family. My mother told me that the goat sent for her was worth over a thousand rupees. This was during the early 1950s when a goat usually cost five or six rupees. The animal was draped in cloth with gold and silver threads and adorned with white metal jewellery. The obese goat could hardly stand and came with the instructions that it was to be seated on a charpoy and fed only jalebis made with asli ghee.

It was imporant that hissas were of the right kind. There were a few engagements broken off in our family because the hissas were sub-standard, for example a cousin whose wedding was cancelled because the samaal consisted of water chestnuts. Her family compared the chestnuts to the thorns of hell and took offence at such a commonplace samaal.

Today, Dilliwalas are a minority in their own city, and butter chicken and dal makhani are the 'delicacies' associated with Delhi. It breaks my heart to see my son relishing burgers, for he will never know the glorious traditions of food which are now memories of the past.

A Village in Delhi: Shahpur Jat

KAROKI LEWIS

Delhi's landscape forms a dense pattern of the old and the new—a maze of streets and dwellings where historic ruins rub shoulders with modern-day complexes and where the expanding city encroaches relentlessly on village settlements which date back centuries.

This uneasy embrace of tradition and modernity has been illuminatingly captured in the book Delhi's Historic Villages *by Charles Lewis and Karoki Lewis. Six villages have been singled out for the historic interest of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century monuments in their midst. The photographs by Karoki Lewis and the supporting text by Charles Lewis combine to paint a fascinating portrait of these villages, illuminating their history and present situation.*

The following photographs have been taken from the chapter dealing with the village of Shahpur Jat, which lies past the Asiad Village and adjoins the ruins of Siri Fort.



The ruined walls of Siri with Bombay Palace Tower in the distance



The baradari—partly used as a cattle shelter and storage …

… and partly housing sweat shops



A typical internal courtyard in a more well-to-do family home

Lodi Colony

RANJANA SENGUPTA

Lodi Colony is at first sight an unlikely and unromantic location for literary exploration. Delhi's government colonies have not formed part of travel writers' lore. These identical rows of yellow houses do not lend themselves to the heartstring-twanging, nostalgia-dripping adjectives that flow so fluently when Shahjahanabad and Lutyens' Delhi are evoked. Travel glossies and British writers in pursuit of lost imperial identities do not visit the dusty quadrangles of Ramakrishnapuram when writing about this city. What they want is irretrievably lost worlds—and it is a testament to Delhi's hugely varied charms that they find all the medieval monuments and mutiny memorials they are in search of—but they close their eyes to everything else.

It is Delhi's past that quickens their imagination. The here and now is usually an opportunity for some comic relief, the equivalent of the Mehmood episodes in old Bollywood films. The ungrammatical English of Sikh taxi drivers is always good for a laugh; or the convoluted, Kafkaesque ways of the city's petty bureaucrats—those demons for all seasons. Such stereotypes exist, of course, but so much that is vital, vivid and robustly alive is elided in such narratives. And the saddest part is that Delhi's own raconteurs, those who have lived in this city and walked its varied and wonderful streets, all too often share the same set of blinkers. The profusions of the present elude them.

Yet, somewhere between the exotic and the kitsch is real Delhi, in which the inheritances of the past coexist with inventions of the present. The film poster slapped on to a crumbling medieval wall has as much bearing on our understanding of the city as does the wall. Government Delhi—and this is, ultimately, a government city—only makes it into the matrix of coffee-table Delhi in its avatar of the perfect symmetries of Lutyens' bungalow land, or the

baroque splendour of the Raisina complex. Lodi Colony is, like all government enclaves, dismissed as humdrum, middle class and ordinary. But it has all the blood and romance, all the nostalgia, the architectural controversies and historic trappings of the standard coffee-table spots. Today government Delhi may be in retreat; but it is not in decline. It is, unlike Delhi's more celebrated locations, still alive and kicking.

Delhi's role as the nation's capital informs and affects the existence—however obliquely—of all who live here. New Delhi was a space designed and created for the apparatus of empire, with its grid of carefully calibrated racial and professional spaces. Senior officials had large houses and gardens, both of which grew smaller and further from the centre as the ranks of undersecretaries, superintendents and lower division clerks were reached, until there were no gardens at all, only open verandas. In its imperial time, race was also a factor: British clerks' quarters were bigger than Indian clerks', and were built to a different design. After Independence racial differences disappeared, but the gradations continue even today.

After 1947, government 'colonies' came up to house the armies of personnel needed to turn the wheels of the new, independent government of India. The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) constructed houses with the status of the future occupants firmly in mind. There sprung up all over south Delhi self-contained groups of houses built in reinforced concrete. Most of them were double-storied and all of them were uniformly unattractive. Yet, the unlovely acres of Lodi Colony, Sarojini Nagar and Moti Bagh exude a sense of being enfolded in the arms of a mostly benevolent master who will protect the inhabitants from the vicissitudes of market forces, insecurity and social upheaval. This assuaged (somewhat) the pain of not being as affluent as counterparts in the private sector. Through the 1950s, '60s and '70s, it seemed this world would last for ever; but that complete confidence in the unchanging order is fraying.

Over the last five decades, a whole way of life came to be invented: officials of roughly the same level live in identical flats; their children play in the community park, their wives shop in the local stores. These are more than neighbourhoods—the residents' professional links make for a surface homogeneity of existence. Like all internally coherent worlds, it has evolved its

own symbols: in the 1950s and ’60s, members recognized each other by their starched, white bush shirts; today by the white ambassador car. Government Delhi is an ethos shared by everyone living in government houses, from Class IV quarters to bungalows, from peons to secretaries; but it is not a monolith. It is segmented—like the rest of Delhi—by class identities, worldviews and primordial loyalties. Its well-developed hierarchies have meant that life in the senior officials’ colonies of Pandara Park or Bapanagar is appreciably different from that at the middle official levels of Sarojini Nagar, Lodi Colony or RK Puram sector XIII; and different again in the Class IV enclaves of Aliganj or Sadiq Nagar.

Today Lodi Colony is in the heart of the city; when it was built, it was on the very edge of New Delhi. Lodi Road was the southern boundary of the imperial suburb and open fields and scrub lay beyond, where jackals howled and black bucks roamed. Lodi Estate, Willingdon (now Safdarjang) Airport and Lodi Colony were built during the war. Huge numbers of armed services personnel came to Delhi to support the war effort; they had to be accommodated. The colony was constructed in 1942 and was designed by William Henry Medd, then Chief Architect to the Government of India, who worked with Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker in the planning of the new capital. Medd designed the classical Cathedral Church of the Redemption in the President’s Estate and the twin-towered Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Gole Market.

Lodi Colony’s pre-Independence construction—it is the only government colony to have been built before 1947—saved it from the modernist matchbox look of all later government housing. Perhaps Medd, fresh from designing the vaulted interiors of churches and cathedrals, was inspired to include the high-ceilinged rooms and soaring arches in his design. The arches have a ‘keystone’ motif, one which graces many of the houses Medd’s mentor, Lutyens, designed in Britain. In Lodi Colony, the keystone is purely decorative. Originally, keystones distributed the load of the wall equally on both sides of an arch, a technique that came to India from central Asia. Its purely decorative purpose is a welcome departure from the wholly utilitarian look that the CPWD espoused after 1947. Lodi Colony’s layout possesses an airy, light-filtered spaciousness, absent in other government colonies—but then, there was a lot of space in those days. Its openness makes for a pervasive sense of security: young girls stroll

confidently to the market at dusk and clothes are pegged out on washing lines that stretch across the community front garden (though the flapping petticoats and pajamas add little to the overall aesthetics). Contemporary architects say that the layout and design of Lodi Colony has contributed to its strong, palpable sense of community. The courtyards run through the centre of each block. Medd so positioned the courtyard arches that there is a clear view past the small kitchen gardens, the parked motorbikes and several sleeping cows that occupy the courtyard of one block, to the courtyard of the block across the road, and through its arches, to the courtyard of the next and the next and the next—till you see the green blur of the Karbala.

These courtyards were consciously incorporated from traditional Indian designs. The government's annual migration to Simla had ceased during the war, and Medd provided plenty of space for those who wanted to sleep out during the hot summer nights. The first occupants of Lodi Colony were servicemen, usually bachelors, and these buildings were known as chummeries, a venerable Anglo-Indian institution, made up of units comprising a bedroom and bathroom, along with a servant's room. There was little cooking space—the occupants were expected to eat out at the club. Today the units have been knocked together into flats and despite the sometimes oddly shaped rooms, the present residents are not complaining. It's rare to find such content—there are a few murmurs about water, fewer still about electricity. They proudly point out that the brick walls are eighteen inches thick. And this, along with the high ceilings, makes the flats incredibly cool.

There are three markets within the colony: Lodi Colony Market, Mehr Chand Market and Khanna Market. Tailoring establishments predominate. 'They are the best for gent's clothing,' boasted a resident; they would have to be as the competition must be intense. But machines were whirring busily at the I-Like Tailor Shop; while the proprietor of Selection Tailors (presumably, if they make your suit you get selected at your interview—a very 'government' preoccupation) explained that people came from all over Delhi, so there was work for everyone. There are also a huge number of Tent Houses ('we cater to the whole of the south') as well as general merchants. The owner of one of them, Mr Pritviraj, grizzled but still game at eighty-one, came from Sargoda in Pakistan in 1947, along with his grandfather, his parents, and his wife and two

sons. They first moved into the then empty quarters of Lodi Colony and set up a small stall selling basic goods to other refugee families camping there. His life has all the feel-good elements of the ideal refugee story: the terrible adversity, the relentless hard work and the rewards of prosperity and security in old age. In the early days the shop was just a shack and his wife had to flap a hand fan over the uncovered foodstuffs to prevent flies from settling on them. Electricity came later, as did pucca construction and the allotment of a house plot at the nearby BK Dutt colony.

This was due to the good offices of Mehr Chand Khanna, then the Minister for Rehabilitation. A Congress politico from the Northwest Frontier Province, he is more or less universally acknowledged as the godfather of this area. He sanctioned the allotment of shops and house plots at the nearby BK Dutt colony. Gradually, the markets were regularized and permanent structures replaced the wooden shacks. The shops follow the same pattern: the counter in front and a godown at the back (this design has been followed in Delhi since Shahjahanabad's builders built shops to a similar design in Chandni Chowk in the seventeenth century). The shopkeepers expressed their gratitude by naming two markets—Khanna and Mehr Chand—after their benefactor. The initial rent was Rs 13 and 11 annas, which rose in the 1960s to Rs 64. The freehold was given to them in 1982. Even today, when most south-Delhi general merchants are transforming their shops into open-shelved supermarkets, Lodi Colony's shops have rows of open sacks from which dried chillies, varieties of rice and daals spill out, practically blocking the entrance. Lifebuoy soap, detergents and asafoetida are crammed at random on the roughly-hewn shelves; at the back the well-stocked godown smells of sacking and garam masala. Changes? Mr Pritviraj reflects. He sells more cosmetics these days, he says, gesturing at a row of Ponds Moisturising Facewash. 'It's the beauty contests.'

The 152 shops in both markets have a well-established sense of community spirit and Mr P exudes the sense of being part of an organized, smoothly-run private world. The traders organize two jaagrans a year. Cards are sent out to politicians of all persuasions and many of them come. Most shops still belong to the original alottees or their children, but the ubiquitous Archies has entered. The halwais and dhabas, however, still provide giant bread pakoras and chhole bhature—pizza and burgers are yet to make an appearance. But international

cuisine is represented in the form of chowmein, which all the eating places—wooden benches and formica-topped tables—serve.

Near Lodi Colony Market, the Rohanlal and Sons Band live in a chik-hung enclosure. The chiks are to shelter the well-groomed white horses. They have been here thirty years, but the bandwalas still sleep in the open on charpoys all around; a nearby dhaba supplies the essentials of breakfast. Drying clothes festoon the elaborate chariot that fetches the more timorous grooms—the ones too scared to ride on horseback. Business is good, they say, and not just in the marriage season—'We are booked at a farmhouse this evening.'

Within Lodi Colony relationships are friendly, with just the occasional undercurrent of mistrust or competition. By and large, Tamils and Bengalis, Khatris and Kasyasths, live together equably enough. Children intermingle freely: everyone between four and eighteen is sent out to 'play' in the evenings. Inside, things are fairly identical too—the three-piece sofa set (usually of rexene or dull brown cloth), a TV in the pride of place, a divan made of trunks covered with a printed bedcover.

There are three kinds of quarters in the eighteen blocks enfolding the markets: A-type, B-type and D-type (no one knows why there is no C type), alerting the cognoscenti as to the specific grade of their occupants. The quarters may be marginally different, but the whole colony spills over on to the street on Sunday evenings. Women in voluminous Lajpat Nagar nighties sit together on their doorsteps and watch their children play. Some play pat-ball cricket with their out-of-condition dads, but serious games of cricket using a dining chair as a wicket take place on the road itself, while cars considerately use other routes. Toddlers lurch around on tricycles, while a group of small boys try, not very seriously, to fly a kite. Teenage girls sit in a row on one of the colony's low walls, whispering about whatever teenage girls whisper about. They wear the universal south-Delhi uniform of jeans and T-shirts, while the local male talent, sporting identical tight black jeans and centre-parted hair, make their slow progress up the street. Mango sellers do brisk, sometimes acrimonious business ('Why should I give you the mangoes at ten rupees a kilo?' one of them asks a hard-bargaining matron), while the chaat seller sets up his wicker stand for a family on its way to the bus stop but hijacked by the thought of some bhelpuri. Here is all the nitty gritty of real life, the magic of the everyday, the internal

rhythm of lives less ordinary … Here is the irreplaceable moment in time when the woman watering her unbelievably giant cannas talks to the woman in the balcony above, who is picking out the stones from a portion of daal.

'This is a good colony,' says Mr C, who has lived here for fifteen years, matter-of-factly. 'Our block has clubbed together to buy a duree and a mike and every month we organize a quiz or games or a cultural show. They have a bonfire at Lohri and a joint function at Holi.' The Fiats and Marutis and scooters, the coolers and even a few air conditioners gleam in the evening sunlight. This seems a place at peace with itself.

Yet Lodi Colony is an island; it comprises one kind of world, which, like all Delhi's many fragmented universes, has complicated interfaces with the worlds around it. Najaf Khan, scion of the Safavid dynasty, lies in a tomb to the west of Lodi Colony, enclosed by a well-tended (in the NDMC sense) garden. He was, according to Khushwant Singh, one of the few to rally Delhi's troops against Nadir Shah, refusing to simply surrender his city to the raider. Imprisoned, but freed at the behest of Safdarjang's brother, he joined the service of the Emperor Shah Alam II, 'attaining high rank'—something Lodi Colony's residents would appreciate. No one knew who he was; they said, however, that the gardens were a good place for morning walks. Najaf Khan died in 1782 and is buried alongside his daughter Fatima in a low tomb, from the flat roof of which is a superb view of the garden's ruined gateway, framed against the blooms of a late-flowering gulmohar. It is a peaceful spot and only the wheeze of buses inching up the Safdarjung flyover just beyond, and the manic sounds made by the early-morning laughter-therapy group, disturb his rest.

To the north of Najaf Khan's tomb is the peaceful, secluded dargah Shahi Mardan, a complex dating to the late Mughal period, which has a footprint cast in stone, said to be that of Ali. Legend has it that Qudsia Begum (she of Qudsia Gardens fame) installed it here. Within the dargah is the tomb of the twelve-year-old saint Arif Ali Shah, a square domed structure, small as befits a child. There is also a tiny shrine to Ali's wife, called Bibi ka Rauza, which men cannot enter. The dargah is a secretive world within a world. In the early-morning light it seems to float in a timeless space. It is hard to believe that the brisk bustle of Kotla's vegetable market is just kilometres away and that the occupants of Lodi

Colony are getting set for their morning rush to file-stuffed locales like Shashtri and Nirman Bhavans, or North and South Blocks.

The Class IV colony of Aliganj (that is how it is referred to) squats in the middle of Lodi Colony. It is a densely populated enclave of single-storey dwellings surrounded by a low yellow wall. Tall pipal trees shade the tiny houses and through the open doors are glimpses of open courtyards where bartans are being vigorously washed. For Lodi Colony, Aliganj, like the dargah, the tomb and the adjacent upmarket enclaves of Jorbagh and Golf Links, exists in another dimension, physically present but virtually invisible. You can seek to explain this through history, religion, class, but ultimately this is how Delhi's fragmented worlds, where you traverse galaxies in the space of inches, coexist.

Lodi Colony like the rest of government Delhi is both an address and a state of mind, but behind that self-contained serenity (complacency, the uncharitable would say) is change. Not coincidentally, a government colony, Sarojini Nagar, was one of the main centres of opposition to the Mandal report in 1990. The children of these government quarters saw their grasp on the civil services—and with it a well-charted, stable future—slipping. Today, the walls of Lodi Colony, like all walls in Delhi, are plastered with posters for special coaching classes. Computer training, engineering and medical college entrance tutorials outnumber civil services study circles by about four to one. The old future doesn't live here anymore.

Lovers, They Are Everywhere

RADHIKA CHANDIRAMANI

Lovers, they are everywhere. In Mumbai they sit on the rocks by the sea, watching the sun set, the water turn grey, the lights coming on to trace the shoreline. In Calcutta you will find them in Eden Gardens or in the shadow of the angel atop Victoria Memorial. They have their haunts in Chennai, they have them in Bangalore, they have them in every city.

Where do you go to track an average middle-class love story in Delhi? Lodi Garden is a good place. So is Deer Park, and Nehru Park, and Buddha Jayanti Park. It has to be a public park; privacy lurks in public spaces. Colony parks are too dangerous. Everyone knows you: the aunties on their constitutionals, the uncles exchanging yarns, the kids who recognize you and run up screaming. The larger parks are best for romance, even better for sex: no one really cares, the fitness freaks are busy counting laps, the families too involved in the unpacking and packing of their puri-subzi dabbas, and the yoga oldies just look away. Afternoons are a good time, not too many people around and there are enough trees for cover and shade.

Delhi is littered with monuments: Humayun's tomb, Safdarjung's tomb, the Old Fort, the monuments in Lodi Garden, monuments with names no one remembers. Where there's a monument, there usually is a park. The trees carry hearts, hearts with arrows, hearts with names, hearts dripping blood, carved deep into the bark. Where there's a monument, there always is graffiti: PINKI LOVES PAPPU, NOOR AND AHMED FOREVER, RAKESH + KAJAL—each a modern testament to love etched into weathered domes and old Mughal walls.

You see them from about ten in the morning (office time or college time, it's a good excuse), trysting under the trees, some in the bushes, all with their backs to the paths where the walkers walk. There are couples in varying degrees of

proximity. Some talk earnestly—these usually sit face to face, taking it in turns to look upset. Sometimes the woman nervously pulls at a once-white handkerchief or the corner of her dupatta or shawl. The dupatta or shawl—this is an essential for the park. He can play with it, she can pull at it, they can cover themselves with it, exploring each other under its cover. Some lovers sit side by side, slowly edging closer. Sometimes one is half-lying in the other's lap. It's easier that way. Rarely do you find them one astride the other's lap. That's too blatant, attracts too many stares. What you can do indoors you cannot in a park. The park is a stage in a journey.

A journey that begins with a look. A look across terraces—in a row of govermnent quarters in Sector VI, RK Puram, let's say. Across concrete and clusters of TV antennae and lines of washing hung out to dry. Or on the road coming home from work or college or school or vegetable shopping. The young men on scooters or motorbikes, or just hanging around, chatting, people-watching, the usual 'timepass' things. The women walking together, giggling, holding their bodies into themselves both to avoid traffic on the narrow lanes and the gaze of men. It happens suddenly. Just a look. Like in the movies. He's in a flurry, a flurry of love. If he doesn't know where she lives he finds out: quarter number this, sector that. He hangs around waiting. He knows when she will emerge. She notices him there, begins to appear in the balcony at regular intervals. They have a routine now, he thinks. That's how he knows she loves him too. If she didn't love him she wouldn't come to the terrace or the balcony or walk down the road when he's around, would she? And would she look at him while he drives past on his scooter, timing it so he can smartly take the turn and watch from the corner of his eye to see if she's looking?

How to proceed now? Should he give her a card? With hearts or roses, or both? Will she think he is like any other fellow? He's not like them, simply playing with girls' feelings, just to get them to bed. He's a decent chap. And she? Of course she's decent. How does he know? He knows. He has watched her enough, hasn't he? A decent woman walks in a certain way—like a well-trained dog, she keeps straight to a path. She doesn't look at men. She has looked at him, hasn't she? But that's different. She doesn't stare in a loose-charactered way; he knows girls who do that. And she always wears a dupatta when she goes out. The other day he summoned up the courage to talk to her when she was on

her way to the Sector VI bus stand to catch her bus to college. But she was joined by a friend so that put paid to his well-laid plan. The card seems like the best idea. The one with roses.

She accepts the card. Smiles even. The next day he is at the bus stand waiting for her, watching the DTC buses belching black smoke—the only ones on the road still doing so. The insouciance of the govermnent! The black exhaust from the buses sticks to the clothes, to the skin. Pollution's decreased, yes, with CNG, but then the autorickshaws charge too much and the buses are too crowded, it's hard to get anywhere looking fresh and smelling good. Ah, there she is. They say hullo, stumble over the first steps in what becomes a conversation. She liked the card, loves roses.

They meet at the Sector VI bus stand every morning and the Gargi College bus stand every afternoon (why can't they have classes on weekends, too?). They talk on the phone in the evenings, setting up a different time every day so no one guesses. If anyone else answers the phone there's a silence. 'Blank call!' mutters whoever picks up the phone.

Now that they are talking, how to proceed? He wants to touch her. What will she think? He gets so excited near her that sometimes it's embarrassing. He makes sure he always has a file or a book to hold over his crotch in case he bulges too much. All the time he's thinking of her. His friends tell him women are easy. 'Just get that chewing gum that creates sexual excitement. Give her some, and she'll be yours, yaar. What's to worry? If anything happens, get it cleaned up.' They laugh at him and say, 'Act fast. Too many hand jobs cause weakness—you'll have to go to that sex clinic in Daryaganj and eat those gold capsules …'

No more hand jobs for him. He wants more, much more. Where to do it? Can't do it at home. There's no way he can bring her home or go to her house. No longer any friends in hostel who could give up their room for an hour or so. One has to be careful what one does. This may be love, but there's family duty too. There should be no loose talk leading to trouble later. After all, it's still a conservative society and one can't marry whom one chooses.

What if she says no? They always do, at least in the beginning, that's what he's heard. He hasn't kissed her yet. Three days ago, in the park, when he asked

her for a kiss she just giggled and looked away. Then the moment was gone. He will try again. She's a decent girl; she won't give in so easily.

They go to Nehru Park sometimes. Meet at the bus stand. Sit together, if they can, in the bus, she by the window, he by the aisle, bodies touching. For thirty minutes till they get to the park, consciousness becomes one-sided: the side in contact with the other's body. No one notices. Privacy lurks in public spaces. The more crowded the bus the better it is. More room for touch, less for responsibility; if she doesn't press back he can pretend it is the others pushing him on to her. So can she actually … He gets a bit confused when he thinks about this. Still, it's good to feel a body.

There's safety in the park. The park sets limits. One can't get too carried away. They hold hands, press palms together, play with each other's fingers. Pleasure is measured touch by touch, inch by inch. The hand becomes the body, each finger a limb, the curve of the palm is the curve of the hip, the edge of a finger is the line of a lip. Privacy lurks in public spaces; pleasure lies in the palm of a hand.



'Worried by an increasing number of couples nestling under trees, in tombs and in monuments, the Archaeological Survey of India plans to dissuade lovebirds from displaying their feelings in historical backdrops.'

—'Sad End to Monumental Love Stories',
The Times of India, Delhi edition, 24 August 2001.

The Kingdom of Waste

BHARATI CHATURVEDI

On a damp and humid morning, Santosh clean disappeared. Save for a few scraps of plastic and bits of metal still glistening with stale rain, there was no telling that he had actually ever worked here. Day after day in this makeshift oasis in the middle of a gloomy graveyard in central Delhi, a dozen scrawny men hunched like giant embryos would expressionlessly sift through heaps of garbage. Now they were all gone as well. Gone, too, was Santosh's uncle, whose own connections to the area went back to the early 1960s. The vast markets, the bribes, the networking of a lifetime—all these investments born of money, sweat, humiliation—were unable in the end to hold them back.

One might have imagined that someone would miss Santosh: an old colleague who wasn't around to say farewell; an on-and-off creditor, an off-and-on debtor. Instead, the other kabaris blandly remarked: '*Woh ghar chala gaya apne. Banaras*. (He's gone back home. Banaras.)' A tatabye-bye kind of tone.

Santosh stood obliterated the instant he left. I was the only one who might have spent a moment thinking of him, half sentimentally, recalling breakfast-time cajoling: 'Have *something*, madam. Okay, have an egg at least. Half an egg. Boiled anda?' We always compromised on a Pepsi, because he remained convinced that I asked for a chai only to save his money. Early-morning pity? Not acceptable to Santosh.

What would this dramatic exit mean? In a flourishing company that's folded up, there's anxiety and rancour; the fear of unemployment. Santosh's departure left no such residue. Santu Kabari played magnet and magnate: Santosh's 'full labour' relocated themselves to his shop barely a kilometre away, and went back to hunching and sorting.

Santu, Santosh, Wasim, Ramesh—all feed off Gol Market, Connaught Place and its environs, as do about forty other kabaris. The waste that the city's 100,000-odd ragpickers mine out from the city's garbage dumps is all bought by men like these: the kabaris. If you can put your hand into a pile of garbage and pull out the saleables, you're likely to be able to feed yourself in Delhi. The kabaris ensure that much.

Of the 6,000 tonnes of solid waste generated each day, between nine and fifteen per cent is recyclable stuff that a kabari's shop is lined with. Every day approximately 20,000 small shanty shops, roofs piled high with junk and columns of baled, sorted materials inside, receive this waste across the city. You are unlikely to find a single big jhuggi cluster in Delhi that does not offer space for the waste thrown out by the pucca world.

It's been termed the informal sector of waste: the agglomerate of ragpickers, kabaris, middlemen and recyclers. It is, in fact, the only recycling mechanism that exists in India. In Delhi it is particularly vibrant because the waste-to-recycled product chain is completed more or less within the city's boundaries. In theory, you can have your plastic waste from the month before last find its way back into your hands as a fragile little toy. Your can of Diet Coke and twisted cutlery from an obscure dhaba will come together quite democratically in crude smelters to be transformed into aluminium rods for your shower curtains.

It all begins with the ragpickers—the men, women and children you often see with big HDPE woven sacks slung on their backs. (Contrary to popular perception, a majority of the ragpickers in Delhi are not children, though this might be true in a city like Bangalore.) They walk around day after day, scrutinizing the same beat, because the work of a ragpicker is highly territorial. Your own waste will end up in these bags, where some of it will retain its familiar name: loha and peetal, for example. But a lot is rechristened and will sound entirely unfamilar. You just threw these out in your trash can: karak, panni, doodh, reecut, Colgate. It's colloquial nomenclature, dictated by the recycling industry, so that the ragpickers and the kabaris are able to distinguish between one type of waste and another and deliver neatly segregated sub-species to those above them in the recycling chain. So karak is any crackly, brittle plastic, the category dominated by polypropylene; panni is plastic bags, mostly low-density polyethylene; and doodh is milk sachets—the most expensive of

them all. Reecut is printed paper with a glossy finish, like labels; and Colgate is near extinct, because it refers to metallic tubes of ointments and toothpaste that went out of fashion around the time toothpaste became fluorescent.

A ragpicker collects, cleans and sorts out this waste, and must sell all of it the same day, regardless of the price offered, because he or she rarely has any monetary reserves and needs that money—Rs 30 or less on a bad day, Rs 80 to 100 on an exceptionally good one—to get into the next day of work. Besides, there is nowhere to store the waste. Most ragpickers are homeless, sleeping under flyovers, on pavements or railway platforms.



