

10. DILLI ALSO CALLED DELHI

Delhi is the loveliest and vilest courtesan among world capitals. She has never yet given herself to a faithful lover. She has almost always been subdued by brutes, whom she has tried to refine into good manners and effeminacy. When her work has neared completion, she has taken on fresh batch of brutes under her refining mantle. She has never wearied nor despaired. One may almost suspect religious element in her disposition, in her enthralling loveliness mixed with pauseless philandering, the Samaritan's desire to do good, to refine, to beautify the gross world into her own like.

Delhi is unique. She is not like Paris, nor like Washington, nor even like Tokyo or Damask. She has been a bit of all these, with the dirt and beauty of each one accentuated. Paris is without doubt the world's current sweet-heart. She has a permanent lover whom she does not change, but this lover, who is the French people, smiles or looks away at her gay frolics outside the marital boundary. She is faithful and frolicsome, a combination of fire and water, something that wrenches and freshens the heart but does not dull it. Washington is the portly and marble pure matron, so beautifully obedient to her lord, an object of some curiosity but greater sympathy. Tokyo and Damask are the honest and industrious street walkers, who are trying to pile up enough substance, so that their lawfully wedded husbands might live in modern comfort like the other husbands in the wide world. Delhi has never had a husband. She never took a lover. She never frolicked for gain or a passing affair of the heart. She has been the pure and undeviating courtesan of the world, applying herself devotedly to refining and enervating the new brute, who has been able to force himself upon her. Her

charms are bewildering and full of pure vice. Totally without heart, all she lives for is beauty and refinement and, while being a bit of the sweet-heart, the matron and the street-walker, she has surpassed them all in her unmixed vice.

Contrary to the assumptions of the ignorant, Delhi emerges into history comparatively late. Delhi's history begins around 750 years ago. The myths of pre-history ascribe to it a somewhat premonitory role over a brief period. Mayadanava built magic Indraprastha; this city of great elegance and cunning, which housed the younger line of Kuru kings, served to humiliate the older line, which ruled at Hastinapur. Indraprastha also acted as the stepping stone to ultimate mastery over Hastinapur. Already in the Krishna myth of pre-history, Indraprastha, the forerunner of Delhi, is full of elegance and wiles and designed to humiliate all except the current lord. But Indraprastha of Jamuna has a brief existence and acts as a threshold, until Krishna's nominees, the Pandavas, can be firmly seated in the not too distant Hastinapur of Ganga. But for this brief mention in pre-history, this elegant, wily and vicious threshold is not heard of again, until, 764 years ago it emerges both as the threshold and the control room of all India, a continuing threshold for all strange and romantically powerful brutes that could force their way in, and a control room for the humiliation of the people and the enervating refinement of the current overlord.

Delhi has shifted its site for each new-conqueror. It does not probably want to be distressed by old memories. It enters into each new venture of elegant vice on virgin ground. During less than eight centuries and within fifteen miles, there are seven Delhis and, according to some tastes, eight, layer upon layer or, rather, scene after scene, of recorded history of elegance and humiliation.

As a colossus, Tughlakabad, though in ruins, stands still unexcelled. I do not remember having seen a fort of more gigantic proportions or one, which exuded as much crude prowess, any where in the world. Its companion Jahanpanah,

the refuge of the world, with its wooden palace of a thousand pillars, later burnt down and not even the ashes left, must have been equally big, though less terrifying and more elegant. The Tughlaks were a strange lot. They were brilliantly original but not wise. They were the first in the world on many matters such as trying to circulate leather coins on the strength of their sovereignty; they built their fort and city without ensuring adequate supply of water. In the process of turning native, they tried very hard to bolster up their enervating refinement with the efforts of identification with the people. Towards this end, one of them strove to move the capital over a thousand miles away to Deogiri, also called Daulatabad, where a midget Kutub still laughs in the background of a great fort, made more by nature than by man.

