

**THE RAJ
&
THE ROSE**

37,000 ft

Across Europa we have both progress'd,
By foot, by boat, by tram, by bus, by train,
But this hour, from a cool & pleasant plane,
Sees me sailing air on a grander quest,
The scenes by cyan skies & soft cloud blest,
How seldom seen & varied the terrain
Of ashen peak, urban sprawl, verdant plain,
Gleaming sea, wastes of sand & wylde forest.

So now we have abandon'd Europa,
Already I can taste the eastern scent,
The sun is setting west of Syria,
The starry heavens singing its lament,
As somewhere yon the grey Arabia
My pilot is beginning his descent.

Mumbai

Our plane approaches as the ghostly wraith
Thro nights black regions steadily she falls
Unto a lab'rynthe of a billion souls,
Crude myriad of language, race & faith.

So I am come, come to this sultry shore,
Bright jewel of the crown Victorian
To sup from cups full of empyrean
& all her diverse cultures fear namore.

By Eastern flair is Western thought inspired

I was recently led to understand,
With me I have fetched a man of England
& all the memory his mind acquired.

Should I deny this infant urchins, "*Please!*"
How many times would I see sights like these?

Bombay

We stand at the gateway to India,
Grand sentinel arch of Britannia's stream
About us the swirl of Bon Bohia,
Thou seven-islanded mercantile dream;
Our senses drowned
In native hue & cry,
We swathe thro sight & sound sweat-streaming, lips parch'd dry.

*The Restoration Monarchy
Courtied by the Portuguese,
Laced a diamond studded dowry
With a harbour overseas,
In billow'd the Royal Navy
On sterner Saxon breeze -
A host of redcoats drawn into its drag,
The gift secured with musket, fort & flag.*

A life blending with India
The diamond in the crown
The hag-beggar, the emperor,
The pale-face & the brown,
The gutter-dwellers looking up the godheads looking down.

Dharavi

Some say Bollywood is monotonous
Verdict of thirty thousand King & I's
But life is better led monogamous
Too many fingers & too many pies;
Pluck'd from the street
An extra was I made
Thro fancy dress & heat & thousand rupees paid.

*In tortured droves the Hindu pours
From Pakistan's cruel Koran,
The VT's gothic gargoyles rose
Oer many a fam'ly man,
No rooms, no work, no peace, no laws,
No pity & no plan -
Could those men who plied the Empire's vision
Have seen the suff'rance at its partition?*

Squallid, one-room'd, tarpaulin lives
Smile at me thro' the glass,
Human beehives, men, spawn & wives
E'er buzzing as we pass
Identical, dark shanty streets choked with the underclass.

Vagator

We trace the outline of the Western Ghats,
Dawn stirs the steaming jungle from her sleep,
Goa gleams! Golden garden of ex-pats,
Dream shores Iberian...what Dolphins leap
From wave to wave
As deft as nymph on lyre -

Last lingering enclave of Lisboan empire.

*To oust this upstart invader
The Marathas marched in mail,
Stout ramparts at Fort Aguada
Fearsome wrath fails to avail,
A hiss...allowing another
Elizabethan pale,
Assault abandoned, acceptance express'd,
Obeysive message given to the West.*

We revv'd n masse to the Nine Bar,
My mount a twin-wheel'd steed,
Thro' sunset sha to Shangri-La
Twirl'd with the techno creed,
On LSD, blues, ecstasy, beer, dexys, weed & speed.

The Ear Cleaner

Stepping out one golden Goan morning,
Drowsy with the sunken sun's adorning,
Content I was to be in nature's hand,
Soul-freshen'd as bare feet sunk into sand,
From out of nowhere stept a wizen'd man,
"Sahib! cleaning your hearing well I can!"
Shows Western praises in his little book,
Black blocks of wax from both my ears he took
I shook the hand that scrubb'd my hearing clear
Said fond farewells & watch'd him disappear
Round red & rugged hill flank'd by the view
Of Konkan coast careering into blue,
Then first finding the profits of his fee
I never knew how sweetly sounds the sea.

Benaulim

Waking up in Goa I must admit

Its nice to get away from it all
The rainy days, credit crunch, news & shit
Eking out existance from work to dole
Come cruise the road
& set the spirit free
Four thousand miles from home thro hill-gouge junglery.

*Sacred Lord Parashurama
Striding mighty mountains high
Drawing on the force of karma
Letting cosmic arrow fly
Landing with much melodrama
As Gods on Earth apply -
No business but obeyance has the land,
Pure, perfect stretch of sand like summer spanned.*

The dragon's moon gazed on Goa
The guest houses all full,
Half-built villa! homeless squatter,
The dogbark silence dull,
& when I woke the waves rolled white, the sun's rays wonderful,

Canacona

A little further down the Konkan tide
I found a beach & bay of perfect pitch,
Curvacious coconut groves ridged its side
Divided by the sunset's tribal switch
Alive by night,
The days lazed solarful
Or motorbikes alight on quests historical.

*Oporto's general strode along
The red rampart ramshackle,
"The moat is deep, the walls are strong,
The terrain tough to tackle,
Still... tell the men in three-fold prong
Teach the East of battle!"
Another day of bloodshed to appal*

The Raja of Soonda surrendred all.

Cocktails at the Cafe del Mar,
Shark meat at Palolem
The beach, the bar, the Greek guitar,
The sweet peace at Patnem,
The cosmopolotania, life's cool creme de la creme.

Gokarna

There is a cliff like the Cinque Terra,
Tho not as sheer, a place where boatmen ply
Their lazy trade, a hint of Kerala,
An island that the Hindus sacrifice;
Gokarnan days
Passing the time away,
In hedonistic haze & sunformed splashful play.

