

POOSH PART 2

My experiences with Indians

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POOSH

PART 2

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Over the years, I have had lots of experiences with Indians, both in my family and others. These three works are just a few of the ones I remember as being notable. They happened both in India and in the UK,



THE VISIT

She was slicing
Vegetables
When we arrived.
Having not seen
Her brother for
13 years
She simply looked
Up and said
So you're back
As if he had been
Away for a few hours.
And he said
Yes
And sat down.
No tears, no hugging,
No questions.
The tea was nice
Though
And a young lad
Had been sent to
The local shop
For biscuits.



FRESH MEAT

We wanted two kilos
Of chicken
And the butcher
A dirtily dressed Sikh
Peered into his cage.
He pulled out one chicken
And stretching its wings
Over its body
So he could hold both
Wings and both feet
In one hand,
Chopped off its head
And let the blood pour out
Into a bucket.
He plucked it, cleaned it
And chopped it.
He did the same with another
And then weighed the meat.
Exactly two kilos.
When he gave me the meat,
Wrapped in newspaper,
The muscles of the chicken
Were still twitching.



FISH PAKORAS

After a hot day
Travelling through the Panjab
We were hungry and
Stopped at Gobindgarh.
The sun was going down.
The dust of the busy day
Was settling.
We ordered fish pakoras
At a roadside stall
And nearby,
We bought a bottle of whisky.

Sitting at the roadside
On a bench
We drank a big snort each
And ate the most
Delicious fish pakoras ever
And watched the sun
Disappear into the night.
Paradise.



A BLOCK OF ICE

Before people in the
Villages had fridges
We used to cycle
To five kilometres
To town and buy
A block of ice.
We wrapped it in a cloth
In 100 degree Fahrenheit
And cycled back to the
Village imagining
That by the time
We got there
We would just have
A wet cloth.
Surprisingly, it never happened.
The ice never melted
And we always returned
Successfully with a big block.
But I never really believed
It would work the next time.



BEGGAR WOMAN

The beggar woman
Pleaded in a familiar way.
No, I said
You don't need money today.
You've had a
Good day's trading.
But you will need some
Money tomorrow
So I'll see you here at
11 am.
She was a bit bemused
But had never come across
A crazy benefactor
Like me before.
The next day she was waiting
For me and I told her,
See, I was right.
She said nothing.



TWO SISTERS

The two sisters
Were excited.
A trip to the Himalayas!
They screeched and
Beseeched
Until we all relented.
They piled into the van
And were breathless
Until we started the
Climb into the mountains.

Curving, spinning,
Bend after bend,
Rise after rise,
Until both sisters
Were yellow.
Then they started.
Spewing up everything
It seemed since their
Birth.

How these girls had
So much inside them
To spew,
Bucketfuls.
It was almost
Impossible.
After ten hours of
Travelling we arrived at the
hotel.

They went straight to
Bed and saw nothing
Of the mountains
Until it was time
To spew all the
Way back down
Again.



SNOOKER

Text goes here
Some people might think
It's a bit daft
To go all the way to
The Himalayas
Just to play snooker.
But the table in the
Hotel was brilliant
And in any case
I could see the
Mountains out of the window.



A MOUSE

The children shrieked
And hugged each other
On the bed.
They shouted in terror,
A mouse! A mouse!
I jumped on the chair
Instinctively
And then realised
That it was a baby mouse
And that I wasn't
Afraid of mice anyway.
Bravely, I stepped down
Hoping no one had noticed.
Everyone had.



JAWALAMUKHI

In Jawalamukhi
At the temple
Three renunciants came
Up to me.
Where have you been?
I started,
I have been waiting here
For you for half an hour.
I have travelled 4,500 miles
To get here and you
Are late.
They, having never seen me
Before, were shocked into
Silence, hands still outstretched.
We need money, one began,
Three hundred rupees.
No you don't, I told him,
Actually you need only 120.
Big eyes and short breath.
They didn't know how
I knew.
But I did.



