

POOSH PART 3

My experiences with Indians

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PART 3

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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 GURU

We went to see his guru.
We drove for some time
And left the car in the
Middle of nowhere in
The mountains.
Climbing down a steep
Grassy hillside,
Crossing a river,
Stepping stones,
Across fields,
And round bends,
Past a farmhouse
And down a snicket.
He was there, the guru,
Sitting on a plastic
Fertiliser bag
Next to his goat,
Tied to a stunted tree.
An old man with
A bag full of wisdom.
We recognised each other
immediately.



GETTING MARRIED

Let's get married then
I said.
There was the temple
Dedicated to my Devi*
Kali Ma.
I went off for a shave
And a haircut
And she went to see the
Landlady for something red
To wear.
The landlady is four times
As wide as my woman.
Then we were there
At the temple,
Me, ignorant as to what to do,
She, held together with safety pins.
It was a quick process
And within an hour of proposing
We were married,
Safety pins and all.

* Goddess



HIMALAYAN TEMPLE

High in the mountains
Surrounded by forest
Of Himalayan trees
A small temple.
Where there should be
No people, there was
A little boy.
I shared some biscuits
With him and he
Took me home to
A little house hut.
His father was all smiles
And agreed that there
Were wolves and bears
All around, especially the
Wolves at night.
It's my job, he said simply,
To look after the temple.
I am the custodian
And the wolves live here too.



JAIPUR PALACE

In Jaipur there is a palace
That has eight identical
Rooms on the first floor.
The Maharaja had eight wives.
He must have got confused,
Tanked up on the
Finest grog.
I can see him staggering
From identical room
To identical room
Trying to remember
Whose turn it was tonight.



TAXI DRIVER

My daughter is ill
Cries all the time
And can never sleep.
My wife is going mad,
Never sleeping herself
And at her wits end.
What to do now?
I gave him my mobile
And told him to ring
His wife.
I told him his daughter
Was asleep.
He rang and then
Went quiet as he handed
Me back my phone.



SIX BANANAS

I just wanted
Some bananas
Six for 10 rupees*.
When I turned to
Go, I banged into
An elephant
Innocently standing
Right next to me.
Six bananas are small
Compared to the
Over friendly elephant
Standing in the queue
Next to me.

*=12p



KASHMIR

When you're forty something
In an army cantonment
It means you must be a
Senior officer.
As I walked around all
The young soldiers would
Snap to attention
And salute me.
I learned to give a
Half dismissive nod as
I went past them.
Colonel? Major?
Which one shall I be?
After all I did once want
To be in the army.
This is the easy way.
All the credit for just
Visiting someone who is
A colonel.



DAL LAKE

People dream of going
To Kashmir,
Of setting out on
A Shikara* on Dal Lake.
We were told it was
Too dangerous
Because it would be dark
By the time we returned
And the terrorists
Would be on the loose.
Once in a lifetime chance
Missed
As we turned and left.

* a boat found in Kashmir



VILLAGE POOR

I went to the home
Of the little girl and
Her older brother.
They were poor but
The brother had just
Scored 75% in a
Computer test
Even though he had never
Used one.

Poor people have to learn
In theory and imagination.
I gave their parents
500 rupees for each child
and told the children
that the money was for books
not to be wasted.

I realised at once that
These children didn't know
What wasting money was
Because they didn't have much
In the first place.



THE TRAIN

On the train from
Jalandhar to Mumbai,
Two nights and a day.
There was lots of tea
But no water or good food
Because the Gujjars of Rajasthan
Were up in revolt
And it was too dangerous
To stop for supplies.
If we were lucky we would
Get through without
Being stopped,
Without violence.
Then we could get our
Supplies of water and food.
We got through.
The next train wasn't
So lucky.



CASTES

Sikhism doesn't recognise
Castes.
Everyone is equal.
But when an untouchable
Wanted to help in the kitchen
He was refused.
He was a millionaire
in the UK
And the ones who refused him,
Although of a higher caste,
Did untouchable work
In the UK.
Sikhism is equal.
To what?



HE WAS DRUNK

She was a beautiful girl,
Long legged,
Smiling.
He was drunk, he said,
And slapped her only once.
He cried because, he said,
He didn't want to be
Like his father.
He was exactly like his
Father
But she wasn't like his
Mother.
She hides in a safe house
Although he will never
Hit again.
I told him.
Her nightmares have
Started up again
The ones her father
Had caused her long before.



THE GHOST FAMILY

A man, a woman
And two children
Stand in my living room.
They have been there
Every night
And stand silently looking
At me.
They won't speak
Except with mournful eyes.
My ancestors?
They have come to get me
To walk me out of this life
And into another one.
Strangely, they are not frightening
But odd
Standing in my living room
Patiently
Every night.
But I am not ready to go
But they are still there.



THE SPIRIT

He came one night
And pushed his way through
The family standing in my
Living room.
He just kept laughing his
Loud, uncontrolled laugh.
He laughed all night.
I asked him what he wanted
But he just laughed.
On the second night he was
There again.
I hadn't slept and got annoyed.
I told him he had passed
Out of this life
And drowned in a canal.
He wouldn't understand
So I told him to go.
He stayed.



THE SPIRIT LEAVES

On the third night
He realised
At last that he had
To say his piece
and go.
He told me he wanted
To talk to his brother
But not his wife.
He realised at last
And I led him
Out of the delusion
And told him it
Was right.
I would pass on the message.
After he'd gone
The family still stood
In my living room.
But I slept like a baby.



KRISHNA

On your bedside table
There is a book
About Krishna.
Either read it or
Give it away.
How do you know? She insisted
You have never been
To my house.
Never mind, I said
Either read it or
Give it away.
She read on the first night
And then she turned
Off the light.
Her bedroom door burst open
And her curtains danced.
Don't worry, I said,
It's only negative energy
Leaving.
It won't happen again.
I was frightened, she said.



THE SCAR

A girl stands in
The bedroom,
A scar running down her face
From her eye to her mouth.
The suitcase lies open
And the couple sleep
On the bed.
The woman wakes and
Peers, half asleep
Across the room
At the girl.
Silent stares, both.
She goes to wake her husband
Laying a frightened hand
On his shoulder.
The girl disappears
Into thin air,
Her curse left to
Float like cigarette smoke.

