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JEST FOR FUN!

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SPECIAL EDITION

THE GREAT EUROPEAN MISADVENTURE

11 countries. 21 days. One Indian couple in their 70s.

Five parts. Countless culture shocks. And far too many receipts.



From
The Lemon Squeezer's Desk

Dear Reader,

This Swiss guy, forlorn and dejected, sat at a street corner in Venice in tears. When I asked him what was wrong, he said his fiancée, (a beautiful white haired canine), was unwell.

Around him, elderly couples and youngsters were fussing over their pets with the tenderness usually reserved for family members. The dog gets a birthday cake, the cat gets a designer bed, and the human gets told to sleep on the sofa. At this rate, the next census may have to ask not only how many humans live in a house, but how many of them have tails.

The growing camaraderie between humans and animals is changing the behaviour of both species. Dogs are applying for certificates. Eagles are checking exam hall tickets. Snakes are visiting hospitals. Pigeons are boycotting government events. And somewhere, a goat is still outrunning the police.

But here's the twist: the real problem isn't animals acting like humans. It's humans acting like animals. It seems Nature has finally given up on civilisation and joined the bureaucracy.

In Bihar, a dog named Dogesh Babu reportedly applied for a residence certificate. The form carried his photograph and listed his parents as "Dogesh's Papa" and "Dogesh's Mami." The only detail officials missed? The applicant had four legs. Certificates have reportedly been issued to "Dog Babu" and even a tractor. An inquiry has been ordered. Whenever something unbelievable happens in India, the government orders an inquiry. It sits quietly, drinks tea, and waits for everyone to forget.

In Kerala, an eagle snatched a candidate's hall ticket before an exam. The bird perched, studied the document, found nothing suspicious, and returned it. That eagle deserves a government job. At least it has vision.

A man bitten by a Russell's viper walked into a hospital carrying the live snake. Doctors needed to identify the species, so he brought the evidence. Most patients bring prescriptions. He brought the accused.

In Chhattisgarh, a pigeon invited to a government ceremony simply refused to fly. Officials were furious. Poor pigeon. It did what many citizens secretly want to do: refuse to perform. The bird seemed to say, "Why should I?"

A Motor Vehicle Department inspector stopped a motorcyclist carrying a mridangam and, allegedly, some reptiles. Instead of asking for licence and registration, the officer asked him to open the instrument. The inspection turned into a musical session. The checkpoint became a mehfil, complete with Nagin dance.

Happy Reading,

Brij Khandelwal

Editor

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Travelling Through Kurruptistan for Election Tourism

Turbulence High, Please Fasten Your Democratic Seatbelts

By Brij Khandelwal
Travel Correspondent, Humour Times

My flight landed in Kurruptistan just as the country was preparing for another election. I checked my calendar. Surely, I had entered the wrong country.

"No," said the immigration officer. "You are perfectly right. We had an election last year."

"Then why another?"

He smiled proudly. "We are promoting Election Tourism. We encourage foreigners to contest elections and enjoy the thrilling adventure. Results don't matter."
"And we don't want people to get bored."

That was my first glimpse of Kurruptistani democracy. Inflation, unemployment and corruption were not considered problems. They had been around so long that citizens treated them like family heirlooms.

I visited the golden office of Lord Guddan Pyare, Supreme Ruler of Kurruptistan.

He was doing nothing.
It appeared to be an important government duty. Suddenly, he declared, "Let us have another election!" The Election Commissioner nervously reminded him about last year's election. "Exactly," said the Ruler. "Democracy needs exercise. Even countries at peace conduct military exercises." Then came the real innovation. Any minister resigning within 24 hours would be considered for the new Cabinet. Resignation became promotion. Within minutes, ministers were rushing through the Secretariat. "Where is the resignation desk?" one shouted. "I am late for my promotion!"

Political parties immediately opened their promise shops.
"Free electricity!"
"Already promised."
"Free water!"
"Already promised."
"Free internet!"
"Already promised."
"Free petrol?"
The room went silent.
"Too expensive."
The opposition promised to complete a bridge.
"Which bridge?"
"The one we started."
"When?"
"Eventually."
A spokesman defended a nine-year-old unfinished hospital.
"We believe healthcare is a long-term relationship."

Television channels were ecstatic.
"Frequent Elections: Future of Democracy?"
"Electoral Yoga: Master Stroke or Master Plan?"
"Resignation Politics: Sacrifice or Ambition?"
Five experts shouted. Nobody listened.

During my travels, I realised that in Kurruptistan, asking inconvenient questions is considered bad manners. At the city square beside the river, I chatted with ordinary citizens. A vegetable seller welcomed another election. "At least politicians will visit us."
A barber grinned. "Every candidate needs a haircut. Most need a new face." A tea seller was delighted. "More debates, more chai."

Before my departure, I was on a river cruise when I heard Lord Guddan Pyare on television.

"Democracy is alive!" he declared. Someone asked about the unfinished promises.
The Ruler smiled. "They are not unfinished. They are works in progress."

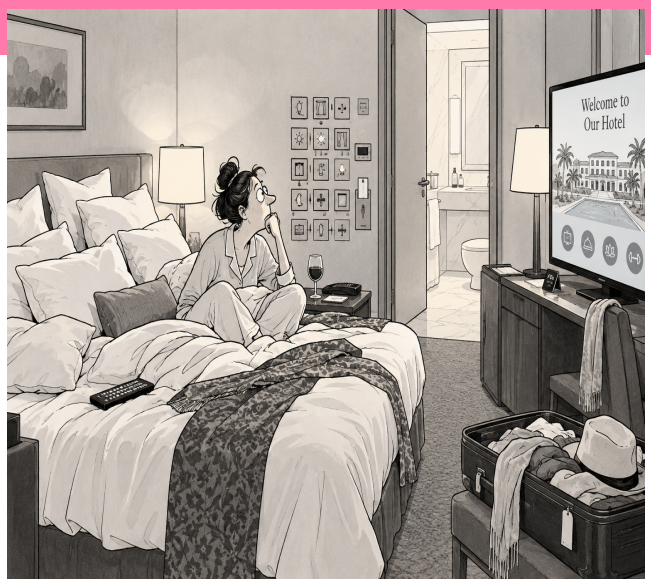
As I left, I saw a clerk stamping a government file:
DEMOCRACY: RENEWED

"Next election when?" I asked.
"Next year."
"Why so soon?"
The clerk looked at me as if I were an idiot.
"Tourism, sir."

That was my final discovery: *In Kurruptistan, democracy is not government. It is the country's most successful tourist industry.*

WHY ARE HOTEL ROOMS DESIGNED TO MAKE US FEEL STUPID?

By Mukta K Gupta



A survival guide to switches, sheets, secret sensors and other hotel-room mysteries

Hotel rooms are designed to replicate *The Matrix* clubbed with *Inception*. The only purpose of a hotel room, I have come to realise, is to make you feel stupid. You may be a perfectly functional adult at home. You may run a business, manage employees, raise children, file taxes and operate complicated kitchen appliances without supervision. But put you inside a hotel room and suddenly you are a confused contestant on a game show.

Your first challenge: Enter the room. It begins with the door lock. Do I insert the key card? Flash it? Swipe it? Hold it against the little blinking square? Or do I have to perform a small ritual involving three clockwise movements and a respectful nod? You stand outside the room waving the card at the lock like you are trying to communicate with an alien civilisation. Eventually, the light turns green.