*She was a lass from Lancashire
Where the misty days all grey,
& came to see the area
Where the sacred saddus pray
There she fell in love forever
As angel-dolphins play
& British winter pass'd in scenes so nice
A beach so aptly named, twas Paradise.*

Crossing hot sand, hacking thick hedge,
Jumping thro jungle green,
Tip-toed the ledge-lean clifftop edge,
Swimming thro currents mean,
Then lazing in the shady huts, life's coastal limosine.

Saraswathi

I fixt mine inner eye upon a star,
In darshan disturbing this diety,
Lull'd by the tantric strains of her sitar
A pure white flowing goddess flew to me
Upon a swan of hue ambrosial,
Her fertile smile still'd time, her luted look
My hearts consort - sublimely cordial
She read from the Pustaka's sacred book

*"Wand'rer, thou art welcom'd to India,
This sari I have sewn know as thy guide,
Where e're she willows there stay close behind!"*

She closed the page, sail'd high skies to Brahma,
Perform'd the blissful duties of a bride,
Rare have I seen such beauties in my mind.

Hampi

As Ghats give way to wide Deccan plateau
Hard is the journey, hot, dusty & dry,
Wyrd into view vast mounds of boulders grow
Ruin'd pillars that yore-since bouy'd the sky;
An Eastern Rome
Once soar'd amidst the stone,
The great King Krishna's home now rubble, husk & bone.

*This was a place to muse on man
In the ruins of his past,*

*Far from the world's tobacco ban
& it's television mast,
Was this part of a divine plan
Or mortal plaster cast -
Scenery settled in serenity,
A haven from human hostility.*

Gliding by graceful coracle,
Serene as English spa,
Aft brief ramble, robust scramble,
Claim summit...from afar
Pastel lustr'd sunsets muster'd oer Vijayanagar.

Bangalore

As truck on truck announced wide cityscape,
With glassy towers scraping hazy sky,
I hoped immediately to escape,
The modern world where monies multiply;
Where east meets west
This valley silicon
Like some ten-headed beast born for armageddon.

*A whirl of British companies,
Thought it better to offload
Its highly taxed dependencies
Sending British jobs abroad
Computerised communities
Spread down the KH road
Eye of the vortex that is man's progress -*

Sports complexes, xerox & western dress.

As I tried to leave the city
The streets were cramm'd gridlock,
Grimy, gritty, slimy, shitty,
Til well past eight o'clock
A vision of commuter hell, confusing ragnaraok.

Sriringapatnam

Beside the rushes of the Kaveri,
Yon the silicon crush of Bangalore,
Lies the capital, lost to history,
Of Tipu Sultan, Tyger of Mysore;
An elfin town
Its ruin'd fortress wall,
Once keeping safe a crown, testament to it's fall.

*His Highness storm'd the British breach,
Precious pistols in each hand,
Teeth clench'd, show'ring curses to teach
This heathen to leave his land,
But royal flesh feels soft as peach,
At this, his final stand,
Troops of scarlet Scots, drunk on blood & rum,
Made murder to the beat of Wellesley's drum.*

We skirt the spot where wailers found
Bejewell'd Raja spread
On crimson ground 'neath mangl'd mound
Of proud & loyal dead -
"Drive on," my pony carriage whipt, to other beauties sped.

Kodangallur

My soul's boatman cuts thro Karnataka
To burst once more atop these feisty Ghats
Crowning the lush jungles of Kerala,
Where crucifix, idol & muslim mats
Share in delight,
Harmoniously furl'd,
Rare bastion of light in this conflicted world.

*The swanhelm'd ship came in to sand
Bearing bearded apostle,
Stunn'd naked natives watch'd the hand
That stroked the Lambs own temple
Fish levitate from sea to land,
Faith inspiring symbol -
From this day hence the sound of Jesus' name
Shall burnish certain Asian hearts with flame.*

A space in some young side I fill
Amid the Toddies tall,
They sense my skill, a tense nil-nil
Til as the shadows fall
I slink'd past six defenders (two were trees) - the winning goal!

Calicut

Thro groves of coconut boles we venture,
Stand where the epic Lusiad lay ceased,
Fisher village where Vasco de Gama
First sank renaissance gaze upon the East;
Further along
I find a fair city
Furnish'd with friendly throng & AC library.

*They palanquin'd embassadours
Thro crowds wide-eyed & gawping,
Depositing those pale litters
At the ring'd toes of their king,
Decadent Zamorin glitters,
What did these envoys bring?
Strange instruments of medicine & war,
The winds of trade blown to his spicy shore.*

The latest one-dayer play'd out
Twixt England & our hosts,
Sehwag bowl'd out, my single shout
A meal of lonely toasts...
Flintoff fires off the final runs...clientelle fade like ghosts.

An Indian Experience

I found myself waiting at this train station
Not for a train, it was just to buy a ticket
Not even for that day, but eleven in the future
The next one available from Calicut to Coonoor
So I´m waiting & waiting & I´m waiting nit-pick longer
& the guy behind the desk´s on his third guy in an hour
& I was fourth, but the seventh guy´s hand starts waving
His reservation form as the third guy was about to finish
So I warned fifth, sixth, & seventh he´d be a foolish to push
in
As I'd been walking in the sun all day like a mad English dog
& my legs felt like lead & I was definitely going next...

So the third guy finishes & just as I thrust my form thro the
window The guy behind the desk decides to go on a mission
to the toilet
& when he gets back the bouncer closes the window for
lunch!

