

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Delhi: Down the Ages is a handy, informative, useful, and good value-for-money book for travellers. In this book, you read and see history. The graphic description is accompanied with interpretations. For example, the history of the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid is intertwined with detailed directions to reach there, pointing out landmarks, well-known joints, buildings with a meaning, even the number of traffic lights you may come across. This way you will know how the city works; your tour will not be restricted to monuments alone. With this book in hand, you will not need another Guide.

This book offers a truly unique experience of Delhi, mixing history, travel, politics and culture. Mr Kapoor offers a 3D vision of his beloved city, giving the reader a mesmerizing armchair adventure.

— Cindy Dalrymple, Tustin, CA



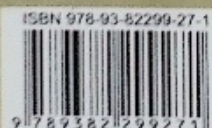
Dinesh Kapoor is a multifaceted personality. He has been a lecturer, journalist, banker, writer, theatre person, actor, director and producer of films. He ran an art gallery for budding artistes for three years. Above all, he is an avid traveller who has been to most parts of the globe. He lived in Miami in the US for several years. A man of restless energy, he is into writing, touring and making films. At 21, his first book was a critical analysis of Samuel Johnson's poems *London* and *Vanity of Human Wishes*. He wrote it while he was doing Master's in English Literature from the University of Delhi. He writes in Hindi and English both with equal ease. His latest film *Pyaar ke Rang Hazaar* is also due for release soon. He devises a new way of learning history and our heritage simultaneously in this latest book *Delhi: Down the Ages*.