When ragpickers sell their goods, it is to a small middleman, a kabari like Santosh. He's different from the kabaris who cycle around on Sundays buying newspapers. In fact, given the subtle distinction between 'saaf' and 'ganda' among kabaris, it is unlikely that our kabari of central Delhi will be the recipient of clean goods straight from middle-class homes—neatly folded newspapers and crisp magazines, intact bottles of Rooh Afza or Black Label whisky. The no-trouble-no-mess respectable waste is a bit like a disposable diaper, a privilege that comes with money and birth. It will go to a kabari who, in a strange way, matches the waste he receives. A 'saaf kabari' is likely to be a caste Hindu, a man with all the trappings of respectability—a pucca house to live in, a shopful of dry waste that requires no messy cleaning up, pen in pocket, and pocket on clean, first-hand clothes. This is business and he could have traded in any other material. '*Hum log gandi panni ko nahin chhootey hain. Hamara sirf saaf maal ka buisness hai* (We won't touch dirty plastic. We only deal in clean stuff),' Ashok, a 'respectable' west-Delhi kabari told me during a survey. '*Hum un logon ki tarah nahin hain* (We're not like *those* people),' he added scornfully.

A kabari—saaf or ganda—is a kabari because he is able to find a little space and capital so he can further sort and sell when it is best, a bit like the stock market in the old days. He'll make roughly one rupee for every kilo of sorted solid waste. And since the volumes he sells aren't huge, he's unlikely to make very much more than it will cost him to keep his little business going and a roof over his head. Like his own regular clientele, the ragpickers, he is highly territorial—a Pitampura kabari will cast his net in Pitampura, an Uttam Nagar kabari in Uttam Nagar. When Santu had to close his shop for a few days because

of trouble with the police, all he could do was to tie up with kin in Parliament Street and Paharganj to buy up his old stocks and the rolling stocks of his ragpickers.

His ragpickers—I use the pronoun deliberately. First, because I've never seen a shop primarily run by women. And second, because there is a deep, symbiotic bond between a kabari and the ragickers who sell to him. Most outsiders intuitively declare it as exploitation, occasionally taking upon themselves the task of freeing ragpickers from their evil kabaris. The ragpickers often resent this, because there are important needs that kabariwalas meet.

Planners of cities here lay great emphasis these days on recreational spaces—hang-out joints like clubs, shopping plazas and gyms. The Ansal Plazas and Habitat Centres aren't, of course, built with the street people and the jhuggi-jhompriwalas in mind. So where do the ragpickers go? They could hang out in side lanes, service lanes, or corners of parks, but only as long as they don't make themselves visible, because none of these spaces were designed for them either. The only safe place, then, where they can gather to gossip and relax is the kabari's shop. When they're feverish, the kabari will give them Crocins, though his own access to medical aid is poor. Often he will also offer them loans—which can be recovered at profits only to him, true, but in their condition of loanworthiness it is unlikely anyone else will help the ragpickers hobble through.

Kinship is another factor. When the middleman is from Almora, many ragpickers will be from there too. Sometimes an extended family of ragpickers scavenges an entire area. In parts of Chanakyapuri, a plethora of aunts, uncles, nephews and cousins guard the bins like minotaurs guarding secret treasures. They are all from near Salem, and their kabari is a relative too. Obviously, contacts are useful everywhere. There's a dependance of a strange kind here: the kabari as provider and protector, however vulnerable he himself might be.

There must be something very alluring about being a kabariwala. Consider Akram Bhai, sitting proudly atop a huge mound of plastic waste from two to five each afternoon, supervising almost two dozen ragpickers cramped into a ten-square-feet space. This may look like a sweatshop to some, but they are not bonded labour; in this part of south Delhi (or any other part of the city, for that matter) they've found no other space big enough to segregate waste—something that should have been done by households in their own kitchens and bins.

However squalid Akram's little fiefdom may appear, however tenuous his position, I have never known him to look anything but contented. Whenever I think of him, the image that comes instantly to mind is this: Akram, neatly dressed—in kurta-pajamas that, magically, never wrinkle—perched on his absurd, spongy throne of plastic, slapping his oversized rubber chappals against the soles of his feet. '*Dekho, madam. Hamara to sab yahin pe hai … Aap jab bhi aao, hum to yahin milenge* (Everything I have is here, madam … come anytime, you'll always find me here),' he says, waving an arm around and chuckling like a merry child.

But I can't crown him king; the title has already been claimed by Rashid Bhai. A labourer in Libya, a contractor in Iraq, a kabari in India. Rich once, less rich now, in the post-dowry stage of a dutiful father. 'After all, this is home,' he begins in patriotic mode, testing the waters. 'And I want to work with freedom, no malik, no one to see how fast or slow I am today,' he smiles. 'Nobody can rule over me, but I can give orders to these people. Here, I am king.'

'*Hum samaan uthate hain, isiliye humein chor bolte hain* (Our job is to pick up stuff, that's why people call us thieves),' Guddan, a ragpicker, told me one afternoon. We were sitting on higher ground behind a public men's loo at the back of the kabari shop. Just a couple of days ago a shopkeeper had lodged a complaint with the police about a missing bicycle, and Guddan and three others from his group had been picked up for questioning. This had happened before. And it happens regularly to many others like Guddan. Bearing and cleaning the city's stinking load is a job fraught with risk, and not just of disease.

Contrary to what most people believe, rapickers usually sell waste picked up off the streets, not valuable stolen goods from middle-class homes. In the absence of brass artefacts and Nike shoes to sell, their daily income rarely exceeds a hundred rupees on a good day; they really are as poor as they look. But stereotypes persist.

When a complaint of theft is lodged, one of the first things the police do is to barge into and search a kabari shop selected usually after not very gentle, or even lawful, interrogation of a terrified thief-in-waiting. Sometimes, the police just take the inititaive. Even if there has been no complaint, a policeman will examine a ragpicker's bags at random. Occasionally he will burn the bags. A

kabariwala is pretty much on the same side of the fence as the ragpickers. ‘We’re not thieves, we don’t steal,’ says Santu Kabari bitterly. ‘We have stopped dealing in all items that might be stolen. Still the police troubles us.’

In a single week, Santu’s shop, eight feet by ten, witnessed a spate of events:

1. Mohar Singh, Sub-Inspector, Delhi Police, demanded Rs 17,000 to allow Santu to continue his work. Threatened to return the next evening.
2. Mohar Singh beat up Pappu, assistant to Santu, three days later and in a fit of twisted sadism, poked his arm with a pointed needle which caused a huge swelling and a nasty blister.
3. Another policeman turned up three days later, unrecognizable without a uniform, and demanded money. Since there was none, he slapped two ragpickers, checked out their bags and went off in a huff.
4. A sudden increase in the number of beatings of ragpickers. Sometimes they were woken up at night to be shoved around and slapped. Some evenings, their bags, full of material that would get them a day’s wages, were burnt.
5. A posse of policemen showed up at the jhuggi and asked for money. Foolish Santu resisted. This was unusual, but he’d had a setback recently. The police returned a while later and tried to take Santu’s uncle and a neighbour off to the police station. All the women of the jhuggi followed the policemen, stood around the police van and forced them to release the men.

The shop closed down for six weeks after this incident.

Such harassment happens almost every day. Sometimes the pressures and losses become too much to bear, and the kabari has no option but to wind up his business. Perhaps this was what had edged Santosh out.

Talking about ragpickers, a cynical senior police officer once mentioned how it was imperative for his men to ‘ruthlessly search their bags—there is no harm if sometimes they burn the bags even. If you don’t teach them a lesson, they’ll never learn.’ A lesson for what? For being poor, looking scruffy and being the Other of the Hygienic Middle Class? There are some in the police department who do not subscribe to these old prejudices, but many still do. Their view of the ragpickers and kabaris is this: They are all thieves. You can try and improve them, but such people never change. Those who are not yet thieves will become thieves. You have to keep them in check.

‘Let them go to jail once at least,’ men in uniform suggest repeatedly, ‘they don’t have to work there, just eat and sleep. It’s the best way to become healthy, even drug addicts get cured. They’ll be so fat, you won’t recognize them.’ Indeed, I almost didn’t recognize one of them last week after his stint in a police

station. He had put on inches on his cheeks and neck, but it was from being beaten

This is not mere individual bias, it is a whole society's inability, or rather, unwillingness to understand marginalized groups like the ragpickers. Understanding the underdog has no tangible profits, so it is not required. Even senior government officers force the police to thrash suspects—from the 'lower-class' invariably—to get them to tell the truth. 'You are talking to the wrong people of society,' a petty shopokeeper would advise me grimly whenever he saw me with a group of ragpickers in the lane outside his shop. Now that I have learnt nothing from his admonitions and continue to deal with the scum, he often shouts at me, righteously wagging his stubby forefinger. Depite its large membership, the anti-poor brigade never gives up indoctrination.



Things are much better higher up on the recycling industry ladder. Above the kabaris in the pyramid are a completely different lot—the asset-owning, rich baby-tycoons. They buy up multiple kabari-loads of recyclables in a go, which they sell to the factory dalals (middlemen, again). Their margins are low, but the phenomenal bulk makes them rich. These are the kings, the true lords of waste. They live well. They look the middle-class madam in the eye. 'Try Italian socks,' Mr Sharma, chief dealer in waste glass, advised me when I complained of aching feet in his air-conditioned office. 'I never miss my Vitamin B complex,' Mr Mittal, big buyer of plastics, informed me pityingly as I caught my breath after four flights of stairs on the way to his plush cabin. They have reason to feel smug. At their level, waste is still just being cleaned, sorted, baled. And yet its value has shot up. Before it is finally reprocessed, the value of a single kilo of plastic is up 700 per cent from the time it was picked up on the street.

At this level, there is no shame, no embarrassment, no mess at all. It is pure business. Success is success, no matter its humble origins in a bin. '*Botalon ke badshah* (The Emperor of Bottles),' young Mr Gupta boasted of his uncle in his store in Idgah. His uncle was reputed in the early 1990s to receive at his godown every single old bottle that went into circulation in the Delhi kabari circuit. Every bottle of Dettol was cleaned, its label intact, and added to a giant heap in Uttam Nagar, west Delhi. These bottles were extremely popular, beaten only by the brown cough syrup bottles—de-labelled, these still looked officially medical

and respectable, attracting customers to the dubious local brews they'd been refilled with.

But business is not as great these days. Perhaps the Badshah and his brother, the King of Kabaris (a title, alas, bestowed only by a loving son), face competition now from the Badarpur border, where huge markets for glass bottles have come up recently.



Not surprisingly, Delhi can be mapped by its waste centres. East, west, north, south—a special kind of waste activitiy plots a city graph. In the extreme north, at Mundka, huge plastic waste mandis keep hearth-sized reprocessing factories running: spaghetti-like melted plastic rolls out, to be cooled by fans and cut into pellets by shredders. The northwest is a fractured remnant of its pre-1995 glory. Then there was Jwalapuri, the biggest PVC market in India. When it was gutted in a fire that year, the shops disaggregated into individual hillocks of plastic, separated by gates and boundary walls. Not all of it is Delhi waste—the owner of one such mountain told me as we stood wobbling at the peak, 'It's hard to get the best—this is foreign maal, clean, shredded and high grade.' Stamping his foot on the hillock, he added, 'German maal,' but I had no means to acertain this by just glancing at the finely shredded pieces.

Loha Mandi, also in west Delhi, the last site in the world to still preserve an iron curtain, is old hat. Even bus terminal points are named after it. Outsiders are kept under strict vigilance, though, and thrown out if they don't follow the rules: shut up and leave soon. Sometimes they subject you to a few minutes of questioning. When you see the amounts of iron scrap, you understand their paranoia: what if you're from the tax authorities?

In the neighbourhood of Welcome Colony, trans-Yamuna, old materials of all kinds stand transformed. Computer monitors are converted into fourteen-inch television sets, old wooden junk into usable furniture. Paper arrives in reams, to be reused for packing fruit or to be recycled on GB Road. And before the clean-up behind the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the reuse of medical waste was a routine and flourishing activity. Syringes, tubes, needles, all cleaned with caustic soda and sold downstream into the hinterland. 'The test is that if you inject one of these recycled syringes into your arm, it will burn like mad. But don't try it—you have to be really desperate,' a substance-abusing co-researcher

explained. Before he vanished, genie-like, Santosh was the sole retailer for bandages from the LNJP-MAMC complex. ‘Just stay away,’ he said to me one day standing beside a heap of dirty bandages, enjoying his macho-martyr talk. ‘If you come near you’ll get a terrible disease. I’m fine, I can manage. I’ve almost died so many times, but I just go to the hospital through the other gate and meet the doctor.’



Most of these recycling activities take place either in bastis or in factories and plots on the peripheries of the city. In fact, several Delhi bastis were settled where they are in order to provide important services to the city. In Regarpura the regars or leather recyclers were expected to clear solid waste, including waste from the nearby dargah. The Balmiki Bastis were for the sweepers who would provide sanitation services. The oldest basti in Delhi, Basti Harphool Singh, settled in 1932, offered similar services. These were critical, because Delhi’s wholesale markets or mandis, then as now, created huge amounts of waste as they catered to most of north India. The bastis ensured the smooth functioning of these mandis by keeping them useable and clean.

Now, bastis of all kinds house kabaris, who also provide an invaluable service to all citizens. But there’s something about Delhi that spawns indifference to the essential: the Masterplan of Delhi makes no provision for the sector, so the kabaris can claim no formal space. In 2000, Delhi’s then Lieutenant Governor and former Urban Development Minister, Jagmohan, banned kabaris from working in jhuggis. In a previous speech, he had declared that ragpickers must be banned. The muncipalities, though, are gradually coming to realize the value of this rich human resource, even as the Supreme Court comes down heavily on them. The New Delhi Municipal Council has already begun privatization initiatives with the help of kabaris and ragpickers, and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi is also open to involving them formally in some areas.

Yet all this threatens to fail if bastis and jhuggis are going to be demolished and relocated and kabaris banned from working within them while they exist. Clearly, a kabari can’t be expected to go to an office each morning. His work is local, so shifting him away will fracture the economy. The reason why a kabari works in a particular area is because the area demands a certain kind of waste handling service. It’s a blessing if he carries out his work from home (a trend

being widely welcomed internationally) in space-crunched Delhi. It's an even bigger blessing that his work is not writing sophisticated software for international clients, but keeping upto fifteen per cent of the city's waste—approximately 900 tonnes every day—from landing up in its fast-filling landfills, of which there are only three. Recently, a move to dump this waste on the Delhi Ridge was being earnestly discussed, after attempts to dump it in a neighbouring state were stalled due to local protests. Without recycling, the landfills would already have been full, oozing more of their toxic soups into the ground water, poisoning Delhi and its neighbourhood.



If the kabaris and ragpickers refused to work, Delhi's municipalities would collapse upon themselves having suddenly to clear all that extra waste. They would have to spend some six lakh rupees that the work of the kabaris and the ragpickers saves them every day. And there'd be no recycling at all.

Santu Kabari, Santosh, Wasim, Ramesh: they would never see themselves this way, as important elements in a chain of waste recycling essential to the very survival of a metropolis. But what they do see themselves as are Delhiites, and they hope for a life of some security and dignity that most citizens of the capital take for granted.

The recycling process, properly managed, is essential to the health of any big city. But it is also a harsh social process. It's an oddly powerful position to be a kabari: so many ragpickers swarm around you, they believe you protect them. Your work is praised by policy makers at the highest level. Yet those who implement policy despise you. The middle classes believe 'their' cities should have no place for the likes of you. You have your little kingdoms, but you are hardly able to keep the blow of the police lathi and the contempt of an aggressive public at bay. You're a ruler without powers. *Naam ka raja*.

Sujan Singh Park

MADHU JAIN

There are places one passes by and wonders about the dramas unfolding behind the half-drawn curtains. They awaken the Peeping Tom in us. In Paris it is the hushed apartments in the Isle de la Cite or Isle St Louis, the two little islands in the Seine in the aristocratic heart of old Paris. In London, it is the quaint, nouveau-chic areas like Islington or Notting Hill, and in Bombay the elegantly crumbling buildings hugging Marine Drive. In Delhi no place fascinates me more than Sujan Singh Park, eighty-four flats arranged in two handsome quadrangles separated by a road in the privileged heart of 'VIP' Delhi.

From the outside it appears a staid and somnolent place. Of the two quadrangles, one is red brick with white pointing, which gives it a misleading institutional, rather 'conventy' look. The other is painted creamy-white and has the recently souped-up Ambassador Hotel in the centre. Built during the last world war by Sardar Sobha Singh, it is a stone's throw from the beautiful Lodi Garden (more ruins per acre—inanimate and animate—than in most other parks). It is also ambling distance from the half-century-old Khan Market, where the well heeled and travelled loiter with intent.

These are not the abodes of the Great Gatsbys. The rich and the nouveau-famous of the capital live elsewhere: in ersatz farmlands skirting the city, or in the more rarified, tree-lined bits of Lutyens' Delhi like Amrita Sher Gill Marg and Prithvi Raj Road. These sprawling mansions and bungalows often have their innards displayed in interior and design magazines. There's less mystery in Posh Land. The Sujan Singh Parkwalas are far more interesting. There is a whiff of eccentricity here, an air of shabby gentility, of lives lived with a fair amount of passion. And yes, the frisson of gossip and rumour; whispers about dark deeds behind closed doors—when passion or greed got the better of reason.

Old inhabitants still talk about the days when the wife of a senior government official stormed into the Ambassador Hotel and shot her husband and his inamorata—the husband died, his mistress survived, and the lady herself got off lightly because she was related to a VVIP. Her car remained outside the hotel for almost six months. Adding to the sweet touch of notoriety was the arrest of one of the tenants for spying. And the enigmatic Q—Quatrocchi, Octavio—is believed to have lodged here during his early days of relative obscurity in New Delhi, before he became the most wanted foreigner in India.

Were I looking for characters to inhabit a novel—or better still, a soap opera—this quirky bit of leftover Britannia would be a first stop. And the narrator, the sutradhar, without doubt, would be Khushwant Singh, novelist-raconteur-scribe-ex-MP-self-confessed-lover-of-womenand-gossip. Also, son of Sardar Sobha Singh, and one of the city's living monuments. But before we get to the dramatis personae, let us examine the setting.



Sujan Singh Park (SSP from now on) forms a golden triangle with the India International Centre, the original watering hole for Delhi's elegantly fraying intellos and culturati (which one wit described as 'the GB Road of retired ambassadors') and the flashier new kid on the block with cultural pretensions, the India Habitat Centre. Like Noah's ark, these three are awash but still bobbing along on a sea of philistinism. Culture's got a high table in this charmed circle. Socialite evenings tend to be round a table of good khaana and the politics du jour is usually the main dish. This is the land of the concerned liberal, pale pink in hue, likely to be clad in handspun and rarely in synthetic, with some ancient books and jewels and old frames with ancestors to add a touch of vintage and class. Many are friends of The Family—the Nehrus and Gandhis—or friends of the friends of The Family. Most would also be card-holding secularists.

The architecture of SSP is quintessentially British; the chief architect, Walter George, was one of Edwin Lutyens' men. One of the legacies of the Raj to stay on, and on, George was an eccentric man, though you wouldn't guess looking at the buildings he designed—besides SSP, the Royal Embassy of Netherlands on Aurangzeb Road and Scindia House in Connaught Place. Khushwant Singh remembers him driving around in his Rolls Royce without lights and with a torch tied to the car to help him navigate through darkness. Says Singh: 'He

frequently ran out of petrol. One day the car stalled. I was on a bike. I pushed the car to the nearest petrol pump, and he gave me a four-anna tip—he did not know I was Sobha Singh's son.'

Built during the early years of the war, and occupied initially by younger British military officers, SSP was a prototype for apartments. Until then Delhi was bungalow land, and South End Lane was the end of Lutyens' Delhi. In fact, SSP was called Sir Sobha Singh's Folly because what is now Golf Links, one of the most up-market colonies of Delhi, was one huge jungle—there was nothing else for as far as the eye could see. Many people refused to move into the flats. Rahul Singh, a journalist and scion of the Sobha Singh clan, remembers going out shooting deer, rabbit and partridge when he was growing up in SSP. How much more English can you get?

Today the jungle has retreated to neighbouring states. But SSP remains an oasis of the old world in a rapidly changing Delhi. In the beginning, the British government and later the Indian government leased many of the apartments. A number of the original incumbents were those rendered homeless after Partition. Some of them returned their flats, but Sobha Singh allowed many of his friends and friends of friends to stay. These original tenants still pay as little as Rs 200 a month, and many not more than Rs 800 (several of the new tenants of the apartments that are being sub-let pay as much as Rs 60,000 a month—but more of the New World later). Not surprisingly, after the original incumbent has passed on, his or her family is reluctant to give up the house, and every once in a while there are hushed conversations in SSP about how some of them were 'encouraged' to leave.

The remains of the British Day still stare you in the eye. Each block of the four-storied buildings encloses a small square park. Tall, almost three-storey-high arched entrances, long, dark corridors, broad stairways and huge windows set these blocks of flats apart from others in the city. The rooms are large, have high ceilings and large windows. Some of the flats have only one bedroom; others have two or three. And in all of Delhi these are perhaps the only flats with a fireplace in the living room. There are also a hundred two-room servant quarters. (Our soap opera could be stretched to infinity if we incorporated the tryst between Upstairs and Downstairs and a class angle into our story.) The Sobha Singh Trust Pvt. Ltd. runs SSP: its inhabitants are not allowed to alter the

facades of the buildings. Only recently, nodding to the changing times and the encroachment of the rest of the world, the trust has hired security guards.

From the outside looking in you can't but help feel that time has stopped in some of the apartments. These usually belong to the original incumbents who are still around—the octogenarians who now rarely venture out and continue to cling to a world where hierarchies of breeding and education are stapled in place. This is a world of sundowners, and tea in silver pots with cheerful tea cozies, and platters in chafed silver, and white-gloved khansamas as old as the hills shuffling about silently. A world of bread puddings, roast chicken and, of course, buttered toast with those early-evening teas. Discussing Anglophilia in his perceptive book, *Anglomania, A European Affair*, Ian Buruma writes that snobbery 'was one of those institutions that lends aristocratic airs to bourgeois striving'. In these SSP homes the marriage of new money and old style keeps the Indian class system propped up and comfy.

It is hardly surprising, then, that glamorous old beauties and onetime royalty chose SSP as their home in Delhi. The late Meenakshi Chettur, mother of politician Jaya Jaitley, and journalist and erstwhile Kerala beauty K.P. Bhanumathi, whose list of political friends (stalwarts of the past and present) is enviable, are only two of the enigmatic ladies who came here and stayed on. Their autobiographies would make for riveting reading. Amarinder, Maharaja of Patiala, was a resident of SSP, and the Nalagarh scion and his wife still live here.



Several worlds and generations coexist in SSP. Each morning while dawn has not even thought of breaking, a light comes on in a bedroom on the ground floor of Block E. It is 4.30 a.m. and Khushwant Singh is getting up to begin his day: he writes while the world sleeps. Simultaneously, a few lights start going out elsewhere—the teenyboppers and twenty-somethings, some from the Sobha Singh clan, have come home from a night out and are getting ready to sleep.

SSP now has become almost a family affair. You could christen it Singhan di Haveli (the Haveli of the Singhs). The prodigals are returning. Today, three generations of the Singh clan possess flats. As each flat fell vacant—government officials left, death or litigation hurried the exit of many others—the family began to return. Initially, three of Sir Sobha Singh's sons (including Khushwant Singh) moved in. The next wave of the family came in the 1970s: Sir Sobha

Singh had twelve grandchildren, and many of them returned from their sojourns as students overseas. In the 1990s his great-grandchildren started getting the keys. In fact, there's quite a unique waiting list—strictly by age, the gender or the branch of the family does not matter. The SSP flats had been hurriedly finished, and some of the inhabitants continue to live with the perennially peeling and damp walls, very rare power points, and the general air of mustiness. But the new lot, several of them NRIs, are finally modernizing the flats: sheer glass, Jaisalmer stone or marble floors, stained glass windows and a bit of international chic.

The most famous address still remains Khushwant Singh's ground floor flat. (Just how famous he is you can tell by the fact that a postcard addressed simply to 'Khushwant Singh, Bastard, India' reached him within two weeks of being posted.) There is a sign outside the door admonishing people not to ring the bell without an appointment. And until a few years ago, there was another kind of barrier: Black Cats to protect the former Rajya Sabha MP from terrorists (he'd on occasion invite the guards in for tea). But these warnings don't deter visitors; most visiting journalists and writers call on him for sound bytes, or for forewords for their books, some of which are bad beyond words. But the man—generous and at times naïve underneath the put-on cynicism—just can't say no.

He also holds court—his hair carelessly gathered in a saffron cloth and his feet on an upturned moora, like a spider-king at the centre of a huge web of stories, apercus and naughty asides. Women courtiers predominate in his durbar. They come and go, talking of poesy and their intimate lives; Urdu verse, some gossip and a bit of adaa get you in fastest, and keep you there longer. But even these ladies of a certain age (though young ones are beginning to replace the older lot) would not dare drop by without that de rigeur phone call. Tea time used to be the main visiting hour in his book-lined living room (once upon a time the best brownies in town were made here). Lately, though, it's the happy hour: 7 p.m. for drinks (only Scotch). If you are lucky you might be invited for dinner, which is at 8 p.m.—you can set your watch by it. But no matter who you are, your luck runs out at nine sharp: you'll be shown the door if you don't head there yourself.

The other salon is across the road. Malavika and Tejbir Singh (another scion of the clan) have one of the best tables in the capital. And gossip of the elevated kind: what's really happening in the corridors and antechambers of power. This

is another stop on the map of politicians, culturatti, journalists, maharajas and maharaja-manques, corporate honchos and ambassadors, both Indian and foreign. And indeed many a PM. Malavika recalls one prime minister drinking a Bloody Mary, happily thinking it was tomato juice.

The chattering, posturing humans have the salons. The animals and birds of SSP have Bhim and Rita Dev Burman. They are not your average people next door. He's a prince of Cooch Behar (Gayatri Devi of Jaipur is his mother's sister) and she a famed beauty clicked and feted by international photographers like David Bailey. She's also an indefatigable social worker who shuttles between Assam and New Delhi and has done a lot for patients of AIDS. What sets them apart in this corner of Lutyens' Delhi is their love for animals.

Bhim is the man people wonder about—he's often seen in his white Esteem on roads radiating out of SSP, feeding stray dogs. Each day he feeds 150 dogs. Dogs with puppies are fed twice a day. More recently twenty-two cats of the area have joined his menagerie. After the dogs and the cats have had their fill, the crows swoop down on the crumbs. Crumbs in baskets are also put in the windows for the birds.

Animals have also taken over their home, which has become a sort of nursing home for the four-legged creatures brought in from the cold. Of the five dogs in the flat one is epileptic and two had acid thrown on them. SSP inmates can't afford to be unkind to animals. Says Khushwant Singh whose new guardian angel is Rita, 'Once somebody hit a dog, and Rita reported him to the police. They landed up and he was in a panic—if you live here, you have to be nicer to the dogs than to your neighbours.'

Khushwant Singh himself is not quite the neighbourly sort. 'I don't encourage the sense of community. It is not good to be too close to neighbours. I stay away because otherwise they think I am part of the management and complain about electricity or water, and then I scream at them.' But the younger Singhs are turning out to be more neighbourly. Let's say they have it both ways. Malavika Singh certainly does. 'These are compact flats, close the door and you are free.' Open the door, and voila, there's the larger joint family. 'You can ring a neighbour's bell if you run out of coffee or take your dinner there and eat it.'

And lately, SSP has acquired a more international mien: the goras (a SSP term for them) have also arrived. And continue to do so. There are nearly a dozen,

most of them journalists. A Spanish diplomat has lived here for about two decades. And for a while American designer Michael Aram made SSP his own. For them it is a good ‘working base’. ‘You feel as if you are in the centre of political-administrative Delhi,’ says David Housego, formerly of The Financial Times. Like some of the other expats, he too feels that there is a sense of community here: ‘If you want to call people at short notice you can just walk across the road.’ It’s a PLU place all right.

The PLU circle is rippling outwards now. There is a new man on the block—the Fiji-born Bhaichand Patel, who was formerly with the UN and has now turned columnist. He is the new party giver; some of the evenings, especially in his garden, put SSP on the page three map. Singleton ladies, intellectuals, journalists, diplomats and those famous-for-being-famous people these socialite evenings.