You have passed Level One.

You enter.

And immediately begin looking for the light switches. There is usually one conveniently located near the door. Wonderful. You switch it on. The room is now illuminated like an operating theatre. You don't need this. It is evening. You are not performing brain surgery. You merely want enough light to find your suitcase. So you decide to turn on a lamp. This is where the real investigation begins. The bedside lamp has a switch somewhere. But where? On the stem? Behind the shade? Under the base? Behind the table? Or is it one of those modern lamps activated by a mysterious hand gesture? You touch it. Nothing. You touch it again. Nothing. You wave your hand. Nothing. You wave it more dramatically. Still nothing. At this point, you begin wondering whether the lamp is operated through the hotel app. Fifteen minutes later, you discover a tiny button hidden behind the lamp. You feel a brief sense of triumph. Then you realise the lamp has three brightness settings. You have accidentally chosen *INTERROGATION ROOM*.

THE TELEVISION

Eventually, you decide to watch television. You pick up the remote. Press the power button. Nothing happens. Press it again. Still nothing. Press every button except the one you actually need. Eventually, the television comes alive. The first thing that greets you is either a news channel in a language you have never heard before or a slideshow introducing the hotel's magnificent facilities. WELCOME TO HOTEL GRAND PALACE. You already know where you are. You are sitting in Room 407. You would like to watch television. You try changing the channel. Nothing. You press another button. The volume increases to a level that suggests the hotel is now hosting a rock concert. You press another. The screen disappears. You press another. The television begins displaying the weather in a city you have no intention of visiting. After several minutes of increasingly desperate button pressing, you call reception. "Could you please tell me how to change the channels?" There is a pause.

"Ma'am, is the remote working?"

"No."

"Okay, ma'am. We'll send someone."

Within minutes, a young member of the hotel staff arrives. He looks at the remote. Presses one button. Nothing. He removes the batteries. Puts them back. Presses another button. The television works. He smiles. You smile. He leaves. You spend the next ten minutes wondering why you couldn't do that.

THE BED

After a long day of sightseeing, you finally shower, pour yourself a glass of wine and prepare for the most basic human pleasure known to civilisation: Getting into bed. Except hotel beds are not beds. They are FORTIFICATIONS. First, there is the bed runner. I have never understood the purpose of a bed runner. It is placed across the bed as though someone has come into the room specifically to prevent you from lying down. I always remove it immediately. And then I wonder: Is this washed after every guest? Because it has clearly been in contact with thousands of strangers who have sat on it, put bags on it, thrown clothes on it and possibly eaten biscuits over it. So I pinch it between two fingers and move it as far away from me as possible.

Then comes the blanket. Or rather, the blanket that has been ENGINEERED INTO THE MATTRESS. Why is it tucked in so tightly? Why?

Do hotel staff believe guests are going to escape through the foot of the bed?

You try pulling the blanket out. Nothing. You pull harder. Still nothing. You pull with both hands. Now you are engaged in a full-body wrestling match with hotel linen. Eventually, one corner comes loose. You pull again. The entire blanket suddenly gives way and you nearly fall backwards. You finally climb underneath. Except now the blanket is too cold. You wait. You adjust the pillows. And then you confront another hotel mystery: Why are there so many pillows? There are approximately seventeen pillows on the bed.

Pillows that appear to have no practical purpose whatsoever. You spend ten minutes removing them.

THE MIDNIGHT SWITCHBOARD

Then comes the most dangerous part of the hotel experience. You wake up at 2:17 a.m. You need to use the bathroom.

You don't want to switch on the main light because that would wake everyone. Fortunately, there is a panel of switches next to the bed. Unfortunately, there are approximately 100 of them.

You think: This one must be the bedside light.

Click. Nothing. Another. Nothing. Third. BLAST. The entire room lights up. You freeze. Your husband wakes up.

Your children make the universal sound of people who have been unnecessarily awakened:

"Ughhhhh!" You whisper, "Sorry." You try another switch. BLAST.

Another flood of light.

At this point, you are no longer looking for the bathroom. You are conducting an archaeological excavation of the electrical system. There must be a dim light somewhere. Surely. You press another button. The curtains open. You freeze. It is 2:19 a.m. The room is now brightly illuminated and the curtains are dramatically unveiling the city outside.

Finally, you find the right switch. A tiny, gentle light comes on. You walk to the bathroom like a person escaping a maximum-security facility. And that is when you realise something. The hotel room has defeated you. Again.

You may have travelled across countries, navigated airports, dealt with immigration officers and successfully found your luggage. But you could not figure out a lamp. Or a television remote. Or a blanket. Or a light switch. And tomorrow morning, when you leave the hotel, you will walk out feeling strangely accomplished. You will have survived another night. Until you check into the next hotel. Where the door lock will have a different system. The television remote will have 47 buttons. The bathroom light will be motion activated. And the lamp will once again require you to perform a secret handshake. Welcome to your room, sir. May the odds be ever in your favour.

WHY DID WE GO TO EUROPE AT *SEVENTY PLUS?*

A 21-day journey through 11 countries, sore feet, strong friendships and an urgent interest in toilets

By Brij Khandelwal



What happens when two Indians in their seventies decide to conquer Europe in three weeks?First, the passport becomes very important. Soon, the knees become even more important.

And by the end, the question of the next toilet becomes considerably more urgent than the next monument. At seventy-plus, travel is no longer just about seeing the world. It is also about negotiating with your knees.