Most Delhis are abodes of foreigners turning native. Kutub, Tughlakabad, Jahanpanah, Kotla and Shahjahanabad are all expressions of this phenomenon. Much cruelty and greater infamy attains this phenomenon in the early stages, when the native is overpowered by the foreigner, and great debasement and beauty attains it in the later stages, when the foreigner is graduating into a native. The first two sites of Delhi, Rai Pithora and Kutab, are layer upon layer, and not scene by the side of scene. They symbolise more than any thing else, the cruelty of the foreigner and the infamy of the native so characteristic of Indian history in the past eight to nine hundred years. Sculptured stone has been reversed and in some cases the Arabic Kuran carved in order to change Delhi of Prithviraj into Delhi of Kutubuddin and heirs.

I once spent a night in this desolation of Indian history and intend to do so again in my quest for its mystery. I was not angry. How can one be angry with a mother, no matter that she has a certain predilection for the conquering foreigner or with the step-father who became the husband of the mother after raping her and with the brothers who were the result of this union? If I was enraged with anybody, sad grief would more appropriately describe my emotion than rage, it was with the

father who did not know how to protect the mother. The weak father, whether Hindu or Muslim, has successively been beaten to death or into drummery to the new step-father.

I looked for a long time at the triangle formed out of the stately Kutub and the unfinished but crude Minar of Allauddin at the base, and the dark and lovely iron pillar at the apex. I was alone and the moon was too small to help. Some unknown fear held me to the base of the triangle. Was it the fear of snakes or conspiring thieves and robbers or purity leaguers, who encourage elegant vice in expensive mansions but pounce upon the poor, whether alone or in couples, in public places, all of which is Delhi today and has been so for nearly ten centuries now, or was it just the nameless fear of the cruelty and infamy of Indian history?

Lest ignorance should read into these emotions a lament at the Muslim's over-powering of the Hindu, I have only to point out the quick succession in which Muslim Kutub was over-powered by Muslim Tughlakabad with the same cruelty and infamy, which in its turn was over-powered by another Muslim, until the last of them Shahjahanabad was over-powered by Gulamabad of British. In addition are the terrible sacks of Delhi and the benumbing massacres that went with them, the sacks and massacres of Taimur, Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah—all Muslims, and all of them carried out against Muslim Delhis of the Syeds or the Moghuls. Indian History of the past ten centuries should be as enraging or saddening to the Muslim as to the Hindu, for neither of them has been able to protect his father, the people of India, from enervation and his mother, India, from her wicked waywardness. The brutes have come in quick succession until the Lodhi Muslims had to accept a new step-father in the Moghul Muslim.

Only twice was there stoppage of the process of foreigner turning native, when the native tried to win back his dominion. This was when the Syeds and the Lodhis and later the Suris attempted to give Delhi a heart that might have turned it into the world's sweet-heart like Paris or the world's refuge like

London. A somewhat feeble attempt was later made by Bahadurshah, the last of the Moghuls, who wrote poems and accepted doles, but the attempt was made memorable because of the support of the populace.

The Suri effort, however, of Shershah and Hemu Bakkal stands out in effulgent brilliance, to any truthful man, the greatest and happiest episode of India's Muslim history. Shershah was greater than any Akbar and Hemu, than any Abul Fazal or Mansingh. That they failed was a tragedy for India and the result of the era of the wicked and lovely courtesan, and less, an indication of their own inherent defects. The grand highway with the shaded avenues, the post, proper accountancy, land settlements, and respect for the law, were the work of Shershah and Hemu, and Akbar merely completed them. Shershah and Hemu, the greatest political partnership of Muslim India, have been pushed back by historians, of course, because of their failure, but, even more so, because the children of the courtesan have not yet been able to gain a proper perspective on the events and processes of India's history. It is a matter of some interest that this effort of the native to win back his dominion took its original impulse not from Delhi, but from several hundred miles away in Sasaram. It is also a matter of some interest that Hemu and Shershah chose to build their fort on the site which legends describe as Indraprastha, the Purana Qila, where refugees of India's 1947 partition have tried to make their home.

Gulamabad, whether in its site of what is now the Delhi university or of government structures of the last British architecture, is the sole exception to this thousand year old process of foreigners turning native. The foreigner in this case refused to turn native. The courtesan could not refine him into enervation. He did not deteriorate into drummery; he was expelled. The people have in their wisdom, greater than that of scholars, appropriately named the sites of the British capital as Gulamabad—the slaves' abode.