Karanci

I took a breath or two of night time air
My heart not knowing why, my legs not where
The starry skies obscured by gremlin cloud
I headed for the hilltop temple loud
Where rattled such a throng of Saivite
Songs echoing thro tea plantation night
Seeming another Calcata to me
For India oft feels like Italy
& all was silver as a Silver Oak
For searing thro the deep & astral smoke
I found there was a full moon pulling clear
These are the moments poets hold so dear
Thro selene scenes setting dream-trails in store
On 'morrow morns may pass these ways once more.

Fort Cochin

Come share a second with serenity
Up in this lake of European rooves,
The crescent lamp'd oer th'Arabian sea
Lulls me thither, I hear the sound of hooves...
At once a sacred chime grows on the breeze,

Some teller of a thousand ancyent tayles,
Some from the world's crop-fellers overseas,
Some cross the Karakoram's lofty trails,
Some were seekers of immortal glory,
Some content to be husbands & be wives...
Tho' the vision all clutter'd & hoary,
With me a single memory survives,
Being extras in the global story
We are stars in the movies of our lives.

Varkala

Sailing between these tranquil backwaters,
Palm-fring'd horizon burst all around me,
Before this treasuregold of Kerala's
All made to stand in stark humility,
For scenes like these
Reveal wond'rous nature -
We slipt with sweeten'd ease into Kollam harbour.

*The beatnik & his blues guitar
Stumbl'd on this perfect place,
Clift portion of the Malabar;
Sand, ocean, sun & solace,
But secrets are soon scatter'd far,
The Western tourists race
To plant their towel standards on the beach
Round which limpet rest'rants & hotels leech.*

I dined with maid Slovenian
Talk'd art, Trieste & Rome,
Slow flirtation! Our supper done
I walk'd her half-way home,
To make love mid the wave-breaks while the moonbeams snaked the foam.

Meditations

The world is changing mate
In the face of fact & feat
Colour-obsession regressing day-by-day

Usain Bolt, Lewis Hamilton - fastest men on the planet
Vishy Anand - chessmaster extraordinairre
& Thro sheer will, skill & luck
Obama comes to fend off world oblivion

& all as black as crows

Like a Rosa Parks sit-in,
Or a Martin Luther march
Far from the Dravidian stigma of varna
When Brahmins could slap him for caste & colour
A youthful Dalit doctor stands & declares

"One day I shall be the Prime Minister of India!"

Kanayakamari

At last the Ghats have peter'd to their end,
Sole, savage witch-peaks all which now remain,
Until we reach the grand Cormarin bend
Where ends Amritsar's forty-eight hour train;
Join'd eclectic
In one wylde, chopping squall
Waves from the Antarctic, Araby & Bengal.

*Ashes scatter'd on ocean stream,
Last remains of Mahatma,
Opponent of London's regime
Nurtured in South Africa,
Returning preaching freedom's dream
With soft satyahara -*

*This half naked fakir's staff thin & long
Ensorcell'd his multitudinous throng.*

Ghandi guides a blood red bindi
To rest upon the line
Slipping slowly into the sea,
The sky an evening wine,
I turn left face, step forth for North & Himalayan pine .

Swami Vivekananda

Narenda left sleepy Simulia
To realise deep faith, this mortal quest
Brought him to kiss Sri Ramakrishna ´s feet
Recipient of pure Sansayan force
O lotus bliss, bliss indescribable

Now changing names he roam´d thro all Tibet
Mastering secret Buddhist principles
Then stepping south he put them to the test
On Kannayakamari ´sacred rock
Meditating on all his countrymen.

From Himalayan height to these three seas
He saw man ´s lot just had to be improved
By way of modern practices, & saw
Each creature ´s soul seam´d by the quartz of god

Happy New Year 2009

Eight Onges died two weeks ago after drinking spurious
hooch
But a boy was born on xmas day bringing the tribe to 93
& what, what of that other tribe by the wide bay of Bengal
The mighty Tamil nation now divided into two
Parted by Adam ´s bridge, where Hanuman strove for Seeta
The native, mainland Tamil - burning proudly independant

& their Lankan cousins , killing for independence
Whose fate procrastinated at the dawn of the Age of Obama
Exploring Ramashwaram's shores with the mythos of the
Ramayana
Listening to Kilinochi as Waterloo entertained Felixstowe
Til the silence speaks volumes...

"The Tiger's have been tamed," bray the international
tabloids
"We must now change out tactics," affirmed determined
Prabhakaran
Within an hour a sleeper suicide-bomber activated in
Colombo

Madurai

I winch in each pinch of a varied view,
Shaking to this train's novelty suspense,
After six sardine hours I'm plunged into
Some busy little city street intense;
Here to sample
Some scene which I was told,
India's best temple bosom'd in urban fold.

*The heart of the Dravidian
Fell to Vijayanagar,
Who built a Hindu pantheon
Taller than it's rising star,
Each kaleidoscopic mountain
Melodic without par,
Enough to urge grown women shed their tears,
Still painted heavenly ev'ry twelve years.*

Opium! Coleridgean wish
Heeded by bloodshot man,
Dark, oily dish, crunch... "What is this?
Liquerice!..." My mind's span
Blew interspatial round the room as thought flew with the fan.