THE GLOBAL FAMILY TAKES OFF

LONDON: THE THAMES AND THE GLOBAL FAMILY

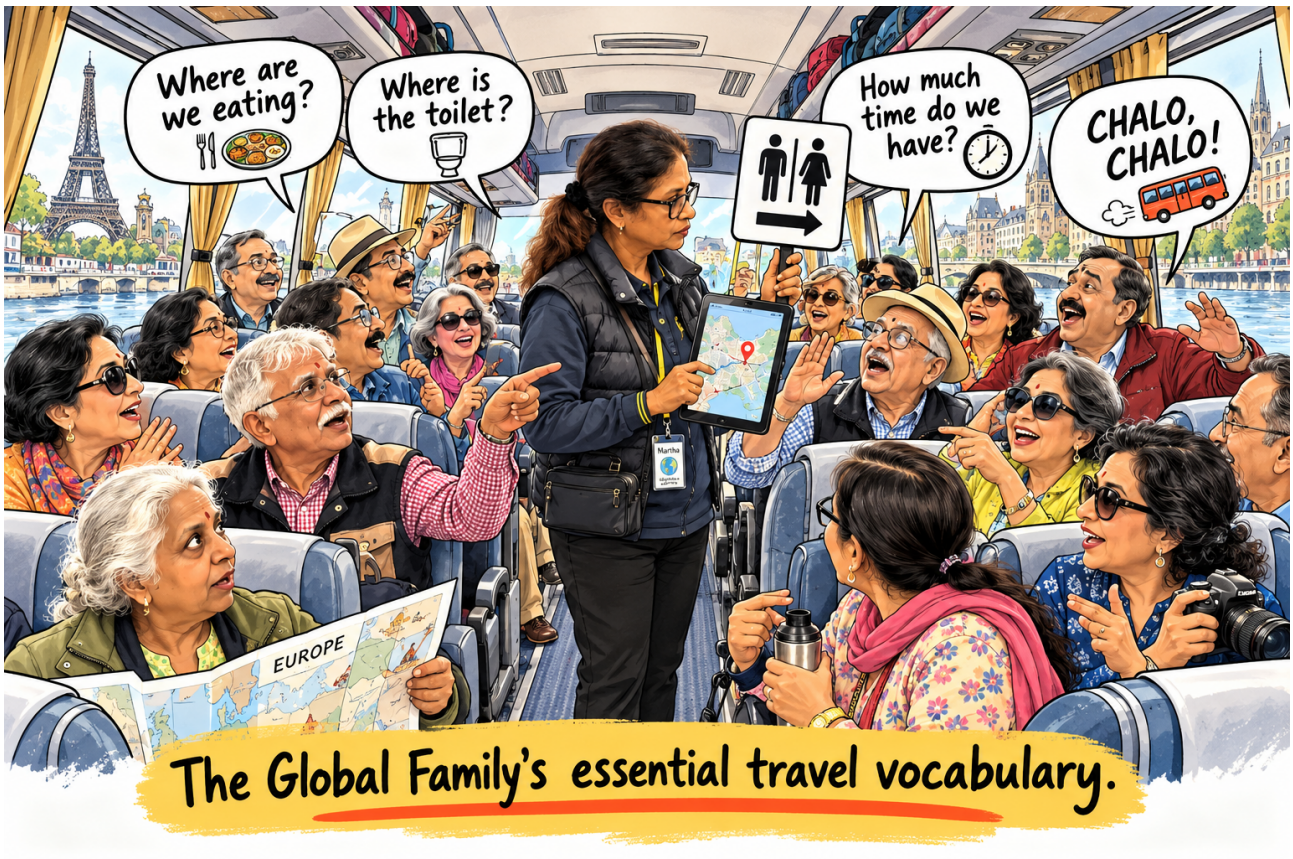
Every great journey needs a cast.

Ours had Martha Gomes — tour leader, organiser, human GPS, crisis manager and, most importantly, **Toilet Minister**.

Robin, our bus driver, had a raspy radio voice, a desi sense of humour and the remarkable ability to keep a busload of Indians moving roughly in the right direction.

Then came Padmini, my travelling companion and occasional creator of suspense.

And finally, the **Global Family** — Indians from India, Australia, America and elsewhere who had never met but were rapidly becoming relatives. The bus



became our moving drawing room.

Antakshari.
Bhajans.
Food discussions.
Gossip.

And four questions dominated every day:

Where are we eating? Where is the toilet? How much time do we have? Chalo, chalo!

London gave us Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, Trafalgar Square, Oxford Street, Madame Tussauds, Hyde Park and, of course, the Thames.

The river made me think of the Yamuna. An Indian Ganga Aarti on its banks was unexpectedly moving — Indian spirituality meeting an English river. What struck me most was how the Thames belonged to the city. People walked beside it, sat along its banks and simply enjoyed it. The river was London's living room. Not its drain.

The Kohinoor, Lord's and familiar names added another layer — reminders of the complicated history connecting Britain and India.

But the real London story was happening on our bus.

Strangers were becoming friends. The bus was becoming home.

PARIS: GLAMOUR, TIRED FEET AND A MISSING HANDBAG

Paris delivered the Seine, the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, museums, Disneyland, Indian food — and a handbag crisis.

Paris looked magnificent.

Our feet disagreed.

Then Padmini's handbag disappeared, containing her mobile phone and, rather more alarmingly, her passport.

Instantly, tourism became international crisis management.

Was it stolen? Lost? Left somewhere?

Should we call the police?

The embassy?

Interpol?

Before involving the United Nations, we searched the hotel room again.

And there it was.

The handbag had not been stolen. It had simply been hiding. The passport was safe. The crisis was over. And the handbag had officially become a member of the travel group.

BRUSSELS: POLITICS AND THE TWO-EURO TOILET

Brussels brought us European institutions,

student protests, security, chocolate, waffles, Mini-Europe — and the unforgettable **two-euro toilet**.

Every city teaches you something. Brussels taught us that even answering nature's call may require financial planning. Students protested. Politicians negotiated. Tourists ate waffles. And we searched for free toilets.

After travelling thousands of kilometres, we had discovered a new European economic indicator:

Cost per toilet visit.

At two euros a visit, even sightseeing required a budget.

AMSTERDAM: BICYCLES, CANALS AND BIRYANI

Amsterdam seemed designed by someone who believed bicycles deserved more respect than cars. Bicycles everywhere. Canals everywhere. And pedestrians learning to look in every direction at once.

The Dutch relationship with water was impressive. The canals were not just beautiful; they were part of the city's history and everyday life.

And then came biryani.

After days of European sightseeing and walking until our knees began filing formal complaints, we found food that tasted like home.

The biryani didn't just feed us.

It restored diplomatic relations between our feet and the rest of our bodies.

GERMANY: MONEY, BOOKS, FORESTS AND A LITTLE BRAJ

THREE COUNTRIES IN ONE DAY: THE ROAD TO FRANKFURT

We "invaded" three countries in one day — France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

No tanks.
No soldiers.
No diplomatic crisis.

Just Indian senior citizens, cameras, snacks and a tourist bus. The road itself became a moving classroom. Fields, villages, factories, wind turbines and railways rolled past the windows.

From a bus, Europe reveals something monuments cannot: **how people actually live.**

Then Frankfurt appeared. The skyline changed. **Money had entered the story.**

FRANKFURT: WHERE MONEY MEETS GOETHE

Frankfurt is a city of contrasts.

Banks and books. Skyscrapers and old streets. Global finance and German literature.

Money and Goethe.

Its financial identity is impossible to miss, but Frankfurt is also multicultural, busy and international.

For us, one discovery mattered particularly.

Indian food.

Rangoli provided the familiar comfort every traveller eventually craves.

HEIDELBERG: THE NECKAR AND A LITTLE BRAJ

Heidelberg felt different. The Neckar flowed quietly beside the city. The Old Bridge crossed it, while the castle looked down from above.

The university gave Heidelberg an intellectual charm — the sort of place where even tourists begin to feel slightly more educated.

Our connection with Professor Paras Nath Chaudhary and the South Asia Institute added an Indian dimension.

Then came Radhashtami. As our bus travelled through Germany, Geetam ji's bhajans filled the air.

"Radhey, Radhey" travelled with us.

For a few moments, Germany seemed to have borrowed a little Braj.

The Neckar was flowing through Germany. Our bus was carrying Braj. Europe was becoming wonderfully confusing.

BLACK FOREST: CUCKOOS, TREES AND DAHI VADA

The Black Forest did not need much introduction. The trees did the talking. The roads became quieter. The landscape greener. The air calmer. Triberg, waterfalls and forests surrounded us, while the famous cuckoo clock reminded us that even **time can have a sense of humour.**

And then, suddenly — India.

Nilesh Desai's restaurant appeared like a small

culinary embassy. Dahi vada. Aloo tikki. Kadhi. Khichdi. And then Black Forest cake.

The forest was German.

The food was Indian.

Our stomachs were delighted by this cultural exchange.