Throughout her history Delhi has been the great

courtesan, with the over-powering conquerors at one end and the drummers at the other. Delhi has known no other categories of people. Each wave of conquering brutes has been nativised, enervated and turned into drummers to the next wave. There has been just a difference of degree between the two categories of drummers, the populace and the former conqueror. One could hardly describe the group of drummers formed out of the former conqueror as courtiers. The true courtiers are the powerful fresh wave of brutes. One group of drummers, the ex-courtiers, is allowed condescending entry into the boudoirs of the courtesan and her new lovers, while the other group of drummers, the populace, stand outside on the road and does obeisance.

There have been only three exceptions to this situation, when the people of Delhi have woken out of their drummery, though not completely. Once when Razia revolted against the triple conspiracy of the nobility, the army and the priest-craft, multitudes gathered outside her fort to encourage her. The high-placed woman and the poor populace were natural companions in their defiance of a stagnant or reactionary order. On another occasion in 1857, the people of Delhi rose in a brief revolt against foreign rule, though its original impulse came from neighbouring Meerut. The third exception to Delhi's infamy seems to have been somewhat more continuous, though not very deep. For a long number of years between 1920 and 1947, even if the earlier attempts, individualistic but brave, at the use of bombs are not considered, the people of Delhi, on stray occasions, massed, resolved, demonstrated, and braved the baton and the bullet, more or less, like their countrymen elsewhere in their revolt against foreign rule. But for these three brief periods, the people of Delhi have done unashamed obeisance to whoever stood by the side of the courtesan.

If Delhi during its ten centuries has known the three processes of foreigner turning native, of foreigner refusing to turn native, and of native trying to win back his dominion,

what of the latest drama that is now being enacted? This drama is clearly enough laden with the motif of the native trying to turn foreigner. The sites of Gulamabad have been taken over and little emblems of their sovereignty are not yet gone. The presidential palace stands on the highest rise of land and the secretariat and the parliament continue to be on successively lower ground as under British rule. The new and colourful architectural creation on the Mathura Road or in the Karol Bagh area are elegant to look at, but they belong to the courtiers of a courtesan who has still no use for her forgotten husband, the people of India. Drummers of the first category abound. Academicians, poets, musicians, teachers, lawyers, manufacturers, scientists, dancers, painters and politicians have hurried to gather in their hordes, but not one of them is great, nor even significant. They are there to do obeisance to the courtesan and her new lovers. They are there to ape the standards and ways of foreign living, to the best of their capacity. They must, therefore, do a complete obeisance to the new conqueror, even though he happens and appears to be a native. The populace has not yet made up its mind, for it is oscillating between obeisance and a dull rumble.

Delhi has probably never had any great or significant men except among the top crust of the conquerors, also very rarely. The Tansens of music and the Todarmals of administration have worked at a time when Agra and Fatehpur-Sikri were Moghul capital, and not Delhi. I do not know what significance I should attach to this fact that the only foreigner who was trying to turn native without too much enervation chose to live away from Delhi, Ghalib may appear to be an exception, but then he was a king of poetry on the minor scale and, additionally, he belonged to an age when the emperor was a captive in his own fort.

Not all of India's history is such unrelieved pain. There had been a great people, great states, great men and women, in this country, as great as any where else in the world and, in some ways, greater. But they have always operated away from

Delhi, from Pataliputra, Kannoj and Ujjain, India's capital of the historical period, not to mention Bhubaneshwar, Dhar, Paithan or Srirangam, which were the centres of beauty as well as strength. Pataliputra protected India at her last outposts in Kabul and Afghanistan and repelled invasions. Mandsaur the forced the Hun invader Mihirakul to bend his knee. In addition to this fact of a strong and healthful people, was the fact that these capitals identified themselves with the people, and ruled with the light touch and allowed men of learning and art to work away from their sites. I do not know how far any of these capitals and its people lived unmindful of the rulers, at least, Vaisali of the Lichhavis did.