And let us not forget the Downstairs people. The same sense of community exists here as well. The servants have created a shadow, parallel world. The community of staff is also interlinked—they bring in their own relatives and friends and PLU. While the Upstairs people still maintain the Raj upper lip, at least in public, it’s in the servants’ quarters that the changing world outside is more visibly apparent. These quarters and garages are reflective of modern Delhi: let out and let out, endlessly. Small traders, garage mechanics, tailors—the real world comes in here. People dry clothes outside, and outside is at times one big loo.

How long can Sujan Singh Park continue to keep the nouveau world out? ‘Some people are lowering the tone of the place,’ laments one of the scion Singhs. But architecturally speaking, the new world is already creeping in. The new international Esperanto of interiors has already crossed the moat: the Ambassador Hotel, lately taken over by the Taj group, has re-made itself in the image of anonymous, anodyne interiors with most of the quirks of the Raj ironed out. Dasa Prakasha, the South Indian restaurant with its original ballroom parquet floor and domed interior, is no more. The hot Dubai look is in.

What would dear old George have said?

Bitch

MRINAL PANDE

I have the greatest admiration for the newspaper vendors who deliver papers in the area serviced not by the august New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), but by its down-market cousin, the Muncipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). I am amazed at how each morning before it is seven they will have found their way across pot-holed lanes and sewage and dug-out cables, past many dogs and pigs and cows, and thwacked your day's paper across the yard and into your veranda, tring-tringed their bicycle bells to let you know they've been there, and left.

But for reasons I cannot fathom, they also have a particular genius for delivering your paper with a mauled and stained front page. I scowled at mine as I worked my way back into my room. Then suddenly a story caught my eye. It was about a four-year-old-girl who was married to a dog to ward off the evil eye from her family.

In comes Gauri, the matronly Bengali cleaning woman, two brooms in one hand and a can in the other. I have the greatest admiration for her too. She finds her way to our house every morning even without a bicycle to help her negotiate the perils of MCD areas. She lives in an unauthorized cluster of jhuggis in southeast Delhi and has been abandoned by her husband Haran, the father of her four children. She works for me not because she needs more work, but because of her daughter Sumitra, who used to be our cleaning woman, who has abandoned her husband and gone off to live with one Pontu, in another unauthorized shantytown across the Yamuna. Before she went away, Gauri tells me, Sumitra told her to take over her job in the 'TV Memsahib's' house, because she does not follow you from room to room or inspect the plastic bag that you carry.

‘Move,’ Gauri commands me, and I put my feet up on the sofa. She sets to work with the bamboo broom. ‘Come here first,’ I say, and point out the picture of the little girl in the newspaper. ‘See, she is from your part of the country. She is only four and her parents have married her to—a dog!’ I say, adding a dramatic pause for effect.

‘Oho,’ Gauri says, resuming her work. ‘So? She is their daughter. They can marry her to anyone they like.’

‘But don’t you see it is illegal? The police—’

‘What police?’

‘The local police.’

‘No, no, why should the police bother?’

‘Because you can’t marry off a girl before she’s eighteen. It’s the law.’

‘So? She’s not married to a man.’

‘Gauri, don’t you see? Her parents could still go to jail for this.’

‘Who will speak against them? The dog?’ Gauri collapses in laughter.

‘It is no laughing matter,’ I say. But I, too, am laughing.

‘Oh Ma, at least he won’t come home drunk and beat her. Or arm-twist her family for a wrist watch or a bicycle, or get her pregnant as soon as he can, and then run off with another woman. A son of a bitch is better any day, Ma, any day, than the son of a man.’

‘But the girl …’

‘What about the girl? She looks happy. She must have eaten her fill of sweets, been dressed in new clothes. What more can a girl want?’

‘But why should she be married to a dog before she knows what marriage is all about?’

Gauri takes a deep breath and speaks in chromatic and halting sentences:

‘Last year I had this neighbour next door … She is an evil person with a real black tongue … My children, they were playing outside and she began to scream curses at them for no reason … “May the pox strike you … may you rot and turn blue …!” She does not have a husband or anything but does black magic for a fee … she can give you magic potions to attract a man or a woman beyond their good judgment … how else do you think I lost my husband to that daughter of a jackal in Seemapuri? How did that good-for-nothing Pontu get my daughter to elope with him? My younger son falls sick at night, vomiting his bowels out till

there is nothing inside, and a raging fever … then I go to the other woman in the Patpargunj Mother Dairy jhuggi …'

'But we were talking about the girl married to a dog …'

'So I knock on her door and I say this is what has happened … She asks me for a bottle of country liquor and one chicken and a hundred rupees … I beat her down to fifty because that is all I have … I come home and I find my son playing with his sisters. And the evil one, she falls sick next week … from trying for a bad abortion, they say … and disappears …'

'Didn't either of you think of going to a doctor?'

'Are you mad? All we have are *haturey* (quack) doctors with no degree … how can they fight black magic with injections and pills?'

'Did the evil one know that you cast a spell on her?'

'Would she let everyone in the colony know that she was powerless before the bigger evil one from behind Patpargunj Mother Diary? There was blood everywhere inside her jhuggi, we saw, and rags soaked in blood … Disgusting … the new people who moved in had to burn everything inside and get a puja done for purification …'

Gauri wrings out the mop and begins to swab the floor with deft strokes. 'Doctors, Ma, are no use to the poor … what do they know about us? Eat well, they all say, and give us prescriptions for expensive bitamin *golis* … If we ate well, would we be sick? I had a terrible time with my last baby …'

She is going to cap it with another story.

Here it comes.

'Before that good-for-nothing Haran was made to drink tea with the burnt-up public hair from that daughter of a jackal from Seemapuri …'

I begin to laugh. 'Is that what a love potion is made of?'

'Don't laugh at me. They show it in so many TV serials, don't they? How black magic works …'

'They're just stories. You shouldn't believe them.'

'And why not? To us they are more real than your news, where they say we will give the poor this, and we will do that … Empty air, that's what it is … they would steal the shroud off a corpse if they could.'

'You were telling me about your last pregnancy …'

‘Yes, yes. After the third one, my Haran had got a *nasbandi* done. The doctor, she told him and me, You both need not fear another pregnancy now … and here I was vomiting like the Kishangarh nullah! I told Haran, I think I am pregnant, and he got violent … he hit me with whatever he could lay his hands on. I ran … other women came … they all sniggered even when I swore upon my older son’s head that I had not done it with another man. They took tests, and told him there must be some mistake, or something must have undone the operation … you are fertile!’

‘So? Haran apologized?’

‘Apologize? A man? Next thing I knew he had run away with that niece of a jackal from Seemapuri and I am told she is waddling around now with a belly as big as a Yamuna watermelon …’

I laugh. I find it hard to laugh, but I am laughing.

‘Next I know my Sumitra goes and drinks tea with that good-for-nothing Pontu and decides to leave her husband …’

‘I was told that her husband was too old and beat her and she wanted a baby …’

‘No, no, it was nothing like that. It was the evil one’s love potion. In our colonies, what good are children? If you do not have them, you get beaten, if you have them you get beaten … and both ways you suffer.’

‘Then Sumitra could have gone to a doctor, maybe she could have …’

‘What do doctors know, Ma? Can they look into our souls? Can they ward off the evil eye? Or undo the love potion? All they can do is tell us that we have a child inside us, or take it out … Can they see that that is not what ails us?’

Gauri smiles, as she departs with her implements, ‘This child, her parents are right about the dog. The evil eye will get distracted now and they will all be better off. Who knows, some day a real man might marry the little girl. Meanwhile, she is better off than I am, for sure …’

Suddenly the story of the little girl who was made a dog’s bride doesn’t seem so distant. It could easily have happened in New Delhi.

City without Natives

VIJAY NAMBISAN

In an early 1980s Tamil film, Kamalahasan (he became Kamal Hassan only when he went to Bombay) is one of four young men who have come to Delhi looking for a job. He sings a somewhat bitter song as they roam the streets:

> Sing a song, brother, let's forget hunger for a while.
> In India's capital, seeking, seeking, seeking work, O my brothers!
> Singing, singing of India's greatness, what need have we of rice?

The film was a hit. It was called *Varumaiyin Niram Sivappu* (The Colour of Poverty is Red).

I too first went to Delhi seeking a job, and though I never actually had to worry where my next meal was coming from, I sometimes got close to worrying about the one after the next. If my poverty was never red, my bank balance often was. But I knew a city which tourists and VIPs don't, not the Delhi which decks itself up and admires its own smugness on Republic Day.

There are few better ways to discover a strange city than to work on the staff of a struggling city magazine. Travelling a good deal by bus (because we didn't always get paid on time); dropping in to office at any hour to check proofs; spending nights at the typesetters' in Green Park or the press in Okhla; and best of all, scouring Delhi for topics, visitors, anything new or offbeat with the smell of a story—it's one way of living your early twenties, and I'll never know any other.

When I first went there, I didn't have to sing in Tamil. I was proud of my shuddha Hindi. I had studied Hindi for eleven years, in school. As I was to understand, that was a very different kind of Hindi.

I'd been in Delhi two months when one day I went to a paan shop for a box of matches. '*Bhai saab,*' I said, '*diyasalai ka ek dibba deejiyega*.'

‘*Kya?*’ he said.

‘*Diyasalai ka ek dibba*.’

‘*Kya??*’

‘*Ek machis do, yaar*,’ I snapped.

He gave me the box and mumbled, ‘*Hindi mein bol diya karo na …*’

Hardly anyone speaks Hindi in Delhi. It’s Punjabi, or Urdu, or Khadi Boli, or Avadhi, or Rajasthani. I can’t think of any other state capital which doesn’t have a native tongue, though Bangalore is fast going that way. But I was a migrant myself in those days, and not competent to criticize.

It has been said that Delhi is not a city, but a collection of villages. Every colony is fenced off from its neighbours by not only metal railings and ‘green spaces’, but by cultural fences as well. Good fences make good neighbours. I lived first in Chittaranjan Park in a Bengali village, then in Amar Colony, Lajpat Nagar, in a Kashmiri village, then in Chittaranjan Park again, and last in Greater Kailash II which was no village at all but only a suburb. There were Tamil villages, and Gujarati and Kannadiga, and over everything, like a blanket—like a blankety-blanket—a vast and spirited Punjabi joy in living that kept the city together and made it one, made it as much as was possible a city.

As a migrant, and fresh from Madras, what struck me about Delhi was the incredible wealth. Or rather, the wealth on display, the ostentation. The Maruti boom had just begun, and the flyovers were still fresh from the Asiad. Rajiv Gandhi was in his first year of office, and there was hope everywhere—except among the Sikhs. Shops, hoardings, hotels seemed to cover every square metre of the city. Delhi was, as it has often been in its history, a boomtown.

Everywhere there was prosperity, but the Punjabis expressed it best. In Madras I had met a couple of millionaires who wore dhotis and ate off stainless steel. No doubt they enjoyed their lives too, but they never showed it with such lavish abandon as did the Punjabis, especially—despite everything—the Sikhs.

I had a friend who was a Sikh—who was the reason I had come to Delhi for a job—and I was (somewhat) personally involved in their predicament. It was less than a year since Rajiv Gandhi had held back the Army for two whole days while the Sikhs were massacred, and though they partook of the prosperity they did so with a certain wariness. They certainly did not share the hope. Those who could afford to were opening Swiss bank accounts and stashing most of their

savings abroad; those who had lost families or factories were working with savage desperation to make enough to be worth stashing abroad. India, for the Sikhs, was no longer home, if home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in. And that was somehow spiritually true even of the Sikhs who would never leave: like my friend, who was a student of Indian culture. Perhaps because of this tension which tinged my life a good deal in those early days, Delhi has never appeared quite peaceful to me.

Another reason was my constant interaction with Delhi's bus drivers, who like Delhi's policemen, live a life which burns the humanity out of them. One afternoon I was sitting right behind the driver on a nearly empty bus bound for Connaught Place. My elbow was on the window bars, and it must have fractionally obscured the driver's vision in the wing mirror. Instead of asking me to retract my arm, as any sane person would have done, he swung the bus in a wide curve on his next left turn so that my arm actually brushed the creepers that hang from the flyover before the Oberoi InterContinental. That was my cue to pull in my arm.

Another time I witnessed a bus driver, asked by a very country boy to tell him when the Chittaranjan Park stop came around, deposit him in Chiragh Dilli, then laugh at him, '*Arré lallu*!' I was too withdrawn to intervene, and I was ashamed of it. But Delhi bus drivers are madmen and not lightly to be interfered with.

They provide their share of laughs too. Very late one night a friend of mine was on a bus wending its way through Lajpat Nagar when, somewhere near Bhogals, the driver suddenly braked where no bus stop was and announced, 'We have to wait for Lovely.' A pick-up when on duty, on government service? But you can't put anything past a Delhi bus driver. So everyone waited, titillated by anticipation of a houri. After ten minutes or so some of the passengers became restive. '*Nahin, nahin*,' the driver chided them, 'Lovely will be here any moment now.' At last Lovely arrived, and was well worth the wait: an enormous Sikh in khaki daubed with grease and a bag of tools in his hand. Lovely Singh, what a lovely name.

There are cities which overwhelm you, make you feel like something the cat didn't want. Bombay sometimes made me feel that way. I hear New York does that to people too; and I wonder if having to commute on a mass transit system is the key. Delhi's buses certainly have none of the soul-searing, dedicated

indifference that Bombay's trains do. It's only when the trains come to a halt that you see a human face to Bombay.

Delhi didn't overwhelm me, but then I didn't overwhelm Delhi either. I have little cause to be nostalgic about Delhi. It always seemed a corrupt city to me, and a dangerous one. I soon knew it much better than Madras, where I'd attended college for four years. Of course it is corrupt: The bureaucracy has its hive there, and one enduring vignette of the capital is the sight of the babus playing cards on the lawns of the government offices in winter. But winter has other charms, especially to one who had hardly any occasion to wear a sweater in his first twenty years.

I revelled in the cold. I bathed in cold water; I wore a coat only as a fashion statement; and if it stunted my growth, it also put hair on my chest. One of my proudest moments came one winter when I was travelling back from Chandigarh by a Haryana State Transport bus, and at four in the morning a Punjabi sitting behind me asked me to close the window.

Those were also the winters of the Festivals of India; Rajiv Gandhi was selling us abroad, and in Delhi we got some of the leavings. There were exhibitions at the National Museum and the National Gallery, and for the first time I saw the Didarganj Yakshi in the flesh; also Amrita Sher-Gill's paintings. There was the Triennale; the film festivals at Shakuntalam, in Pragati Maidan, where I saw practically all of Scorsese and Tarkovsky and Woody Allen; best of all, there were the music festivals. Imagine listening to Mallikarjun Mansur and Bhimsen Joshi and Amjad Ali Khan in the Purana Qila.

In Delhi I had for the first time money of my own to spend. Much of it went on books. I went to the book fair and bought a dozen books—most of them new—for 250 bucks. I also ordered and paid sixty rupees for Wendy O'Flaherty's *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, I don't know why. In The Bookshop, in Khan Market, I bought a copy of Milligan's *Puckoon* for seven rupees. Those days are certainly vanished.

Is this nostalgia? God knows there's little to justify it. It's okay for a Delhiite, it's okay for Khushwant Singh to sit back and be eloquent about the vanished days. Though he wasn't born and bred a Delhiite, he is part of the Raj-and-Lahore culture which coloured the early days of the new city. Indeed, his father

helped to build New Delhi. I knew Delhi for a much shorter time, and much later. My only excuse for nostalgia is that those days are gone too.

Khushwant Singh is the archetypical Delhiite, and sight unseen I can tell his essay is going to lead off this book. (If it doesn't, it's because he's tired of doing the same thing over and over again.) But who else call themselves Delhiites? The well off, certainly; those who have apartments and steady jobs. Not the people who make the city work. I don't mean the enormous corps of Government servants, they only keep the machine ticking over. I mean the cops, the bus drivers and conductors, the road sweepers, the scooter and taxi drivers, the plumbers and electricians. The overwhelming majority of these are migrants who do not think of themselves as belonging to the city.

This is not the case with Bombay or Madras or Calcutta. Delhi suffers from lack of what in town-planning terminology is called a 'hinterland'. It has a hinterland for town-planning purposes, of course; its expansion is not in any way circumscribed by the sea. But it has no cultural hinterland. It has no longer any native tongue, no native manners, no native cuisine, no native folklore or handicrafts. Invariably, the lowest common denominator fills the niche in each of these essentials.

People come to Delhi to better their lot, to make money. Few actually have a stake in Delhi, and those who run the city—the politicians and bureaucrats—are those who have the smallest stake. Making Delhi a State of the Republic was a purely cosmetic political measure. The Chief Minister of Delhi has her roots in Uttar Pradesh; the Chief Secretary, P.S. Bhatnagar is also from there, and no doubt the millionaires who put up the Uphaar Cinema think of themselves as Punjabis.

Delhi does not assimilate newcomers as easily, as indifferently, as does Bombay. In my first year in Delhi I met a chap called Nair who'd come up on business from Bombay. 'Where in Kerala are you from?' I asked. 'Me? No fear, I'm from Bombay,' he said. Malayalis are among the most parochial of races (as my own question showed), and few Malayalis living in Delhi, even second-generation Delhi-dwellers would admit to being Delhiites.

Delhi was the first foreign country I'd lived in, and living there made me conscious that I had roots—elsewhere. I picked up some Punjabi there, and some Bengali, and I learned Gurmukhi from the road signs which are conveniently

written in several languages; but these tactics did not help me feel at home. A friend of mine, a Tamil from Hyderabad, worked out a rather innovative method of correcting the cultural imbalances Delhi produced. Travelling by bus as he often did, he had his toes stepped on a good few times, and always responded with curses in the rawest Tamil. Tamil is a good language to curse in, better than Hindi, and I'd have adopted his method if I'd had the nerve.

If Delhi could leave one red, indelible image in my mind, it would be that of a city where no one speaks its native tongue. But I retain no one image: Delhi is too raw, too amorphous. Besides, I'm not sure I want to hold Delhi in my mind like that.

If anything about Delhi makes me nostalgic, it is winter. Not the brown winters of today, born of pollution by corruption, but the winters of fifteen years ago. Fifteen years! That's only the beat of a hummingbird's wing in Delhi's history.

Delhi was perhaps never home to me. But I still know a couple of people there who, if I have to go there, will have to take me in.

In the Company of Hijras

ANITA ROY

In the Japanese martial art of ninjutsu there is a technique of concealment in which one may be in full view yet not draw the eye of the observer. It is said that one who has mastered this art can move through a crowd entirely unobserved. They may not be black-belt ninja-warriors, but the women of Delhi are highly adept in donning this cloak of invisibility. It has become part of their armour in the daily battle of the sexes.

The sexual harassment Delhi's women have to deal with every day is all-pervasive. It informs your body language, it subtly alters the way you dress, how you appear, who you look at. Drawing attention away from yourself becomes second nature, an invisible shield designed to deflect lewd comments, puckered lips, appraising glances, crude gestures. Women new to the city, and especially from the west, irrespective of colour or class, stand out a mile: their shield is down. But for those of us who live and work here it's what we put on, unconsciously, every morning, and wear with floaty ease through the day.

It is not the case that Indian women are meek, doe-eyed, soft-spoken sirens. I'm lucky enough to work in an office where women heavily outnumber men, and are so loud and articulate that the only sirens they resemble are of the ambulance variety. But the moment they step out, even they don this force field against the male gaze of strangers.

It took me a while to get the hang of it. For the first few months living here, the five-minute walk from my office down Sansad Marg to Connaught Place was a daily trial. I'd steel myself to not flinch. To stare down those starers. To outbrazen those bastards. To rise above it all—or, if I fell, then at least to give as good as I got. One day, it all became too much. The sucky-kissy come-on noise made by some uxurious pavement Romeo was the final straw. I wheeled round

and let fly a gaali I had spent weeks rehearsing, under the tutelage of my girlfriends: '*Sala harami*!' Sadly, in the heat of the moment, my at best tenuous grasp of the language slipped completely and what came out was 'salami!' The man, unfazed by my threatening sausage, sauntered on.

Hardly surprising, then, that the first time I witnessed 'Adam teasing', I nearly whooped with joy. There, trundling along Aurobindo Marg, came an autorickshaw packed with the loudest, most outrageous women I'd ever seen. Loud saris, grand gestures, big hair, bigger voices: not an invisibility cloak to be seen. The auto careened to a stop and out they spilled, surrounding some poor hapless chap, wiggling their hips at him, pinching his bum, their eyes flashing, tossing their proud manes, daring him to flirt back. He scuttled away, beetroot red, willing the pavement to swallow him up. They laughed loudly, showing all their teeth. Still giggling, they pushed and shoved each other back into the auto. The autowala sighed, as though this were not the first time it had happened today, re-lit his beedi, and swerved off madly into the traffic.

As I watched the sign on the auto's back window ('Love Coach') recede into the dense Delhi smog, I realized that these were not women at all, but hijras. Eunuchs, castrati, transvestites, transsexuals, the 'third sex'—none of these really translates. A hijra is a hijra is a hijra. You can't take her out of the Indian context. In Mughal times, they played an important role in the court. According to Italian chronicler Niccolao Manucci, 'Kings, princes, queens and princesses place great confidence in these people. All people of quality have eunuchs in their service.' From that apex, the hijra community has fallen far. Nowadays, they operate at the fringes of society. Unlike the hijras of Bombay, who are also often sex workers, the Delhi hijras make their living mainly by singing and dancing at births and weddings. Their presence is considered simultaneously highly auspicious, and a royal pain in the neck. They are paid not to perform but to go away. Whereas in the court of Louis XIV, or in the nineteenth-century Vatican choirs, young boys were castrated to enhance and maintain the purity of their pre-pubescent sopranos, the timbre of the hijras' voices is as coarse as their lyrics. To extort yet more money from their hapless host, they will threaten to lift their saris; and rarely do they have to reveal more than their sturdy knees before the outraged victim—his anger fuelled by desperate anxiety—reaches for his wallet.

In her book on hijras, *The Invisibles*, Zia Jaffrey tries to find out about this famously secretive community. This apparently rather straightforward objective ends up being a maze of dead ends, side-tracks, false leads and red herrings. We end up having learnt quite a lot about Zia Jaffrey; precious little about her quarry. In one fell swoop, she manages to both belittle hijras themselves and the heterosexual fears on which they play: 'With their whimsy and genderless faces they reminded me of Shakespearean fools. In their buffoonery they could tell all, and lose nothing,' she says.

William Dalrymple fares slightly better. In the course of his year in Delhi, researching *City of Djinns*, he tracked down some hijras to their haveli near Turkman Gate. To Dalrymple, the hijras represent a fascinating blend: not just of genders, but of religions. The roots of this community are as deeply embedded in the traditions of both Hindu and Muslim history as is the city—indeed the country—itself. Not a very popular view with the fundamentalists of either camp and, if only for this reason, one worth taking seriously. Hijras are also extremely devout. They embody a strange mix of 'piety and bawdiness—forever visiting temples and mosques—and going on pilgrimage to Hindu and Muslim shrines over the subcontinent'.

No wonder people are so drawn to and repelled by this community. If the socially marginal becomes the symbolically central, then perhaps it's small wonder that the hijra has become a sort of synecdoche for India itself. For such a miniscule percentage of India's population, they loom large in almost every guidebook and travelogue, and yet the sum total of what we 'actually know' about hijras is tiny, shrouded as they are in myth, fear and superstition. As Jaffrey found out during the course of her research, most middle-class Indians would simply rather not know: it was partly that 'curiosity itself was foreign when it came to the lower classes', compounded by the general conception of hijras as 'filthy people'. Yet it is this very denial which constitutes their power. As Dalrymple points out, for generations hijras have been outcast from their families, ostracized from society: 'You do not have to spend very long with them to appreciate how India has turned them into what they are, how it has brutalized them and forced them to anaesthetize their own sensibilities.'

Trying to explain 'hijradom' has become a mini-industry for sociologists and anthropologists. A cause célèbre for gay activists who love the idea of adding

another colour to their rainbow nation of sexuality; and a source of fascinating frustration for feminists, struggling to make sense of these cross-dressed, castrated men aspiring to a gender which has always played second fiddle. But, best of all, their mere existence—let alone their behaviour—is a slap in the face to the prudes, the self-appointed moral police, who infest great swathes of middle- and upper-class Delhi society and blight it for the rest of us. The landlords who insist on scrutinizing your wedding certificate. The neighbours who tut-tut on seeing a girl smoke. The police who judge a woman on the clothes she wears. The uncles who praise their nieces when they dress pretty, talk little and serve tea. The mothers-in-law who disapprove of a daughter-in-law going out to work. The husbands who wear their wives like ornaments. All those lives wrapped tight in the boa constrictor of *decency*.

How often have I heard the phrase ‘decent people’ since I got here. The standard matchmaker’s line: ‘He’s a very nice boy. Very decent family.’ Or a property agent turning to me with a sweet smile, having just mentioned some stratospheric rent figure, and saying: ‘Actually, money is not the issue. Owner is really just looking for decent people.’ The unspoken subtext: like you and me. Such insidious inclusiveness brings out the worst in me. I feel myself breaking out into a positive rash of indecency. Short skirts! Cigarettes! Booze! Depravity! False eyelashes! Whips! Anything, but Lord save me from the decency of Delhi.

One evening, last winter, a friend called up and announced that a friend of hers, a hijra named Shiromi, was having a party, and would I like to go? It sounded like the last place on earth for any decent Delhi girl, so of course I said yes.

Like most hijras in the city, Shiromi lives to the north of Connaught Place which, for us ‘Sou’delhi-types’ is relatively uncharted territory. In fact, if you wanted a metaphor for a gulf of any sort—social, economic, political, architectural, you name it—the north/south divide of Delhi is it. It is a city partitioned within itself—the old city to the north with its winding lanes, cycle-rickshaws, mosques and kebaberies, ramshackle clutter and bustling life, and Lutyens’ dream of imperial order to the south, with its wide, straight tree-lined avenues and perfect circles. Levis gave way to lungis, chinos to churidars as we left behind the languid poseurs of Generation South Ex, and wended our way through the bumpy bylanes of Ajmeri Gate and Feroze Shah Kotla.

The driveway to Shiromi's house was canopied with fairy lights and carpeted. We parked next to a mosque, and followed the lane to a large clearing, covered over with all-purpose Indian tenting, held up with poles and dotted with impossibly large chandeliers. At the foot of a tree in the middle of the clearing (also carpeted), were a couple of charpoys strewn with rugs, quilts and small children. There were rows of seats facing a stage, where sound chappies were doing complicated things with wiring. As we walked in, one of the figures beneath the tree detached itself from the shadows and bounded forward to meet us with arms flung wide in a dramatic gesture of welcome. So this was Shiromi.

She must have been in her late fifties or early sixties, a broad broad, with chunky shoulders, large hands and a wide face. Years of dedicated paan-chewing had distorted her mouth to a permanently lopsided vermilion gash through which peeped toxic-shock, environmental-disaster-zone dentistry. She had deep-set, caramel brown eyes, brimming with warmth. Unlike some of the hijras who turned up later, who have repainted their eyebrows into Romanesque arches, Shiromi's eyebrows had been plucked out of existence and left there.

Her hair was an unqualified disaster. A tangled, matted, straggling mass that looked like it would have reared up and legged it at the mere sight of a comb. And her voice—well, her voice was really something else. Talk about lived in. That was a voice that had been around. It had gone places and done stuff that would have made the crustiest midshipman blanche a bit. You could grate carrots on her vowels. And yet, when she wanted to she could sure turn on the honey—rough silk, and I do mean rough.

She was disappointed that one of our friends couldn't be there. And when Shiromi is disappointed, the world knows it. She pantomimed great crashing paroxysms of despair, her fingers tracing the course of crocodile tears down her face, the corners of her mouth dramatically downturned. Then, in a lightning turnaround, she pirouetted towards me, beamed, and enveloped me in a rib-crushing bear hug.

She grabbed us playfully by the hands, and led us to the charpoys, scattering small children and puppies hither and yon, and plumping up the quilts so we could loll at ease. With all the lese-majesty of an unlikely empress, she conjured up a huge silver platter laden with cashews, dates, pistachios and almonds from somewhere, and thrust a handful into my lap with a lewd and wicked wink.