Translations from Thirukkural

Rain's continuance preserves existence
Speaketh, then, ambrosia (2:1)

Falsehood conferring faultless fruitfulness
Nature's truth contains (30:2)

Kingly fame fades forgotten
Without righteous government (56:6)

When soldiers fear bloodshed
Kings cry destitute (77:1)

In miserable poverty's train
Many more miseries (105:5)

Her jewels perplex me
Celestial? Peahen? Women? (109:1)

Pleasure entertains my dreams
Wakeful desires obtain'd (122:4)

Tamil Animals

Pastel Gopura
Monkeys perch'd like mountain goats
Squabbling like humans

Our once proud peacock
Begging at food-stalls for scraps
Far from Kings & Camps

Manless mountainside

Dragonflies dart on the breeze
Butterflies ablaze

Piglet playtime
Scampering thro foot'thick filth
Young stags ajousting

Nuzzling thro wild rubbish dumps
Cows, Crows, Goats, Swine, Hens, Dogs, Apes

Nalatiyar

Her :

O lord of fertile land & everflowing waterfalls
O lord of cool sunshine warming ocean ´s running waves
O lord of good country with beautiful ebony mountains
O lord of flowery hills with lush & sparkling waterfalls
O lord of honey-bearing woods in the good country
O lord of long seashore with fine, unfailing salt-pans
O lord of the hills with lovely sandal groves on
O lord of cool lagoons & bays brimming with water
O lord of prosperous vineyards & huge gem-studded caverns

Him :

O beautiful lady with breasts like budding flowers
O lady of beautiful hair with fragrance of musk
O lady of long-eyed spears & bow-like eyebrows

Him & Her

O lord of bewitching victories bring these beauties to me

Crossing Tamil Nadu

From India ´s Niligris water-tanks
Rivers aim plainward

Kabbadi, washerwomen, rickshaw repairs
Madurai's bankside institutions

Thanjavur's impressive medieval cityscape,
Trichy's towering temple

Kaveri, Coleroon, Arasalar, Mahamakham
Kumbakonam's sacred waterways

Ghostly, seacoast colonial fortress
Idyllic, white-wash'd Tranqebur

Lotus-pool, paddyfield, rainflood, riverine
Wonderful watery world

Kollidam crowns Kaveri's delta
Pitchivarum's pirhouetting Cu-Co

Pondicherry

Gorgeous Coromandel, crown prince of coasts,
My wanderlust has earn'd thine ancylent treats,
Meagre are glimpses of the Gallic ghosts
Dwelt within this grid of well ponder'd streets;
An antique chair,
Deep tann'd Gendarmerie,
All that retains the air transported from Paris.

*Discovering rare poetry
Is the poet's shooting star,
Like at Kannayakamari
Where stands Thirruvallavar,
Sri Aurobindo's Savitri,
On grand Miltonic par,
Wonderful words more wondrous to behold
As Cortez stumbl'd on the Aztec gold.*

I wafted in on inland scent

& left by soft, sea breeze,
Before I went...bemustach'd gent...
"A cool kingfisher please!"
I nearly piss'd myself when he hiss'd, *"Twenty six rupees!"*

Auroville

To this green belt, thou sliver of the West,
Where lingers still a hint of apartheid,
Went I, somewhat the uninvited guest,
Not for the ashram, but to read & write,
City of Dawn,
Sri Aurobindo's dream,
Life lived with perfect tone & meditative stream.

*The Mother sanctified the ground,
Twas wilderness red serene,
Over whose dust & termite mound
She sprinkl'd Provencal green,
Dewy-eyed adepts gather'd round
The brook peace of their queen,
Forming a calm co-op´rative of souls,
Surrounded by tough fields & begging bowls.*

I join the morning reading group,
Savitri's sacred text,
Pass'd round the loop, slow hula hoop,
& soon they hint me next,
& so I sung a poet's song, sang every circumflex.

The Mother *(On Youth)*

*"You will become the Person you want to be
Our future is in our own hands*

*The higher our private aspirations
The higher our realisation
This is the key to youth
Never accepting the irreparable
& with firm resolution follow our true life's aim.*

*Those useless years age us
Contentment beginning the decline
But unquenchable thirst for progress
Keeps us moving til our dying day
Those deeming completed tasks
The start of things to come
Will never feel the weight of passing days."*

Chennai

My driver sure don't know the highway code,
Thro vast, suburban, lawless sprawl haring,
Thirty kilometres of ribbon road,
Shops, neon signs & chi stalls commingling;
A diff'rent class
Of Indian City,
Formally Queen Madras, maid of an English sea.

*Into the caves of Mylapore
Hot blood gusht from the doubter,
Dragging himself across the floor...
Savage loin-cladded hunter
Hath thrust a spear into his core...
Whispering last prayer
He saw the sweet beatific & he cried,
"Thou art fulfill'd..." the martyr smiled & died.*

By Fort Saint George such church stands tall
As English as the Downs,

On sacred wall writ the roll call
Of heroes & of towns,
When London's lackeys grappl'd with & topp'l'd Hindu crowns.

Departing for Andaman

Gazing across exotic ocean stream
Shamrock musing drifts to distant Burnley,
Where for as long as breathing there shall be
My friends, my family, my football team -
So far away, for following my dream
I am a stranger in a strange contree,
Tho slowly hook'd upon it's cup of tea,
Darjeeling serv'd with a darling Devon cream.

The sun has fallen & the ship has sail'd,
The last lamps of the mainland shrink & fade,
A moment to define me has prevail'd
Born of the apex of my third decade,
Next time by solid ground my feet regaled
Into youth's fleeting heart I shall have stray'd.

Port Blair

I dawdl'd four days on the *Nancowry*,
Small taster of the voyages of yore,
Fodder'd on a bland, suspicious thali,
My heart leapt up to see Hanuman's shore;

Some deep & sheer
Mountain range submarine
Thrusting it's summits clear in shades of leafy green.

*The cellular jail built to last
Thro good ol' British know how,
Where Freedom Fighters earn repast,
Some collonial Dachau,
Where bull whips crack'd & rough sticks flash'd
Guantanamo know-how
A place where proud blood flows for liberty...
How could my contree build Kalapani?*

I took a boat to Ross island
Accross clear water'd bay,
Wylde Banyans stand on buildings grand,
Imperious Pompeii,
Where now the White Man's Burden is a ghost town in decay.