Paris and London live unmindful of their rulers and so does Rome or even Berlin. The people of these cities would not be able to name or recognise their government ministers. The government of France is only a small part of Paris. Delhi, and all of it, is the government of India. From Paris to Berlin, over London and Rome is the category of capitals that does not recognise the government as its overlord; from Washington to Delhi over Tokyo and Kahira is the category of capitals, which has little existence outside of its government. Paris is the most complete expression todate of the free capital. Delhi is the most complete expression todate of the enslaved capital. It is not foreign rule that distinguishes free from enslaved capitals; it is the fact of obeisance of the populace to the government. Paris is wedded to the enduring people of France. Delhi is wedded to the passing government of India.

One would wrongly infer that I am allergic to London, being the capital of England. I loved London once, though only at parting and when I was a young man on a visit from Berlin. It was a moment's wrench as I sat in my train, but one that left an indelible impression on me. I tried then to guess at the reason as I now try to recollect it. It may well have been the nearness of Tottenham and Regent streets to Belsize parks, of St. Paul's Cathedral to Hyde Park, the case and the speed with

which I could travel from the busy and multiform throngs of a world metropolis to the idyllic romance of London's parks and bounds. All of it was London. At one point was the efficient and stern demeanour of the city, though not as high-speed as New York or as stern as Tokyo, and at another point were the relaxed smiles of the pretty milkmaids.

London is big bosomed. One looks away from it at first sight as though it were broad and flabby. And, then, when it is time to depart, the big bosom bares itself and shows how well proportioned and sensually beautiful it is, indeed, a refuge of the world. I have been to London again and recall some experiences. I remember a university girl, who hit headlines in the popular press, was she Ginger, who stood up on a stool to harangue and to introduce order in a situation which might well have resulted in a riot among theatre-going crowds and the managers. I have personally seen university girls and their like get up on stools in the Hyde Park of London or the May Day parades of Berlin, and declaim to the crowds on the impending over-throw of the government or the capitalists or both and of tyranny and exploitation. I also recall how I was chided by a waitress for not taking sufficient care of my coat and warned of what my wife would say or do to me. To my lament that nobody ever wanted to be my wife, the waitress quickly answered, "Ye, never asked any" which I found pretty and good. I also recall another pretty and wise waitress in a Soho Restaurant, whose father-in-law was once the chief secretary of the Madhya Pradesh government. Then, there was that patently middle class girl in Sutton, very pretty and very well mannered, who was running across the road, of whom I asked the way to my house, before I realised that she must have been crying over some dispute or an affair of the heart, when she directed me on my way with a stoic repose. London is big.

The last time I was there, Trafalger Square was my first big view. I decided then that I had no other programme in England except to spend half an hour with the pigeons, half an

hour with the lions, and a third half an hour with Admiral Nelson up there on top. The lions are in complete repose, almost as though they are there to protect the pigeons, which is a complete lie on British history, but a fair presentation of the internal affairs of England, in any event, an elegant picture. I wish I had stayed longer in New York to sense the soul of that great city. London is big. If it is a bit of the sweet-heart, the matron and the street walker, all of them thrown together, it is each one of them on the large-hearted scale.

The waitress, the university girl and the suburban maiden and their male counterparts are not unique to London. They are there in Delhi as well. In Fact, they are as pretty or pleasant in Delhi as they are in London, with a bit more of wit and wisdom due to their older ancestry. But they have been turned into drummers. Their souls are not allowed free expression and their clothes are soiled or crushed. The courtesan does not allow them her company. In London and Paris they are free, in London they are free to be indifferent to the government, in Paris they are even free to cock a snook at their government.

I have not seen Moskova but I greatly admire that city. Moskova has oft times gone out to fight for itself, has withdrawn under pressure, but has turned each one of its streets and homes into fortresses. Delhi has sometimes gone out to fight for itself, on the grounds of Kurukshetra or of Panipat. It is of some interest that Kannoj's last great fling for freedom took it not to Delhi but to Thaneshwar, around 90 miles further to the north. Thaneshwar and Panipat are sad towns, Thaneshwar even more so. It takes me a long time to tune myself to the silent story of old towns, and I would have to go to Thaneshwar again, but have not these courtesans of high-caste minority something to do with the tall and formless ruins of that town. Delhi's success on Kurukshetra or Panipat is very rare, in fact, difficult to recall. Delhi has made an art of withdrawal. She has bared her breasts to the conqueror, in the hope that he may be allured, and ultimately tamed. Her breasts have indeed been rapturously lovely in the past. But all

that age of treasure is now gone, which introduces a new element into the situation.