She appeared to have catered for several thousand. So far there were just the six of us. Then three more hijras made their entrance, swathed in shawls and picking their way through the rubble with a breathtakingly regal hauteur. All three were carefully made up, the youngest with an amazing hair-do that swept off her forehead like an ossified orange tidal wave. They delicately picked at the plate of nuts, and ingratiated a couple of cigarettes from us. The largest one had a marvellous dark coiffure of hair, and blood-red lipstick carefully applied to her lavish mouth. They made genteel Urdu small talk for a while and then gathered themselves up and headed off into the night again. This seemed to happen quite a lot—I had absolutely no idea how this 'event' was hanging together, it was such an odd hotchpotch of highly organized (there were various young men shimmying up poles and draping marigolds around throughout) and totally chaotic, with characters wandering in and out like spare parts in a Beckett drama.

As the evening wore on, a newcomer arrived. This was the head hijra, Shiromi's guru. Draped in a creamy-white woollen shawl, her face was just incredible. Heavy jowls, large features, soft, floury skin that looked like risen dough, and extraordinary light green eyes. No make-up, as far as I could tell. She had the kind of presence that commanded respect, the kind of respect that one only associates with male elders. And yet, the gestures she made with her enormous, spade-like hands, were as elegant and poised as any classical dancer, and utterly female: Don Corleone in drag. She stayed for just the correct amount of time demanded by etiquette, and then rose to leave. She placed a huge hand on each of our heads in turn, a gesture of blessing that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

She exited, everyone breathed a little easier, and the songs began led, of course, by Shiromi. My friend had described her to me once as the most self-destructive person she'd ever met, and looking at her in her vermilion pool of silk, simultaneously drinking whisky, smoking dope, chewing paan and tobacco, I could see her point. A lush, hopeless, needy, funny, lovable, maddening drama queen, a latter-day gender-bending Muslim Scarlett O'Hara gone to seed.

It seemed that Manucci's opinion of the hijras of Delhi back in the seventeenth century couldn't have been further from the truth. 'They are

baboons,' he wrote, 'insolent, licentious baboons.' Neither baboons nor buffoons, they are as heartbroken, or as heartbreaking, as the rest of us. Perhaps more so.

In Delhi more than any other place I've ever lived, the past collides with the present. The sheer archaicness of eunuchs in the twenty-first century makes me smile, because it means that there are more things in heaven and, at least on this particular patch of earth, than you can dream of. The idea that the most uptight, sexually repressed and censorious middle-class Indian babu or behen-ji needs the blessing of a hijra at the birth of their child makes me believe there's hope yet. The fact that hijras can earn their living from the fear of what is, or is not, under their petticoats makes me simultaneously want to cheer and weep. Their economic security rests on the sexual insecurity of others. Take away that fear, and you take away their livelihood—but perhaps what you give back is the dignity of being able to choose for themselves how to make a living. We may give them money to go away, to stop bothering us, to leave us in peace, but in the end, no matter how much cash changes hands, it's they who pay the price.

The hijra is the heterosexual Indian male's nightmare made flesh. Is it fear of seeing cruel disfigurement? In that case, why not flinch at every traffic light beggar's leprous hands? Or is it rather that beneath the hijra's petticoat lies his own heart of darkness—the realization that a man's potency, his power, can be physically removed? His own penis shrinks at the mere thought.

Hijras may perhaps envy women for their ability to bear children, for the apparent 'naturalness' of their gender. But Indian women, in turn, may envy the hijra the confidence and ease with which she flaunts her femininity. There is this terrifying or liberatory thought: that the hijra represents what 'real' women might be if they were to become as sexually confident as 'real' men. The invisibles of Jaffrey's title have much to teach the women of Delhi who have long been hidden behind the stifling veil of decency.

Shahjahanabad: The City That Once Was

PAVAN K. VARMA

I do not belong to Delhi but I have grown up in this city. In many ways, it has become my city of adoption. I first really discovered Shahjahanabad when I was researching the life of one of its most talented citizens, Mirza Ghalib. What struck me most then was the manner in which the Old City was disappearing—almost brick by brick and stone by stone—before our very eyes. The destruction seemed to be relentless. I felt compelled to try and chronicle what little remained, and through this process, to resurrect also what it must have been like in its prime. Thus was born my book *Havelis of Old Delhi*.

It is not entirely clear why Shah Jahan, the great Mughal emperor, left Agra to make Delhi the seat of his empire. Perhaps, he realized that only Delhi, the mistress of centuries of imperial endeavour, could provide a truly legitimate seat to his architectural aspirations. Whatever the reason, construction began on 12 May 1639, and a little over nine years later, Shah Jahan arrived at the head of a magnificent retinue, with his favourite son, Prince Dara Shikoh, showering gold and silver along the way, to hold his first court at the Diwan-i-Aam.

The decapitated bodies of several criminals had been interred in the foundation as a sacrifice, in accordance with a bizarre but long-standing ritual. Perhaps, this juxtaposition of death with renewal, of endings with beginnings, was symbolic, for, like the many incarnations of Delhi before her, Shahjahanabad too would fade away into history in but a couple of centuries, recalling the famous line by Ghalib: *Har bulandi ke nasibon mein hai pasti ek din* (In the destiny of every apogee lies the seed of its ending).

Yet such thoughts must have been farthest from the mind of Shah Jahan on the day when he made the journey from Agra to Delhi. With the fort ready, his first concern was to build a city adjoining it. The wall enclosing the city took seven

years to build, costing a princely sum of four lakh rupees. It was 6,664 yards in circumference with twenty-seven bastions and fourteen gates. Next in importance to security was the need to provide water. A disused canal, built in the fourteenth century by Feroz Shah Tughlak which had tapped the waters of the river Yamuna, was extended to Delhi. One branch flowed down Chandni Chowk. Another flowed through the Red Fort, its waters raised to the level of the fort through an ingenious mechanism called shutrgulu (camel's neck). For the citizens of Delhi, the canal not only became a source of sweet water but provided a coolness and greenery that made Shahjahanabad unique among the cities of India. No wonder then that they named it the Nahar-i-Bahisht, the stream of paradise!

As I walked along the kuchas and galis and the alleyways and the by lanes of the walled city, I could almost visualize the picture, when, during Shah Jahan's rule, Chandni Chowk ran resplendently from the Lahori Gate of the Red Fort to the Fatehpuri Mosque. Trees would have lined its entire stretch; the Nahar-i-Bahisht would have flowed down its centre; about halfway down the street the Nahar would have traversed a circular pool built by Shah Jahan's sister Jahanara. It is said that the name Chandni Chowk came from the silvery reflection of the moon in this pool. Contemporary records describe the different segments of this imperial avenue. The section from the Lahori Gate of the fort to Dariba was known as Urdu Bazar or the Lahori Bazar, catering to the needs of the imperial retinue—soldiers, clerks and artisans—residing within the fort. The section west of Dariba to the Kotwali was called Phul ki Mandi or flower sellers' market. The area from there up to Johari Chowk was called Ashrafi Bazar or Johari Bazar (jewellers' market); the last section from Johari Chowk to the Fatehpuri Mosque was called Fatehpuri Bazar. In my mind's eye, I could see people gathered under the shade of the avenue's trees, or along the waters of the canal, or in the many eateries that were situated along it. I could see the colourful facades of shops selling every conceivable commodity: spices, precious stones, firearms, textiles, birds. I could hear the dastangos (storytellers) holding their audience mesmerized. I could see astrologers predicting sequined futures for an inexhaustible number of the gullible. I could almost smell the aroma of kababwalas jostling with each other to attract customers.

As always, my reveries would inevitably be broken by the discordant cacophony of what Chandni Chowk has come to symbolize today. Today, Chandni Chowk no longer has trees lining it, nor does it have the Nahar-i-Bahisht flowing through its centre; there is no longer Jahanara's pool to catch the reflection of the moon; no longer are there the eateries for people to sit and wile away their hours. There are only a mass of people, gradually being asphyxiated by unrelenting noise and noise pollution. Chandni Chowk, like the rest of Shahjahanabad, has become a commercial slum.

When a city has moved so far away from its original inspiration, it is difficult to judge its place in history. What did Shahjahanabad achieve that its predecessors did not, or that its successor, New Delhi, has not undone? For me, Shahjahanabad will always be immortalized for two things above all: First, the authenticity of its architectural tradition; and, second, the authenticity of its cultural milieu, which, ironically, grew in depth and acceptance even as the imperial power that could sustain it went irreversibly into decline.

Shahjahanabad may have been built as a planned city, but it was soon overtaken by the chaos of spontaneous evolution which is the true hallmark of historic cities. The ideological inspiration of the city was predictable: one more monarch seeking to build a habitat within the finite space of a walled enclosure. But beyond such a stereotype, the edifice of the city grew according to a pattern unwilled by its founder, gradually reaching out, like all such settlements, to a gracious but unplanned destiny of its own. Katras, kuchas, mohallas, bazaars, waras, chowks and baghs came up at different intervals, not in accordance with any master plan, but in tandem with the city's evolution and growth. Every landmark recalled an authentic association with individuals or events, not yet erased from memory or lore: Habash Khan ka Phatak, Bangash ka Sarai, Haveli Haider Quli, Qasim Jan ki Gali, Jarnail Bibi ki Haveli, Begum ka Bagh, Kucha Ghasi Ram, Namak Haram ki Haveli.

If the palace-fortress dominated the urban area as a whole, the havelis dominated the areas immediately in their vicinity. In this sense, the havelis became the architectural motif of the city. An arched gateway, often richly decorated, was usually the external proclamation of the existence of a haveli. From the gateway leading inwards was an extended vestibule or long passage. Sometimes, this was covered by a low roofway, a chhatta, where the common

visitors and retainers would spend a considerable part of their day. At the end of the vestibule, or to one side of it, there opened another door leading into the haveli proper. This door usually opened to a blank wall—the purdah diwar, which prevented visitors from looking in and reinforced the privacy of the havelis. In more imperial constructions, an arched gateway on the outside led to another gateway inside—the naqqarkhana, or literally the house of the drums—from whose vantage point the drummers, musicians and trumpeters of the nobleman's household would proclaim the four watches of the day and announce important visitors.

In basic format, havelis had two divisions, an outer area where the amir conducted his official business, entertained visitors and interacted with his staff, and an inner area which constituted the personal living area, the mahalsarai and zenana. The diwankhana was the centrepiece of the public area. In effect, it corresponded to the modern drawing room, but because the amir also held court there, there was much greater formality. An office and a library were the other important rooms in this segment.

Havelis have been called 'introverted gardens'. The appositeness of this expression becomes evident when we look at the planning of the innermost spaces, the sanctum sanctorum of the secluded mahalsarai. Apartments and pavilions were nestled amidst exquisitely laid out gardens and pools, fountains and fruit trees. An observer standing outside a haveli would scarcely have reason to believe that behind the forbidding blank wall were lovingly indulged areas of light and openness. Even where elaborate formal gardens were not laid, the basic pattern of construction was to have verandas and rooms around a private open space—the aangan (courtyard), chowk or sehan. It was not unusual to find a huge tree growing even in a small aangan. Care was also taken to ensure that the aangan received a great deal of sunlight. The verandas surrounding the open chowk were mostly two-tiered: the outer one (dalan), more overtly an accessory to the courtyard, giving way to an inner veranda (dardalan), less open and more private. Abutting the dalan on both sides was often a mezzanine space, the duchhatti or dohashmi or janashin, from whose vantage point, unseen behind intricately worked jafries or screens, the ladies of the house could witness 'private-public' functions, such as a mujra or a music performance.

Within the mahalsarai, an essential feature was the tehkhana or underground chamber. This was not merely a basement: it was an integral part of the residential quarters where the entire family would retreat during the long days of summer. But the tehkhana was not the only refuge against the Delhi summer. High ceilings and thick walls served this purpose as well. Terraces too were cleverly planned: they were bereft of awkward architectural appurtenances that would block the much-loved purvaiya, the wind from the east, that blew crisp and cool in the pre-dawn darkness, or at night, when one lay back on cool, white bedsheets and gazed at the stars above. Khas screens, kept constantly wet, were used extensively in summer. Jalis or sunscreens, beautifully worked in geometric patterns, also played a functional role in controlling the harsh light while providing ventilation. The luxurious hammam or bath was also a noteworthy feature of most havelis. Built of marble, these shallow pools were fed with waters drawn from wells or through a tributary of the Nahar-i-Bahisht. The bath complex usually consisted of a minimum of three rooms: separate rooms for hot and cold water baths, and a dressing room. The ultimate structure to dilute the travails of summer was the baradari or garden pavilion. Built on a raised platform in the midst of a garden, it was open to the breeze from all directions and was surrounded by pools of water and fountains. It was the nawab saheb's pride, as it was indeed that of his emperor within the Qila.

Shahjahanabad was not a big city. There are no reliable figures but estimates place the number of people living within the walled city at between 100,000 and 150,000 from 1800 to 1857. Perhaps, the numbers would have been more when Mughal power was at its peak, but still they point to a city whose population was small and manageable in relation to other cities, such as, for instance, Lucknow, whose population, according to British census, totalled 350,000 in the 1850s. It would appear therefore that in relative terms, Delhi was certainly not one of the largest cities, for Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were even larger than Lucknow, and this could be one contributing reason for the quite remarkable degree of cultural homogeneity that had then begun to characterize a Dilliwala, be it in language, witticism or attire.

In fact, even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Mughal power declined, Shahjahanabad survived because it had come to be for its often beleaguered citizens both the seed and the fruit of a distinct and effortless

cultural identity. This identity transcended class barriers. Both the nobility and the common man were bound by the vibrant Urdu tehzibiyat, and towards the final decades of Mughal rule the dominant theme of the age was undoubtedly the Sufi tariqah. There was a truly laudable degree of communal harmony, leading C.F. Andrews to remark that:

> The intimate residence together side by side in the same city of Mussalmans and Hindus had brought about a noticeable amalgamation of customs and usages among the common people … I have had more convincing and corroborative evidence about this especially friendly relationship between Hindus and Mussalmans in old Delhi than I have had concerning any other factor.

Such an eclectic mood played a catalytic role in the development of the Urdu language and by the 1850s Urdu had almost fully replaced Persian as the popular literary medium. Mushairas were much in vogue and established poets much in demand. Along with this literary efflorescence, there was also the beginning of western scientific learning or what Andrews has called ‘the new learning’ whose institutional focus was the Delhi College. New innovations found place along with old signposts, although the passage from the old to the new was not always smooth. When in 1854 the British introduced the more impersonal letterbox, Ghalib’s reaction was one of indignation and suspicion!

The rhythm of the city included all sections in its sweep; the poor, in spite of their deprivations, remained active participants in many of its divergent entertainments. The sandy slopes of the Yamuna near Delhi Gate—Mahabat Khan ki Reti—was the kite flyers’ arena, and it is said that patang baazi matches were arranged here with teams from as far away as Lucknow. Pigeon flying or kabutar baazi was another popular sport. Once a year, the swimming competition was held—Tairaki ka Mela—for which almost the entire city gathered along the Yamuna. Interested groups maintained several akhadas or wrestling clubs in the city. And on the steps of the Jama Masjid, the storytellers—dastangos—always attracted large crowds.

1857 marked the beginning of the end of Shahjahanabad. In its aftermath, the painstakingly built, centuries-old socio-cultural edifice of the Mughals came crashing down. On the night of the fall of the city, General Wilson, the commander of the British Forces, celebrated his victory with a festive dinner laid out in the Diwan-i-Khas, the sanctum sanctorum of more than three centuries of Mughal power. In the days that followed, the palace was systematically

ransacked. Twenty-one princes of the imperial family were ‘condemned, hanged and carted off’ in one day. The last Mughal king Bahadur Shah Zafar was incarcerated within the Red Fort in a small dingy room, with a low roof and plain whitewashed walls. The Lahori and Delhi Gates were renamed Victoria and Alexandra Gates. The palace was converted into barracks. A host of other buildings, including the Jama Masjid and Delhi College, were also converted into barracks. The exquisite Fatehpuri Masjid was sold to a Hindu merchant as private property, and the Zinat-ul-Masjid was converted by order into a bakery. The famous bazaars of Delhi—Khas Bazar, Lahori Bazar, Khanam ka Bazar—were reduced to rubble and innumerable havelis and kuchas were raised to the ground to disappear for ever.

Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor, was exiled for life to Rangoon in October 1858. The British officer escorting his small convoy, as it left the Red Fort, would perhaps not have known that Bahadur Shah Zafar, even if no longer suzerain of a mighty empire, was the acknowledged symbol of the definite zeitgeist that symbolized all that was best in the culture of Shahjahanabad. He was the touchstone of correct etiquette. He was a fine marksman and a good horseman. He was an accomplished poet, adopting the takhallus Zafar as his nom de plume. He was a scholar, who authored a learned commentary on Saadi’s Gulistan. He composed khayals and thumries under the pen name Shauq Rang. He was an accomplished calligraphist and a patron of painting. Notwithstanding his empty coffers, he found the means to somehow express the Mughal love for gardens, laying out one in Shahdara and one below the palace wall. He played chess and cards, enjoyed kite flying and liked bird fighting. His own bulbul—bulbul-ehazaar dastaan—was greatly admired by the public. He liked good food and beautiful women. He was poor but dignified, politically impotent but still a Jahanpanah in the eyes of the people of Shahjahanabad.

The decision by the British in 1911 to build New Delhi, without integrating the old city with the new, sealed the fate of Shahjahanabad. From then onwards, purani Dilli would live on but only like an ageing courtesan abandoned by her new suitors, waiting to die.

Mere nostalgia of the past will not resurrect Shahjahanabad. Nor need its past be resurrected in its entirety. What is required is to try and preserve some of the special character and beauty of this historic city. Small beginnings need to be

made, not dramatic statements of intention. If even one haveli is partially restored and converted on a commercially viable basis to a restaurant, or a period hotel, or a speciality theatre, others are likely to emulate the venture. In Rajasthan, the restoration of one fort, Neemrana, on a commercially viable basis, has led to dozens of forts being restored. I have not lost hope, but if nothing is done there is little doubt that Shahjahanabad will soon cease to exist. As I wrote in *Havelis of Old Delhi*, in its place would be a vast and nondescript commercial slum, and the soul of the city would say with Ghalib:

> If Ghalib continues to weep this way,
> Then O people of this world,
> Watch these settlements,
> They will be barren one day.

Public Relief

MANJULA PADMANABHAN

On the left-hand side of Mathura Road, going towards Nizamuddin, I once saw a gigantic man, a truck driver perhaps, perched atop the culvert-railing with his salwar down around his ankles. On his face was an expression of unholy delight as he balanced on his heels, frontally exposed to the traffic. In this precarious position he was expelling what appeared to be a week's worth of digestive by-products from the prison of his gut. The car I was in was moving fast but even in that fleeting moment I noticed with horrified fascination that he was generously hung both fore and aft.

I realize it's disgusting beyond belief to mention such incidents. We are all brought up to turn our heads daintily to one side at the first indication that someone in our vicinity is about to expel a load of personal wastes. 'Don't look!' our mothers might say, as a man fumbling with the string of his pajamas prepares to squat down by the side of a road. 'Turn your head away! It's not polite!' we might be told when a woman holds a bare-bottomed young baby over an open drain.

Of course I sympathize with those who seek public relief. I don't doubt that we are all expected to respect the privacy of those who have none. But the volume of personal-waste dumpers in a megapolis like Delhi is so great that there is no question of avoiding the sight of them. We must either learn to become selectively blind or else become forced witnesses to the hordes of depositors lurking behind trees, striking manly stances in front of walls, tucked behind the corner of a tomb or nonchalantly letting fly on the pavements along main thoroughfares.

And if we can neither avoid the sight of something nor prevent it from occurring, the only thing left to do, in my opinion, is to reset our notions of

politeness and acknowledge open-air excretion as indigenous performance art. ‘Behold!’ the tourist guide might bellow to a group of goggle-eyed visitors from distant shores, ‘we see in front of us yet another local hero, watering the foundations of a public building. While here at your feet, is that man’s child, practicing the ancient art of Sphincter Relaxation—do watch out!’

Delhi has the abundance of public space which, I believe, inspires its citizenry to greater feats of al fresco alimentation than elsewhere. The streets are broader, better paved and more lavishly supplied with traffic islands and pavements than in any other Indian metropolis. There are fewer obstructions or constructions on either side of the main thoroughfares, enabling those who live on them to be more easily seen. There is even a matchless selection of historic monuments upon which to empty a bursting bladder. The lack of public facilities is compounded by dreadful conditions within the few toilets that are available. According to a friend who once attempted to use a public toilet in Khan Market, the floor was so dense with human waste that his only option was to stand at the entrance and aim for the pissoir from there.

Some men, of course, are wont to regard the use of outdoor facilities as opportunities for showing off their personal assets. I once saw a young boy at the corner of Ring Road, just before the turn towards Okhla Phase II, engaged in what seemed at first glance a routine bladder deflation. It must be a popular spot for these activities because there were at least five other boys of a similar age likewise occupied. This particular youth, however, was looking around at the traffic in the way of someone who wants to be watched. A second glance revealed the reason why.

He seemed no more than ten or twelve years of age, judging from his height. Yet even from a distance of some twenty metres it was clear that the instrument between his hands would have looked right at home on a stallion. His lack of maturity showed in the way he was flinging it about, as if he didn’t know quite what to do with it, like the newborn elephant I once saw in a Discovery Channel documentary, at the moment when it discovered its own trunk. The expression on his face was a mixture of arrogance and appeal, like an opera star yearning for applause after giving a brilliant performance. He made me aware for the first time how embittering it must be for a man who is unusually gifted in the

appendage department to recognize that the world does not permit him to advertise his charms.

The sight of men waddling off in pairs to water a wall is so common that we must conclude it is a feature of male-bonding. The reason they waddle is that they are often tugging at their zippers as they go, like gunfighters striding towards a fight with their hands already fondling the handles of their weapons. Often, they chat as they darken a public wall in companionable relief. I am always wildly curious to know what they talk about. How much can there be to say? Are they sharing output analyses? Personal measurements? Inflow-outflow data? The comparative pleasures of this wall versus some other wall? The satisfaction of adding nitrogen to a tree, where trees are available? The joys of being uninhibited? The preference of Y-fronts over X-front briefs or bikinis—or no briefs at all? It's a mystery to me.

Some men are apparently able to pee without extruding any body parts while others feel the need to haul out their entire tackle, bending their knees a little and bouncing up and down, as if winching anchors up from unfathomable depths. Some men gaze down upon themselves as if remembering with fond regret the keg of beer currently being returned to the elements. Some men stare away into the distance with glassy expressions like captains standing at the helms of their ships of Self, holding their steering wheels ever so lightly. And once I saw a man posing with his left hand on his waist and a cigarette in his right, with his fly open and his wee companion performing all on its own, looking quite sad and lonely as it did so. I was impressed at his confidence and sangfroid. Only when he was done did he finally look down, stowing his equipment away with his cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, Belmondo-style. So cool.

Women, meanwhile, are expected to leave their bladders at home when they venture forth into the world. I have heard it said that the reason women don't irrigate the countryside as enthusiastically as men is that the female bladder is smaller. I would have thought this meant they got filled up quicker and hence needed releasing sooner, but apparently the opposite is true. Women's bodies, being less hairy and better supplied with sweat glands than men's, are more efficiently hydrated. Which is a good thing, because women neither have the social sanction to pee at will, nor do we have the physical equipment to exercise the water-cannon option described a couple of paragraphs ago when confronted

with a user-unfriendly toilet. An added disincentive is that women wearing modern clothing require the skills of a trained contortionist to use the floor-level commode of a typical Indian public loo. Traditionally apparelled women score in this department. Unfettered by underwear, wearing full skirts or saris, they can stand and deliver over drains, ditches, gutters or any space at all. But the rest of urban womanhood must crouch down with panties stretched to breaking point at the ankles, high heels teetering dangerously, salwars tangled up in dupattas and handbags clenched between the teeth.

The sight of small children squatting down in formation is another Delhi staple. Perhaps their mothers set them out in company, so that each can watch over the activities of the other while modest pagodas of infant dung develop beneath all. Most young children are intensely curious about their bodily functions. Those who grow up on the streets are no exception. With the elastic joints and infinite flexibility of the very young, they can be seen staring down with rapt attention at their own rear ends, as if unsure whether or not there is more to come from the internal food processor.

Once I saw a young boy of perhaps twelve years of age in the act of voiding his bowels in the gutter by the side of the road running down the middle of Jangpura. It was late in the evening and the reason I noticed him was that the car in which I was a passenger was parked right next to the gutter. The gutter was alongside a food stall. The stall owner was winding up for the night. Two young men were cleaning out the cooking vessels, scrubbing hard with coconut husks and water, under a flaring gas-lit lantern.

The boy had just completed his task and was looking around, as if searching for something. One of the vessel-cleaners, glancing over to where the boy squatted, noticed that he was looking around and guessed what it was for. In a spontaneous act of recognized need, he paused in his vessel-scrubbing, scooped up a mug of water from the nearby bucket, and poured a steady stream down towards the boy’s rear end. His aim was perfect. The boy looked up over his shoulder and grinned thankfully. He washed himself off with his left hand, then stood up, adjusted his shorts and scampered away without a backward glance.

It wasn’t as if the boy needed any assistance. He was old enough to manage his personal sluicing on his own. The pot-scrubber did not appear to be related to him in any special way. Yet the deed was so gracefully done, as if the two

principle actors in that roadside drama had been rehearsing on a daily basis, that I didn't know whether to feel impressed or repulsed.

Another time, I saw a middle-aged woman, squatting down on the grassy embankment of a main road, with her rear end fully exposed to the traffic. She was dressed in the type of gathered skirt I associate with Rajasthani peasant women and it was impossible not to notice her, what with the bright blue flounces framing her naked butt under the midday sun. If not for the fact that Indian women are known to be fanatically prudish, it would be hard to guess she wasn't being deliberately provocative. Two days later, there she was again, taking her ease on the grass. She did not seem deranged, like those vagrants whom we occasionally see, walking around naked and wild-haired. Her clothes were reasonably clean. Since then, I've noticed her on and off, sometimes occupying an unused municipal garbage dump, curled up asleep in the middle of the day. I look at her, wondering along what dark tunnel of experience she travelled before reaching a point when she could defecate by a main road apparently heedless of who saw her or what they thought of her. It is a kind of negative freedom, a kind of strength.

She and others like her were on my mind when I visited the area near Delhi's Azadpur garbage dump, along the Grand Trunk Road. This site might be said to represent the city's toilet, receiving an estimated 8,000 tonnes of waste material every day. From here, it has nowhere else to go. There is a single garbage-composting plant, run on behalf of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi by a family of Delhi-based philanthropists called the Khuranas. This unit transforms a portion, perhaps one eighth, of Delhi's organic wastes into eco-friendly, odour-free compost. The remainder of the city's litter is dumped as 'landfill'. That is, it is left to rot in the open, with all its toxic contents seeping into the soil and into the water table, untreated and unsupervised.

Right in the middle of this dismal place lives a community of ragpickers. Young children grow to maturity, marry, breed and die amidst low hillocks of rotting garbage, where the only touch of brightness is the malignant blue of indestructible polythene bags. Stunted black pigs patrol the landscape, like zealous four-footed janitors, rooting through the filth of the nation's First City. Thin veils of rank vapour rise continuously out of the slowly compacting mass. There are no trees or plants, only poles bearing electric cables. They seem

shorter than usual, the cables swinging dangerously close to the ground. Then it hits you: it's not the height of the poles that's different, but the ground that has risen, swollen with garbage, to swallow up the poles.

The ragpickers make their living by herding the pigs and from gleaning nuggets of recyclable trash from the garbage. It is reportedly a dangerous area, where murder and casual crime are commonplace. The reason I went there was to visit the MCD plant, an island of cleanliness and order amidst an ocean of desolation, in order to see for myself that it is really possible to treat garbage as if it were a valuable resource. I was told that a common sight every morning along the main access road to the garbage dump is a line of people relieving themselves. According to my informant, who takes this route every day, the squatters are both male and female. They chat amiably to one another, nothing hidden, nothing covert, as they rid their bodies of waste.

It is as if, by living at the very outermost margins of society, these citizens have dispensed with the prudery and personal fastidiousness that characterize every other facet of Indian life. While the privileged socialize for the purpose of consumption, here is a group of the underprivileged, who socialize for the purpose of elimination. Like the woman in the garbage dump, they have learnt a trick of psychological distancing that permits them to behave as if they were invisible.