Havelock Island

To one of Andaman's more famous isles
I set off with more nomads from the boat,
Thro' moped skids & liquid acid smiles
A little slice of paradise was bought;
A perfect home
Strung up on Beach Seven,
Hammocks slung oer the foam lapping against heaven.

*When I am old, sat in my chair,
This may be my youth's highlight,
Upon my left the ocean fair,
The jungle tall upon my right,
Astride an engine driven chair,
Above sublime sunlight,
Ahead the glory of the open road
A lovely lass from Oslo as my load.*

With Elephant beach looming ahead
Thro swamps of charr'd mangrove,
The sunset red, I paus'd & said,
The evening ripe for love,
"This is mortal perfection!" kisses to the Sutras move.

Shipwreck'd

Down southern Andaman lies Jolly Bouy
Thick with bright coral & of snorkling joy
I spent an hour lagooning in a laze
& fell astoned... then woke... to my amaze
The boat had left, deserted, all alone,
No rizlas, samosas, water, nor phone
A mile or so across the sharky foam
A trail of smoke show'd someone was at home,
& so I built a raft but that soon sank,
So off I swam, my goddess I should thank
For showing me this was a wild riptide
My muscles haul'd me back, I'd nearly died
Then shouting to some boats around sunset,
I was the strangest fish they'd ever net.

TSU-NA-MI

Sing to the outlying islands of Andaman
As waves strip the tribesmen's neolithic dress
Ripping them out to the mad, frothing ocean
Leaves nothing behind but waste & wilderness

Remember them fleeing the huge walls of water
That snapped them & tossed them & made bloody piles
The aftermath pale, she search'd for her daughter
A sad scene repeated some three thousand miles
Remember the mood in the days after Christmas

When so many strangers shall shun the new year
A new, doleful sound when the river grows restless
As so many tears crystallize a new fear

From Asia to Africa surged the wild sea
O sing a sad song for the TSU-NA-MI!

Hugli

We sail'd from the comforts of Port Blair
Into the wide-wave level loveliness,
We men have conquer'd mountains, moats & air,
But never on deep ocean made impress;
We watch'd the fins
Of silver fish skimming
Where flipp'd slick-back Dolphins ribbon'd in star-swimming.

*Empiric British ambition
Found a human pulse in Clive,
Whose self righteous indignation
Blazed triumphant to arrive
And address the situation
Within this Nawab's hive,
His tiny fleet transporting all his boys,
These royal redcoats & loyal sepoy.*

We sighted land on the fourth day,
Sunder'd by a river,
Naiad gateway to the wide way
Of th'AryaVarta -
I have travers'd from South to North via the Nirvana!

Avataras

At the back of the ship, at the height of the trip,

Drawn by the harmonies of Lord Vishnu's call,
I saw cross the waters navel rooted lotus
Absorbing the beateous bay of Bengal,
Transcending to milk, pearly seaway of silk,
Thou lavender cushion of infinite white,
Surrounding the foetal spirit centripetal
Sucking upon toenails painted starry bright.

*"Rider, thou art welcome to India,
Saraswathi, I see, has smil'd on you,
Thy mortal aura bless'd in her prayer,
Thine energies hued in a rainstorm blue,
Come drape thyself in the Himalaya,
For there, my child, thou wilt know what to do."*

Calcutta

Akbar's passengers rush from the harbour,
Haul'd by rickshaw thro' wacky racer streets,
Power'd by pedal, petrol or runner,
Til once again the Western posse meets
Mid Sudder's share
Of the Imperatrix
I felt without a care, bouy'd up by British bricks.

*Magnificent Pax Mughala
Declines into decadence,
The Nawab, Siraj-ud-Daula
Grows in scope & confidence,
His army march'd to Kolkatta
& English arrogance -
Abandon'd, but for those too late to leave...
Slamm'd in the hole...dawn breaks...few left to breathe.*

Grand ocean of humanity,
Sea of friendly faces,
From to native tea, & black taxi,
Betting down the races,
An excellent community garnished with English graces.

Plassey

Life simple mid familiar surrounds,
But senses of adventure grow depress'd
So I set forth, a hunter with the hounds,
In pursuit of other interests;
A battlefield
Lies died for to the North,
If feeling it shall yield a call may be of worth.

*All in this monsoon of Indra's
That growls with the guns of France,
Go rhino shields, glint curv'd daggers,
Howdah'd behemoths advance...
Rudely halted by Clive's soldiers!
Mir Jaffa sees the chance,
His mass of decision led from the field,
This treachery the Nawabcy must yield.*

My cycle rickshaw gliding hies
From the glean of battle,
A poets prize...dark dragonflies
Dart oer the arable -
My guide plants me on Northbound bus roaring at ful throttle!

Murshidabad

I awoke in a strange, white-sheeted bed,
Fellow passengers moaning in sev'ral ways,
Soak'd in blood & clutching a concuss'd head
I stumb'ld to a taxi in a daze!
"Driver, just drive!"
I fled that hospital

Lucky to be alive, the crash had been fatal.

*Why am I in a strange white bed,
Woke by moans? to my amaze,
Bags lying by my concuss'd head,
Stumbling out in blood-soak'd haze,
In old, odd rickshaw off I sped
Such are our brave young days,
Leaving behind a fainting hospital
Laxsmi my saint - the crash had been fatal.*

I took a room to convalesce
Mid palatial surrounds,
I was a mess, for more or less
A week of sleeps & sounds,
Until half-heal'd I took the sights, great palaces & grounds.