Delhi has always bared her breasts to the conqueror, but often to no immediate avail. Taimur and Nadirshah scarred her into ugliness when there was no need of it. She had surrendered. But the old witch won some secret portions and ointments and no scars are permanently left. Other cities are sacked with a view to conquest. Delhi is sacked after conquest. On the British withdrawal in 1947, when the streets of Delhi were once again full of blood or at least of broken homes, an old Muslim lady serenely said: "Delhi is changing her wifehood. Blood always flows when that happens." The translation is not quite adequate, for the Hindustani word for 'wifehood' is 'good fortune' or 'good destiny'. I do not know why this should happen. I could have understood if blood had flowed in order to effect a change of wifehood, but why after? Is it that this wicked and fascinating courtesan likes to celebrate her new love with blood?

I would recommend a two-day long tour, if possible, longer, of the 7 or 8 Delhis, to native and foreigner alike. I have looked long at this evil town and have occasionally caught myself slipping into admiration for her elegance. I do not mean so much the slender grace of Jama Masjid, when seen from a distance, nor the tall beauty of the Kutab Minar. In fact, there is not much by way of old monuments in this town, not one that goes back beyond a thousand years.

Rai Pithora's iron pillar and the two Asokan pillars on Kotla and the Ridge are not native to Delhi and were brought from a distance by usurpers in order to give themselves the respectability of age. There are not many beautiful buildings, either medieval or modern. That is probably the charm of Delhi; Delhi does not remember. To be just to her, that could well be said of all towns in the valleys of the Ganga and the Jamuna. Here, Mahakal or the Great Time reigns and obliterates all. Nothing remains. Delhi can proceed with her elegant vice, without any memories to trouble her. This is what

I have admired in her, this wicked old woman more beautiful than a maiden.

I was once face to face with an upraised snake in front of Tughlakabad. The snake was on the middle of the road and I was in a car. We had gone quite half a mile away from the snake, and it was the middle of the night, before my driver told me of it and we returned to the spot. We faced each other for quite a few moments from the distance of a metre or so, when the snake slithered with majesty and power towards the car and I felt an involuntary shiver, before it turned and sinewed into the neighbouring grass. Old stones are the abodes of snakes and lizards. Delhi has not much by way of old stones. But she awakens numberless old memories, while she herself does not remember them. That is why I recommend a tour of her, so that men may recall in their minds her elegance, her vice, her utter rottenness, the cruelty of the conqueror, the infamy of the conquered and above all, the total transience of man unless he is wide awake.

Any one who wants to rule Delhi, should go to her not as wooer but as her subduer. I hope and believe that the age of foreign conquest is gone, at least for a long time. The age of transfer of power within the people has begun. The Congress Party, which now rules Delhi, shifted its headquarters from Allahabad only after it had made sure of its possession of Delhi. The Communists and the Praja Socialists have come to woo and not to subdue and they have already established their central offices in this town of diseased elegance. They will not have won Delhi, but Delhi will have turned them into its drummers.

Is a coup possible in Delhi like the one in Baghdad or Kahira or like the one that may be theoretically imagined in London? I doubt very much. Here is the weak chink in Delhi's armour of vice, and here is also good fortune in the future of the people. India is big and each one of her states shall increasingly become organised, cohesive, conscious and responsible. A violent upset in Delhi, I hope, will lead to

continued resistance from the states. One may imagine exceptions to this situation, but one may hope that they will not occur. What is of deciding importance is the demeanour of people of Delhi? When would they have realised that the age of the courtesan should be over, that they should neither do obeisance to her nor try to capture her exclusively for themselves or their leader, that they should be basically indifferent to the government, their city houses and support it when it does good and cock snooks at it when it does bad, which would be often enough.