Published, Marketed & Distributed by



A division of
Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

www.tgb.indiatimes.com



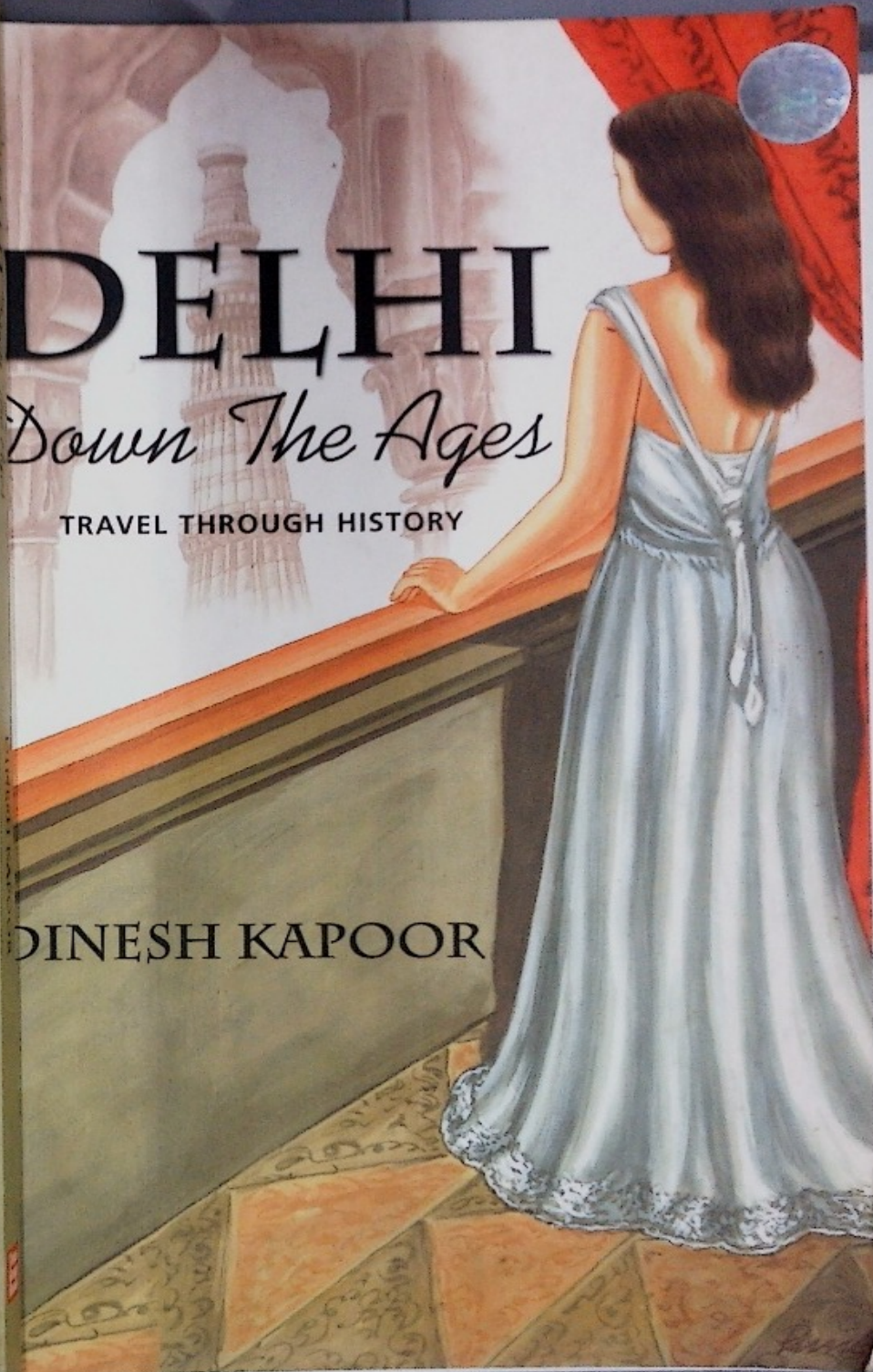
₹399

DELHI

Down The Ages

TRAVEL THROUGH HISTORY

DINESH KAPOOR



CONTENTS

Acknowledgement.....	7
Prologue.....	9
A Bottomless Pit of History	
A Word or Two Before.....	15
Dates and Statistics — All about Delhi	
1. Pick Up Your Delhi.....	21
Delhi and Its Culture- <i>Shulture</i>	
2. A Guided History	36
On Way to Old Delhi or Shahjahanabad	
3. This City Never Sleeps.....	56
Old Delhi — Jama Masjid	
4. The Roller-Coaster Ride	65
The Famous Rick Tour Through the Lanes of Old Delhi	
5. Then and Now.....	85
Red Fort	
6. Live from Delhi.....	103
Raj Ghat	
7. I Want Some More	113
North Delhi	
8. On a Platter	123
Food	
9. A Madhouse of Religions	129
A Tour of Places of Worship	
10. The City of Contention	143
The Central Delhi Sightseeing	

11. Walkie-Talkie Delhi	157
Safdarjung's Tomb — Lodhi Gardens	
12. The Phoenix Called Delhi	168
Humayun's Tomb	
13. Discover More of Delhi.....	178
Old Fort — 6th City of Delhi and around	
14. Hey Dude, Don't You Know My Dad...?.....	186
On Way to Qutab Minar	
15. City of Invaluable Heritage	202
The Qutab Complex	
16. City of Yore.....	223
Out of the Qutab — Mehrauli Archaeological Park — Ghari — Garden of Five Senses	
17. Epitome of Victory.....	231
Tughlaqabad	
18. A Word in Modern Indian Vocabulary	237
Shopping	
19. Troubleshooting	245
May I Help You?	
20. Wedding Our Way, Their Way	250
You Laught at Me, I Laugh at You.	
21. Never Say Die.....	258
Anna Hazare	
Epilogue	261
Delhi Will Prevail	
Index.....	263

PROLOGUE

A Bottomless Pit of History

The story of Delhi starts with Satyawati and Parashara way back in about 1200 BCE. Since mythology is based on myths, your analysis and interpretation of accounts of events happening in that era is as good as mine. The events were apparently compiled by sages of the times, contemporary as well as the ones following those eras. Mostly, the tales were told by wise men to their congregations by word of mouth until writing material and system came up. Even so, in these holy discourses, the need to relate events that would hold the listener's interest was paramount. Who wants to listen to the true but boring accounts of the warring royalty? This realization led to some preachers adding fiction to the holy tales. And they added a liberal dose of religion to wash down those weird and unbelievable details. Because nothing works like the mystery of the unknown with the poor and the oppressed. This mixing of sagas went on for more than 3000 years, and whatever we have today is a mix of concocted stories told by preachers over these years with some factual ones. The idea was to preach morals and a tolerant way of life. Even if this was to be done by fictitious examples.



At the Battle of Mahabharata: Lord Krishna with Arjuna

Satyawati was the adopted daughter of a fisherman. She was visited by the wandering *rishi* Parashara and a son named Vyasa was born out of this union. Vyasa later went on to author the epic Mahabharata. This author understands and has read the great epic Mahabharata and most of what has been written on it. The summary of events related below is based on the stories told in its 18 Parvas (chapters), the Puranas, the Upanishads and the books depicting and analysing the Mahabharata. Since for many centuries the tale of the epic was orally spoken and carried over, it is difficult to substantiate stories associated with it. They contradict each other much too often and rationalism has to succumb to faith.

Sample the following and trust me there are numerous such stories we are supposed to believe.

The story of the birth of Satyawati is as follows. Satyawati in her previous life was Achchhoda, daughter of the *pitras*, meaning ancestors. According to the Mahabharata, *Harivamsa* and the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Satyawati was the daughter of a cursed *apsara* (celestial nymph) called Adrika. Adrika became a fish in the River Yamuna. The Chedi king Vasu had a wet dream on a hunting expedition. He sent his semen to his queen through an eagle who fought with another eagle on the way. The semen dropped into the river and was swallowed by the cursed Adrika-fish. Consequently, the fish became pregnant. The chief fisherman caught the fish, and cut it open. He found two babies in the womb of the fish: one male and one female. He presented the children to the king, who kept the male child. As the female child smelt of the fish, the king gave her back to the fisherman, naming her Matsya-gandha.

The boy grew up and founded the Matsya kingdom. The fisherman raised the girl as his daughter and named her Kali, the dark-complexioned. However, in portraits, Satyawati is always painted white — a perfect example for all Indian girls and boys who think only fair is beautiful! Satyawati helped her father in his job as a ferryman and grew up to become a beautiful maiden. Over the course of time, for no apparent reason, Kali became Satyawati the truthful. She was cunning, conniving and spoke lies at the drop of her *dupatta* — a stole to cover the already-covered chest. Howzzat!

For a generation fed on TV serials or tales told by their mothers and self-appointed guardians of the Hindu faith, the kings and princes and other members of the households of those days never wore informal clothes. They were mostly clean-shaven when they were young and had long white beards when old. They were always laden with jewellery, wore their armour and probably even slept in them. Their subjects were mostly in rags. The sages had flowing beards and wore saffron clothes. But the truth is these apparently larger-than-life characters too had shades of grey. Like us, these royal figures hated, envied, loved, intrigued and indulged in every petty and minor squabble. The only exception perhaps was Lord Krishna, whose godliness cannot be doubted.