In any other situation, it would be considered supremely insulting for one person to reveal his or her private parts to another person without prior consent. On the streets in Delhi, however, no conscious offence is intended—the ugliness is endemic to a situation where the civic authorities do not consider the need for public toilets to be more urgent than, say, flyovers or smartly paved roads. Nor do the authorities, or anyone else, show an interest in guaranteeing a roof over every citizen's head—or, to be more precise, a screen around every citizen's bum. So in a sense, these sights represent a catastrophe in slow motion, a war zone of the human spirit, where the public meets the private in a defiant downloading of excrement. They are the tax we pay for being unconcerned with the arithmetic of physical needs.

A great metropolis without proper sanitation for its thirteen million citizens is like a land-locked Titanic without enough lifeboats for all its passengers. Bereft of efficient waste management, Delhi's tree-lined avenues, ancient monuments

and gracious parks become like the worst kind of bathroom joke: many miles of sights to see but nowhere to ‘go’.

One Long Party

RENUKA NARAYANAN

I could write of the sorrows of my city, no greater or less than those of any great capital. I could write of its underbelly, its ghosts and vampires, its djinns and devils, its shadow people who flock at traffic lights like so many dried leaves blown in by a desert wind. I could write of the angels in human guise who work unseen amidst us, with disabled children, with unwanted elders, with women who are abused and beaten. Our colours and costumes vary, but is human behaviour so different in other places? I have lived, worked and travelled alone in Europe for two years and had giddy times in the dance studios and lofts of New York. There are good people everywhere, and joy seems to run hand-in-hand with its twin, grief.

But I prefer to let other pens dwell on misery. There is no lack of those, some exceedingly abler than mine is, at telling the world what it prefers to know about poor South Asian countries. Instead, I want to wander through Delhi's hospitable hangouts and homes. It's a city that—forgive the cliché—works hard, plays hard, and drinks far too much for the good of its liver or its love life. But there's an energy to Delhi that I find irresistible. It's been good to me and I'd be pleased if you joined me in a romp through my own city of joy.

A woman, hung about with silver and turquoise, swathed in a viridian dupatta off the looms of Maheshwar, walks purposefully to the elevator from the underground parking of the India Habitat Centre, the epicentre of south Delhi's social convulsions. She's on her way to the assured delights of a Lucknawi kabab festival, where she's bound to see at least a hundred people she knows.

A black Lancer swooshes out at maniacal speed and she skips smartly aside. The car screeches to a halt, the passenger door is flung open, a man from

Mumbai whom the woman hasn't met in months leans across to hiss: 'Get in at once! I'm buying you dinner tonight!'

They zoom off, laughing at this absurd kidnap, to a new Italian place with a real wood-fired oven, to feast off artichoke hearts and smoked salmon crepes.

Do you wonder that Mills & Boon does great business still, despite the trashy American novels on CD that people now play in their cars between bhajans? Keep driving. Go south, towards Haryana and the expensive new suburban ghettos with idiotic names like Malibu Towne and Beverley Park. Fiercely aspirational, mad about the movies, been to San Gimignano (the Italian town, not the Delhi restaurant). These the places for summer swims under a skyful of stars in private pools screened by scented plumeria, and winter barbecues on rolling green lawns while fat bumblebees careen about, punch-drunk on the nectar of a thousand flowers.

Or head on a Thursday (it's already passé, though) to the Delhi Gymkhana's dance night. I'm used to sedate lunches there with delightfully batty aunties elegant in chiffon saris, with unrelentingly exquisite manners and perfect vowels and consonants to match their lace-edged hankies. Or mellow evenings with a pleasant drink and a chat with my bookish, gentle father. And I remember the prettiness of my brother's engagement party there (he's in advertising, she's a lawyer and they work so hard, I can't tell how their lives are different from my sister's in Manhattan). When we were little and lived together in the pleasant green of Lutyens' Delhi, we learnt to swim in the Gym's gloomy pillared pool (the Lady Willingdon Bath, but at least they've banished the portraits of Liz and Phil from the ballroom, unlike in the Madras Club down south). The loo attendant still remembers me as a 'shaitaan' and the hedgerows of lantana and henna nod conspiratorially—were they not a forgiving witness to teenage kisses from far-too-suitable boys?

But Thursday nights at the Gym today? If you go with a bunch of gay friends, it's like looking through the Smirnoff bottle in the old ad. Perspective shifts to seeing things as they are, not as we are. 'Uncles', whom I've always thought of as lonely old fellows nursing a solitary drink and brooding over lost love, suddenly reveal themselves as hunters, except it's not women they're after, but the merry men I'm with.

One of my friends keeps up a running commentary in my ear: ‘See that guy, the one in the Versace shirt with the girl in the black Prada dress? She’s a rich industrialist’s daughter, but she doesn’t know her husband’s really bi.’ Before I’ve recovered from that, he points out another (handsome) man, whom I’ve discreetly been admiring from under my lashes. ‘Don’t bother, darling. He’s gay, though he’s not come out.’

‘Isn’t there a man left in town?’ I snap, with residual bourgeois annoyance at being caught looking. ‘I don’t think so, doll. I mean, who’d want a hetero guy any more, they’re so obnoxious. But, hey,’ he pats my shoulder consolingly, ‘you could always try the marrieds—except, they’re secretly bi, too, you’d be surprised how many! Maybe you should stick to out-of-towners?’

Sensible advice, I think, not without a pang of regret at the sharp, sweet memory of all the romantic adventures Delhi afforded me in my teens and twenties (it’s also the city of my courtship, marriage and divorce). But I can’t help noticing something. Lots of sweet young things I know seem unable to marry or even find a proper boyfriend: ‘Where are the men? They’re either so geeky and boring, or they’re mama’s boys, or they’re so self-obsessed they come out as real losers!’ Some major millennial angst is obviously wracking the city, which however parties furiously on, like something in a cautionary tale before the scourges strike.

I go off to sleep over at a girlfriend’s house. She and her husband are busy, successful television producers. Our friendship dates back to the divine 1970s in Delhi University, a glory time of political upheaval, great world cinema, ferment in dance, music, theatre and the start of both the NGO revolution and the ‘ethnic’ wave that connected rural crafts with urban markets, changing the Indian home for ever. Acts of possession by an old country–young nation growing more comfortable in its skin; joyous purpose before the long shadows of Punjab terrorism sandbagged the 1980s and our playgrounds, like Lodi Gardens and the Ridge, turned for a decade into areas of darkness.

Delhi was good to us even then, when we were painfully young and struggling to make our lives happen right here, too much in love with its green avenues and jasmine-scented nights to try escaping to America, dreaming big dreams in a poor, fraught but stubbornly hopeful country. We’ve trod a long measure, I think,

as I hug her children and collapse on the carpet in the family room. Her pre-teen daughter combs out my hair while I admire her school project.

My friend, one of the loveliest women in Delhi, tirelessly photographed by Page Three shutterbugs, is touchingly unaffected by her success. We settle down to our new fad—watching Pak TV and giggling ourselves sick at how similar yet different they look and sound.

'*Panun Hindustan*!' we shout, when we catch Pakistani propaganda on Kashmir. Secure at home while our soldiers guard us from our covetous, unhappy neighbour, we talk of her relatives, who once led useful, valuable lives as doctors and professors in Srinagar. They were forced to flee their ancestral homes and life is now forever reckoned in terms of 'Migration *ke pehle*' and 'Migration *ke baad'* (before and after they fled in disarray in the early 1990s).

Next morning I buckle down to a few hours of serious reading from the holy books of every religion. This is a self-imposed routine for my betterment as religion columnist and Editor, Arts and Culture, for the feistiest national newspaper in India. A paper I'm proud to write for, as much for its historical opposition to political tyranny as for its concern with invisible India. It is also a paper that allows a fair amount of elbowroom to its writers, a fact that encourages the habit of homework. What makes work even more piquant is that the extreme right-wing party that backs the government of the day regularly rips apart my columns on its website and sneers at me as 'Our Lady of the Secular Church'.

I lose myself happily in the action-packed episodes of my favourite Hindu scripture, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. If India had nothing else left over from history, perhaps this one book would be enough to furnish a strong life code for generations to come. I marvel again at how the Upanishads seem to have inspired even reformers and iconoclasts of almost every persuasion in India, and re-read a beloved old story:

Prajapati the All-Father created the three races of devas (celestials), danavas (men) and daityas (titans). He bade them go forth and inhabit the three regions of sky, earth and netherworld. Each race begged for a watchword to live by.

'Very well,' smiled the All-Father.

To the devas who had magical powers, He said, '*Damyata*.' Be restrained.

To the interdependent race of men, He said, 'Datta.' Give, be generous.

To the daityas who had supernatural, ferocious strength, He said, '*Dayadhvam*.' Be merciful.

Know then, that when we hear the thunder crash DADADA, it is our All-Father's voice, minding His children to be restrained, generous and merciful.

The phone rings to interrupt this reverie with exciting news. A dancer I wished to keep track of has called to tell me about the new choreography she's presenting that week. Listening to her, I realize with an electrifying jolt that she belongs to a whole generation of Indian classical dancers in their thirties and forties who are currently on a terrific creative roll. No other generation has had so much education, exposure, travel and inward journeying as this glorious company. They are reaching within and scooping out treasures to share with the public, in the biggest new lease of magic since the 1950s and '60s when newly-independent India reconstructed her arts step by lovely step. And it is Delhi that spearheads this new victory parade, finally sharing the action with that sturdy bastion of classicism, Madras (where, incidentally, the best popular movies and music now come from).

I meet up early that evening with a dear friend from college days, who's an opera addict. But he happens to be in a bad mood and we sit through three different versions of Mozart's *Clemenza di Tito* before he decides to cheer up. When I demand to hear '*Chahe koi mujhe junglee kahe*! (Call me a barbarian!)' as an emotional antidote to '*O nero tradimento, O giorno di dolor* (O black betrayal, O day of sorrow)', he sits instead at the piano to quiz me on major and minor scales, from which I perversely take off to sing Carnatic devotional music. We call a truce by going off to Geoffrey's, a pleasant wood-panelled pub, to meet friends from our play-reading group and to catch up on Edinburgh Festival gossip.

Three evenings later, I'm overjoyed to see with what rapt attention the hall responds to Indian classical dance. People leave humming and smiling: greybeards, grand dames in silks, hip professionals, cool young things in jeans and tees. Clearly, the public knows when a good thing's happening in an area of national life, even if the print media prefers ectoplasmic blobs from fashion shows as its main visual offering.

Afterwards, at a farewell party for an Indian writer-diplomat who's a friend and co-author and about to leave on a Mediterranean posting, the lawn swarms

with bureaucrats, politicians, artists, media people and writers. Gossip travels from lip to lip with languid ease, smiles of a summer night sparkle brighter with chilled vodka, women drift gauzily about while men flock gallantly around them.

Conversation never flags and talk turns with real relish to dinner. Glad cries greet the announcement of nihari, a spicy shank stew typical of Old Delhi, mopped up with fresh, fragrant rotis. A groaning pudding table yields, amidst more formal dishes, a whimsical plate of homemade fudge. It is such down-home grace notes amidst the *foonfaan* that make Delhi a truly hospitable place, plus the fact that you can always take a house-guest along to a party. Meanwhile our host, a media man of honourable standing, and hostess, a radiologist, inquire tenderly about the state of everyone's plate. When contentment reaches critical mass, the host and hostess, both excellent singers, lead off into a bitter-sweet old Hindi film song.

An appreciative shush descends and before you can say Jai Hind, we're off on a Sufi trip. Soulful medieval lyrics, some born of Delhi's own soil, melt everyone's remaining defences. I see Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and Muslims nodding and smiling together in a bond of such good fellowship that I want to run out and round up all meddlesome politicians, priests and evangelists for a public ducking in the fountains of Vijay Chowk at the foot of the Presidential Palace.

Back in my flat, I make a face at the clock that says it's well past the pumpkin hour and happily shuffle my bedside books. Shall I read Amin Maalouf's Samarkand (a magic city I've visited twice) or Jose Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* or Lily Prior's *La Cucina*? Or shall I call my best friend at work, who's mad about physics, writes wicked editorials and has opened my mind to a score of new authors I'd never have broached on my own? She's sure to be home now from her carousals and we could swap post-mortems, fix up to eat our next therapeutic Thai curry at the Oriental Octopus.

My cellphone shrills. 'Baby, are you home? We're on our way to Djinns. Want to come along?'

City of Walls, City of Gates

RUKMINI BHAYA NAIR

'In My Mind's Eye'[1]

The clear Danish sunlight seeps into my room at midnight. It is Sunday and the streets of Odense are enveloped in a Lutheran calm it would be hard to imagine anywhere in India—let alone in Delhi! But despite the lateness of the hour and the pervasive quiet, sleep is impossible. I know of no switches that can turn off the relentless brightness of these northern skies. As a consequence, my biological clock has gone predictably haywire and to add to my miseries—damn!—the only reading I have is a bunch of conference papers. Under the circumstances, what choices exist? I can wander out in search of other wakeful company in a strange city or I can wander about the familiar alleyways of my own head …

It takes less than a second for me to realize that my pusillanimous Indian upbringing will not allow me to exercise the first option. I'm left, like it or not, with only the unreliable resources of memory at my disposal. And so, in a distant, sunlit room—I summon up Delhi. That, after all, is the place to which I must shortly return—it's where my family is, where I work, where I spent the first five years of my life. What about the last five years though, asks the demon in my brain. That's the acid test of belonging! Would you choose to die in Delhi, *would you*, *would you* …?

Ah well, I have to admit I'm not convinced that I would like to spend my dying days in this metropolis of road rage and toxic fumes. Nor am I a scholar of Delhi—aficionado of the havelis of its walled city, seasoned hanger-outer in the dhabas of JNU or even a student of the myriad tombs and gardens that give the city its legendary character. So what does Delhi mean to just another boring,

middle-class person earning a living there, a quasi-migrant? The ‘real’ migrants, as we know, came earlier, trekking into the city from Sind, from divided Punjab, from Lahore, not just in search of livelihood but to hold on to life itself. They were the genuine ‘1947-diaspora’ who today constitute a significant proportion of what one might call the immigrant aristocracy of the city, its haute bourgeoisie. In contrast, my own status as a Dilliwala is palpably ersatz, fake.

It strikes me that I never had to struggle to make Delhi my own …

And as I wait, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in the inadequately curtained wings of Hamlet’s country, a line from Shakespeare’s play comes back to me, suitably transmuted: *What’s Delhi to me, or me to Delhi, that I should weep for her*?[2] This improbable question seems to me suddenly urgent. I realize that, without my being aware of the fact, I seem to have been haunted by it for a long time.

‘Murder Most Foul’[3]

Some years ago I wrote a poem ‘Malviya Nagar–Sissinghurst’ trying to express the complicated links between my own elite post-independence education, the residue of a dead colonialism and the immigrant psychology of the residents of Malviya Nagar, the area of south Delhi where I was living at the time. But this sort of endeavour can backfire! More than one reviewer seemed convinced, on the slender evidence of this poem, that it was about the struggles of my particular family to settle down in Delhi after Partition. No question of reading any universal truths about the human condition into my account—no, sir. Instead my feeble attempts at ‘understanding’ my neighbours had furnished me—a Bengali-Goan of uncertain origins—with a new ‘Sikh’ persona!

I had, in effect, lied my way into somebody else’s head. Or to change the metaphor, I had been handed, so to speak, that familiar object—a ‘duplicate ration card’. This valuable commodity, which can be acquired for a price just like anything else in this city, would now enable me to partake of a variety of goods and services within it. It would even enable me to pass myself off as ‘belonging’ here. Yes, to ration—and to rationalize—the complicated facts of our lives so that they fit into a proforma, preferably one that can be tagged with a bureaucratic label, that was the secret of success in this ancient capital.

Slowly, I began to grasp that becoming a Delhiite involved an ambiguous aptitude. It was to learn to negotiate the shadowy terrain of a permanently uncertain identity, what Jan Morris has called ‘the blur and slither of Delhi’. Despite its unimpeachable lineage as a city of kings and aggressors, courtiers and bureaucrats—or perhaps because of this ancestry—the spirit of the place spells transience. Everyone in Delhi seems always under threat of ‘transfer’ or ‘dismissal’—as a South Block official might put it. But what accounts for this almost metaphysical sense of alienation, of ‘multiple personality disorder’ that Delhi imposes on its citizens? Is it that it was always a city of campers, nomad-people who pitched their tents here because they saw the city as a gateway into the heartland of India but never as home?

There are many etymologies that have been offered for Delhi, but perhaps one of the most appealing is the philosopher Ramchandra Gandhi’s suggestion that its name could derive from the words ‘dehri’ or ‘dehli’, both meaning ‘threshold’[4]—a permanent point of entry and departure but forever resistant to any stamp of permanence.

Now, I do not know whether it is permissible to include poetry within the space of an essay, but two excuses for doing so spring to mind. Historically, Delhi has always inspired poetry—it is the city of Zauk; and, theoretically, this piece is about exploring contemporary Delhi via the ill-defined, in-between, and, ultimately, perhaps brutal and uncaring attitudes adopted by some of its recent denizens—such as myself. My poem, then, as the point of departure to describe a city of ceaseless arrivals and departures:

Malviya Nagar–Sissinghurst[5]

He dreams of a white garden camellias, lilies, briar roses
With their colour bled out the Sackville-West saxifrage …

Up on a roof see the old Englishman
Dozing at noon his skin sun-rusted
While one tall cockerel steps high, high
Prince among the mongrel rabble …

Fringes of eucalyptus bravely rising
All the trees in Malviya Nagar possess
That stranded look blocked in concrete
And far, uncompromising the defiant Qutub
Exactly as the Slave King built it in 1198 …

Winter herbs in kitchen boxes silver ash
And a river without colour without a name …

It is not as if we belong here—far from it
Literally, I mean Partition drove us from Sind
From Multan, Punjab there are still some who
Imagine fountains, blood, chinar brushing the clouds …

Nehru gifted us this ruined city Jahanpanah
Our trades grew with the wheat besides Begumpur
Now *Sat Sri General Stores* stocks everything …
First-class auto-repair! and now we have started
Chow-Mien Restaurant though Chinese food
Is a mystery to us *EXELENT ELECTRICK EQUIPMANTS*
Good Night Chemist LOrd-in-DECor UPholsterERS
Heavenly Travel Company business is good
By God's grace our sorrow has turned to gold …

He dreams with his blue eyes wide of freeze-encrusted ponds
A late November pea-fog sharp, invisible scenes …

We came straggling to Malviya Nagar in twos
Threes, struggling the British pushed out
Our country free but this old Sahib remains
Stuck in a lane behind the Blind Institute deaf
He cannot hear their canes tap, tap, tapping …

Canes painted white trellised plants at Sissinghurst
Summer's mating swans the enclosures of his boyhood …

To us he is like newspapers black on whiteness
Old papers we use in our shops to wrap up goods
Then torn and crumpled tossed into a corner!
Or used to light our Diwali fires only, we cannot

Read him we tell our troubles on the Gurdwara steps
He speaks to no one and no one will weep for him
When his time comes No one but the Sahib's bearer
For forty years Kirpal Singh tended the dumb old man
Loved him but the truth is that for us he never really lived …

Snow at Sissinghurst soft as a woman, feathers
In her hat, laughing dandelions in the spring …

He calls his house White Haven we do not give
Our houses names still, in one way or another
Partition broke us all this place of garbage dumps
And desolate smiles is not ours we refugees know
The dust never settles in the heart's deserts it rises
Chokingly this is not written in the guidebooks:
Khirki Masjid kisses the moon but a refugee

Grows crooked neither like gulmohar nor chinar
Nor like the Qutub, pitiless sword dividing the sky …

It seems clear enough that writing poetry about a city—its current refugee hordes or the ghosts of its troubled past—does not entitle one to claim roots in it. But what does? My own simple conjectures about the processes that confer ‘rights’ to a place include the following. First, the desire to include it in one’s dreams of the future; second, the sacrifice of one’s present time and energy towards its well-being; and third, the need to return to it as the site of one’s past however far one roams and however attractive other destinations might be. On all these counts—future, present and past—there’s no doubt in my mind that I have signally failed Delhi. I have not only not stood *by* it, I have not stood *in* it. Even as I have lived there, I have walked away from it and the seething undertow of its problems. Delhi has been for me a forever absent city. I have never cared to weep for her.

Deadend in Denmark?

Well, all those ugly, uneven gaps in my poem were meant, I suppose, to serve as visual signals of the impossibility of making satisfactory connections in Delhi. But is it not my own isolationist, academic gaze that renders me so unfit? My landlord in Malviya Nagar, a genuine Sikh who ‘bought’ his land in Malviya Nagar from the Government for the magnificent sum of two rupees and remains unswervingly loyal to Nehru and the Congress, has a different vision—far truer, tougher and unutterably more tragic.

Ajit Singh is a huge Vesuvius of a man, calm and gentle for the most part but prone to an occasional, shattering eruption. When we first rented the apartment on the first floor of his home, he told us that even at the height of the 1984 riots, when Sikhs were targeted throughout Delhi, Malviya Nagar was a model of brotherhood. His own unlikely profession of manufacturing—of all things—billiard tables had long flourished, and he did business with the highest in the land. There were pictures on the mantelpiece of him with Indira and Rajiv Gandhi in Rashtrapati Bhavan to prove this. Also, other pictures of a large and contented family—sons and sons-in-law, smiling daughters in sparkling dupattas and milling grandchildren. It seemed impossible that anything could happen to change the even tenor of this happy existence …

But Delhi is as capable of a swift brutality as any contemporary metropolis—New York, Tehran, Johannesburg. In November 1993, Ajit Singh's daughter, son-in-law and two sturdy grandsons aged six and three were all summarily murdered in their apartment in Vasant Kunj.

We shielded our children's eyes. Tegh and Malta had been friends with my own son and daughter. I quickly contacted my employers to ask if there was housing, any housing at all, available on the IIT campus. In short, typical of my class, I sought an immediate escape route from the scene of carnage. Hamlet in Denmark, also on the subject of familial murder: conscience makes cowards of us all. As a mere tenant, an uninvolved witness, I could invoke one of those several identities that a middle-class life in the city permitted, and simply flee—bag, baggage and children. But who would shield the eyes of Ajit Singh's wife, a spirited woman who wore glittering diamonds in her ears until the very last? True, she had recently developed cancer but that might have been amenable to treatment. What broke her entirely was the news of the Vasant Kunj deaths. Within a few days, she, too, died, wounded by forces far more ferocious than cancer. Then, in quick succession, another of Ajit Singh's daughters developed a brain tumour while his son broke a femur. Delhi had managed to strain the endurance of a small, random subset of its citizens almost beyond belief. *When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.*[6]

It was literally as if an angel of death had flown over our secluded bylane in Malviya Nagar. The people in the house opposite simultaneously got involved in a property dispute that lead to an old man being shot dead by goondas on a motorbike almost before our eyes. Left behind as evidence: only his twin rubber chappals pathetically separated by a spill of blood on the tarmac. And a few days later, the armed guard parked by the courts outside the house of this old man shot himself in the head—again, no explanation.

Nor was the suspected murderer of Ajit Singh's daughter's family—a policeman's son—held for long. There was insufficient evidence against him, said our systems of justice. To ration and to rationalize the 'facts', as I mentioned before, seemed to have been honed to a fine art in Delhi, august seat of the Supreme Court of India. The criticism is valid of course that writing about incidents like the ones above amounts to mere sensationalism. These things happen in big cities—a Jessica Lal or Phoolan Devi shot ('they deserved it');

bystanders mown down by an admiral's grandson plying his imported BMW ('he couldn't help it'); a whole family, including children, murdered ('but we don't know the circumstances'). As for the rest of the events I have narrated, they are mere coincidences, not typical of Delhi in any respect. Sickness, accident, the willingness to go to any lengths over a piece of lucrative property—these are attendants of the human condition. They could happen anywhere. So why drag them into an essay on Delhi?

Logic tells me that I should concede this point, but my gut tells me that it is important to investigate the links between the pervasive indifference of Delhi and the violence that the city generates. After all, it was that same self-serving instinct that made me run from the terrible goings-on in Malviya Nagar and protect my own family rather than stay on and console the grieving Ajit Singh (though I am not so arrogant as to suppose he needed our help). And where did I flee to? It was—predictably—to the safe haven of the IIT, properly protected by corporate security.

Contingent they might be, but in contrast to the brash 'celebrity culture' of the city, it is these petty facts about Delhi that seem to me essential—precisely because you and me, indeed anyone at all, can get caught up in them without warning. In the rest of this essay, therefore, I will try and present a thesis that seeks to explain the particular species of alienation that Delhi imposes on its citizens. I would indeed want to argue that I am especially well placed to investigate this phenomenon, for the critics who commented on my Malviya Nagar poem got me wrong all right! I am no brave Sardarni. If someone like me 'belongs' to any tradition, it is that of the hated and despised bureaucratic 'servants' who rule Delhi from the safety of several anonymous fortresses—walled cities.

'Bounded in a Nutshell'[7]

According to the authorities, Shahjahanabad is the walled city of Delhi, its centre the wondrous Chandi Chowk, its eastern boundary the Red Fort, its western landmark Fatehpur Mosque and its northern citadel the Kashmiri Gate. In this essay, however, I will suggest that the tradition of the walled city has taken on amazing new guises in post-colonial Delhi. As all significant concepts do, the 'siege mentality' of walls has worked its way into the very fabric of citizens'

thoughts, desires and beliefs. Delhi, in short, is bustling with walled enclosures —some in the shape of grandly visible architectural follies and some in the subtle contours of the systems of exclusion and hierarchy set up all over this highly politicized metropolis.

As the true post-colonial heir of the derelict Englishman in my poem, let me begin by citing those glass walls of language through which class is indicated in the city. For example, it is my simple contention that the imperial 'colony' (e.g. Defence Colony), the 'enclave' (Sarvodaya Enclave), the 'estate' (Lodi Estate) and the 'park' (Gulmohar Park) still tend to house the elite and the western-educated, while the suffixes vihar, nagar, pur and puri (Sarita Vihar, Soami Nagar, Shadipur and Govindpuri) imply a more mixed population, ranging from the upwardly mobile middle classes to impoverished tenement dwellers. There are, doubtless, exceptions to these broad swathes of discriminatory nomenclature, but on the whole even the most sophisticated of Delhiites have internalized these distinctions and use words like 'colony' to describe the invisible walls that girt their dwelling places with no hint of irony.

A preliminary exercise for the initiated: name seven significant walled loci in modern Delhi—and I must admit I have no reason for fixating on the number seven here, except for a tangential association with the seven legendary cities of Delhi. Specimen answer, below:

1. The private colonies (complete with clanging gates, chowkidars wielding lathis and midnight curfews; to be found all over the city)
2. The official residences of Members of Parliament and the bureaucratic boffins (also equipped with impressive gates, armed guards etc. but minus curfews; to be found mostly in Lutyens' central Delhi)
3. The ministerial offices and bhavans ('Leave your umbrellas, bags, arms, sticks and stones here' says the notice at the entrance to Parliament)
4. The hotels (marbled palaces of our time, focal points for guzzling, revelry and business intrigues)
5. The forts, tombs and gardens (haunting reminders of Delhi's walled past, tucked away in the interstices of its present; e.g. Jamali-Kamali or the Lodi garden and tombs)
6. The centres of high cultural life and the ever-expanding peripheries of slums (notably the India International Centre or IIC and the India Habitat Centre or IHC in the former category and Govindpuri, Jamuna Pushta, Shadipur etc. in the latter)
7. The universities and institutions of 'higher' learning (Delhi University or DU, the Jawaharlal Nehru University or JNU, the Indian Institute of Technology or IIT and so forth).

Of all these locations, I shall now describe arguably the most 'modern' of the walled sites listed above, namely the Indian Institute of Technology. My purpose

in choosing the IIT is threefold: one, I live within its boundaries; two, it illustrates well the way in which the concept of a walled space has been adapted to meet the demands of 'modernity'; and three, it is unlikely that, despite its international reputation, it would figure in anyone else's litany of Delhi's hotspots!