Bhagavad Gita

Let us transfer to a field of battle
Where two armies are solemnly opposed
Forever on the Gangeatic plane.

Between, steering a golden chariot
Drawn by four horses whiter than the eye,
Stands Krishna, sacred keeper of the cows,
Him born when all India was asleep.

By him knelt Arjun in woeful weeping,
Shedding tears for brethren he must affray,
Til the king bouy'd by his charioteer.

From potent lips gallop'd the song of God,
Defining how a man should live with peace,
And tho' the fight would be a bloody one,

All karmas laid a spiritual base.

Varanasi

Alluvial flatlands roll ever West,
The Ganga Matha shimmers into sight,
Here came the British banquet of conquest
To dine on the age old City of Light;
Siva's domain
Beside her fragrant flow
Where marigold & grain ash-daub'd ascetics throw.

*To Sarnath, thou deer park of bliss,
Stretch'd by the Holy River,
He came, gave men a kiss,
"No longer I Siddhartha!"
They knew not what to make of this,
"Call now me the Buddha!"
They sat & listen'd to the first sermon
Soft on the lips of the enlighten'd one.*

Hypnofixed on that bamboo bier
Down by the riverside,
The pyres appear, fire'd atmosphere
Reeking for those that died
Their blessed death, Kashi lit up as Vedic chants men vied.

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Lucknow

Countryside chiming like a park of Kent,
No wonder here they chose to stamp the Pax,
Alas, civilisation really meant,
The ignorance, the excrescence, the tax;
Shame struck the Oudh,
Their noble kingdom next,
Shamed as their Nawab bow'd while the British annex'd.

*The North declared the battleground,
Focus for a mutiny,
Fifty thousand aggriev'd surround
Eurasia's residency,
All day & night the cannon's pound
The dreams of Dalhousie,
Til Redcoats, march'd under merciless skies,
Bring redemption, slay those who dared to rise.*

Regent ruins as red as dust,
Cupid's nuzzling couples,
Are held in trust, coated with dust
From those desp'rate battles,

They form symbolic sepulchre of empiric shackles.

India

Nation of nations, hot & happy land!
With spicy dishes morsell'd by the hand
Being a valourous & graceful race,
Thy universal mullet firm in place,
Despite taking three men to stamp a form
Corrupted feudalism Laksmi's norm
A fanatacism for the rupee
Cements this secular society
Of power-cuts & cripples & bazaars
Neath a pristine panapoly of stars,
Of swastikas & cricket in the streets,
Bounteous crops & oversugar'd sweets,
Ashrams soothing riot-torn religion
& always blaze the rays of Asia's sun.

Naini Tal

Swallow'd by the slopes of sentinels sheer
I enter'd the Himalayan foothills,
Linger'd by a Pyrrannean Grasmere,
Thou crystal lake, queen of the sparkling rills;
Those nubile streams
Which on steep courses flow
Into what slowly seems a relique volcano.

*While on a steel-trapp'd Tyger hunt
Froze the belicose Barron,
Before the perfect place to punt,*

*Emerald paned Kumaon,
His yacht haul'd upland by the grunt
Of low caste Indian,
A boating club soon furnishes the shore,
Then churches, barracks, schools & prison floor.*

Neath the Himalayan mountain tree,
An eagle on the wing,
I watch'd Holi unrolling free
Paint happy splattering,
Then all at once they covered me, some Jackson Pollock fling.

Nanda Devi

Up to the world's rooftop I slowly rose;
Checking upon the progress of the soul
Appears a mountain prospect a la snows
Of Austria, New Zealand & Nepal.

I left Almora for the Kashyap Hill,
High commune of fairest tranquility,
Fresh dawntint drew me to the lofty chill
Of this monolithic Axis Mundi.

It seems for me the lips of Laksmi smile,
No sweeter place on earth to greet the sun,
Here summon'd by the lyrical lifestyle,
I whisper a gentle dedication;

*"Until my feet have circuited the globe
My thought & life with posey I shall robe."*

Old Delhi

I stood tall as the mountains for a week,
Better tall than a tourist at the Taj,
Each morn spent with the Empire's highest peak,
The summit of my soiree round the Raj;
With dew-eyed wrench
I ride back to battle,
The noise, the heat, the stench cloaking the capital.

*From the steppes of central Asia
Camest Nadir Shah, great guest
Of a weak-minded emporer,
Th'ancestral riches to wrest,
Twas a festival of slaughter,
Blood splasht on treasure chest
As seized from the fabulous peacock throne
He gripp'd the Koh-i-Noor, Babar's bright stone.*

Singing paeans to mu goddess,
Fingers on Krishna's flute,
Dark eyes carress my soul's weakness
For lashes & luve's lute,
I left that preciosu temple spirit ripe as summer fruit.

New Delhi

As the streets of the nine Delhis unfold,
Epic ephitets of stone & motar,
Emergant dynasties merging with old
Flavour the chaos with it's carachter;
The way widens,
Flank'd by banks & airlines,
Toward one of Britain's more gandiose designs.

*With measured pomp & pageantry,
Exotic extravagance,
An Empire grants a colony
Elevated eminence,
This nucleus of the contree
Spared no magnificence -
Now the natives are ready to govern
The lords shall soon depart, their duty done.*

As a hundred Sunday innings
Spreads round the grassy mile,
Tricky spinnings, wicket winnings,
Each man an Anglophile,
For cricket is to India as Egypt needs the Nile.