Now, Shantanu was the Kuru king of Hastinapur. He fell in love with Satyawati and asked her to marry him. For fear of social boycott she had already

abandoned Vyasa, an illegitimate son she had from Parashara, immediately after his birth. Shantanu was already married and had a teenaged son Bheeshma, who was an able and brave man. Bheeshma was born out of a strange wedlock between Shantanu and Ganga, who had killed the first seven of their eight children.

In fact, the roots of the Mahabharata go back till king Bharat seven generations earlier. But for our purpose, let us take off from Shantanu. Satyawati could see that the prospects of her son from Shantanu becoming the next king were very bright. But what if Bheeshma objected, she asked. Bheeshma said he would gladly take a vow relinquishing his claim to the throne. This sacrifice on the part of the son doing his best to facilitate his father's lust for the conniving fisherwoman was not enough. What if Bheeshma's son put a claim over the throne? So Bheeshma took the ultimate vow of celibacy. And he never did marry. He merely facilitated the marriage of his good-for-nothing half-brother. Satisfied with his vow of celibacy, Satyawati decided to bury her past and did not tell anything about her son Vyasa to her husband. For good measure, she elicited a promise from Shantanu that only her son would be the future king. She thus became the queen of the Kuru king Shantanu and bore him two children, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya.

Later, when her abandoned son Vyasa went out to search for his mother, he found her ruling Hastinapur. King Shantanu had died and her own children were worthless. Chitrangada was killed by a *gandharva*, a celestial musician. His minor brother Vichitravirya had been crowned the king. And Bheeshma, the legitimate, sacrificing and obedient son of the lusty king Shantanu, was ruling on his behalf until he grew up. Now, Vichitravirya had to be married if Satyawati's dream of continuing to don the mantle of queen-mother was to be fulfilled. Satyawati asked Bheeshma to win the princesses of Kashi-Kosala, Ambika and Ambalika, for him in *swayamvara*, a sort of competition wherein princes from various kingdoms came and displayed their worthiness to claim the hand of the princess in marriage. Bheeshma dutifully won the princesses but Vichitravirya failed to produce an heir. Suffering from tuberculosis, he was weak and impotent. Later, he even died of the fatal disease. Satyawati first asked Bheeshma to forget his vow of celibacy and impregnate his daughters-in-law. But when he refused she quickly sent for Vyasa to father the children of the two widows of Vichitravirya through *niyoga*.

Niyoga was a practice by which an impotent husband or a widow could arrange for a man who would impregnate the woman for the sole purpose of implanting his seed in her womb. Much like today's artificial insemination or hiring of a womb by a childless couple.

Vyasa refused initially, saying they were like his daughters, but later relented after being persuaded by Satyawati. In due course, the blind Dhritarashtra and the pale Pandu were born. Satyawati accepted Vyasa as she needed him to sire children for her two daughters-in-law for the dynasty to continue. She was perhaps the first royal lady indulging in realpolitik and her political manoeuvres

could put the likes of Thatchers and Gandhis to shame. Thus, as fate would have it, Vyasa, the illegitimate son of Satyawati, went on to become the grandfather of the Pandava and Kaurava princes. And she their great-grandmother through a different route!

Dhritarashtra's eyes were bereft of vision apparently because his mother Ambika had shut her eyes and flinched when she saw Vyasa, who looked awful with oil all over his body. She had nearly fainted on seeing the man who would impregnate her. Similarly, Ambalika had turned pale and bloodless upon seeing him, and thus her son Pandu was born pale and unhealthy. There you go again! In fact, the name Pandu itself is derived from a disease that means jaundice. Sensing there would not be much of hope with these deformed children, Satyawati asked Vyasa to try once again. However, this time Ambika and Ambalika sent their maid to Vyasa's room. Vyasa fathered a third son Vidur by the maid. Since the maid remain unflinched, Vidur was born healthy and grew up to be one of the wisest characters in the Mahabharata. However, he was constantly taunted because of his low caste. Even so he served as prime minister (*mahamantri*) to both Pandu and Dhritarashtra.

The pale, thin and physically weak king Pandu was unable to father children even though he married twice. So, history had to get repeated again. This time deities were invoked by his two wives Kunti and Madri to father the five Pandavas. Like Satyawati's Vyasa, Kama was the son Kunti had out of wedlock, from Surya. And like Vyasa, he too would be abandoned. Yudhishtira, Arjuna and Bheema were born to Kunti from various deities. Nakul and Sahadeva, both born to Madri, were fraternal twins. They were fathered by the divine physicians Ashvins, who were identical twins themselves. Consequently neither any of the Pandavas nor their father Pandu had a legitimate father.

The blind supremo Dhritarashtra ruled Hastinapur and had a hundred sons known as Kauravas. In normal course, the throne of Hastinapur and the properties around would have gone to Duryodhana, his eldest son. But cousin Yudhishtira laid his claim to the throne on the basis that he was older than Duryodhana. Dhritarashtra wanted his son Duryodhana to be the successor but was helpless before the family customs. Dhritarashtra himself had been denied kingship by Vidura, even though he was the elder brother of Pandu, based on the rule that a blind man cannot be the ruler, though he did become the king after Pandu's untimely death.