Many reasons have turned Delhi into the most heartless courtesan of world history; but the force of language seems to have worked most. No other capital in the world has worked with a foreign and a feudal language over such a long period. Arabic, Persian and English have dominated Delhi, all of them languages unfamiliar to the people and of the smallest feudal minority that ever ruled a people. The courtesan probably wanted a complete divorcement from the people and therefore, conducted her affairs in languages they would not know. There was a brief native period of Urdu but only for secondary purposes. All they had to do was to play the drum for her. Tokyo or Kahira shares Delhi's divorcement from the people up to a degree, but none of them has been able to turn it into an absolute and almost irreversible divorce. The reason is obvious. None of them has been able to curtain itself off from the people by the iron armour of a foreign and a feudal language. The iron curtain is here, if anywhere. Elegant and enervating vice proceeds behind this curtain of an unfamiliar language and the people know about it only from gossip and whisper. No people on earth, not even the Indian people with their famed resignation, could have so long suffered the infamies of Delhi, but for the protective screen of a language unknown to them.

One may imagine what would have happened if London or Paris had transacted their major affairs through the medium of a language unknown to the people. Imagine what would have

happened if Paris or Berlin, London, or Rome, and their universities and law-courts and their parliaments had worked through a language unknown to their peoples. Assuming that their peoples had not revolted, despite the continuing use of unfamiliar languages over ten centuries; these capitals would also have been turned into courtesans. Their universities, law-courts and parliaments would have been just as insipid as those in India. Their men of learning, art and distinction would have been just as great pimps, some of them elegant pimps, of the current overlord. Tiny minorities of a feudal class rule over majorities of the people, not alone through the bullet. They rule even more so through awakening a sense of inferiority among the ruled. An unfamiliar language of the feudal minorities whether native Sanskrit or foreign English, is the best means to make the people feel inferior, even more so than are distinctive styles of dress and living. The courtesan's divorcement from the people is complete. It is so complete that, even after foreign rule has ended and people's rule began, the courtesan's vice and habits have helped bring up a native minority, and a tiny one, of courtiers of the current overlord. This native minority has equipped itself with the protective screen of a foreign language, which spreads a radiant smile on the courtesan's evil and captivating visage.

The courtesan not only speaks a foreign language; she has also adopted foreign styles of dress, home and food. Some of these styles are definitely superior to the native ones. They are not only modern; they are also good. But under their cover, a lot of tinsel that passes off as modern is also accepted as good. While modern plumbing is good, the coat and tie and sherwani are a definite insult to India's poverty and landscape, but the courtesan is fond of them as she is of anything that separates her from the people. Additionally, almost everything modern is expensive and beyond the people's reach. This puts the courtesan into raptures. She is so happy that the people, who are too poor ever to become modern in the current way, must of necessity keep themselves out of those foreign-style

mansion where she can dally uninterfered with her native but foreign-style courtiers. She can even call her dalliance a religious duty to the land, which involves her in expensive estrangement from her rightful husband, the people, in order that the country may be modernised. She and her courtiers can and have become selfish and cruel with a high purpose.

Asian, African and presumably, South American embassies have much to learn from the fate and current career of Delhi. While their governments have not estranged themselves from their peoples so absolutely as in Delhi, primarily, because they work in their own languages, they have become similar victims to a cruel, unthinking and expensive modernization. Can they not take lesson from the fate of Delhi and work out a scheme of modernization, as will leave out the tinsel and as will also not estrange them from their peoples? I have seen Tokyo, utterly stern and ugly in repose, and beautifully wreathed in smiles, when in conversation. I have seen Kahira, though not exactly like Paris but at least like Brussels, in its modernised *quartiers* and the stench, dirt and poverty of the rest of the city. These contrasts or strains are not healthy; they cannot endure.

Will Delhi ever cease to be a courtesan, that is, will she ever effect identification with the people? I do not know. The history is some kind of a hoodoo on her. But her university girls, waitresses and housewives and their male counterparts can tear down the iron curtain, that separates them from their university, parliament and law-court, if they so choose. They may acquire contempt for the person who wears the feudal dress that the courtesan decrees or talks publicly the language unfamiliar to them, and give resolute expression to their contempt. If they do so, there would be no need to shift the capital.

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