Cities make us move faster. Nature makes us slow down. And sometimes, after several days of sightseeing, walking and negotiating with our knees, **slowing down is exactly what the doctor ordered.**

SWITZERLAND AND THE ALPINE ADVENTURE

RHINE FALLS: WHEN A BOAT RIDE BECAME AN EXPEDITION

The Rhine Falls began peacefully.

A boat.
Water spray.
Beautiful scenery.

It sounded like a postcard. Then came the second circuit. Then the third. Suddenly, our peaceful outing had become a **senior-citizens' Himalayan expedition**. There were steps.
Confusion.
A missing ferry.
More steps.
More confusion.

Martha, our human GPS, eventually turned into a full-scale rescue operation. And then came the real reward:

Chai. Samosas. Dinner. Pani puri. Sambhar. Rasam.

By the end, we had survived the Rhine Falls and been fed back to life. A good tour guide takes you to beautiful places. **A great one gets you out of trouble and feeds you pani puri afterwards.**

The Rhine showed us another side of itself — powerful, beautiful and carefully managed, yet still capable of surprising a group of seventy-plus tourists.

SWITZERLAND: MOUNTAINS, SYSTEMS AND "WHAT'S FOR LUNCH?"

Switzerland was the grand Alpine chapter.

Zurich. Interlaken. Jungfrau. Titlis. Lucerne.

Mountains, glaciers, cable cars, Swiss trains, engineering and chocolate.

And, inevitably, the most important question on any Indian tour:

What's for lunch?

The mountains were spectacular. The systems were almost as impressive. Trains ran with extraordinary coordination. Infrastructure seemed to work *with* the landscape rather than against it. And Indian warmth followed us into the Alps.

Food. Conversation. Songs. Then came **Vande Mataram** and the national anthem. For a few moments, the Alps became the backdrop to an Indian gathering.

But beneath all the beauty was another thought. The glaciers are changing. What we admire today may not look the same tomorrow. Travel can be a privilege. It can also be a quiet warning.

LIECHTENSTEIN: A TINY COUNTRY, A GIANT SURPRISE

After Switzerland came Liechtenstein — a country so small that our Indian sense of scale needed recalibration.

Vaduz.
Mountains.
Princely heritage.
A tiny population.
A toy train.

And, of course, **another country conquered.**

Padmini summed it up perfectly:

"One more country conquered!"

The joke was harmless.

But travel does something wonderful. It makes a very large world feel smaller.

And sometimes, it makes a very small country feel **much bigger than it looked on the map.**

AUSTRIA: WHEN THE ALPS BEGIN TO DANCE

INNSBRUCK: WHEN THE ALPS FOUND A RHYTHM

Innsbruck offered us another river — the **Inn** — with the Alps rising dramatically around it.

Trams moved quietly. Public transport worked. Everything seemed efficiently Austrian.

Then evening arrived.

Tyrolean costumes.
The Gundolf family.
Music.
Yodelling.
Shoe-slapping dances.
Laughter.

Suddenly, the Alps had acquired a rhythm. For one unforgettable evening, the mountains came down from their lofty heights, put on

dancing shoes and joined the rest of us.

The Inn was more than scenery. It was part of Innsbruck's name, history and daily life.

Another city.

Another river.

Another way of living with water.

ITALY: LEANING TOWERS, GONDOLAS AND THE ETERNAL CITY

VENICE: GONDOLAS, GALAS AND A BUS FULL OF INDIANS

Venice was unlike anything we had seen.

Water instead of roads.
Bridges instead of crossroads.
Gondolas instead of buses.
Centuries-old buildings rose from the water, carrying the stains and stories of time.
Then Gandhi One arrived with something equally important: I**ndian food.**

Buttermilk.
Antakshari.
Bhajans.

And eventually, something resembling a **baraat**. Venice gave us the gondolas.

We supplied the baraat.

The Italians had centuries of history. We had a bus full of Indians and a loudspeaker.

PISA TO FLORENCE: LEANING TOWERS, RIVERS AND UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS

Pisa began with one question:

Why doesn't the tower fall?

The Leaning Tower has survived centuries of engineering challenges and millions of tourist photographs. Naturally, we compared it with the Taj Mahal.

An Indian meal was essential. No serious civilisational comparison can be completed on an empty stomach.

Florence brought Renaissance art, architecture, fashion and the Arno. Martin, also known to us as Vijay, guided us through Indian slogans and European history.

As a River Connect Campaign convener, I couldn't look at the Arno simply as a tourist. Its riverbanks were public spaces. Its bridges were attractions. The river was visible, accessible and woven into the city's identity and economy.

And that raised the uncomfortable question that had followed us from the Thames:

Why can a river become part of a city's identity in Europe, while the Yamuna in Agra is so often treated as a problem to be hidden?

ROME: ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME, BUT OUR HEARTS LEAD HOME

Rome needed time.

There was simply too much history to absorb between meals.

The Colosseum.
Roman roads.
Ancient ruins.
Vatican City.
St Peter's.
Trevi Fountain.

Rome was history with a traffic problem.

The city could make an archaeologist emotional and a pedestrian nervous.

Then Padmini injured her ankle near the Colosseum. At seventy-plus, the passport may still be enthusiastic, but the knees and ankles have begun negotiating.

Poornima ji appeared with pain-relief ointment, concern and care. It was a small gesture, but it captured something much larger. Someone helps you today. You help someone else tomorrow. Strangers become friends. Friends become family.

That was the real Global Family.

Not the tour package.

Not the bus.

Not the itinerary.

The people.

VATICAN CITY

FAITH, CROWDS AND THE ONE-EURO QUESTION

Finally, the Vatican.

The world's smallest country came with enormous crowds, tired feet and a distinctly Indian suspicion about European prices.

Pilgrims had gathered from around the world, waiting patiently for a glimpse of the Pope.

Faith has a strange power. It can make thousands of people stand quietly under a scorching sun for a few precious moments of spiritual connection.

Unfortunately, the Roman sun had other plans.

It roasted us with the enthusiasm of a Roman chef.

Then came the familiar questions:

Where is the water?

Where is the toilet?

For Indian travellers accustomed to water stalls, public taps and generous hospitality, paying for basic necessities takes some getting used to. At roughly ₹110 to the euro, even a one-euro toilet visit begins to feel like a small pilgrimage.

Back home, we may complain about almost everything, but many religious places still offer drinking water, food and prasad.

An innocent Indian question therefore arises:

If temples can offer food for free, surely the Vatican can spare a little water?

Of course, European cities have to maintain public facilities. Toilets need cleaning. Water costs money. Still, the contrast is amusing.

At the Vatican, **faith was free. Prayer was free. Emotion was free.**

Water and toilets came with a price tag.

Perhaps that is one of the amusing differences between our two civilisations.

In India, the gods often feed you before asking what you came to pray for.

In Europe, even nature seems to have a billing counter.

We left the Vatican with photographs, memories, tired legs and renewed appreciation for Indian hospitality.

And, naturally, we checked our pockets.

The Vatican had given us faith.
The euro had taken care of the rest.



FAREWELL

THE GLOBAL FAMILY GOES HOME

The final days brought an unexpected sadness.

Martha's emotions.
The hugs.
The photographs.
The last jokes.

The final bus journey.

People who had been strangers three weeks earlier had somehow become part of our lives.

That is the strange magic of travel. You board a bus with strangers. You share food with them. You complain about toilets together. You get lost together. You laugh together. Someone gets injured. Someone finds a lost handbag. Someone produces samosas. Someone starts a song. And suddenly, you have a family.