Duryodhana, assisted by his brothers and uncle Shakuni, plotted to oust the Pandavas from the race to the throne. An architect Purvanchan was deployed to build Lakshagriha, a palace made of inflammable materials like lac and ghee (processed butter), and the Pandavas were tricked to stay there. As the plot thickened, the Pandavas were tipped by their uncle Vidur that the intention of their wily cousins was to burn them alive in the Lakshagriha. Vidur then sent a miner to dig a tunnel, through which they escaped. Back home in Hastinapur, the celebrations began as the rivals were presumed dead. This rivalry and enmity between the Kauravas and the Pandavas led to the battle in Kurukshetra when

the latter returned to Hastinapur later after their exile. This battle is the basis of the second Hindu epic Mahabharata, the first being the Ramayana.

During their period of hiding, the Pandavas won Draupadi at a *swayamvara* and brought her home. She became wife of all the five brothers. When the Pandavas eventually went back home to Hastinapur to claim their rightful throne, the elders in the family sat and decided to split the kingdom and divide it between the cousins. This was reluctantly accepted by the warring cousins. The Pandavas were greatly agonized by the fact that the territory of Khandavaprastha given to them was a bushy patch of wild forestry, uncultivable and uninhabitable. This is the first ever mention of a capital on the banks of the river Yamuna in modern Delhi. They hired Maya the Danava to build a beautiful city Indraprastha, which was the first-ever settlement of Delhi as capital. It is from here that the seeds of contempt grew and finally resulted in the epic battle.

When it came to choosing a successor from amongst the hundred sons, the Rajya Pramukh (head of the state) Dhritarashtra had only one choice. Yudhishtira was a strict follower of *dharma* (righteousness) and the eldest amongst the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Only, he was from the rival side and was therefore handed over the estate reluctantly. Soon, the battlelines were drawn when Dhritarashtra's son Duryodhana, the eldest of the 100 Kaurava brothers, raised an objection. The Pandavas offered a truce. Alright, just give us five villages to rule, they said, and take away the rest of the property. Duryodhana refused. Despite the fact that the Kauravas are painted black in the epic — possibly because of Krishna being on the Pandavas' side — all the elders in the family were on the side of the Kauravas and fought for them even though they recognised that they were on the wrong side of *dharma*. This was probably because of their allegiance to the then ruler Dhritarashtra. As events develop leading to the battle, it would appear both sides were indulging in all sort of dirty politics, tricks, conniving plots and unlawful means to gain favourable ends. Sounds like the Kalmadi era, eh?

In hindsight, it would appear that the Kauravas were pitched against Krishna alone, who at every step corrected and undid foolish *pratigyas* (vows) taken by the Pandavas. In fact, the Pandavas would have perished long before the battle. But they were saved a lot of humiliation from the Kauravas and other quarters because of Krishna. The war essentially was between the Kauravas and Lord Krishna. The most poignant error of judgment on the part of Duryodhana was when he chose Krishna's 18 Akshohini Naraini army instead of the Lord himself. He chose physical power over mental and paid for it with his kingdom and life. By all standards, the Mahabharata is in many ways a tale more poignant than the Ramayana. It teaches us the value of brotherhood and pleads that the way out for the warring parties in any argument is through mediation and listening to the pieces of advice from experienced elders. War should be avoided.

The Mahabharata is, at best, the epic story of a dynastic struggle for the throne of Hastinapur. At worst, it is a tale of property dispute amongst cousin brothers. Either way, today's Delhi was the epicentre of the struggles and subsequent

battles. In times to come it would remain so for ever — the city of contention. Anyone who wanted a foothold in India would have to capture this city first. Delhi became forever the epitome of victory.

About 3000 years later, the remains of Indraprastha would be found in a totally different era. Humayun and then Shershah in the mid-16th century built their cities over the ruins of Indraprastha. Like in ancient times, the two rivals fought for the kingdom. Like the epic battle of yore, their war was full of intrigues and betrayals. Unlike it, however, their tales were not epic in proportion. The British rulers and later the Indians changed the shape of Delhi completely, polluting the river Yamuna severely — the river on the banks of which 100 miles downstream in Mathura the greatest of the yogis, the God who turned the battle in favour of the Pandavas, Lord Krishna, had spent his colourful childhood and boyhood. It is not the river alone that would change its colours. The city of yore changed colours often with every marauding invader. Many a time its riches were looted by successive plunderers and its cultures were ruthlessly torn. Each time it rose from the ashes like a Phoenix. Today, its fears stem from rampant corruption and terrorism. However, the civic society is taking care of the former and the army is well equipped for the latter. Surely, in the changing times, both will be uprooted to a substantial extent.

May Delhi, the city of invaluable heritage, shine forever and ever!

A WORD OR TWO BEFORE...

Dates and Statistics

— All about Delhi

It was around 2000 years BCE when the Aryans came from what is known as south of Russia today. They crossed the Volga and filtered into India through the regions of Kashmir. At that time, the Dravidians were already there in the South. Initially, the Aryans confronted them but soon mingled with them to give way to a mixed race.

Since such accounts are largely unsubstantiated, there may be wise people contradicting that the Aryans came from Tashkent or from across the Volga. The supporting argument is that nowhere in the Vedas have they mentioned that they came from outside India. It was convenient for the marauding invaders to propagate such theories, to question claims of the Hindus that the land of India belonged to the Hindus alone, and to justify their attempts to enter it. There is an attempt to alienate the south from the north, saying it was the land of the grandfather of Ravana, who is perceived in general as the demon-king of Lanka. Their version of the Ramayana is twisted to suit their political priorities. Similar is the case with the Sikhs. Before Sikhism came into being in the 15th century, they were Hindus. Political compulsions made them demand Khalistan, land for the Sikhs. My aim is not to discuss politics. But there are mythical versions of our epics. For long they have been prompted by the political needs of one party or the other. Often, I am just stating the versions, not supporting them.