Tuqluqubad

To Delhi spread the dead prophets ambit,
First city of the Mughal emporer,
Whose submitters aid spirits to submit,
Bedazzl'd by carpets & chased silver;
Thro' sewer streets
My cycle rickshaw rolls
Til some splendid fort greets me with grand, rouge-blush'd walls.

*Akbar sounds the sacred trumpet,
Rajarajadhiraja!
Round onion dome & minaret
Mussalmen kneel in prayer,
Mounted archers & swordsmen set
For the Digvijaya -
A ball is launch'd from golden cannon's mouth,
The cheer goes up, an army marches South.*

These battlements bat infested
Still stand triumphantly,
Here rests the dead Raja whose head

Swell'd into this city,
Stood ghostly with the curse of those who found a fresh Delhi.

Nataraja

One timeless night in the scorch'd wilderness,
When sands & stars ranged with immensity,
Sinew'd with the verve of youth's loveliness,
Lord Siva, the destroyer, came to me.

He left his mountains with a single stride,
Three velvet eyes a-gleam with dreamy hue,
Caphor white, clad in an ivory hide,
He had come to consecrate my Saddhu.

Nearby smoulder'd a fresh cremation pil,
Soon daub'd in ash we danced a pirrouhette,
Absorb'd in the Daemon Damaru drum.

The dreadlockt Ganges spun in sundry flight,
His halo trail'd a blue blazed tail'd comet,
My senses drew an esoteric numb.

Pushkar

Amid the arid plains of Rajasthan,
Where jagged peaks rise from the calcined earth,
Where man bedecks camel & caravan,

I taste the astral nature of the tirth;
Thou oasis,
Defying solar bake,
Centre of pilgrim bliss cluster'd round sparkling lake.

*Brahma toss'd a lotus flower,
Three kunds sprung from the petals,
Round celestial water
The wailing Brahmin settles,
There came a Mughal emporer
To raze their fine temples,
Who bath'd his face in cool lucidity,
Magic'ly aged he show'd Puja mercy.*

I stroll'd a stroll from ghat to ghat,
Chess session camst upon,
Cross legged sat on woven mat
Sparr'd with their champion...
With secret Western technique & sleek gambitry soon won.

Rajputana

Gigantic Jodhpur
Round mem'orable Mehranga
Rippling sea-surf rooves

Oasis Jaiselmer
From turret & tower gold
Homesteads blend with sand

Jaipur's pink lady
Thro the Tiger Fort breaches
Fledgling climbers rise

Oer shanti Bundi
Stoic Tarragarh hovers
Grand & goblin-hewn

Visions conjured forever
With somakshetriyan fire

Jaisalmere

Beyond gigantic Jodhpur's sea-surf rooves
Phantastic sandstone streets rise from the sand
Still echoing the sound of horses hooves
Still sensuous with scents from Samarkand;
The rainless Thar,
Scourge of the wanderer,
Keeps Pakistan afar, wild edge of India!

*Proclaim the proudest Rajput clan
The grand Rawals of Bhatti
Who took the stout walls to a man
Against Alauddin Khilji
Avenging his lost caravan
& precious jewellery -
A second Troy it seemed for seven years
Til walls were breached & bloody dimmed the spears.*

Down desert roads from Jaiselmere
A town was left to rot
Thro fiscal fear, with wistful tear,
The locals left the lot,
Leaving their ghostly memories & one small broken pot.

Overtaking Lanes

Two saddus stood by the side of the road
Staring at a truck that had spill'd it's load
By that, an old wreck that just would not start
Bypass'd by a man in an ox-drawn cart,
& faster still; first a cycle rickshaw
A dull green tractor from the days of yore,
Auto-rickshaw belching dirty black smoke,
Bright red moped missing many-a-spoke,
Some weird lorry's siren psychedelics,

Bus driven by two mad alcoholics,
These by breezy motorcycle bypass'd
Til last, a white car of the Rajput caste,
O lawless highways death-dark angels stalk
You know, it's a nice day, I think I'll walk.

Mount Abu

Green peaks rise up from Rajasthani dust
The oldest in the world - or so I'm told -
The desert heat cool'd by the breezy gust
Wings butterfly & dragonfly take hold:
 An upland breeze
 Kept out the lowland heat,
An Englishman at ease, a cool & scenic treat.

*Vashistha was the sad guru
The world knew as their teacher
Who with the cow Kamedhenu
Defied the laws of nature
& found the forest of Arbhu
When King Vishwamitra
Challenged this mystic's fame to no avail,
For he preferred these hilltops to grow frail.*

Yon Tunbridge Wellsian Toad Rock
Some Hindu New Year's Night,
Then thousand flock to share the shock
 As sunset settles bright
& when she dips such cheers rise up in praise of sacred sight!

Jaipur

This short, Byronic sortie to the East,
Sometime tourist, sometime adventurer,
Sees sublime sunsets as each new night pieced

This myriad India together;
Yon Udaipur,
The honeymooner's dream,
I trundl'd to Jaipur to watch my native team.

*Some worship Christianity,
Or pray five times to Mecca,
Perhaps Laxsmi, Saraswathi,
Krishna, Lord Vishnu, Siva
The Buddha, Kali, Parvati,
Durga or Ganesha,
But all thro India one god is king
Sachin Tendulkar at the opening.*

With friends I met at Andaman
We watch'd a thrilling game,
With swifty ton K Peiterson
Cunning spin bowlers tame,
Each stroke applauded by our hosts, the batsman flashing flame.

Bundi

Reaching the eastern edge of Rajstahan
The stands abandoned fortress goblin-hewn
While wandering within & round its span
I wondered if it was some vedic boon;
Neath red rampart
I Kipling'd for a week,
For poets slowly part from places quite unique.