The Global Family was never part of the itinerary.

It was the journey itself.

A WORD OF THANKS TO WANDERON

We would like to thank **WanderOn** for putting together such a memorable European journey and for bringing together this wonderfully eclectic group of travellers.

From navigating unfamiliar cities to keeping a busload of Indians moving in roughly the right direction, the organisation behind the journey made a complicated itinerary feel remarkably manageable.

Thank you, WanderOn, for giving us not just a tour of Europe, but the opportunity to create our own little Global Family along the way.



A kid from the 80s Bangalore swells with pride to have belonged to the most serene, beautiful and most desired place to live... well, although polluted, it is relevant to this day and time.

Travel in the 80s and 90s in Bangalore was simply through long tireless walks or through the BTS bus as we called it. Very few commuted through own transport and a handful brought cycles to school. Owning a bike meant you were relatively upper class and cars were for the elite.

The earliest travel that I could ever recall was a school trip to Balmuri Falls, Mysore. The journey began with a school prayer on the bus... instructions to never put hands outside the windows and to be at our best behaviour... we sat through the journey absorbing the winding tar roads that led us through green patches on either side of the road... it felt like an image from Wordsworth's poetry.

The next travelling experience was the Grade 10 end of year excursion to Ooty. The endless packing of woollens and mittens would put travellers to Switzerland to shame. The first experience of blowing your breath out into the freezing cold morning, forming vapours in the open air replicating cigarette smoke, felt extremely cool. The lengthy stroll through Sim's Park felt like our Bangalore's Lalbagh and Cubbon Park but with friends and the harrowing eyes of the teachers.Travels that started with school and college excursions became visits to pilgrimages upon sharing the experiences at home. Trips to the temples in the Western Ghats... Dharmasthala, Horanadu, Udupi to the temple town Tirupati... sailed us through weather conditions that were unimaginable.
Now, it was time for beaches. Baywatch had left such a lasting impact that all of us although dressed in jeans and T shirts and occasionally in shorts... bermudas as we called them... felt like Pamela Anderson and Dimple Kapadia in Saagar. The only way we knew to flaunt our version of burgundy touch in our mane was through Shahnaz Husain's Henna Mix.

The travels now were sponsored by hubby dearest. The escapades led us to the north of India. Agra, Delhi, Jaipur, Udaipur were truly the history chapters that were simply taught to memorise. Akbar to Aurangzeb... their rise to fall... the love stricken Jahangir... Saleem and Anarkali... and the immortal love story of

Shahjahan and his supposedly thirteenth wife Mumtaz, seemed intriguing. Love so intense that he created one of the seven wonders... the Taj Mahal in her memory... their awestruck moment crept away as quickly as it had arrived, the minute I discovered it to be the grave tomb of the lady.

Amer Fort walked us through the royal lives of the Rajputs and their achievements, but all that I could see was Rawal Sa and Rani Padmavati... the peacocks took me back to a song in Hum Saath Saath Hain... Mare giva mein nache more...

The royal palaces and the stories drove me to learn about our own Chalukyas, the Hoysalas back home. Belur, Halebidu, Badami, Bidar to the ruins of Hampi and the contributions of our own Rayaru, made my chest swell with pride... in my heart I sang... Romanchana vi Kannada...

Amidst all these, work drove us off Bangalore. The home that was mine since birth suddenly threw me off the nest, just like a parent giving her child wings to fly...
Hyderabad happened!

The princely state of the Nawabs and the Persian grandeur reverberated through the Falaknuma Palace, the Salar Jung Museum and not to miss... the Irani chai. The Golconda Fort narrated stories of triumph and destruction... Birla Marble Mandir and the tiptoeing experience in the scorching heat remains forever in one's memory. School field trip to the Nehru Zoological Park and Pragati Medicinal Resort leaves us with the bittersweet memories of getting cooked in the sun versus the calm and quiet atmosphere of the resort respectively... amidst the great travel expeditions, happened wonderful friendships and memories to last... six years flew by... toddlers grew up and the bag packing was towards the historical city of Mysore…

Although away from Bangalore, it felt closer. The Bangalore that I had left behind had grown leaps and bounds, almost unrecognisable... Mysore came by as a new home with a fresh breath of hope. Mysore resembled the 80s Bangalore that I had left and every nook and corner felt nostalgic... The Amba Vilas Palace, Lalith Mahal, Jagan Mohan Palace were all the daily views through our drives and walks around the princely state. The beauty of having the Royals reside alongside made you belong to history. The narrative behind KRS Dam, the relevance of the Chamundi Hills and the heritage makes you feel belonged to the yesteryear's grandeur. Mysore Dasara and the illumination is ten times more magnificent than the Eiffel Tower in the city of Paris. The Kukkarahalli, Karanji Lakes, Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, the well planned city roads, the tastefully picked and planted trees, the University... every road and street reflects royalty!

With going back to roots, paved way for international tourism. Dubai, the land of luxuries came as a pleasant contrast to the natural serenity of Mysore. While Mysore is natural, Dubai is exclusively man's creation. The skyscrapers, the Palm Islands, luxurious Burj Al Arab and its hospitality... most of all... the Emirates and the Dubai Airport, totally breathtaking! From the quiet peaceful humble life of Mysore to a week's visit to Dubai, felt like a Disney princess. The branded stores of the Dubai Mall to the musical fountain, every ounce of Dubai spoke luxury. By the end of the week, the richness and high quality felt like an overdose, urging us to land in Mysore and simply inhale the fresh breeze with natural scents of eucalyptus and neem. Nostrils flared and lungs opened up like never before... subtly displaying pride of being home!
The adventure this time was towards Sri Lanka... Ravana and his golden period, Rama Sethu, brought the Ramayana epic alive. The Sri Lankan roads and churches spoke of the colonial power and history. The quiet tranquility that entailed at Bentota beaches created a vivid imagery of Sita waiting in Ashoka Vatika for Sri Rama. The Sigiriya Fort, the wives of Kashyapa and his grand home on the hill top... an evening with cultural significance and dances and not to forget the Raksha masks sold as souvenirs, a piece of Sri Lanka that one carries home. A quiet extension of the Western Ghats and the invaluable spice markets, the gems and precious stones... are authentic to Sri Lanka. With its bounty, although a foreign land, it still felt at home.

This time around, the escapades extend far from the Western Ghats to the Eastern Ghats... with a short hiatus, leaving behind Mysore... my home of the 80s... the travel moves to the Temple Town... Tirupati!

Every travel has quietly etched its spot, creating memories and memoirs... as I grow, learn and quietly create my own history in the books of my world!

Darjeeling: A Journey of Mountains, Tea and Teacher-Induced Suffering

By Mahi Heather Gupta - *A Student Who Was Simply Trying to Sleep*

Every school trip begins with excitement.

You imagine yourself sitting next to your best friends on the plane, exchanging snacks, taking pictures, listening to music and generally behaving like the main character in a coming-of-age movie.

Unfortunately, this fantasy relies on one crucial factor: **your boarding pass cooperating with you.**

Mine did not.

Upon entering the aeroplane, I discovered that I would not be sitting next to any of my friends.

Instead, fate had decided that I would spend several hours trapped between my Hindi teacher and my Kannada teacher.

Yes.

Between them.