While in Russia, I asked many if they knew about the Aryans or a race that migrated from the south of Russia. None did. I saw the Volga river and the south meant the Caspian Sea. It does not mean anything except that I should have referred the subject to a historian and not to guides or an occasional wise old man who took me around.

The Aryans brought the concept of caste system into India. They were a white race who formulated rules for the non-whites. They divided caste largely into four parts. The head signified the priest, who was the head of theology. The heart symbolized the trader, the thighs the warrior, and the feet belonged to the Shudra or the untouchable. This division was largely a device to suit the Aryans' instinct

of domination. In the years to come, the situation only worsened. Many sub-castes branched out, even amongst the untouchables, who were victims to the caste system. So much so that the untouchables had their own caste system, in which no less than 150 sub-castes existed! It'd mean that a hunter of an animal would belong to a different class of untouchables from the one who would peel its skin, and this peeler in turn would be different from the one who'd make shoes out of that skin, and so on. And it would not be proper to be feasting beside a lower sub-caste Shudra! As far as the British were concerned, they would sleep with an untouchable woman but not eat with her. It was the same with the Indian rich.

In modern India, caste system is beneficial for aspiring politicians. It is still practised, mostly in rural areas — rather discreetly, because the law does not take kindly to the ill-treatment meted out to the miserable lot. It is not entirely absent in urban society either. But the urban people are compelled to discard their caste notions or ignore them, as it is generally the so-called lower castes who they employ as the helps they need, to wash their dirty linens. It is difficult to ask the caste of the waiter who serves you. Most truly educated, however, do not discriminate. Gandhi knew the disastrous implications of caste system and did his best to abolish it.

In Khajuraho, I was with my friends from the US. To add another dimension to the tour, I brought them to this village in Khajuraho. There appeared this French woman from inside a rural house, clutching the finger of her three-year-old son. All were pleased at this surprise. During the informal chat that followed, it came as a shock to hear that there were three parts of the village, one each belonging to the untouchables, the traders and the higher castes respectively. We actually saw the boundaries and the wells that catered to each community. It cannot be officially imposed but an unwritten whip exists wherein no one is expected to cross the lines. As for the French lady, she had fallen in love with an untouchable from this village, married him and then moved to Canada. She had come to meet her parents-in-law, and nothing would persuade her to live in the area earmarked for the higher castes. Some things come up suddenly and unexpectedly and stun you. Even before you could say amen!

200 years after the advent of Aryans in India, in 1800 BCE, our greatest God, Lord Rama took birth. Based on His life and activities, the Ramayana — the first of our two most revered epics — was conceived and written by the sage Valmiki, who is believed to have recorded events of Lord Rama's life even before his birth.

The Turkish history goes back to 7500 years BCE. The Turks are known to be amongst the earliest inhabitants to have lived on the Earth. They were found in Central Asia in around 2000 BCE. However, they embraced Islam in the 10th century.

In circa 1200 BCE, the five Pandavas walked into Delhi, and Delhi became the capital for the first time. Please refer to the "Prologue" for details. The Pandavas

fought a battle with their cousins called the Kauravas over the right to rule and property. The battle was fought 100 miles north of Delhi in the fields of Kurukshetra and came to be known as the great battle of Mahabharata, which became the basis of our second epic — the Mahabharata. Lord Krishna, another supreme God of the Hindus, took an active part in the battle. When Arjun, one of the Pandavas, felt disinclined to fight, He gave him a sermon establishing the law of action. He propagated that it is for us to act only. The fruits of those actions are not in our hands. So, if duty calls, we should fight and not worry for the end, as the end is pre-ordained. This sermon resulted in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most sacred books in Hindu theology.

The recorded history of Delhi dates back to 1192, when Muhammad Ghori came from Afghanistan, defeated and killed Prithiviraj, the then ruler of Delhi, and started the Turkish dynasty. The battle was fought in Terain of the Punjab region. Muhammad Ghori went back but left his general Qutb-ud-din Aibak to look after the Indian affairs in his absence. We shall talk in detail about those times when we visit one of the city's landmarks and the highest stone tower in India — the Qutab Minar. Nearly seven dynasties later — none of which was here to stay for more than 40 years at a stretch — the Mughal dynasty made its mark in 1526 and gave India some of its unforgettable monuments. The Mughal dynasty gave in to the British in the 18th or mid-19th century, depending upon how you look at it.

When I say "how you look at it", I mean this: The Brits had come to the shores of Gujarat in India as East India Company. This happened when they came as traders for silk and spices during the reign of Jahangir, the fourth Mughal emperor. Later, they built forts in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay and traded with the local rulers until they found out that the provincial rulers were willing to hand over their territories to them on a platter. Political rivalries and false personal egos gave the British many opportunities to exploit their vulnerabilities. However, their rivals were the equally astute Dutch and French traders. This went on till the middle of the 18th century, by when the British had established their supremacy. The next century is dubbed as the Company rule in India, which culminated into the British Crown rule in 1858. Thus, the Brits were ruling by proxy in the name of East India Company until the struggle for Independence in 1857 triggered its merger in the British Government.