Like the castled interiors of Hamlet's Elsinore, the IITs contain a culture of the intellect that is viewed with envy, desire and pride by its country's citizens. During the half-century since Independence, the acronym IIT has become a name to conjure with, a mantra of success throughout the country. Although these incantatory letters stand for nothing more electrifying than the staid 'Indian Institute of Technology', they summon up an entire myth of modernity. For, the technologists produced at these premier institutes constituted by an Act of Parliament (next only to an Act of God!) receive a training that seems to equip them to virtually *make* their world. Epitomes of the tool-using mammal, they may begin as hatchlings in Delhi but their wings are designed to span the globe. The Delhi IIT, in particular, symbolizes the Nehruvian dream of a progressive India in the heart of its capital.

What goes on in any walled city? It is the continuous creation of a self-sufficient microcosm—complete with shops, living quarters, hierarchical divisions, work units, gossip, jealousies, ambitions and shared laughter. When such a walled enclosure exists within the bounds of a greater city, it has a double function. It must let in, or mirror, this external city, as well as retain its distinctive character. In the case of IIT, Delhi, this means that it has to ensure that it is seen as an oasis of calm and ordered activity amidst ringing chaos; strikes, confusions and anger may rend the rest of the metropolis but IIT remains functional. At the same time, the institution must somehow connect with the external contours of Delhi. How does IIT achieve this?

Let's begin with the look of this campus. Unlike the wild bougainvillea-entranced terrain of the neighbouring JNU with its rocky ups and downs and intemperate nilgai, the Delhi IIT is set amidst flat, manicured lawns. Its 320-acre area boasts no wild beasts, only pretty peacocks and certain other coquettish and superior avian species. Set amid this unthreatening landscape, its Main Structure —or MS, as it is known in the no-nonsense IITian language—is built of reinforced concrete, rfc, a building material signalling strength and functionality.

I was told by an architect once to observe the MS carefully. ‘It sits,’ he pointed out to me, ‘atop the landscape, like so many Corbusier-inspired buildings.’ Symbolizing a magisterial ‘ship of learning’, such a structure commands; it does not integrate. It stands proudly apart from the surrounding seas. Blending into the background is not its style, nor are concessions made to aesthetic longings by such an erection. From which it follows that the teachers and students who operate here are drawn willy-nilly into accepting an ideology set in reinforced concrete—an unbending ideology of distance and difference.

In effect, IIT, Delhi connects architecturally with the rest of the city by being a smarter and more efficient version of the government bhavans and administrative ‘blocks’ of Lutyens’ imperial Delhi. One of my students, Ramnik Bajaj, described the mentality spawned by the structural constraints of the walled city of IIT thus:

> The otherwise uncommunicative IITian emerges highly opinionated when amongst his peers. The architecture of the IIT hostels ensures the dominance of the ‘wing’. A wing is a group of seventeen rooms that are arranged facing a common closed corridor. Every wing enjoys an identity through the close association of its residents. In fact, a wing becomes an entity to the extent that questions like ‘Should X be thrown out of the wing’, or ‘Should Y be accepted into the wing’ are commonplace at the time of allotment of rooms every year. The wing is the locus of discussion, debate, conference and contention in the hostels.

Questions of identity and difference are quite clearly the staple of negotiations within a walled city, bravely supported by its architecture, that odd blend of the awesome and the plebian.

Another classical feature of this kind of city is its ‘gates’. For instance, the ‘public’ can enter the precincts of IIT—and residents leave!—only through these strongly fortified gates, and sometimes only after being severely cross-questioned about ‘who they are’. Indeed this is the prime raison d’être of any walled city: to reinforce a public-private divide by boldly announcing its power to be both different and—indifferent.

From Kashmiri Gate to IIT Gate—my argument would be that this terminology of ‘gates’ is no accident. It is part of the ongoing history of the creation of walled cities by the elite of Delhi. Few would fail to recognize the landmark of IIT Gate on Outer Ring Road. Those who have actually gone further and visited, or lived, in the place, are likely to arrive first at the aforementioned MS. As I have already indicated, this structure was designed by an associate of

Le Corbusier, the same French architect who once famously described a house as ‘a machine for living’. And much the same thought might apply to institutions, particularly those that produce graduates who make their living out of machines!

Any tour through IIT, Delhi, would probably begin with the foyer of its main building—cool, grey, impersonal and clean, a perfect entry point into a technocratic universe. To its right, a large auditorium; on the left, tucked away, the computer facilities.

Between the two, but veering slightly towards the computer end of things, are the lifts—one of the pair of them often malfunctioning. Meant to take perhaps seven or eight people at most, they usually squeeze in considerably more. However, this must be true, I suppose, of almost every lift in India, so our predicament is no more metaphorical in IIT than elsewhere. What’s unusual about the IIT lifts, however, is their situational sandwiching: between the symbolic seminar hall, locale of cultural crosstalk, and the zone of computer activities, powerhouse of the twenty-first century engineer. And then—there is the marble plaque set right next to them.

Given that perhaps the heaviest human traffic in all of IIT, Delhi, goes past its lifts, many entrants into IIT’s walled portals must have absent-mindedly read its engraved words. They bear the legend, both in Hindi and in English:

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY DELHI
THIS FOUNDATION STONE WAS LAID BY
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH, K.G.
ON THE 27TH JANUARY, 1959.

Much history is contained in this tacit inscription. The colonial heritage of technology in India is evident from the fact that more than a decade after the final dissolution of empire, the foundation stone for a technological college is still being laid by a Royal Highness from Britain. The date tells us that the Duke did the honours a day after Republic Day was celebrated. Perhaps he was in Delhi for the ceremonies; but whether he was or not, it remains that one is routinely reminded by this writing on the wall about the origins of our most treasured technological learning. Gandhi and Nehru, idealistic architects of the India we now inhabit, would both have noticed the irony.

It’s all very well to say that nobody reads notices on walls and that, anyway, colonial history is over and done with. My point is that we don’t need to read the inscription; it has been subconsciously absorbed. It’s there in the bones. To get at the psyche of IIT engineers—as a removed but representative section of Delhi’s power base—it is not enough to observe them pottering around among the computer facilities, working out spreadsheets, fingering email, mastering FORTRAN and inventing nasty little viruses. Moving on from the modest darshan sthal of the founding moment of IIT’s walled city, let me now supply the reader with another example of the ‘Delhiite’ nature of IIT—a concrete example would be, I guess, an apt phrase to use.

Try, if you will, to fill in an ordinary Travel Allowance (TA) form in IIT. You will be surprised to learn that it queries the amount you are to claim if you happen to be travelling by camel (or, equally bizarre, by canal, in some versions!). It also tells you what the rules are for claiming second-class fare (without meals) on steamers, not to mention distance travelled by trolley! Which era are we in? Well, it doesn’t require much acumen to guess that this form has been handed down practically unchanged from British times. I would conjecture that the same Macaulay who drafted the Indian Penal Code still in use today, was also responsible for these travel rules.

Our clerks of the Government of independent India have simply added air travel to the list of possible conveyances, but changed little else in the cumbersome format of a TA form devised in the nineteenth century. What does this show? It shows that, despite their flirtation with computers, despite that gleaming foyer and the constant talk of efficiency, the ‘IIT boys’ as much as anyone nurtured in an official institute in our country remain in the grip of a bureaucratic mentality. They have to contend with the regime of the paperchase just as helplessly as any of us. The obfuscatory rites of colonial administration, designed to keep everyone out except for those few who hold the reins, are with us still. And nowhere is this malaise more evident than in Delhi.

Why have forms like this not been changed to allow greater transparency? It is not only because of institutional inertia. The reasons could go deeper. One, so indelible is the bureaucratic impression on Delhi’s soul that we appear to have lost the ability even to notice that such forms need drastic changing. Two, demanding simplifications and/or other changes in ‘the system’ could well

boomerang. One day when the IIT undergraduate is himself a powerful technocrat, he could lose the wonderful advantages that this walled system provides for those at the top. In short, to make changes in a formally ordered, historically legitimized universe becomes more and more disadvantageous the higher up you are on an official ladder. And if there are a couple of beliefs on which there seems to be universal agreement, they are that the IITians belong ‘at the top’, and that they are no fools. As future technocrats, within the IAS or in charge of any of our massive scientific establishments, they’ve subconsciously absorbed the lessons of history.

Complicated rules, backed up by even more complicated forms, can be a source of great and lasting power. In Delhi, hoary capital in repeated reincarnations, this is always a foundational premise. This is a city whose function is to turn all of us into remote babus, removed by writ from the sufferings of those unfortunates who bang at the gates from the ‘outside’.

Long after the colonizers have left, their language of power remains safely protected inside our best institutions and inside the hearts and minds of the best students produced in independent India. That’s why the recent ‘abolishment’ of the ‘licence/quota’ Raj and the programme of liberalization may not meet the high hopes generated. It’s easy to substitute one set of papers with another but ideologies are harder to reverse. Why should the elite care to re-frame rules that, on balance, protect them? If decolonization were so easy, we’d have decolonized long ago, but as Alvares argues, it is precisely among those who are trained in cutting-edge technologies that the colonial mentality goes deepest.

Let’s ask ourselves again—why was it the Duke of Edinburgh who laid the foundation stone of IIT, Delhi? It wasn’t just that IIT, Delhi, was initiated with British aid, or that the Duke was a distinguished friend of India, cousin of Lord Mountbatten, who happened to be here for the Republic Day parade. It was because he was logically the most appropriate person. The Duke’s foundation stone, as I’ve mentioned before, is placed, with amazing metaphoric felicity, right next to the IIT lifts—which brings us to the matter of upward mobility.

Upward mobility: a beloved phrase in the lexicon of the Delhiite, as it was once in that of the energetic colonizer. But what is the current state of the IIT, Delhi, lifts? Short answer: overcrowded, badly maintained, slow. They symbolize, I believe, the nature of governmental rewards. A technocrat would no

doubt rise in government service but the ride would not be particularly cushy or comfortable. For in India, as in many post-colonial states, the system was simply overburdened.

Clearly, then, staying within the system is a bad bet, if meteoric rise is what one is after. The canny IITian has already worked this one out. Like the earliest colonizing forces in India, the mercenaries, he is ready to sell his undoubted skills wherever they are most rewarded. It follows that there is, and always was, very little chance that the average go-ahead IIT graduate would be masochistic enough to choose to utilize his techno-managerial talents in low-paid government jobs, so why bother at all to tangle with governmental rules? A far more viable alternative to 'challenging' these rules had presented itself long ago to the sharp brain of the IIT engineer: namely, removing himself literally, body and soul, from India and its limitations and taking NRI routes to America, UK, Europe. Failing which, the next best thing is place oneself with a private company, preferably an internationally based one. A professional recognizes no boundaries.

Fourteen out of seventeen students in his hostel wing, Ramnik informed me blithely, were planning to leave India; the remaining three would probably do the IAS. What about our economic programme of liberalization and a changed work culture, I asked. Wouldn't that act as an incentive for them to stay behind, be with their families and still make big money? Ramnik was sceptical. That's just another avenue for being able to leave, he said, smiling indulgently at my naïvete. The word 'wing' had a double meaning, he reminded me!

Images of flight superimposed on images of architectural containment: how did these two 'wings' cohere? One learns from one's students. It occurred to me from Ramnik's sign-posting that living in a walled city like IIT enables one a sort of 'escape' from the pressures of the world outside, but it also mentally prepares one for a greater escape—this time from a utopia with a small 'u' to a bigger Utopia. The flight paths from Delhi to Dallas, from IIT to MIT are charted, as it were, from the moment students entered the hallowed gates of the institution. Delhi is a city of immigrants and the post-colonial engineer from IIT just embodies its latest and most gifted immigrant strain. He is Delhi facing westwards …

‘Something is Rotten’[8]

Of all the western cities I have been to, Odense seems to me most unlike Delhi. I cannot for a moment imagine an IIT Delhi graduate migrating to it! The city Delhi most resembles, on the other hand, is Athens—with its monumental, crumbling history strewn all around, its ramshackle, seething present. Athens, possessed of a stunning museum of antiquities, and casually laying on son et lumiere shows for its visitors at the Parthenon—just as we do at the Red Fort; Athens, whose citizens feasted on the creamiest yoghurt and drank the hottest tea —a city just as unselfconscious about its epic past as is Delhi. Yet I could not imagine an IITian leaving his walled enclosure for Athens either! What the IITian wanted was a utopia of the future, unburdened by too much memory, a country like America where not a single building is more than four centuries old —most, less.

The character of a city is determined by the behaviour and ambitions of its citizens. In this essay, I have attempted to look closely at a low-profile but high-achievement segment of such citizens. Young and dynamic as these info-warriors are, my observations imply that they too subscribe to that immigrant psychology of flight that is Delhi’s destiny. From within their walled city, they too seem eternally committed to hatching further plots of escape.

Like Athens or Rome, Delhi is careless of its history, but the fact that it, like them, has been a threshold of civilization for millennia inevitably haunts it. I remember reading, with Ramnik’s class, Umberto Eco’s disquisition on how the *limen* (or, in our context, dehli) was conceptualized in Western history. An extract from that text:

> The Latin obsession with spatial limits goes right back to legend of the foundation of Rome. Romulus draws a boundary line and kills his brother for failing to respect it. If boundaries are not recognized, there can be no civitas … The ideology of the Pax Romana … the force of the empire, is in knowing on which borderland, between which limen or threshold, the defensive line would be set up. If the time ever comes when there is no longer a clear definition of boundaries, and the barbarians (nomads who have abandoned their original territory, and move about on any territory as if it was their own, ready to abandon that too) succeed in imposing their nomadic view, then Rome will be finished … Julius Caesar, in crossing the Rubicon, not only knows that he is committing sacrilege but knows that, once he has committed it, there is no turning back. *Alea iacta est* … What has been done can never be erased. [Even] God cannot violate the logical principle whereby ‘p has occurred’ and ‘p has not occurred’ would appear to be in contradiction … This model of Greek and Latin rationalism is the one that still dominates mathematics, logic, science and computer programming.

Just as I had written earlier of the significance of the Duke's foundation stone embedded in the heart of IIT, Delhi, Eco writes of the founding of another walled city—Rome. Obligingly, he makes it even easier for me by mentioning 'mathematics, logic, science and computer programming' in connection with the setting up of intellectual as well as physical boundaries. For the walled city constructed for the modern monastic order of the students of IIT, pride of India's youth, specializes in exactly this aspect of learning—a learning which will take them as far as they want to go in fulfillment of their immigrant destinies. As Eco emphasizes, however, always on the other side of a boundary—whether we call it a seema, a lakshman rekha or kalapani, as in our myths, or simply a wall—lies fear and danger.

Most disturbing of all are the boundary-crossers, Eco's 'nomads' or barbarians —who make their home on both sides of the boundary but belong to neither. With these nomad adventurers, Delhi has had a long acquaintance. Take Timur, sweeping through Delhi in 1398, leaving behind him mounds of skulls and the reek of conquest. Today, Delhi still boasts of the Turkman Gate, named for Timur.

IIT Gate already exists—a modernist equivalent of an earlier site of kingly ambition and aspiration; and it is, I suspect, just a matter of time before we put up a Bureaucrats' Gate, a Civil Servants' Gate or a Parliament Gate, for they would surely be Delhi's answer to Watergate! Delhi's way of commemorating her nomad hordes, her settlers and the enterprise of her immigrants, in short, is consistent. She furiously erects walls and gates. As with many ancient kingdoms, including Rome, she retains this mode as one of her chief strategies for spatially marking her history, her visible contribution to the culture of India and the world. With post-colonial groups like the IITians, whose dwelling place I have depicted in so much excruciating detail here, Delhi is now going further and producing her own cosmopolitan nomads, her brand-label boundary-crossers. This, too, is part of her destiny.

Edward Braithwaite, the African poet, wrote of yet another legendary city, Timbuktu, his birthplace, whose walls rose 'so certain, so secure'. Delhi's walls are the opposite—insecure, uncertain and under threat of deadly danger. It was this open secret about Delhi that Ajit Singh of Malviya Nagar learnt to his sorrow and it is this insidious worry that causes even its gifted contemporary

princes, the IIT graduates, to persuade themselves into aspiring to a permanent absence from the city. Delhi is, in this sense, true Hamlet territory. Incidentally, I should point out here that the only journal in the world devoted exclusively to this single text, entitled *Hamlet Studies* and edited devotedly by Rupin Desai of Delhi University, emanates from Delhi! The journal has sustained itself for over two decades now, and in my view, not entirely without reason. For, it could be maintained with some truth that a Polonius lurks behind every arras in Delhi and the sad, revengeful ghosts of long-dead kings still haunt the city's streets. Indeed, at the beginning of this essay I had mentioned Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Ramchandra Gandhi's derivation for Delhi; now, towards its end, I refer to him again for his celebration of just this unreliable, myth-haunted aspect of Delhi's gated city:

> 'Delhi is 'Dehali', i.e. 'threshold', 'gateway', glorious etymological truth of the capital of India, deeply embedded in its samsaric imperial heart and trivial bureaucratic self-images and centrist complacency, likely to be quite drowned in the flood of five-star freebooting now overtaking it. But in its occult and occasional unfallenness, what is Delhi, a threshold, a gateway, to? Let us supplicate its ancient King and Queen, Yudhishtira and Draupadi for an answer. The Delhi (all right, Indraprastha) that they had fought for and won … was certainly a gateway to samrajya, imperial power. But Delhi … is also a threshold to Himalaya … the samrajya of eternal wisdom … *Dehali ki jai*!

Whatever happens, Dehali be praised! It is no accident, after all, that the Delhiite's favourite twin phrases are: *chalo, thik hai and sab chalta hai* ('never mind' and 'everything goes'). I have heard these words again and again from Haryanvi mechanics, Punjabi matrons, Sindhi salesmen. Any spill of disaster, it appears, can be countered by Delhiites invoking these karmic, talismanic words!

As a threshold city, systems of morality and permanent value are in general subservient to rules of expedience and immediate commerce in Delhi. The clamorous language of 'import-export' is privileged by Delhiites, whether the goods consist of market products or human capital. Seasonal travellers from Bhutan, silver-ankled Rajasthanis, vegetable farmers depositing their stocks in sabzi mandi, ambitious academics from the deep south, itinerant labourers from Bihar—everyone can come and pitch his tent here. This is both the source of the city's banyan-tree greatness and its appalling record of apathy. With a population of thirteen million or thereabouts, Delhi is possibly the fastest growing city in India, which strains its resources beyond belief. And it has probably been heading this way from the time Delhi was Yudhishtir's mythic Indraprastha!

Hence, the endless fantasies of ‘the walled city’ in Delhi, the desire for a place of escape in a city of no escape.

It is true that *I* appear to have escaped to a kind of timeless zone in Odense for the time being, but the respite is only temporary. The rest is not silence. Delhi follows me even here; and in my quiet Danish hostelry—where night magically mimics afternoon—the mills of memory tumble in my head. I cannot help but recall that other ‘midnight hour’ when Jawaharlal Nehru—the same hopeless dreamer who saw the ‘IIT system’ as one that would produce not just world-class technologists but caring citizens—delivered his unforgettable speech from the walls of the Red Fort.

On that 15 August 1947, Delhi was the historic location where India’s entry into a world of ‘light and freedom’ was celebrated, and its ‘tryst with destiny’ ratified during ‘the dead vast and middle of night’[9], as the prescient text of *Hamlet* terms it. Delhi was the city to which all of India looked. But have the walls closed in since then, have the gates swung shut? This *to be or not to be* question, practical as well as moral, confronts each benighted citizen of Delhi today: Ajit Singh, Ramnik, myself. Far from the madding crowds of the city, however—my perspective no doubt distorted by distance—a sudden, epiphanic hope for us all seems to suffuse my thoughts as the clear Danish sunlight seeps into my room at midnight …

Across the River: Noida

SAM MILLER

This extract is taken from Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity.

I was, for the first time in Delhi, part of a huge crowd of walkers. There were mainly Bihari migrants, many thousands of them, of all ages, heading towards the Yamuna river for the religious festival of Chhath. They had reclaimed the roads, bringing all traffic to a halt, swarming around the stationary cars, peering in through the tinted windows at discontented businessmen trying to reach the satellite city of Noida across the river. The walkers veered off down a dust track towards the river bank and I pushed forward, sidestepping the amblers, trying to get to the front. I spotted a gap in the crowd, and moved stealthily into it, imagining myself to be waif-like. But I tripped over a leg, and went sprawling in the dust, next to a near-naked man who was lying on his stomach and seemed even more surprised to see me than I was to see him. The gap I had spotted was not in fact a gap, but the space the crowd had given to the man I was now lying next to. He jumped to his feet, in one lithe movement, and moved forward two paces. Then, to my further consternation, he threw himself to the ground again, raising a spectacular cloud of dust that briefly concealed him. He was like a human yo-yo, spending alternate periods of five seconds lying on the floor, before leaping to his feet, and then plunging back down to the ground. And each time he lay on his stomach, he would move his arms forwards, and mark the Delhi dust with an outstretched finger, and then, when upright, would move his feet to this mark, before diving, like a footballer trying to win a penalty, to the ground again. He was, unsurprisingly, making slow progress, and was far too busy prostrating himself to talk to me. A fellow pedestrian, carrying a large basket of fruit and vegetables on her head, and trying to stop her children from imitating the human yo-yo, told me that he must have committed a serious sin

and had been told by a priest to do penance in this way. We began to talk. She told me she was new to Delhi, though her husband had lived in the city for several years, working on construction sites. She had left her village in Bihar because her husband now earned enough to rent a small room for them and their three children. She told me she wanted to leave the village because the schools were better in Delhi; but she'd had problems getting her children into school. The head-teacher had wanted a bribe. Today was a holiday, but her husband's employer wouldn't give him time off work. Each member of the family had a new set of clothes, and at sunset they would make offerings of fruit and vegetables to the sun-god on the banks of the Yamuna.

I forged ahead and stepping out from behind some trees was startled to see a truly extraordinary scene, as if from a Hollywood version of a Biblical epic. The river banks were invisible; they had disappeared beneath waves of humanity; hordes of people as far as I could see, brightly dressed in crimsons and saffrons and turquoises, and all facing in the same direction. I could not see any land at all, and very little water. Many worshippers were standing up to their chests in the shallows of the chill autumn river, holding coconuts and garlands of marigolds, and staring at the setting sun. But strangest of all were what appeared to be huge snowdrifts floating on the surface of the river, as if a melting Antarctic ice-shelf had drifted up the Yamuna. It has never snowed in Delhi, and the snowdrifts, I later learned, were a poisonous bubble-bath of blinding-white froth, created by pollutants spilled into the river at a nearby weir. Small rowing boats sliced their way through the froth, delivering worshippers to an invisible island in the middle of the river, entirely hidden from view by the crowds that were standing on dry land and in the water.

Chhath is Delhi's largest outdoor gathering. But because it is a festival celebrated mainly by poor migrant workers, the affluent Anglophones of south Delhi (except those stuck in their cars) are almost entirely unaware of it. Migration is changing this city, though, and Chhathcelebrants are now part of what is probably Delhi's largest community, the people of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh who refer to themselves as Poorvanchalis. * Delhi's politicians do know the electoral importance of the Poorvanchalis and will try to visit as many stretches of the river bank as possible, and pay for huge advertising hoardings,

featuring their own photograph and obsequious declarations of their deep reverence for the festival of Chhath.

A gerrymandering tongue of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, crosses the river by road bridge, and surreptitiously licks the eastern banks of the Yamuna. By looking over my shoulder, at the battered, faded 'Welcome to Delhi' signs, I know that I have left the capital. The bridge goes to Noida, a new urban centre, officially outside Delhi's city limits, but contiguous with the capital, and part of what's known as the National Capital Region. Noida has a population of more than half a million—and is probably the world's most populous acronym. It was born in 1976 as the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority, a largely greenfield site, parcelled up into 168 sectors, many of which are still being developed. It briefly captured the attention of the international media in 2005, with the proposed construction of the world's tallest building, to a design that bore a striking resemblance to the Disney version of Cinderella's castle. 'Penis envy' was the scathing headline in one of India's best-known blogs. When it was pointed out that the area is earthquake-prone, and that its soil is sandy, the glory-seekers of Noida quietly shelved this attempt to get into the Guinness Book of Records (there is no category for populous acronyms).

In the dying days of 2006, the media returned. They were visiting Noida's 'House of Horrors', not a funfair ride, but a quiet suburban residence, in Sector 31, where the decomposing body parts of more than twenty people, most of them children, had been found. Two men were arrested—the house-owner and his manservant. There was a New Year media frenzy, with tales, some true, some false, of cannibalism, vampirism, organ-selling and necrophilia. The house-owner, it turned out, was well-connected, and educated at elite Indian schools. The TV stations tracked down his former classmates, who scratched their heads to find anything interesting to say about him. His son blamed the servant. The servant's wife blamed her husband's employers. The parents of the dead grieved in front of the TV cameras, and a hypnotized, disbelieving public were interviewed in the streets and the shopping malls by bright-as-a-button reporters. 'How could this happen?' asked the voice of the people. 'Because no one listened to us,' responded the grieving parents. It gradually emerged that the police had ignored the parents, had sent them away when they tried to report

their missing children. Most of the parents were low-caste and poor, and seemed unsurprised, though very angry, at the way the police had treated them.

I hurriedly skirted Noida. It had become, temporarily, a synonym for serial killing. And Delhi's politicians seemed delighted that the killings had happened on someone else's turf. Noida is neither Delhi, nor not-Delhi. It is a protrusion into Delhi's natural space, a kink in the city limits. It certainly feels like the rest of the capital. But because Delhi has no jurisdiction here, it is a place with even weaker planning laws, where many of those escaping from the sealing laws have relocated. Factories cravenly pump bilious smoke into the atmosphere, and there is a very significant (for a walker) lack of pavements. One main road did have a pavement—and a man who appeared to be guarding a yellow bucket. I peered inside. The bucket was full of water, submerged in which was a large and varied collection of wristwatches. I asked the bucket's guardian why the watches were underwater. He looked at me as if I was very stupid, and said with a look of disdain, 'because they're waterproof'. As a regular purchaser of cheap and unreliable waterproof watches, I had never been shown such evidence of their effectiveness, and asked the price. *Paintis*—Rs 35. I couldn't believe the price: it was as if I'd been offered a Salvador Dali for twenty dollars. I was too stunned to bargain and handed over the money, less than the cost of two cigarettes in London. The watch had a smart utilitarian black plastic finish, and told the time. Ever since I've taken pleasure in asking my more plutocratic, materialistic friends to guess how much my watch cost compared to theirs.

As I examined my new purchase, using my fingernails to detach a sliver of loose plastic, a convoy of television outside broadcast vans drove past, heading for the House of Horrors. Relatives of the dead children were holding a public protest against the police. But Sector 31 was not on my route, and I was secretly relieved: the house and the drains outside had become a macabre tourist destination for the people of Delhi. And the 'tourists' were shown glum-faced on TV, helping to look for bone fragments in the open drains, as if panning for gold. 'Sicko', as my children might say; though still not one-hundredth as sicko as the original crime. In all my time in Delhi, nothing has shocked its inhabitants so much as the Noida killings. But no one quite dares mention the worst of it: these children, all children of the poor, were tortured in terrible ways before they died;

dismembered, according to one account, while they were still alive. Panning for bones might be one way of dealing with the trauma.

As the weeks passed, the coverage of the Noida killings disappeared into the inside pages, and spawned a series of sidebar stories. Noida's reputation, as a middle-class sanctuary for those who can't afford south Delhi prices, has been badly damaged. House prices dipped dramatically, and some local residents have called, successfully, it seems, for the media to refer to the 'Nithari' killings after the Noida slum where most of the victims lived. Then there is the great drain debate—in which it was pointed out that if the drains had been covered, as many local residents had been demanding, the body parts might never have been found. Others point out that if the drains has been cleared more regularly then the body-count would never have reached double digits. And the great death penalty debate has returned, with Afzal Guru still hanging out on death row. The Internet news forum sadists are back on form, demanding that the 'killers' should be executed without trial. One of them says, 'give them wounds that could not be healed, let them rot by the roadside to be eaten by stray dogs'; another demands that they be treated like the children they killed, and be cut into small pieces by the relatives of the victims—though *lex talionis* doesn't appear to extend as far as cannibalism. Most bizarre of all was the way the alleged killers themselves became victims, when making a regulation courtroom appearance. A group of lawyers dealing with other cases heard that the Noida killers were in the building and rampaged through the corridors searching for them, in full view of the TV cameras. The manservant was wearing a balaclava and managed to avoid being identified by the lawyers. The house owner was less fortunate. The lawyers pulled at his arms, as if they wished to dismember him; they grabbed his hair and his beard. He collapsed on the ground, unconscious, and shielded from the lawyers, but not from the TV cameras, by some terrified policemen, who stretchered him off to hospital.