It was less "school trip" and more "hostage negotiation."

With no friends nearby and absolutely nothing productive to do, I decided to sleep. Surely, I thought, I could simply close my eyes and wake up in Darjeeling.

This was an ambitious plan.

The only problem was that my seat had somehow become a highly sophisticated human sandwich. On either side of me were two teachers, leaving me approximately seven centimetres of personal space and the freedom to move my arms only if both teachers simultaneously agreed to it.

I attempted to sleep anyway.

Then came the food.

My teachers began passing food between themselves. Every few minutes, one of them would apparently discover a new snack and feel morally obligated to wake me up.



"Mahi, do you want some?"

Half-asleep, I would mumble no.

I would close my eyes.

Thirty seconds later:

"Mahi, are you sure?"

Eyes open.

"No."

Eyes closed.

"Mahi, have you eaten?"

Eyes open.

"Yes."

Eyes closed.

"Mahi, do you want this?"

At this point, I began to question whether the food was actually being offered to me or whether this was an elaborate psychological experiment designed to determine how many times a sleeping teenager can be resurrected before losing consciousness permanently.

But eventually, the snacks stopped.

Peace.

Silence.

Sleep.

Or so I thought.

Because apparently, being trapped between two teachers was not enough. I also had to endure what can only be described as **The Indian Aunty Lecture™.**

My Hindi teacher began discussing how "kids these days" get into relationships.

There I was, trying to sleep peacefully at 30,000 feet, while receiving a surprise moral education seminar.

According to the lecture, apparently teenagers today are moving far too quickly, society is changing, children are different, and relationships are something that require approximately seventeen layers of parental supervision.

I had boarded the plane expecting a school trip.

I left the conversation feeling like I had attended a three-hour parent-teacher meeting.

Eventually, however, my body won the battle.

I fell asleep.

Finally.

No snacks.

No lectures.

No questions.

Just peace.

Or at least, I assumed it was peace.

Because while I was peacefully unconscious, my teachers apparently decided that this was the perfect opportunity to begin a **photographic documentary of my suffering.**

They took pictures of me sleeping.

Not one.

Not two.

Several.

And naturally, they waited until I woke up to reveal their masterpiece.

I was shown photographic evidence of my own unconsciousness, like a criminal being presented with CCTV footage.

But the situation became significantly worse when I discovered that these photographs were not merely for personal amusement.

They were added to the official trip pictures.

So while everyone else's Darjeeling memories consisted of mountains, tea gardens, monasteries and scenic landscapes, mine included photographic proof that I spent the journey unconscious between two teachers.

Some students returned from the trip with beautiful pictures of themselves overlooking the Himalayas.

I returned with a collection documenting my gradual psychological and physical decline.

And so, my Darjeeling adventure began.

I had not yet seen the mountains.

I had not tasted the famous tea.

I had not explored the town.

But I had already experienced the most dangerous part of the trip:

an aeroplane seat between two teachers.

Darjeeling had better be worth it.

Skyfall of the Bajpais: The Final Descent

By Syeda Fathima Ahmed

The exact moment the Boeing 777 hit a minor pocket of clear-air turbulence over the Arabian Sea, Rekha Bajpai instinctively converted her seatbelt into a lethal weapon by yanking it so tight her husband, Ashok, lost all sensation in his left thigh.
"I knew it," Rekha hissed, her voice vibrating with the terrifying certainty of a woman who had spent six weeks warning the entire extended family on WhatsApp about this exact flight. "I told you, Ashok. Leaving the house at 4:20 PM instead of 4:15 PM has messed up the rahu kaal. Now look. We are falling from the sky."
"We dropped four feet, Rekha," Ashok muttered, though he kept his eyes glued to the flight path screen on seat 12B, constantly recalculating their ground speed against a mental Excel sheet.
Their nineteen-year-old daughter, Tanvi, jammed her noise-canceling headphones deeper into her ears, staring blankly at the ceiling of seat 12C while calculating the exact legal age at which a child could emancipation-divorce her parents mid-flight.
The saga had not begun at 30,000 feet. It had begun seventy-two hours prior at their residence in Lucknow, where packing had been treated with the solemn gravity of a military campaign. The fundamental premise of Bajpai family travel was simple: commercial airlines were scam operations designed specifically to starve innocent Indian citizens. Consequently, four check-in bags had been packed to precisely 22.9 kilograms each—a feat achieved only after Ashok weighed every single item on a digital kitchen scale, including two packets of bhujia, three tins of homemade gond ke laddu, and seven distinct varieties of pickle double-wrapped in three layers of industrial-grade polythene to prevent a hazardous spill that could trigger an international maritime crisis.



When they had arrived at the airport a full four hours before departure, the check-in counter agent had committed the fatal mistake of making direct eye contact with Rekha.
"Ma'am, these carry-on bags look a bit heavy," the agent had said gently.

"Heavy?" Rekha's eyebrow had shot up with the force of a surface-to-air missile. "It is just light snacks! You people charge forty thousand rupees for a ticket and now you want to weigh my hand-knitted cardigan? Show me the rulebook. Call your manager."
Ashok had immediately executed Protocol Alpha: pulling out two heavy woollen shawls from the bag, draping them over his shoulders in the 34°C heat, and glaring at the agent until the young man surrendered to avoid a complete public audit of his airline's business model.

Now, three hours into the flight, the real battle of endurance was under way. The tray tables were deployed, not for laptops, but to serve as a mobile assembly line. Out came a Tupperware container that had survived three decades of domestic utility, opening with a decisive pop that released a cloud of roasted cumin and garlic into the pressurised cabin environment. "Eat, Tanvi," Rekha commanded, shoving a foil wrap containing two cold parathas and a mountain

of mango pickle into her daughter's lap.
"Mom, I literally pre-ordered the vegetarian meal on the app," Tanvi groaned. "The flight attendant is going to bring it in ten minutes." "That plane food?" Rekha scoffed, loud enough to cause the British couple in Row 11 to flinch. "Rubber potatoes and water curry! They make it six months ago in some factory. You want to ruin your stomach before we even reach Dubai? Eat the paratha. Your father spent twenty minutes flattening the aluminum foil so we can reuse it."

Ashok, meanwhile, was conducting his primary in-flight duties: monitoring the cabin crew for operational deficiencies. Every time a flight attendant walked down the aisle, Ashok would look at his wrist, tap his watch, and offer an audible sigh of profound disappointment.
"In 1998, on Lufthansa," Ashok announced to no one in particular, "they gave proper metal cutlery and hot towels before takeoff. Today? You ask for a glass of water and they look at you like you are asking for their personal property. No discipline. Total commercialisation."
"Uncle, excuse me," the young man in 12A whispered nervously, trying to squeeze past Ashok's knees to reach the lavatory. Ashok didn't move an inch, instead initiating a complex geometric manoeuvring process that forced the young man to climb over his shins while receiving an unprompted lecture on cabin etiquette. "You should go to the washroom before boarding," Ashok advised sternly. "Walking around during flight increases fuel consumption of the aircraft due to balance shifting."
As the pilot's voice crackled over the intercom announcing that they had begun their final descent, the energy inside the cabin shifted dramatically. The sign for seatbelts hadn't even fully illuminated when Ashok's hand was already hovering over the buckle like a fast-draw gunfighter in a Western movie.
"Ashok, wait!" Rekha whispered, gripping his forearm. "Let the plane stop!"
"If I don't stand up now, we will be stuck behind Row 25," Ashok said, his voice laced with the desperation of a man facing total societal collapse. "Row 25 has three strollers, Rekha. Three! Do you want to stand in the passport control line behind three strollers?"