The British left the Indian soil in 1947 on the 15th of August, which is our Independence Day. Three years later, India was declared a republic on the 26th of January, which we celebrate as Republic Day every year. On both these occasions, a parade exhibiting India's military and civil development is conducted. It originates from the Rashtrapati Bhavan or President's House and ends at the Red Fort. Footfalls have been decreasing year after year, however, as people tend to watch it on their television sets at home.

We are over 1.23 billion people. Every two seconds, a child is added to the population of our country. There are seven major religions — 83 per cent are Hindus (98.5 per cent in 1947), 13 per cent Muslims, 2 per cent Sikhs and the

rest constitute of Jains, Christians, Buddhists and Zoroastrians. But 13 per cent Muslims in India (some say they are much more) make India the second largest Islamic nation in the world after Indonesia. We shall soon surpass Indonesia too.

Nearly 60 per cent of our population lives in over 600,000 villages in India. 35 per cent — more than the entire US population — are rich, about 30 per cent are in the middle class, and the rest are poor. Three different estimates by respectable commissions put the percentage of the poor in the range of 37.5, 50 and 72 per cent respectively. In September 2011, the Planning Commission recommended to the Supreme Court that anyone spending ₹965 per month in urban India and ₹781 in rural India will be deemed not poor. Therefore, a family of four in a metro, spending over ₹3860 (equivalent to about 80 dollars) per month on themselves, would not be considered poor. This has been raised from the earlier ₹2400 ceiling per month. This means you are not poor and cannot avail of the low prices of rice and cooking oil fixed by the state. It is being alleged that this is an attempt to reduce the figures of people living below poverty line. For most of the poor, it is a joke at their expense. Then the planning commission says it is only a proposal, which is not true as a mere proposal cannot be submitted in the highest court of the nation as an affidavit. The average monthly salary of a clerk in government service is around ₹10 thousand and that of an officer about ₹25 thousand. The bureaucracy is lazy and full of red tape and corruption. Private enterprise is encouraged these days. Salaries in multinational companies range from one to five million rupees per annum for middle-range executives.

Summary

- About education, religion, states, statistics relating to population, villages, caste system, etc.
- A brief history of Delhi down the ages

True confessions

The Indian society is full of anomalies like the ones mentioned in this chapter. And these make India a country which is a perfect study in contrasts.

Telling a good story

In 1200 BCE, when Lord Krishna was born in Mathura, his maternal uncle Kansa, the ruler of Mathura, would order cow's milk to be brought from every village for urban consumption. Krishna, then being brought up in a village, wanted to stop the pilferage and pronounced cows holy as mother. The outflow of milk stopped. Ever since, the cows have been sacred for the Hindus. Also, the cow's milk has lots of nourishing elements and is known to cure many ailments.

Activity

Ask for a way to one of the scores of villages in and around Delhi and explore if there is caste system still prevalent there.

The problems you may face while doing this chapter

Most of the history covered is relevant to Delhi alone. The effort is to put things to you in perspective by referring to important contemporary events happening in the world around. Problems relating to medieval names and understanding Indian context will solve themselves as you go on tour.

Precaution

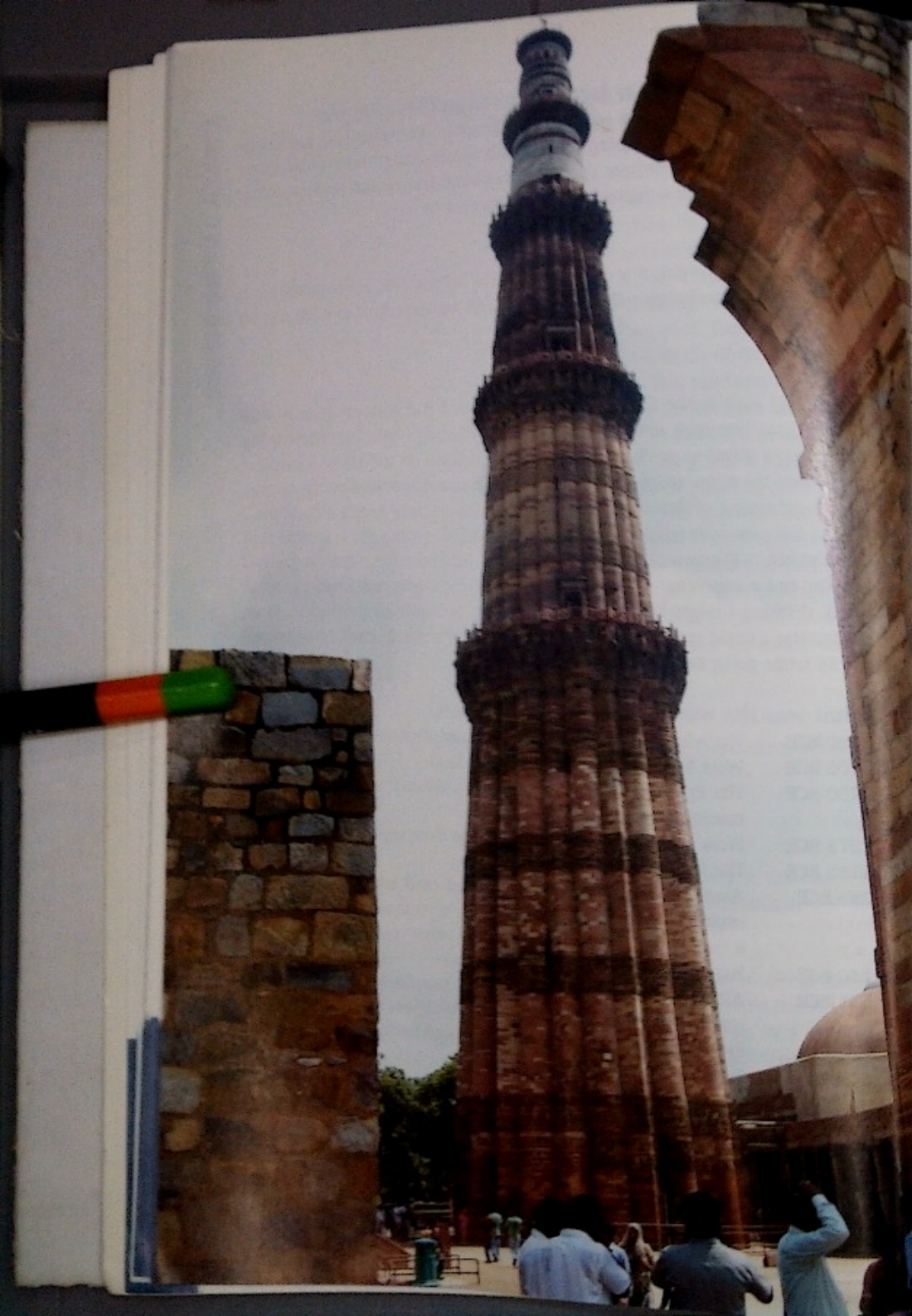
Drink only mineral water. It is easily available at Delhi shops. Eat hygienic food. Carry a few rupees change with you and go with an open mind to learn as you enjoy the city.