Inauguration

JAANU NAGAR, BABLI RAI, SHAMSHER ALI AND SURAJ RAI

Translated by Shveta Sarda, this piece has been written by the young writers of the Cybermohalla Collective. Since mid-2006, these writers have been questioning, gathering, conversing, writing and unravelling the new 'resettlement colony' of Sawda-Ghevra, emerging in the northern frontier of Delhi. These writings can be read as much as a record of a time and place, as of the act of making and thinking together.

1

Recognizing the pitch of the whistle, a flock of pigeons turned sharply in its flight, waylaying a few pigeons of a neighbouring flock startled by this sudden intersection. The boy continued to whistle, guiding his pigeons towards himself. He scattered grain on the roof on which he stood. Their wings flapping furiously, the pigeons alighted on the roof. The boy counted them while they pecked lustily at the grains. Each time he spotted a pigeon from another flock amidst his own, he grabbed it and pushed it into a cage. Then he set his own pigeons free to fly once again in the sky.

An old mendicant walked through E-block with his monkey, asking for alms. Young children trailed the monkey. The monkey growled, assumed postures to frighten them away. Asserting their claim over their territory, a pack of local dogs circled the monkey. Fear and play interlaced. In life, some live with modest, others with momentous fears. And there are those too, who are weighed down by fears they are yet to encounter. Whenever we begin to express our fears, we talk about that which makes us or might make us fearful. But what do these fears do to us, how do they affect us in our daily lives? This remains unexpressed within us.

Standing by the street, a boy thought up a mischief. He set up two chairs in the middle of the street. Sitting down on one chair, he called out to every passer-by

to join him on the other. He inquired about the well-being of those who accepted his invitation, he talked generalities. Some played his quaint game with him, while others turned away, uninterested and unimpressed.

Sitting nearby, a little girl nibbled at a fragment of a red brick. With the portion that she wet with her saliva, she drew shapes and lines on the ground. She was creating and erasing worlds on her whim, and this pleased her. Here, where there is pressure that the form of all things be fixed and stabilized according to rules, making these meaningless drawings probably brought her quiet. Every new contour emerging within Sawda-Ghevra is being measured and scrutinized. When the scales of this measurement will become particularly severe, and when they will be temporarily relaxed, this no one can predict. In this context, the simplicity with which she drew, then erased what she made, to begin again, seemed poignant—it struck some chord in the onlooker.

A woman appeared at the window of her first floor. ‘I am roaming far more in my dreams than I can possibly roam in Sawda-Ghevra,’ she said. ‘I was at the shrine of Lattu Shah Baba just recently. There is so much spiritual depth and quietness there. I could see myself sitting by the shrine, offering namaz, seeking the saint’s benevolence. I saw Babaji asking me about the good and the bad in my life, and me answering him. Then I saw myself going towards the shrine of Haji Ali—angels were carrying me to it. I was dressed in white clothes; I was flying. Suddenly I saw that the fridge had caught fire.’

Drawing attention to himself, the madari called out, ‘Don’t go away yet! Keep watching. Our dangerous feats continue. Now coming before you is a thief who will fool policemen and escape.’ A boy of about twelve cut through the crowd, whirling a pair of bamboo sticks. Taking off his shoes outside the bright circular stage, he somersaulted through the entire space within seconds. Ten policemen appeared, but they could do no more than stave off the bamboo sticks and protect themselves from blows. Before they could even register it, the boy danced away from them and escaped.

The cool breeze gathered a storm-like velocity. It began swallowing the clouds. It carried dust from the earth skyward; the sky turned darker. It was as if gravity slowly loosened its hold over things, and they flew towards the sky. The wind howled. People ran into the shelter of their houses. Some dashed out again, to quickly gather up the clothes they had put out to dry. Many doused the stoves

they had lit outside their houses. Food would be cooked later. An old woman stuck her head out of her frail house of bamboo mats, to look. Just then, strong torrents of rain lashed out from the sky, forcing her back in.

2

The Municipality had marked out the piece of land adjoining G-block as a cremation ground. But the new residents got together and placed a bust of the poet Valmiki there immediately after their arrival. That was the year 2006. The placement of the bust was still tentative. Then after some time, an idol of Lord Hanuman was placed alongside the poet's bust. Now devotees of Hanuman began to frequent the place. Then one day, a cobra appeared, pursued by a mongoose. People saw the mongoose attack the cobra. When it sensed so many pairs of eyes upon it, the mongoose grew afraid and escaped. Some people carried the cobra and lay him beside the bust of Valmiki. They tended to his injuries and offered him milk mixed with turmeric. Different things were tried to revive the cobra, but he died after twenty-four hours. Everyone gathered again, to perform his last rites. A pedestal of bamboo was built over the cremation spot. A male form of a cobra was skillfully moulded out of clay and set up over this pedestal. People contributed money for a havan to purify the space. Thousands of mantras were chanted. Crafting the space through its inner dynamics, people slowly built a temple complex, in a gentle contravention of the Municipality's plan.

3

The man with the drums played on his drum and walked through J-block, his eyes scanning his surroundings. He paid no attention to the hullabaloo around him. He looked past it, to some point far away. But whenever he did reach that point, it was as if by virtue of having reached it, his relation with it would end. His eyes would always be set ahead of him. Up ahead, some goats were nuzzling around in a sack, trying to chew the cauliflowers in it. Till he was far from them, he kept looking at them; but when the man with the drums reached them, he moved his gaze past them and walked on, as if his destination lay further ahead. Did he even have a destination? He didn't halt anywhere, but only kept walking. When my niece was much younger, why did my mother scare her by saying,

‘Don’t fuss, or the dhol wala will take you away’? She used to say the same thing to me, and possibly both my elder sisters too were kept in check by evoking this same figure. A drummer beats his drums, and amid the crowd that gathers around him because of this noise that he produces, his eyes lose their focus. Drawn by the sound, the crowd follows him, but maintains a distance. Weaving a web of glances around him, the drummer disappeared into K-block.

4

To
Respected Madam President
Republic of India
New Delhi

Madam,

To fight back the rising wave of communalism in our country, Muslim fakir Rabb Baba, on 26th January 2007, the Republic Day of our nation, set up Lord Shiva’s temple in Sawda-Ghevra J.J. Colony, on the vacant land near G-block, with the assistance of the local residents.

The development of this temple, a symbol of all faiths, is impeded by the rules of the government, which remain unmindful of the faith and feelings of the local population which is deeply attached to this place. Thousands of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and followers of many other faiths pray in this temple everyday. When Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians gather in this temple complex and offer prayers to Lord Bholenath—it is a sight worth seeing. Established without any government support, this temple, which promotes national unity, communal harmony and brotherhood, begs the government and you to protect it.

The land on which this temple has been built has lain barren for years, and, moreover, no government scheme of any national value is applicable to it. Today, on 26.11.2007, local Hindus, Muslims and followers of many other faiths pledged their custodianship of it and formed the Shivalaya Communal Harmony Promotion Committee. This committee, apart from taking on the construction of the temple complex and the development of a herbal garden around it, will work to spread the pure feelings embodied in this temple to the common man and, in

this way, strengthen national unity, and help the government and the people in uprooting communalism, casteism and terrorism from this country.

Therefore, in the context stated above, we urge you, in the interests of the nation, to make available one acre of land to the aforementioned committee at rates that are in accordance with those for religious establishments. Alongside, we request you to ensure that the forest department grants us plants for a herbal garden and the National Foundation for Communal Harmony under the home ministry grants us monetary aid so that the temple committee may be able to develop the unused land around the temple, for public use.

Sincerely,
Shanta Rani
Chairperson
26.11.2007

5

The bus halted at the bus stop of Sawda-Ghevra. Its passengers emptied out and vanished into different blocks.

The brick kiln right near K-block stood out sharply under the blazing sun. But, from time to time, it would suddenly disappear, engulfed by the thick haze of smoke that it emitted. Some children stood in the lane that leads into the block, intently looking into a house whose floor began at a height—as high as these children—from the level of the lane. Inside, a man, a knife in his hands, butchered hens. The children edged closer to the door.

A boy stood inside the school in B-block. On the other side of the gate another boy of the same age sat on a bamboo mat, with eatables that he meant to sell laid out around him. The two boys looked at each other for a long time, unblinking. The weight of the gate caused it to slowly unhinge itself from the walls.

The room that will soon be open to the public as the Mother Dairy in G-block is now complete. A few days ago, electricians had descended upon it with their tools and implements to install the fixtures: Where should the machine into which tokens will be inserted be placed? From where will the milk flow out? Where will the machine that keeps the milk cold be located? Work continued for four to five days. As for how the Mother Dairy will look—it will look exactly the same as all other branches all over Delhi.

A Tata Sumo with ‘Government of India’ written prominently on it drove into the colony. From the two loudspeakers that had been fitted on either side of the car, a voice emerged, informing the colony dwellers that a camp will be set up on the 27th, 28th and 30th of that month, for installing electricity meters. Everyone was required to bring their parchees—which show they have been allotted the plot on which they are staying—and election I-cards with them to this camp. They will then be provided with forms, which they will have to fill so that electricity meters may be installed in their houses. The vehicle of the Government of India moved along the main roads of the colony, repeating this announcement. People followed it and asked the officials, ‘And what else should we bring with us?’ An officer in the car replied, ‘Listen carefully to what we are announcing, remember the dates, and make sure you come to the camp which will be set up at the bus stand near B-block. Don’t forget to bring your plot-parchee. And now go, tell everyone in the inner lanes about this announcement.’

In M-block, most people have got their house numbers engraved on the cement walls of their houses. These inscriptions state the block that each house belongs to, and the plot number. These brief introductions of themselves, provided by each house, are so prominent that they seem as if they would jump out from the walls at passers-by. Naive about the purpose this serves, someone smiled and asked, ‘Why not get a nameplate made and hang it near the door instead?’ A young woman, her skin dark like the evening, dressed from head to toe in pink, smiled kindly at this naivete and replied, ‘This way everyone ensures their plot number is marked out distinctly, as being separate from that of their neighbours. When one’s identity remains tangibly before others, it stays firm.’ Not far from her, in the park, a cyclist declared loudly that he would keep cycling in the same spot for the next twenty-four hours; that he will eat on the cycle, sleep on the cycle, and even change his clothes on the cycle; and that by cycling in the same spot, he will dig a deep hole in the ground.

‘The surveyors are here,’ a voice came from far. As soon as this voice reached them, people left whatever they were doing and headed for the place from which this voice came. When surveys had been conducted in Nangla, Lakshmi Nagar and all the places from where people have been relocated to this colony, signs had been left on different doors which had remained puzzles for long.

NDS
Lock
Comm

The residents whose houses had been marked with these signs didn't make it to Ghevra. A place might be brand new, but when people begin to dwell in it, they bring with them the understanding they have formed over years. Isn't there a saying, 'Scalded by boiling milk, one blows even on buttermilk before taking a sip'?

A file in their hands, some officers are standing where two streets intersect. A heavy silence is descending around them. People fear government departments. They are gathering around government representatives, swelling into a crowd around them. 'We will come again tomorrow,' thundered the representatives. 'Everyone must begin constructing their pucca houses by then or their plot allotment will be cancelled.' When they are addressed by a voice that speaks only to dismiss them, even the strongest personalities hesitate. And this, after all, is a crowd of people who are only beginning to live in a place which has just recently started to get made. Their announcement over, the officers turned, ready to leave.

Surveyors work under the constraint that their job has to be done during the day. Whenever a survey has to happen, it will happen during the day. If a survey were to be conducted tomorrow, which it will be according to these government representatives, it will be during the day.

The crowd refused to budge.

'Our work too is done during the day.'

'We could take a day's leave from work, but what's the guarantee they too will not take the day off tomorrow?'

'Arre, who knows what will happen tomorrow?'

'What we have in hand is today.'

People refused to let the surveyors leave.

'You can't leave till you finish our survey.'

'We won't let you go till everyone's survey is done.'

'Everyone will come back from work soon.'

It was beginning to seem now that this was one survey that would have to be done by night.

6

It is said about Kanjhawala district that, for centuries, people who lived in it refused to allow the state to enter their homes to resolve their disputes. Whenever a difference arose, it was resolved internally. Sawda and Ghevra are two among several villages in this district. Since 2006, on land the government has bought from the inhabitants of these two villages, it is settling those people whose neighbourhoods it's demolishing all over the city. This new, emerging settlement has been named after the two villages on whose land it is being built, by joining their names—hence, Sawda-Ghevra J.J. Colony. Perhaps the government thought in this way the villagers will always remain proud that this new corner of the city is being settled on land that was, at one point of time, theirs. But, for every villager who sold his land, whether this place is something they take pride in, or if its new residents are nothing more than unacceptable strangers who have cropped up in their midst, this only time will tell.

7

It's a gathering where there is no fragrance of freshly prepared food, there's no qawwal, no poet, no star from the world of music, nor is any film about to be released. But still, there is anticipation in the air. The occasion is the inauguration of a school. Not just any school, this is the first school of its kind in all of Delhi. It's a B.A.L.A. school. Building as Learning Aid—the building itself will teach its students.

The chief guest is being awaited.

Potted plants had been placed along the edges of the main gate of the school; flowers and leaves swayed gently in the breeze. A banner saying 'Welcome' hung above the gate and continued to draw many people from the colony towards itself. But when time stretches on endlessly, how can restlessness not take over? The waiting children burst into loud applause now and again. Teachers appealed to their students to be patient. An endless stream of do's and don'ts emanated from the loudspeaker.

A green carpet spread out till far, and where it ended, a colourful square carpet began, beyond which was a high stage, brightly decorated. All pairs of eyes were fixed on it. Children were going to perform on it soon. The guests being awaited would climb on it and put forth their thoughts. A voice was heard, which soon

spread as a murmur through the gathering—the chief guest is about to arrive any minute now. A voice spoke through the loudspeaker trying to hush everyone, asking everyone to be seated, instructing people at the gate to leave, to not crowd around. A dog moved about on the stage, sniffing everything, making sure no unidentified object lay upon it.

A cluster of voices now reached the gathering from outside: ‘All the residents of Sawda-Ghevra, come out! Move out of there!’ These voices were of those residents of Sawda-Ghevra J.J. Colony who had been stopped at the gate. They continued, ‘This function is not for us. It’s for the school; it’s a function organized by the school management for its own purposes. What’s in it for us?’ On hearing this protest, some people began to get up from their seats and leave. The atmosphere became charged.

The person making announcements immediately changed his tone and tried to appease everyone, ‘This is your function; it has been organized for *you*,’ he said. ‘Everyone is respectfully invited. This is your own school. These children are your own children,’ he tried to placate everyone. ‘Please be seated. Please maintain silence. The chief guest is about to arrive,’ he pleaded. Now all the teachers began to get up from the chairs they had been sitting on, offering them to the residents of the colony. Soon each chair was occupied by not one but two people.

Poetry—the kind that intimates that someone special has arrived—began to be recited. The chief guest’s car and the accompanying vehicles could now be seen at a distance. Excitement filled the air. Police personnel became alert. The sound of clapping echoed through the colony. On the beautifully decorated stage, a group of girls began to sing.

The chief guest entered the tent. Near the stage, on the carpet, in a pitcher filled with water, an earthen lamp that had been set afloat amidst flowers, lit up. Innumerable tiny earthen lamps balanced along the edges of the pitcher also lit up. Media persons, cameras in hand, flooded the stage.

‘Congratulations to everyone on the new building of a new school!’ It seemed there would be no end to clapping in Sawda-Ghevra this day. Encouraged by the applause, now countless education-related words spouted forth from the loudspeaker—education to become an engineer, education to become a doctor, education to become a pilot, education to become a government servant,

education that imparts computer literacy … Education is something that never ends.’ Clapping resounded in the inaugural venue.

8

In H-block, the roof was being laid over the four walls of a house. Assisting four masons were eight women, who carted concrete-masala from the mixer that stood on the street to the roof. The tea shop was open tonight. The woman who makes tea said, ‘I decided to keep the shop open because this house is being constructed.’ Someone called out from above, ‘Can we get three cups of tea?’ Soon it was 1 a.m. The roof was ready. Everyone went home. The shop packed up.

In G-block, near the almost-ready Mother Dairy, three cots had been set up at short distances from each other. The third of these cots, which had a mosquito net over it, shook vigorously, as if someone was wrestling on it. One moment it seemed a body was sitting on the cot, and the next moment the body suddenly become prostrate. This went on for about twenty minutes. People slept soundlessly on the neighbouring cots. After some time this cot too became quiet. The mosquito net stopped shaking.

A drunken man staggered past C-block, muttering to himself. A dog followed him. Under the glow of the street lamps, a woman carrying her child walked towards B-block. It was 1.30 a.m. A boy of about five years hopped and skipped along the length of the street, all by himself. The woman stopped and asked him, ‘Aren’t you scared?’ He replied, ‘Why should I be when you’re not?’ And he hopped and skipped towards the lane that led into E-block.

A voice interrupted the stillness of the night. A man was singing. The tune he sang, and his words, both seemed like they were from Rajasthan. A woman danced. Surrounding her stood many more women, clapping, providing a beat to the woman who was dancing, encouraging her. A family was about to spend its first night in its newly constructed house. They were going to spend the night awake, singing and dancing. It was almost 2.30 a.m. From the yellow house a little distance away, came a loud but indistinguishable sound.

Half an hour later, a man and a woman, their two children in tow, were seen strolling on the deserted road. A religious teacher, an elderly man, walked unsteadily towards the masjid in C-block, with the support of a walking stick.

9

‘She’s left,’ someone said. Today she has left us all, and gone. Who? The one who’d been ill for many years? ‘Lay her body down on the ground,’ someone said. Lay whom down? The one whose turn it is to be carried away on four pairs of shoulders today? The sound of the horn, the beat of the drum, spread. Around whom? The one who’d been ill for very long? Flowers, sugarcakes and smoke from the burning of dried cakes of cow dung filled the road. Where? On the same route along which she was carried away? People had gathered, the bus had arrived. Where? Near the age-old pipal tree? The bus waited for its passengers, and she too climbed into it. Who? The one who’d had some sad tunes playing over and over in her head for the past few days? The wood was sorted, and it was weighed. Where? There, from where she was to leave everyone forever? The pyre was aflame, her body burned. Whose? The one who had been ill for many years …

10

A stormy wind blew, lifting up things and smashing them into the ground as it went. Trees bent to kiss the earth. Clothes left out to dry in the evening blew about like scraps of paper. Doors were flung open, banging against their frames, making a clamour like a crowd. The night was dark, the human world still sound asleep. When nature exerts its force, humans lose their hold over the order of things.

Someone’s tin roof, another’s thatched roof, flew off. Walls trembled. In ten or fifteen minutes, the wind had shaken up and loosened even the binds between adjacent walls. Now everyone began to make feeble attempts at saving their belongings. Through it all, a voice could be heard, saying, ‘It’s only a question of tonight. We’ll see tomorrow morning.’

11

When people first came here, this place was nothing but empty land rolling out till far. Tractors would be at work everywhere, trying to level the uneven land. As people came, they were directed to the plots assigned to them, as per their parchees. On these they made their first dwellings with bamboo mats. Then they got their plots measured by the registrar of land accounts and built their houses

again with brick and cement. Slowly, as pucca houses began to come up amidst the bamboo-mat houses, the place started taking a firmer form. The unbuilt stretches of land surrounding these emerging pockets of houses began to seem like ‘empty land’. To assure people about them, the Municipality planted signboards announcing what would eventually be made in those empty spaces. Here, a post office, a garden there, a hospital here, a dispensary there, a primary school here, a police station … Even today, these signboards continue to stand on their respective spots, unaccompanied by the structures they foretell.

It is rumoured that people from twenty neighbourhoods in the city will be evicted and brought to Sawda-Ghevra. People from nine neighbourhoods are already here. Now preparations for those who are about to come is on in full swing. Roads are being built; parks, toilets, schools are being constructed with haste. Before more people are brought here, the place that is going to be allotted to them is being prepared. Some of these new blocks lie in the space between two already settled blocks, and others in the empty space some distance away. Land is measured, electricity poles are planted in straight lines along a rigid grid. People will make their houses after they come, but in the lanes that will lie between rows of houses, brick paths are being laid. Those already settled watch this transformation of land. Over and over again, the plan on the basis of which they have been resettled in Sawda-Ghevra reveals and repeats itself.

SHIV BUILDING MATERIAL AND HARDWARE SUPPLIER

dust, gravel, sand, bricks, cement girders, tirons angles, iron bars door frames, gates and grills available here at competitive rates

Here, far away from the city, many decided to re-enter the world of work by setting up their own shops.

TRUTH HARDWARE

pump, paint, materials for whitewash pipe fittings
PVC materials available here

As people kept coming, the number of shops kept increasing.

GET WELL MEDICATIONS

joint pain, arthritis, allergies, hemorrhoids stones, respiratory problems, etc. are treated here with traditional herbs and medicines

Cost of daily medicine Rs 10 only

KALEEM TELECOM

photocopy, lamination

Make a call to anywhere in India for 1 Rupee!

All kinds of electrical material available

In every block, the ground floors are being moulded as shops, the first floors as residences.

BHOLE SHANKAR MATKA KULFI

Available in cashew, pistachio, milk and cardamom flavours

Bookings are made for weddings

MITHILA HAIR CUTTING SALOON

Mobile recharge coupons available

Walk through these lanes and you hear the entire colony hum the tune, ‘shop below, house above’.

NARENDRA (TEELU HALWAI)
(SK HUSSAIN)

Buy milk sweets, condensed milk, chowmein, butter at proper rates on placing orders

Note: Bookings are also made for weddings and parties

Also available artisans for these occasions

The daily needs of the residents of Sawda-Ghevra are comprehensively catered to by these shops.

SISODHIA CHHOLE BHATURE CORNER

Come, eat!
Keep eating!

But much still remains. One realizes this each time a new shop is opened.

TANNU JEWELLERS

All kinds of readymade silver jewellery available
22, 23 carat gold jewellery can be made on order
Do give us an opportunity to serve you

13

Radheshyam owns a PCO booth, which he runs from the stall he set up soon after he came to Sawda-Ghevra. From this stall, one can also buy cigarettes, toffee, tobacco, pan masala, a range of snacks, chips and biscuits. That's not all. Many more kinds of everyday things that Radheyshyam thinks his customers might need from time to time are also sold—like hair oil, combs, lighters, eye liner, toothbrush, toothpaste, digestives, etc. The space that gets left over in his stall after it is filled up with all these items is really little—just enough for him to squeeze himself in and sit. And Radheyshyam is a very short man.

All the houses have been constructed keeping in mind that over time, as facilities keep reaching the colony, the height of these lanes will increase. First the lanes were measured and marked out, then these spaces were filled with mud, bricks were laid, drains were dug for sewage and the lanes remade. All this happened over several months, changing the height of the lanes each time. This is still just the beginning after all. That is why, when the foundation of a house is prepared, it is raised till about five feet above the ground, and it is over this height that the building is constructed.

Radheyshyam's stall too got affected whenever a lane was dug up and remade. Each time, he had to shift his stall, change its orientation to the lane. Radheshyam deduced that, in keeping with the requirements of this continuously changing space, he would need to alter the make of his stall. He removed the two wooden pillars that propped up his stall on the ground and fixed four wheels in their place.

Even though Radheshyam's stall stays on the same spot, and its wheels remain locked, by innovating with its structure he has ensured that whenever the lanes

are dug up, he will be able to comfortably roll his stall over to another spot. Gaining confidence from the duration for which this stall has been in the same spot, a barber recently set up a mirror and a chair to the right of Radheshyam. Soon after, a tailor set up his sewing machine to the left of the stall, making that space his.

14

‘Arre bhaiyya, he behaves like a madman.’

‘No that’s not true. I’ve worked with him. He’s very wise, his words reflect his wisdom.’

‘He has ruined his body.’

‘Don’t talk of him! He goes about destroying idols in temples!’

‘It’s impossible to know any more what he is up to and what he will do next.’

15

The buses arrived and left from their stands on schedule. The weather was clear, people’s faces were lit up and smiling. The driver of bus number 949 asked a shopkeeper, ‘Bhai, what’s going on here?’ Folding a betel leaf, the shopkeeper replied, ‘The toilet is going to be inaugurated today. The Councillor is coming to Ghevra.’

A tent has been set up opposite G-block. The usually empty place was filling up with people. Many sit on chairs inside the tent.

A group of government officials stand a little apart, in one corner of the toilet. The gate to the toilet, which has been decorated with marigold flowers, looks no less than an entrance to a temple. The path leading to it has also been decorated with flowering plants.

White and black cars finally begin to arrive, one by one. From the tent, a voice could be heard, welcoming these guests. The voice is announcing: ‘The chief of Sawda village is amidst us now …’, ‘Nizampur’s chief has arrived …’, ‘The chief of Ghevra village is here with us in this gathering …’ The cars continue to come.

Lectures now began to be sprayed on the gathering through the loudspeaker. All the chief guests, it seems, have something important to say. Then someone

said, ‘On this occasion of the inauguration of the toilet, I announce that blankets will be distributed to people.’

The public became attentive. People began to go up on the stage. It seemed each person who would be given a blanket had been provided with a chit of paper beforehand. The man giving away the blankets would ask each person’s name, take his chit from him, hand him the blanket and send him back.

Meanwhile, the other chief guests entered the toilet to see how it had been constructed. People who live in the colony also took this opportunity to take a tour of the toilet. Some even tried the facilities—they opened the taps, inspected the toilet seats. Men and women weren’t required to go into different sides of the toilet today.

After much time passed in this fashion, people began to leave. A wave of restlessness spread through the colony. Everywhere people said, ‘What kind of a gift giving was this?’ Someone said, ‘It was as if a big favour was being done!’ Another said, ‘They knew the blankets were to be given to the old and the disabled, then couldn’t they have given bigger blankets?’ Yet another added, ‘These blankets are good only to cover the body of a small child!’

The potted plants that had been swaying in the sun were loaded back into Tata 407 tempos. The strings of marigolds that had adorned the doors and the walls of the toilet were taken away on motorcycles.

‘The toilet has been inaugurated, but it is not yet open to use,’ someone said. ‘That will happen only after a caretaker is appointed.’ The lock to the main entrance, which had been removed in the morning, was replaced on the gate.

Those who had set up the tent began to pack it up. The silver strings that had decorated the tent were left scattered on the road. All those promise-filled words that had been amplified through loudspeakers all morning had evaporated by now. The empty chairs asked each other, ‘Did we come here only to listen to lectures? Where is the feast?’ Slowly the chairs too were gathered up and loaded into tempos and carried away.

16

It was 4.15 p.m. on the fourth day of the month of March, the year 2009. Ved Singh, friend of retired army officer Om Prakash, cut the red ribbon and inaugurated the Mother Dairy branch. Om Prakash distributed laddus among

children and barfi among the older people. That very day Mother Dairy began to sell milk. All other brands of milk stopped being bought, and milk from the Mother Dairy was seen in every household. Some people applied their intelligence and began enjoying the other milk products also available at the Mother Dairy.

'I'll remember this barfi,' said Mehtab khala as she sat on the stool in the tea shop. Vijay, who is a sculptor, too was sitting there. Sipping tea with his piece of barfi, he said, 'We make that memorable which we have and which we think or know won't remain with us. But I make idols specially for immersing in the river. When I make something knowing it will be dissolved into its elements soon, how can I make it so that it remains memorable? This is something I'm always grappling with.' For Vijay, it seemed, memory is not a factor of time, but relates to space. Or rather, it relates to what he has made getting dispersed over several places. This understanding stands in contradiction to how we construct memory through photo albums! Listening to Vijay, one is compelled to consider that memory-making is connected to something losing its wholeness, dispersing and appearing before the eyes of many.

The sun was about to set. A little distance away, a Tata 407 could be seen making its way into Sawda-Ghevra J.J. Colony. Another family was arriving, its household items loaded into a tempo. As they moved through the streets of Sawda-Ghevra, the tyres of the tempo spread the dust from the untarred streets into the air.