The moment the wheels touched the runway with a dull thud—while the aircraft was still roaring down the tarmac at ninety miles an hour—Ashok snapped his seatbelt off and launched himself upward like an uncoiled spring. "Dada, sit down! The plane is moving!" Tanvi yelled. "Moving-shoving doesn't matter, bag is right here," Ashok grunted, popping open the overhead locker and heaving down a 12-kilogram trolley.

That was the final straw for Senior Flight Attendant Karen, a veteran of twelve years who had spent the entire flight smelling garlic parathas, listening to WhatsApp voice notes on speaker, and watching Ashok audit her service speed.
Karen marched down the aisle, her face turning the exact shade of Rekha's mango pickle. "SIR! SIT YOUR BODY DOWN RIGHT NOW!" Karen bellowed, her voice echoing over the jet engine noise so violently that three passengers in Row 10 dropped their phones. "THE AIRCRAFT IS TAXIING AT ONE HUNDRED KILOMETERS AN HOUR! PUT THAT BAG BACK OR I WILL HAVE AIRPORT SECURITY ARREST YOU THE SECOND WE REACH THE GATE! SIT DOWN!"
The entire cabin went dead silent. For the first time in recorded history, Ashok Bajpai froze. Rekha gasped, clutching her chest, while Tanvi slowly pulled her hoodie string tight until only her nose was visible to the public.

Ashok, thoroughly humbled and under threat of international detention, slowly shoved the bag back into the bin, clicked his seatbelt, and stared straight ahead into the seatback cushion without saying a single word for the remaining six minutes of taxiing. When the seatbelt sign finally clicked off at the gate, Ashok did not spring up. He waited precisely three minutes, letting Row 25 walk past him in utter triumph.

They shuffled out through the jetbridge, silent and subdued, until they finally reached the international arrivals terminal. But as they approached baggage carousel number four, Ashok took a deep breath, looked at the crowd of passengers struggling to spot their luggage, and felt his confidence return. He tapped his watch, leaned over to a stranger, and declared, "See? Bad system. In Singapore Airport, luggage comes in five minutes. Here we will suffer." Rekha nodded in agreement, pulling out another foil packet from her handbag. "Here, Ashok. Eat a laddu. It'll give you energy to fight with the customs officer." Some things, altitude could never change.

एयरपोर्ट के न्यू रिच जॉम्बीज़
अंग्रेजी, आईफोन, और अकड़ की उड़ान

बृज खंडेलवाल द्वारा

बेंगलुरु एयरपोर्ट पर मैंने एक अजीब बाइपोलर मानसिकता देखी। लोगों को विमान पकड़ना था, लेकिन कई लोग अचानक अपनी औकात से बहुत ऊपर उड़ने लगे थे। घर से निकलते समय वही लोग साधारण इंसान होते हैं। पत्नी से कहते हैं, "चाय बना देना।" बच्चे से कहते हैं, "बैग उठा ले।" पड़ोसी से पूछते हैं, "भैया, बाजार जा रहे हो?" लेकिन एयरपोर्ट का गेट पार करते ही कायापलट! अचानक आवाज में ऑक्सफोर्ड उतर आता है।

"डियर, प्लीज टेक केयर।"

"ओह माय गॉड!"

"Actually, I was thinking…"

"यू नो, वी ट्रैवल अ लॉट!"

मैंने सोचा, यह एयरपोर्ट है या अंग्रेजी बोलने वालों का पुनर्जन्म केंद्र? मेरे साथ बेंगलुरु से आगरा की फ्लाइट में ऐसे कई नमूने थे। महंगे चश्मे, चमचमाते जूते, आईफोन, ब्रांडेड बैग और चेहरे पर ऐसा गुरूर, जैसे हवाई जहाज इनके खानदान की जागीर हो। एक महिला ने बच्चे को दूध का गिलास पकड़ाते हुए कहा, "बेटा, मिल्क हॉट है। केयरफुली पकड़ो।" फिर पति की तरफ मुड़ीं। "डियर, स्विट्जरलैंड वाले होटल का नाम क्या था?" पति ने गर्दन झटका। "द ग्रैंड... कुछ।" महिला ने माथे पर हाथ मारा। "ओह माय गॉड! लिटिल डोगी को बाय कहना भूल गई!" मोबाइल निकला। "हेलो मेड? प्लीज टेल हिम फ्रॉम माय साइड... आई



मिस हिम!" कुत्ता घर पर था। मगर उसकी विदाई अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर की थी। यही है हमारा नया अमीर। कुत्ता देसी, नौकरानी देसी, दूध देसी, मगर बातचीत इंटरनेशनल।

एयरपोर्ट नवाबों का पहला इम्तिहान सिक्योरिटी चेक पर इनकी असली परीक्षा शुरू होती है। लाइन लंबी है। सब अपनी बारी का इंतजार कर रहे हैं। लेकिन हमारे एक भाई साहब की आत्मा बेचैन है। वे बार-बार आगे झांकते हैं। फिर ट्रे आगे रखते हैं। फिर पीछे वाले की ट्रे भी अपनी ट्रे के आगे कर देते हैं। पीछे से आवाज आती है, "भाई साहब, लाइन है।" वह मुस्कराते हैं। "ओह, सॉरी!" सॉरी के साथ आधा कदम और आगे। यह खास भारतीय कला है। माफी भी मांगो और गलती भी जारी रखो। सिक्योरिटी अधिकारी कहता है, "सर, हाथ ऊपर कीजिए।" सज्जन हाथ ऐसे उठाते हैं जैसे अधिकारी ने उनसे योगासन करवाने की मांग कर दी हो। चेहरा बता रहा है, "आपको पता है मैं कौन हूं?" अधिकारी शायद रोज ऐसे सवालों से मिलता है। वह शांत रहता है। न्यू रिच जॉम्बी बेचैन हो जाता है। कुर्सी भी हमारी, हवा भी हमारी वेटिंग लाउंज में पहुंचते ही दूसरा अभियान शुरू। एक साहब ने तीन कुर्सियां कब्जे में कर लीं। एक पर खुद बैठे। दूसरी पर बैग। तीसरी पर जैकेट, चश्मा और खाने का डिब्बा। एक बुजुर्ग महिला खड़ी थीं। उन्होंने पूछा, "बेटा, यह सीट खाली है?" साहब ने बैग देखा। फिर महिला को देखा। फिर बैग को देखा।

"Actually, my wife is coming."

बीस मिनट बाद पत्नी आईं। बैग वाली सीट खाली हुई। महिला के लिए नहीं। पत्नी के लिए। मैंने सोचा, आजकल सीट पर बैठने के लिए इंसान नहीं, सामान होना जरूरी है। एक दूसरे सज्जन ने तो अपना छोटा बैग सामने वाली कुर्सी पर रख दिया। किसी ने पूछा, "यह सीट खाली है?" उन्होंने कहा, "No, occupied." मैंने पूछा, "कौन बैठा है?" उन्होंने कहा, "My stuff." अब "मेरा सामान" भी इंसान से ज्यादा अधिकार रखने लगा है। बोर्डिंग का महाभारत घोषणा हुई।

"Passengers travelling in Zone 3 may now board."