*Drom a dying Satis' final words
Flew an ancyent prophecy,
"When princes meet hunting the herds
Born of Mewar & Bundi
One must die!" Ajit aim'd at birds,
His arrow flies keenly...
Whether by chance, by fate, by secret gain,
Rana, the prince of Udaipur, lay slain.*

I took a ride thro villagery,
Sought out a waterfall,
It seemed to me like ecstasy,
Immersing body's all,
& driving back, dried by the breeze, felt burdens lift from soul.

Jait Sagar

If India can make a man a man
More than the brothel-nests of Amsterdam
If thro the chaos he can make a plan
Respecting Hinduism & Islam

If he can give the beggar his rupee
& tip a tout charging over the odds
If he can read his Rajput history
& choose a god but still bless other gods

If he can bear the rolling railway run,
Find fresh clean waterfalls amid the dirt
If he can wonder how the Raj was won
Then pause upon the horrors & the hurt

If he can haggle down & know his daal
Then does he need to see the Taj Mahal?

Gwalior

Back in Britain I once had helped to raise
Snehalya's project oer ten thousand pounds
To spend the most poignant of all my stays
I found myself fenced off in garden grounds;
Bandit country,
By nervous locals farm'd,
The gate security both ex-army & armed!

*O holy land of poetry,
Mystic maze of India,*

*Cauldron of human chemistry,
Histrionic theatre,
Man's ever-living mystery,
Beggar to Emporer,
Stramineous ground of goddess Karma,
Beauteous life-balladry of Brahma.*

I went out with a local nurse
Village after village,
Her paltry purse could not reverse
Such under-privelege,
But now their most disabled children have their orphanage!

Agra

To lead good life is to leave no regrets
& so, despite cursing the tourist trail,
That glory-monument to man & wife
Over my wanderlust must now prevail;
Oer crowd & lane
The Taj Mahal arose
France, Italy nor Spain could match her matchless poise.

*The house of Shah Jahan grew hushed
His grief was overbarring,
But chieftans prosper best when crushed,
The weeping wreath outwearing,
He briefly with the heavens's brushed,
All who saw were staring,
A testament to beauty's deep adore,
The Taj Mahal, Cupid's conquistador.*

With prime Indian Icon
Tick'd from my tourist box,
The North was won, tour almost done,
As workers watch the clocks,
Downloading my flight details as the homeward notion knocks.

Paneer

First make paneer from bubbling pans of milk
A little lemon juice to separate
Then freeze the cheezy tofu to smooth silk
& place it by the veggies on a plate.

Heat up the oil, two cloves of garlic fry,
Toss in red onion & a pepper green
Stir till the scent of cooking warm & dry
Then add paneer with soft & salty sheen.

Mix in the sauce, tescoe's or one own brand
Of soy-sauce-brush'd tomatoes flush with spice -
All the colours of the hot desert sand.

Cook up & then your curry will appear
To serve upon a bed of saffron rice,
Wash'd down with a white wine or nice, cold beer.

Chittorgarh

My camel treks thro' realms of chivalry,
Follow'd barefoot by this gypsy player
Conjuring scenes upon his Sarrangee,
Charming the desert night with sung prayer;
Ah! Completed

Is our nomadic flow,
An ancyent city stood on tabletop plateau.

*At the steep walls of the fortress
Insatiable Akbar stared,
Those soldiers in their saffron dress
Say Jauhar has beenm declared,
They rode to die in gentillesse,
A martyrdom soon shared...
As wives & children step in to the fire
Chants of victory climb with the empire.*

The sun hoists flame up oer the walls,
A cruel & hostile red,
My contree calls, fresh footstep falls
By dry Ghamberi's bed,
Aim'd at Burnley, on the dusty Daksinpatha I tread.

L'Envoi

I pause in Ratlam for a two night stay,
My long tours's circle drawing to a close,
An obscure spot to while the last full day
Of this, the latest triumph of the Rose;
One last sleeper,
Neath overarching sky,
Yon the pale Narmarda, pulls back into Mumbai.

*I saw so many miseries
& saw so much beauty too,
All of mankind's categories
Thro a single contree drew,
What mixture of cacophonies
Climb'd with the morning dew -
Them to mine ears did seem a morning choir,
The chantings of the children of empire.*

I step tween mendicants, oxen,
Fresh stools, strays, tips & crows,
Strange monkeymen, hags, swine & then
A sense of friendship grows,
"One glorious sub-continent, as wondrous as a rose!"

On Departing India

An olympiad since that piazza
Where first I flirted with the myrtle muse,
Now knoweth I a new peninsula
Whose galaxy of monuments enthuse
The spiritus, where all Earthly aspects
Have form'd a microcosm of the sphere,
Firm foundation for when I journey next,
Days of endeavour drawing ever near.

Around the Raj was flung a faerie ring
& all it's channel'd poesis regaled,
I have succeeded in my conquering
Where Ghengiz Khan & Alexander fail'd.

I smile a moment, musing on the wing,
As oer the sea of Araby we sail'd.

England

At last my gaze is cast oer English skies,

The thrill of homecoming springing inside,
We burst thro' cloud to claim a poet's prize;
Big Ben...Tower Bridge...Millennial ride.

So I am back, back from my epic tour
Ten rupees all that furnishes my purse,
Scruffy & tann'd I call upon the door
Of compassion & an NHS nurse.

*"Well I cough'd up blood-clots, gush'd dysentry,
Mozzy bites have turn'd into puss-fill'd scabs,
Salmonella, concussion, twisted knee,
Neuropraxia, the screaming ab-dabs!"*

*"It's lucky you survived"...I smiled a smile,
"Dying," said I, "It's never been my style*