17

The day dissolved amidst the clutter of 'bring this', 'buy that'. No time to linger or chat. No respite. Evening descended softly upon the accumulations of the day. Bulbs hanging from poles lining the streets lit up, spreading a warm golden glow. Light came out in sharp streaks from houses with walls made of bamboo mats. Darkness seemed to have escaped into the grass that had sprouted on the edges, in the space between settled and as yet unallotted blocks. The night grew darker. A voice asked, 'Son, does it get very cold here at night?' Another voice replied, 'Yes. There is no construction till far; the place is open from all sides. No one sleeps here at night. Here, people walk around in their sleep.'

18

To stake back its claim over the space, the Municipality built a thick, high, grey boundary wall around the temple complex. As if to announce, ‘We choose to allow you to be here. But remember, we can contain you, we can contain your spread.’

It was night. A young man walked to a shop and bought himself a pack of cards. He sat on his cot, all by himself in his house, a candle burning softly by his side. He shuffled the cards, just like people who can gamble well do. Over and over again, he chose numbers and picked cards to check his luck. He did this sitting, then standing, then tried it while keeping near him different good luck charms. The following night, he bought himself yet another pack of cards, shuffled them, played with himself. Even now, every night, night after night, he practises and tests his luck, preparing himself, readying himself for that gamble which he knows he will soon have occasion to play.

*When I first lived in Delhi, the city was dominated by Punjabis, many of them migrants from Pakistan at the time of partition. The census figures are not definitive, but it is likely that Poorvanchalis had overtaken the Punjabis as the largest community by the late 1990s.

Notes

NEW DELHI AT WAR, 1939–45

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CITY OF WALLS, CITY OF GATES

1. *Hamlet*, 'In my mind's eye, Horatio' (I.ii.145).
2. *Hamlet* (II.ii.593).
3. *Hamlet*, 'Murder most foul, as in the best it is;/But this most foul, strange and unnatural' (I.v.27).
4. See 'Delhi is Dehali' in Ramchandra Gandhi, *I am Thou: Meditations on the Truth of India* (Indian Philosophical Quarterly Publications No: 8, 1984), pp. 293.
5. In *The Hyoid Bone* (Viking Penguin, 1992), pp. 38–39.
6. *Hamlet* (IV.v.78).
7. *Hamlet*, 'I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams' (II.ii.264). And those 'bad dreams' could be very troubling indeed inside Delhi's walled cities!
8. *Hamlet* (1.iv.90).
9. *Hamlet* (I.ii.198).

Notes on Contributors

Shamsher Ali is a writer and photographer. He has pursued both passions since he left school after the tenth standard. He is a co-writer of *Trickster City: Writings from the Belly of the Metropolis*. His photographs and art works have been presented in the *City As Studio* exhibition series of Sarai-CSDS in 2010. He is currently working on a book of his photographs of LNJP colony, Delhi, where he lives now.

Babur (1483–1530), also known as Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, was the founder of the Mughal Empire. A descendant of Timur and Chingiz Khan, he succeeded to the throne of Fergana in Central Asia when he was a little over ten years old. After triumphing over Ibrahim Lodi in the Battle of Panipat in 1526, he captured Delhi and Agra, and subsequently conquered nearly the entire north Indian subcontinent. The *Babur Nama*, a collection of his memoirs, reveals fascinating details of his turbulent life.

Sheela Bajaj teaches at Delhi University, and is a researcher and writer, specializing in habitat-related issues. Portions of her essay ‘The Building of New Delhi’ first appeared in the magazine *Delhi Diary*.

Ibn Battuta (1304–69), also known as Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Abdullah Al Lawati Al Tanji Ibn Battuta, was an Arab scholar and traveller who is best known for the account of his travels and excursions in the fourteenth century. His journeys lasted for a period of nearly thirty years and spanned three continents, covering almost the entirety of the known Islamic world and beyond.

Annette Beveridge (1842–1929) was an orientalist renowned for her efforts in women’s education. She came to India in 1873 to promote female education in Bengal and helped found the Hindu Mahila Bidyalaya in Calcutta, which later

became Bethune College. Her lasting contribution was as a translator of medieval Indian and Central Asian texts into English.

Dhiren Bhagat (1957–88) was a journalist, poet and short-story writer. His memoirs have been published as *The Contemporary Conservative: Selected Writings of Dhiren Bhagat*.

Ruskin Bond wrote his first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, when he was seventeen. Since then he has written severals novellas, short stories, essays and poems, all of which have established him as one of the best chroniclers of contemporary India. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993 and the Padma Shri in 1999.

Radhika Chandiramani is a Delhi-based clinical psychologist working on issues of sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights. She co-edited *Sexuality, Gender and Rights: Exploring Theory and Practice in South and Southeast Asia* with Geetanjali Misra and has recently written *Good Times for Everyone: Sexuality Questions, Feminist Answers*.

Bharati Chaturvedi is the founder and director of the environmental advocacy group Chintan. Her specific area of work is related to material consumption and disposal. She writes on environmental and development issues, and has also edited the book *Finding Delhi*.

William Dalrymple was born in Scotland and wrote his first book, *In Xanadu*, when he was twenty-two. In 1989 he moved to Delhi researching his bestselling book *City of Djinns*. After that came *The Holy Mountain*, *The Age of Kali*, *White Mughals*, *The Last Mughal* and *Nine Lives*. Apart from being an award-winning writer, he is also a co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival.

Sadia Dehlvi is a scriptwriter and film-maker who also works as a columnist with the *Hindustan Times*. She has been the editor of *Bano*, a popular woman's journal in the Urdu language, and has recently authored the book *Sufism: The Heart of Islam*. She belongs to a family that has lived in Delhi for centuries.

Sheila Dhar (1929–2001), a renowned raconteur, was also a Hindustani classical music vocalist who gained late recognition for some of the most insightful

English essays ever written on culture and performance within the north Indian gharana tradition. Her books include *Children's History of India* and *Raga'n Josh: Stories from a Musical Life*.

Emily Eden (1797–1869) was an English novelist who gave witty pictures of life in the early nineteenth century. She was the sister of Lord Auckland, who was Governor-General of India from 1835 to 1842. Her accounts of the time she spent in India were later collected in the volume *Up the Country: Letters Written to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India*. She also wrote two very successful novels, *The Semi-Detached House* and *The Semi-Attached Couple*.

Ghalib (1797–1869), whose original name was Mirza Muhammad Asad-ullah Khan, was a classical Urdu and Persian poet of the nineteenth century. A nobleman, wit and poet, he was born in Agra but spent his adult life in Delhi. His compositions remain popular among Urdu speakers all over the world.

Namita Gokhale is a writer and publisher. Her books include *Paro: Dreams of Passion*; *Gods Graves and Grandmother*; *A Himalayan Love Story*; *The Book of Shadows* and *The Book of Shiva*. She has co-edited the anthology *In Search of Sita* with Dr Malashri Lal. She is also one of the founders and co-directors of the Jaipur Literature Festival.

Khalid Hasan (1935–2009) was a renowned Pakistani journalist and writer. In his illustrious career as news correspondent, he worked in both the USA and Pakistan, reporting for Lahore-based papers as *The Nation, Daily Times* and *Friday Times*. He has written many books, including *Scorecard, Give Us Back Our Onions*, *The Umpire Strikes Back*, as well as numerous translations such as *Bitter Fruit: The Best of Saadat Hasan Manto*.

William Stephen Raikes Hodson (1821–58) was a British leader of irregular light cavalry during the Indian Revolt of 1857. Popularly known as 'Hodson of Hodson's Horse', he was famed for his capture of Bahadur Shah Zafar from Humayun's Tomb after the British capture of Delhi. He is also credited with being jointly responsible for the introduction of the khaki uniform. His letters were later published in the volume *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India*.

William Irvine (1840–1911) was a distinguished scholar of Indian history.

Khurshidul Islam (1919–2006) was a noted Urdu critic and poet. He has written extensively on Ghalib. Among his many works is included *Ghalib: Life and Letters: 1797–1869*, which he co-translated and co-edited along with Ralph Russell.

Madhu Jain worked with *India Today* magazine from 1986 to 2000, writing on cinema, art, society and books. She has also written for *Sunday*, the *Statesman* and the French newspaper *La Croix*. She is the author of *The Kapoors: The First Family of Indian Cinema*.

Anees Jung is a best-selling author and journalist. Educated in Hyderabad and the USA, she began her journalistic career as editor of Youth Times. She has since been a columnist for major newspapers in India and abroad, and has authored a number of books including *Unveiling India, When a Place Becomes a Person, Seven Sisters, Breaking the Silence* and *Within the Courtyard, Beyond the Courtyard*.

Kamleshwar (1932–2007) was a prominent figure in Hindi literature. He wrote short stories, novels, drama, screenplays and literary criticism. His most famous novel, *Kitne Pakistan*, was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2003. Its English translation, *Partitions*, has been published by Penguin.

Amir Khusrau was an Indian musician, scholar and poet. He was an iconic figure in the cultural history of the Indian subcontinent. He wrote poetry primarily in Persian, but also in Hindavi. A Sufi mystic and a spiritual disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, he was not only a notable poet but also a prolific and seminal musician and is regarded as the father of the qawwali musical tradition.

Perceval Landon (1868–1927) was an English writer and journalist. A lifelong friend Rudyard Kipling, he is now best remembered for his classic and much reprinted ghost story *Thurnley Abbey*. Apart from being a novelist, he wrote travel books on India and Nepal, and also worked as special correspondent for papers like the *Daily Mail* and the *Times*.

Karoki Lewis is a London-based professional photographer whose work has appeared in a number of photographic books on India. Among the books he has co-authored with his father Charles Lewis are *Delhi's Historic Villages*, a new edition of which is forthcoming from Penguin, and *Mehrauli: A View from the Qutb*.

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–55) was the leading Urdu short-story writer of the twentieth century. He was born in Samrala in the Ludhiana district of Punjab. He worked for All India Radio during the Second World War and was a successful screenwriter in Bombay before moving to Pakistan after Partition. During his controversial two-decade career, Manto published twenty-two collections of stories, seven collections of radio plays, three collections of essays and a novel.

Niccolao Manucci (1639–1717) was an Italian writer and traveller who worked as a soldier and quack doctor in the Mughal court. Manucci is famous for his work *Storia do Mogor*, an account of Mughal life in the seventeenth century.

Vaishali Mathur is a Delhi-based editor and translator. Apart from translating Jarnail Singh's *I Accuse …: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984* into English, she has also translated two books from *The Chronicles of Narnia* series into Hindi.

Meer Taqi Meer (1723–1810), whose original name was Muhammad Taqi, was the leading Urdu poet of the eighteenth century. A devoted Sufi, his invaluable verses helped transform the Urdu language itself. He remains arguably the foremost name in Urdu poetry.

Sam Miller had his initial brush with Delhi in the early 1990s when he was posted there as the BBC World Service TV and radio correspondent. On his return to the UK in 1993 he became the presenter and editor of the BBC's current affairs programme *South Asia Report*, after which he was appointed the head of the Urdu service and subsequently Managing Editor, South Asia. In 2002 he was posted back to Delhi, where he has remained ever since. He is the author of *Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity*.

Jan Morris is a Welsh author, historian and travel writer. A gender re-assigned woman, she was published under her former name, James Morris, until the

1970s. She is particularly famous for her *Pax Brittania* trilogy, a history of the British Empire. She has also written *Last Letters from Hav* in addition to books on Wales, Venice, Oxford, Manhattan and six volumes of travel essays.

Jaanu Nagar trained as a teacher for a year after finishing his graduation from Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh. After coming to Delhi in 2003, he lived in Nangla Maanchi until 2006 when it was demolished. He now lives in Sawda village, Delhi. He is a co-writer of *Trickster City: Writings from the Belly of the Metropolis*.

Chaman Nahal, born in 1927, is a renowned writer and scholar. He formerly taught at Delhi University and Cambridge University. He is the author of nine novels, including *Azadi, Into Another Dawn* and *The Triumph of the Tricolour*.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair is Professor of Linguistics and English at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. Her research areas are in cognitive studies and literary theory. She has written several books, including *Technobrat: Culture in a Cybernetic Classroom*, *The Ayodhya Cantos* and *Yellow Hibiscus*.

Vijay Nambisan is a journalist, poet and author. His books include *Bihar Is in the Eye of the Beholder*, *Language as an Ethic* and *Two Measures of Bhakti*.

Renuka Narayan is the Arts and Culture Editor at the *Indian Express*, where she also writes a weekly column on religion. She has co-authored *A Passion for Dance* with Yamini Krishnamurthy and *Maximize Your Life* with Pavan K. Varma, and has compiled and edited *The Book of Prayer*.

Hasan Nizami, also known as Sadruddin Muhammad bin Hasan Nizami, was an Indo-Persian historian who lived in the thirteenth century. By order of Sultan Qutbuddin Aibak, he wrote *Taj-ul-Maasir*, a contemporary account that chronicles the history of the Delhi Sultanate. Very little is known about Hasan Nizami himself, and the only available references come from his own writings.

Manjula Padmanabhan is a Delhi-based author, playwright and artist. Her comic strips have appeared previously in the *Sunday Observer* and the *Pioneer*. Her books include *Hot Death, Cold Soup*; *Getting There*; *This Is Suki!*;

Kleptomania and *Escape*. Her fifth play, *Harvest*, won the 1997 Onassis Award for Theatre. She has also illustrated many children's books.

Mrinal Pande is a journalist and TV personality. She has written novels in both Hindi and English, including *Devi, My Own Witness* and *Daughter's Daughter*. She has now been appointed chairperson of Prasar Bharati, the apex body of Indian Broadcast Media.

Nayantara Pothen grew up in Kolkata, Singapore and Sydney, Australia. In 2007 she was awarded her PhD in History from the University of Sydney. Her essay 'New Delhi at War' is based on a chapter from her forthcoming book on New Delhi society in the 1930s and 1940s. Her deep interest in the country of her birth is rivalled only by that of her Indophilic husband. She lives in Sydney.

Babli Rai lives in LNJP colony. She is a co-writer of *Trickster City: Writings from the Belly of the Metropolis*. Currently, she is finishing a long text about her conversations with an old, transgendered woman in LNJP colony, who has travelled all over India and is highly respected in the neighbourhood.

Suraj Rai is a writer and a self-trained Linux system administrator. He is a co-writer of *Trickster City: Writings from the Belly of the Metropolis*. Born and brought up in LNJP colony, Delhi, he is currently in the US on a scholarship to pursue higher education in computing from the Common College Initiative Programme of the United States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2010.

Gordon C. Roadarmel (1932–72) was perhaps the first American scholar seriously to concern himself with contemporary Hindi literature and criticism. Born and raised in India, he went on to study and teach in the USA. He was the first to translate Premchand's novel *Godaan* in 1968. His other noted translations include *To Each His Stranger* by Agyeya, and the collection of short stories *A Death in Delhi: Modern Hindi Stories*.

Anita Roy has worked as an editor in Delhi since 1996. She is a regular columnist and reviewer for magazines and newspapers in India and the UK.

Ralph Russell (1918–2008) was a British scholar and teacher of Urdu literature. He co-edited and co-translated *Ghalib: Life and Letters: 179–186* with Khurshidul Islam.

Pran Sabharwal was a veteran journalist. He was one of the first Asians to work with a major American newspaper, the Baltimore Sun, in the 1970s. He covered several national events, including the India–China War. A socialist since his student days, he was also president of the Delhi University Students' Union.

Samsam-ud-Daula was an eighteenth-century historian. He is best known for having written *Maathir-ul-Umara*, a biographical dictionary of illustrious men who lived in Hindustan and the Deccan.

Ranjana Sengupta is an editor and is also the author of *Delhi Metropolitan: The Making of an Unlikely City*.

Shveta Sarda is a Delhi-based writer and translator, and has been working in Sarai-CSDS since 2001. Her translations have appeared in the Sarai Readers. She has recently translated *Trickster City: Writings from the Belly of the Metropolis*, a collection of composite narratives about Delhi previously published as *Bahurupiya Sheher*.

Bulbul Sharma is a Delhi-based painter, short-story writer and novelist. Her books include *My Sainted Aunts*, *Banana Flower Dreams*, *The Anger of Aubergines* and *The Book of Devi*. She writes a column for the Asian Age and works as an art teacher for children with special needs.

Sunil Sharma teaches Persian and Indian literatures at Boston University. He is the author of two books on Indo-Persian poetry and has translated and edited *I n the Bazaar of Love: The Selected Poetry of Amir Khusrau* with Paul Losensky.

Jarnail Singh has worked as special correspondent with *Dainik Jagran*, Delhi, for ten years, covering the fields of Sikh politics and defence. He has written extensively on the Sikh massacre of 1984 and its aftermath, including the recently published *I Accuse …: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984*.

Khushwant Singh is one of India's best-known writers and columnists. He has been the editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, the *National Herald* and the *Hindustan Times* for several years. He is also the author of several books, including the novels *Train to Pakistan*, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, *Delhi: A Novel* and *The Company of Women*; the classic two-volume *History of the Sikhs*; as well as numerous translations and non-fiction books on Delhi, nature and current affairs.
Renuka Singh teaches in JNU and has written several books on gender studies and Buddhism.

Sunny Singh has worked as a journalist, teacher, and as a management executive for multinationals in Mexico, Chile and South Africa. She gave up the corporate life for writing and after three books, and various writing projects in progress, still believes it was the best choice. In 2005 she relocated to London, where she teaches creative writing at the London Metropolitan University. Her books include *Nani's Book of Suicides*, *With Krishna's Eyes* and *Single in the City*.

Timur-i-Lang (1336–1405), also known as Tamerlane in English, was a fourteenth-century conqueror of much of western and central Asia. A controversial figure in his lifetime, he was the founder of the Timurid Empire as well as the great great grandfather of Babur. He captured Delhi in 1398. The accounts of his invasions have been recorded in his memoirs, collectively known as *Malfuzat-i-Timuri* or *Tuzk-i-Timuri*.

Pavan K. Varma is a writer and diplomat. A member of the Indian Foreign Service, he has served in Moscow, New York, London and Cyprus. He is at present India's Ambassador in Bhutan. His books include *Ghalib: The Man, The Times*; *Krishna: The Playful Divine*; *The Great Indian Middle Class*; *Being Indian: Why the 21st Century Will Be India's* and *Becoming Indian: The Unfinished Revolution of Culture and Identity*, all published by Penguin.

Vyasa is a central and revered figure in the majority of Hindu traditions. Regarded as the author of the Mahabharata, in which he also plays a principal role, he is also credited as the scribe of the Vedas and the supplementary texts such as the Puranas.

Yashpal (1903–76) began to write while serving a life sentence for his participation as a comrade of Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad in the armed struggle for India's independence. After his release, he went on to author several novels and collections of short stories, including *Jhootha Sach*, considered one of the finest Hindi novels ever written, and *Meri Teri Uski Baat*, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1976.

Read more in Penguin

FINDING DELHI: LOSS AND RENEWAL IN THE MEGACITY
Edited by Bharati Chaturvedi

Delhi is a magnet—for migrant workers, students, highly qualified professionals, ambitious tycoons, politicians. In the national imagination, it is a city of wide roads, flyovers, the Metro, markets and multiple opportunities.

But all this ‘progress’ and the quest to become a world-class city have also had an unsettling effect. People have been pushed out of public spaces, lakhs of slum dwellers have been banished and the Yamuna has been overwhelmed by sewage and industrial effluents.

Finding Delhi brings together many voices, offering a kaleidoscopic view of Delhi. It has essays on subjects such as the demolition of slums, the factories that deal with the city’s waste, the campaigns for clean air and BRT corridors, and the difficulties faced by women. Also included are first-hand accounts that reveal the travails of being a dhobi, a garbage collector, a fruit vendor and a maid in the megacity.

This book looks at Delhi from myriad angles and tells many untold stories.

Read more in Penguin

CELEBRATING DELHI

Edited by Mala Dayal

Who are the real makers of a city?

Delhi, located at the crossroads of history, has been occupied, abandoned and rebuilt over the centuries. It has been the capital of the Pandavas, the Rajputs, Central Asian dynasties, the Mughals and the British, and is best described as a melting pot of these vastly varying traditions and customs.

A galaxy of experts come together to offer fresh perspectives on the capital city—Khushwant Singh, Upinder Singh, William Dalrymple, Sunil Kumar, Pradip Krishen, Narayani Gupta, Vidya Rao, Sohail Hashmi, Dunu Roy, Priti Narain, Ravi Dayal. Originally part of the Sir Sobha Singh Memorial Lecture series organized by The Attic in collaboration with the India International Centre and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, this updated selection explores Delhi's living syncretic heritage.

The essays illuminate unknown and fascinating aspects of the city's history. We learn, for instance, how Sir Sobha Singh transplanted Delhi's two foundation stones by bullock-cart in the stealth of the night from Kingsway Camp to Raisina Hill. In a different departure, archival records point to the fundamental ecological miscalculation of the British choice of trees to line the avenues of Imperial New Delhi. Place names, part of the cultural fabric of a city, unearth a vanishing history of Delhi, while the contrasting history of Sufi shrines draws attention to the spiritual masters, the *pirs*, and their search for truth.

The letters and public proclamations issued from the Mughal court in the Delhi uprising of 1857 reveal an open-mindedness that is inspiring. These were

emphatically religious, yet inclusive of both Hindus and Muslims. In our time a different take on the reality of refugee and resettlement colonies shows the blindness of the city's civic planners, and reveals who was making and who was breaking the city in the twentieth century. The many peoples who made Delhi their home through the centuries have all contributed to the creation and development of a sumptuous cuisine noted for its rich variety.

Celebrating Delhi takes you on a journey, both varied and unexpected.

Read more in Penguin

BESIEGED: VOICES FROM DELHI 1857
Translated and compiled by Mahmood Farooqui

When Delhi lay under siege for five harrowing months in the summer of 1857, the people of the city described the events as *ghadar*: a time of turbulence. Resources within the besieged city fell dangerously low and locals found the rebelling sepoys' presence and the increased levies insufferable. Nonetheless, an extraordinary effort was launched by the government of Bahadur Shah Zafar to fight the British. Thousands of labourers and tonnes of materials were mobilized, funds were gathered, the police monitored food prices and a functioning bureaucracy was vigilantly maintained—right until the walled city's fall. Then, as Delhi was transformed by the victorious British, these everyday sacrifices and the efforts of thousands of people to save their country were lost forever.

In this groundbreaking work, Mahmood Farooqui presents the first extensive translations into English of the Mutiny Papers—documents dating from Delhi's 1857 siege, originally written in Persian and Shikastah Urdu. The translations include such fascinating pieces as the constitution of the Court of Mutineers, letters from soldiers threatening to leave Delhi if they were not paid their salaries, complaints to the police about unruly soldiers, and reports of troublesome courtesans, spies, faqirs, doctors, volunteers and harassed policemen. Shifting focus away from the conventional understanding of the events of 1857, these translations return ordinary and anonymous men and women back into the history of 1857.

Besieged offers a view of how the rebel government of Delhi organized the essential requirements of war—food and labour, soldiers' salaries, arms and

ammunition—but more than that, this deeply evocative book reveals the hopes, beliefs and failures of a people who lived through the tragic end of an era.

Read more in Penguin

TRICKSTER CITY:
WRITINGS FROM THE BELLY OF THE METROPOLIS

Azra Tabassum, Jaanu Nagar, Lakhmi Chand Kohli, Rakesh Khairalia, Yashoda Singh, Kiran Verma, Suraj Rai, Neelofar, Kulwinder Kaur, Shamsher Ali, Babli Rai, Ankur Kumar, Dilip Kumar, Love Anand, Nasreen, Rabiya Quraishy, Sunita Nishad, Saifuddin, Arish Qureshi and Tripan Kumar

Translated by Shveta Sarda

A groundbreaking collection of writings about the South Asian city

—Rana Dasgupta

I f you put your ear to this book you will be able to hear people breathing, if you touch it, you will be able to feel their fragile, but furious pulse. If you read this book, you will be greatly rewarded.

—Arundhati Roy

Trickster City is an extraordinary composite of writings on Delhi by a group of young people who have, over several years, sustained among themselves and with others around them, a relationship of conversing about the city.

This collection chronicles the loss of home and livelihood through urban eviction; encounters with the agencies of the state; love stories gone awry; the fragility of relationships; and the sustained effort to build life in anticipation of beauty and pleasure.

The writers draw from experiences, events and biographies, part fictive, part documentary, to inscribe an image of the city that is rarely available. There is a yearning in their writings for the expression of the poetic and allegorical alongside the harshness of everyday existence.

Trickster City is an aphoristic and playful meander in search of a new language that expresses the profound uncertainties and delicately realised joys of urban life.

Read more in Penguin

DELHI: ADVENTURES IN A MEGACITY

Sam Miller

This is an extraordinary portrait of one of the world's largest cities. Sam Miller sets out to discover the real Delhi, a city he describes as being 'India's dreamtown—and its purgatory.' He treads the city streets, making his way through Delhi and its suburbs, visiting its less celebrated destinations—Nehru Place, Rohini, Ghaziabad and Gurgaon—that most writers ignore. Miller's quest is the here and now, the unexpected, the ignored and the eccentric. All the obvious ports of call–the ancient monuments, the imperial buildings and the celebrities of modern Delhi—make only passing appearances. Through his encounters with Delhi's people—from a professor of astrophysics to a crematorium attendant, from ragpickers to members of the Police Brass Band—Miller creates a richly entertaining portrait of what Delhi means to its residents, and of what the city is becoming. Miller is, like so many of the people he meets, a migrant in one of the world's fastest growing megapolises and the Delhi he depicts is one whose future concerns us all.

Miller possesses an intense curiosity; he has an infallible eye for life's diversities, for all the marvellous and sublime moments that illuminate people's lives. This is a generous, original, humorous portrait of a great city; one which unerringly locates the humanity beneath the mundane, the unsung and the unfamiliar.

Read more from Penguin

DELHI METROPOLITAN: THE MAKING OF AN UNLIKELY CITY

Ranjana Sengupta

Independence, four million refugees from Pakistan and the overwhelming presence of visible and invisible power that flows from New Delhi being the capital have transformed it from the unruffled imperial town it once was to the fearsome metropolis it is today.

And yet, says Ranjana Sengupta, this largely unloved city deserves to be loved. Delhi is home to the most diverse population of any city in the country. The unceasing influx of migrants has unleashed new urban architectures of opulence and deprivation. Different groups have set up their own, different universes, and these manage to coexist, not unhappily. And somewhere between the futurist Gurgaon skyline and the proliferating slums, alongside the march of the Metro and the refurbishment of Khan Market, lie Delhi's unsung sagas—the memories, the passions and the unspoken expectation that the city will change lives.

Delhi Metropolitan tracks the changes from the time 'going to CP' was almost the only leisure activity for the middle class, it looks at the subtle reinventions of government colonies and the shining new suburbs, and inspects the footprints of 'Punjabification'. Have all these actually managed to colonize this extravagant, undefinable and unlikely city? In a work of immense detail, at once informed and entertaining, Ranjana Sengupta proffers an answer.

Read more in Penguin

CITY OF DJINNS: A YEAR IN DELHI

William Dalrymple

A scintillating memoir of a year spent in Delhi by one of the best writers at work today. Alive with the mayhem of the present and sparkling with William Dalrymple's irrepressible wit, *City of Djinns* is a fascinating portrait of a city. Watched over and protected by the mischievous, invisible djinns, Delhi has, through their good offices, been saved from destruction many times over the centuries. With an extraordinary array of characters, from elusive eunuchs to the last remnants of the Raj, Dalrymple's book is a unique and dazzling feat of research. Over the course of a year he comes to know the bewildering city intimately, and brilliantly conveys its magical nature, peeling back successive layers of history, and interlacing innumerable stories from Delhi's past and present.

Read more in Penguin

DELHI: A NOVEL

Khushwant Singh

‘I return to Delhi as I return to my mistress Bhagmati when I have had my fill of whoring in foreign lands …’

Thus begins Khushwant Singh’s vast, erotic, irreverent magnum opus on the city of Delhi. The principal narrator of the saga, which extends over six hundred years, is a bawdy, ageing reprobate who loves Delhi as much as he does the hijda whore Bhagmati. Travelling through time, space and history to ‘discover’ his beloved city, the narrator meets poets and princes, saints and sultans, temptresses and traitors, eand mperors and eunuchs who have shaped and endowed Delhi with its very special mystique. And as we accompany the narrator on his epic journey we find the city of emperors transformed and immortalized in our minds for ever.

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