Zone 3 वाले उठे। लेकिन Zone 1 वाले पहले से लाइन में थे। Zone 2

वाले Zone 1 में घुसे हुए थे। Zone 5 वाले सबसे आगे खड़े थे।
मैंने एक से पूछा, “आपका जोन क्या है?” उन्होंने कहा, “Five.” “फिर यहां?” “बस ऐसे ही।” बस ऐसे ही! भारत की बहुत सी समस्याओं का यही राष्ट्रीय उत्तर है। स्टाफ ने कहा, “Sir, please wait for your zone.” जवाब आया, “But I am already here.” मानो एयरलाइन ने नियम नहीं बनाया, व्यक्तिगत निमंत्रण भेजा था। एक महिला ने तो स्टाफ से कहा, “Can you please allow us? We are travelling with children.” स्टाफ ने विनम्रता से कहा, “Ma’am, there are other families also.” महिला का चेहरा उतर गया। उन्हें पहली बार पता चला कि दुनिया में और भी परिवार हैं।
विमान में प्रवेश और सोशल मीडिया दरबार सीट पर पहुंचते ही फोन निकलता है। पहली सेल्फी। फिर दूसरी। फिर खिड़की की फोटो। फिर सीट की फोटो। फिर बोर्डिंग पास की फोटो। फिर कॉफी की फोटो। फिर परिवार को वीडियो कॉल। “हेलो मम्मी! हम फ्लाइट में हैं।” “हां, बेटा, कहां जा रहे हो?” “आगरा।” “क्यों?” “बस, बिजनेस मीटिंग है।”
मैं बगल में बैठा मुस्करा रहा था। मुझे मालूम था कि आगरा में कोई मीटिंग नहीं थी। एक नई दुकान का उद्घाटन था। लेकिन “दुकान” में वह रुतबा कहां? “बिजनेस मीटिंग” बोलो। बात में वजन आता है। न्यू रिच की दुनिया में काम छोटा हो सकता है, नाम बड़ा होना चाहिए। व्हाट्सऐप पर पड़ोसी को जलाना एक सज्जन ने वीडियो कॉल पर अपना कैमरा सीट की तरफ घुमाया। “देख रहे हो? बिजनेस क्लास जैसा है!” वह इकोनॉमी में थे।
पीछे बैठे यात्री ने पूछा, “भाई साहब, बिजनेस क्लास कहां है?” उन्होंने कहा, “Actually, this is premium economy.”
टिकट देखकर पता चला कि वह साधारण इकोनॉमी थी। लेकिन सोशल मीडिया में सत्य का किराया बहुत कम है। वहां सब कुछ अपग्रेड हो सकता है। घर की रसोई “मॉडर्न किचन”। स्कूटर “माई राइड”। दुकान “बिजनेस हब”। और मामूली यात्रा “यूरोपियन स्टाइल ट्रैवल”।
उड़ान में भी नवाबी घोषणा हुई कि इलेक्ट्रॉनिक उपकरण बंद रखें।
एक साहब फोन पर लगे रहे।
“हेलो... आवाज आ रही है?”
भाई साहब, विमान हवा में था। आवाज नहीं, शायद धरती भी मुश्किल से आ रही थी।
एयर होस्टेस ने विनम्रता से कहा, “Sir, please switch off the phone.” साहब ने फोन नीचे किया। और धीरे से बोले, “You know, I am on an important call.”
मैंने सोचा, देश की अर्थव्यवस्था शायद इसी फोन पर टिकी है।
दस मिनट बाद वही साहब झपकी ले रहे थे। महत्वपूर्ण कॉल खत्म।
देश बच गया। अंग्रेजी का कमाल
इन लोगों की अंग्रेजी भी कमाल है। शब्द गलत हों तो कोई बात नहीं। उच्चारण गलत हो तो भी कोई बात नहीं। लेकिन आत्मविश्वास में कोई कमी नहीं। एक साहब ने एयर होस्टेस से पूछा, “Can I have one veg vegetarian?” मैंने सोचा, यह शायद शाकाहारी का अंतरराष्ट्रीय संस्करण है। दूसरे ने कहा, “I want hot water, but little hot.” तीसरे ने पूछा, “Where is the washroom toilet?” चौथे ने कहा, “I am feeling very hungry stomach.” अंग्रेजी अपनी जगह। भूख अपनी जगह। व्याकरण को कौन पूछता है? लैंडिंग का लट्ठमार अध्याय सबसे बड़ा तमाशा लैंडिंग के बाद होता है। विमान अभी रनवे पर दौड़ रहा है। सीट बेल्ट का संकेत अभी जल रहा है। लेकिन तीन महानुभाव खड़े हो चुके हैं। एक ने लॉकर खोल दिया। दूसरा बैग खींच रहा है। तीसरा फोन पर लाइव वीडियो बना रहा है। घोषणा हो रही है, “Please remain seated.” लेकिन शायद उन्होंने सुना, “Please stand immediately.” एक यात्री ने दूसरे से कहा, “बैठ जाइए।” जवाब आया, “बस सामान लेना है।”
“विमान अभी रुका नहीं है।”
“अरे, कुछ नहीं होगा।”
यही वाक्य हमारे देश में बहुत से हादसों की शुरुआत है।
कुछ नहीं होगा।
फिर कुछ हो जाता है।
असली बीमारी क्या है?
बेंगलुरु से आगरा तक की इस यात्रा में मुझे लगा कि समस्या अंग्रेजी नहीं है। समस्या पैसा भी नहीं है।
समस्या महंगे कपड़े या आईफोन भी नहीं हैं। समस्या है दिखावा और ठहराव की कमी। पैसा आया तो ठीक है। नई कार खरीदी तो बहुत अच्छा। विदेश घूम आए तो और अच्छा। बच्चों को अच्छे स्कूल में पढ़ाया तो शानदार। लेकिन अगर पैसे के साथ तहजीब नहीं आई, तो मामला अधूरा है।

Gyanwati Aunty

Your neighbourhood aunty in print...



+9198-SAB-PATA-HAI gyanwati@aunty.com

"Dear Gyanwati Aunty, I went on a family holiday hoping to relax. Instead, my father planned every minute, and my mother packed enough food to feed the tour group. How do I take a holiday from my holiday?"

Dear Beta,

You have made one fundamental mistake.

You assumed a *family holiday* was meant for relaxation.

A family holiday is not a holiday. It is a **mobile family meeting with better scenery**.

Your father plans every minute because apparently spontaneous enjoyment requires a timetable.

Your mother has packed enough food to survive a minor famine because no Indian mother has ever accepted the possibility that food might be available at the destination.

So how do you take a holiday from your holiday?

Next time, take one day completely by yourself.

No itinerary. No family. No packed parathas. No Google Maps.

Just walk around, sit somewhere, have a coffee and experience the rare luxury of **not being responsible for anyone else's enjoyment**.

Of course, your family will call you seventeen times asking where you are.

Ignore them.

That, my dear, is the beginning of true relaxation.

Gyanwati Aunty's Golden Gyaan:
The best part of a family holiday is the day everyone goes home.

"Family holidays are wonderful. You get to argue with your relatives in places you've never argued before."

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A peaceful family holiday: an excellent theory!