RAMAN'S RESTAURANT

We were in the Himalayas
And went for breakfast
To Raman's Restaurant.
We were the only ones there
And listened intently
To the clanging and clashing
Of pans and spoons
In the kitchen.
It seemed like the clock
On the wall had stopped.
It felt like we had
Been there for days.
Eagerly we looked at the
Door from the kitchen
But it never opened.
Our stomachs were desperate
For something, anything.
In the end we realised
We would probably never
Get any breakfast
When even the flies
Were falling to the floor
Dead.



A TINY SCAR

The beggar woman
Pleaded with tortured
Eyes and high pitched
Words.

She pointed to her belly
And showed me
A tiny scar.

I couldn't resist it
And lifted my t-shirt
Exposing the numerous
Scars I had accumulated
Over the years.

She stopped pleading.
The high pitched appeals
Disappeared.

She called all her friends
To look.

She asked me how all
These scars had happened.
She forget her role as beggar
Completely, and we
Had a laugh before she
Resumed in her mask of beggar.



DOSA

For 25 rupees* you can
Get a Dosa in this
Delhi café.
It's made of rice bread
And if you don't know
What you're doing
You might end up with one
The size of a large tray
Or a little one rolled up
The size of a sausage.
In any case you have
To eat at 100 miles an hour
Because people are waiting
To sit down.
Even a stray inch or so
Will find you squeezed
As another bony elbowed
Indian office worker
Contorts himself into the gap.

* about 30p



FLOODS PART I

The woman insisted that
She would brave the
Mumbai floods
And hotel workers lifted
Her and carried her to
Her car.
The driver was apprehensive
In his white uniform and cap.
The manager insisted no one else
Would be allowed out.
It was too dangerous.
The next day we learned
That a woman along with
Her chauffeur
Had been found dead in Juhu.
The water short-circuited the
electrics
The electric windows wouldn't open
The doors were pushed closed
By the force of the water
And slowly both had drowned
In the car.



FLOODS PART 2

On the TV
There were live text messages
Being shown.
From the Air India offices
At Mumbai airport
Were desperate appeals
Save us, the water is rising.
On and on
Over and over
The same appeals in desperation.
The next day
The news presenter
Told us that all the
Air India crews were dead,
Drowned.



FLOODS PART 3

On Juhu beach
On the third day of the
Floods
It was a lovely sunny morning.
I stepped out to walk on
The beach
And listen to the
Enchanting waves of the
Indian Ocean.
Instead all I could see
Were grey lumps
And the horrible stink
Of death.
The dogs were ripping
The stomachs of the dead buffaloes
And feasting.
All along the beach.



MUSLIM IN A TEMPLE

A Muslim in a temple.
He was a Muslim but
The Sikhs put up with him.
He was devout and
Had his own reasons for
Not attending a Mosque.
After some months
The other devotees even secretly
Admired him for his devotion.
One day, there was a call
For volunteers to help with
Running the temple.
He waited while some people
Volunteered
And then volunteered himself.
He was turned down because
He was a Muslim.
Suddenly, everyone forgot his devotion
And the admiration they
Had had for him.



MAD WOMAN I

The mad woman
Begging at the temple
Beseeched me with
Her flailing arms.
I got some sindoor,
Married women wear
The red powder in their
Hair parting,
And went to sit with her.
I drew the swastika,
Sigh of peace to Hindus,
In front of her.
She angrily wiped it out
With her hands.
I stood up and sprinkled
The sindoor on the ground.
Next day, I asked my driver
To go to the temple
And confirm to me
That she was dead.



MAD WOMAN 2

The mad woman in the
Temple was dead.
I said just wait,
In four months or so
He will call you and
Tell you his wife is pregnant.
It will be a girl
And she will be disabled
In some way.
The half unbelievers stretched
Their eyebrows in doubt.
But when the phone rang
On a hot Mumbai evening
And he said his wife was pregnant
There was more than stretched
Eyebrows.