Snippet

On my first visit to the USA in the mid-Eighties, I had a stopover at Kuwait airport. I was homesick already and got panicked when I heard my name being called. I was asked to go down and open my suitcase. In full glare of people, I went down the stairs timidly and saw my lone suitcase sprawled on the tarmac. Amidst tightening of fists on machine guns by the security people around me, I opened the case with trembling hands and started to put out the miserable stuff — a blanket, 500 grams of tea, sugar, and so on. And then the culprit — the steel tumbler and a saucepan — rolled out from the cloth wrapper. I had put these items, thinking I might have to share my room in true immigrant style. In an emergency, I could make tea on stove! Those steel utensils must have beeped crazily while going through routine check-ups.

What was the world doing in those times?

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 3500 BCE | The wheel is used in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). |
| 3100 BCE | Work begins on Stonehenge in England. |
| 2700 BCE | The Egyptians create the 365-day calendar, with the New Year starting in June. |
| 2575 BCE | Work begins on the Great Pyramid at Giza in Egypt. |
| 1185 BCE | The Trojan War |
| 753 BCE | According to legend, Rome is founded by Romulus. Twelve birds circled overhead during the founding ceremonies and legend had it that the city would survive for 12 centuries. |
| 750 BCE | Homer writes the Iliad and the Odyssey. |
| 333 BCE | Alexander the Great defeats Persia under Darius at the Battle of Issus. However, his army refuses at the Hyphasus river to march further into India and he is forced to turn back. |
| 44 BCE | Julius Caesar is assassinated. |
| 30 CE | Jesus is crucified. |
| 570 CE | Muhammad is born. Syria, Jerusalem, Egypt, Persia and North Africa fall to Muslim armies many decades later. |
| 632 CE | Muhammad dies. |
| 1149 CE | Oxford University is founded in England. |



01

PICK UP YOUR DELHI

IN THIS CHAPTER»

- *Delhi and its culture-shulture*
- *Pleasure of knowing exactly what you are going to do*
- *Preparing for the magic*
- *Sightseeing history of Delhi in a day*

Let's cut to the chase: you want to know India, right? I do not know anyone who knows all of what India is. Our first Prime Minister Nehru perhaps did. And he detailed it in his book *Discovery of India*. So did the Father of our Nation, Gandhi. But they are no more, and their books are not going to help you in the kind of tour you are about to take. India is a perfect example of five blind men feeling an elephant, each a different part, and describing it. And truly, describing an elephant, just like describing India, is full of contradictions. Whatever you say about India, the opposite may hold true. This is because there are 28 states and 7 Union territories and every state is different from another. It is not like the US or UK or Europe (Sorry, UK is in Europe, but wants Europe to be its part than be a part of the Europe. Hence the separate mention.), where the standard of living and infrastructure is more or less the same. You will not find people dressing differently or speaking a different language in the cities of the same country. The United Kingdom consists of four countries — England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Within one country, they are different countries, but not quite in the same way as in India. These four countries have their own culture, customs, dresses, etc.

In India we have 22 official languages other than English and 850 dialects. Go 200 miles in any direction in India and you would see different sets of people with different ways of dressing, behaviour, customs, culture, language and different infrastructure. In other words, you would discover a different city and another world, everywhere in India. In all the four directions in India, the cities and states sometimes are so different so as to warrant a different country. If you travel the length and breadth of India, you will arrive in a new India every day, one different from what you saw yesterday. No cities or towns are conventional representations of India. I can't emphasize enough on the fact that even for an

Indian visiting another untried Indian city, the experience is as exciting as for a foreigner visiting the same place. Even for an Indian it would be a failed mission, if he is out looking for the 'real India'. India is not a single culture; it is an album of a thousand countries within a country. And Delhi reflects and truly represents this fact.

As for cities, in most of the Indian cities, you'd discover two cities. One old and the other new. The old city may have its origin in the medieval era or even earlier while the new one has taken shape post-Independence. Delhi has three cities in one — Central Delhi or Lutyen's Delhi built during the British times, the Old Delhi and the new Delhi. The old city is in the North while the new one is in the South. Besides, there are the satellite towns around Delhi. All of these, when combined together, christen Delhi as the National Capital Region or NCR.

DELHI IS A BIG MONUMENT IN ITSELF

Delhi has risen so many times from its own ashes that it should be rechristened the Phoenix. I take Delhi as a big monument in itself. It has 1370 stopovers, each entailing a piece of history in its own right. The journey from one monument to another is interspersed with modern Delhi gadgets and the traditional Indian ethos. You may spot a *piya* as shown in picture below at Raighat and some other places. But this is a phenomenon on its way out. Its roots lay in the Hindu belief that giving drinking water to the thirsty is a good act that would earn you *punya*, which is to say a nod of approval from the Gods. The cities have long switched over to a bottle of mineral water and yet a substantial portion of Indians identify with these drinking-water outlets. That is why I have not dealt with the



Piya: An outlet for free drinking water for the public



Roadside food: A deep-rooted culture of snacks

culture, habits, rituals, ceremonies, behaviour, etc. of Delhi in separate chapters. They are mingled with our daily lives. It would be inappropriate to describe separately the monuments and the way an Indian lives his daily life. If I include all the 1370 monuments, I'll only sound repetitive. Hence, only the more important ones have been included. For example, you see Jama Masjid and you have seen nearly 500 small and big mosques in Delhi. Similar is the case with tombs. There are other cultural aspects and things that you will become conscious of having seen or experienced, as you go along the suggested route.

Old refugee colonies like Lodhi Colony and Lajpat Nagar deserve an equal mention in the story of Delhi. The Chaatwallah at UPSC, the Bengali Market, the modern malls and the Metro are as much a part of Delhi's legacy as are its monuments, art, culture and heritage.

The Riches of the Poor

A *chaatwala* sells *papri* (a small puri made of *maida*) mixed with curd, sweet and sour chutney and delicious spices at ₹20 (less than half a dollar, though in posh places like the Habitat, the price is triple). A *samosa* is *maida* flour filled with boiled and diced potato mixed with spices; a *bhatura* is a puffy, spongy roti served with a delicious *dona* (bowl) of peas or grams. There are many more such spicy, tangy and mouth-watering dishes, inexpensive and within the budget of the poor, sold on the roadside. Like *golgappas* or *panipuris*, which are small, thin cups of *suji* or wheat flour filled with mashed potatoes and peas. They are immersed in a bowl of spicy water to fill them, and are then put in the mouth, one at a time. They may not be good for a Westerner's stomach, though. If ever there was a typical Delhi cuisine, this is it. You can find these in the most posh as well as in the remotest areas of Delhi. Even in the wilderness of



the forest behind the Qutab, in the heritage park, as you see in the picture above.

There are abundant examples where a small-time roadside stall owner makes all or one of the delicacies mentioned above and rakes in millions. Even the well-heeled can be seen pulling their cars and savouring these delicacies on the roadside. This culture is deep-rooted. Our ancestors have been enjoying snacks in this way for centuries.

Interestingly, there is a difference between India and most of the Western countries. In the US, for example, you cannot get a cup of tea for less than a dollar anywhere. Which means about 45-55 rupees. So, if you do not have a dollar, you go hungry. In India, you can get that sort of tea at that price served to you in a very posh restaurant. But you can also get it from the roadside stall for five rupees. Which means, even if you are poor, you don't have to go hungry. There are options for the poor who are permitted to live alongside the rich. Similarly, you can get a shave under a tree as in the picture above, for five rupees, and for 100 to 500 rupees in salons of different standards.

With metros and flyovers and escalators and shopping malls all around, today's Delhi has gone beyond recognition for the stalwarts of the past when Delhi had only one escalator at the airport which never moved. When I went to New York in the Eighties for the first time, I felt like Alice in wonderland. Notwithstanding the fact that I was from a cosmopolitan Delhi and worked as a bank manager, I was treated in the US like a village bumpkin. My Indian hosts gleefully showed me the gadgets of the city and its buildings as if they had built them with their own hands. They took perverted pleasure in rubbing home that India was like a village when compared to the great US. They were not the Indians I knew back home.

The situation is no longer so. Delhi is India and the US mixed. If you want the street food in Delhi but not the standing on dusty and dirty streets, there are air-conditioned outlets offering the same in hygienic surroundings, as in the picture

HOW TO TOUR DELHI

Since there is so much to 'know', here is the dilemma. How much time do you have to cover all places to make the trip meaningful? A day or two, or merely a few hours? It may not be possible to cover all the major monuments detailed in this book in a day or two or even three. But you may not have more than three hours to see Delhi. You may be here for a conference. Or, you may perhaps just have arrived here on a biz trip from India or abroad and have some time off to go or send your spouse for a quick tour of Delhi. For such a tourist, this book would present a glimpse of India through Delhi with history thrown in. Enough to not let you have that feeling which says you merely groped in the dark, looking out for a handle or a peg to hang Delhi on. Enough to prompt you to come back, seeking a more leisurely trip. Making you hungry for more instead of 'cloying the appetite it feeds', as Shakespeare may put it.

Or, you may have time. And so you may want to devote more time to Delhi. Or, maybe you don't know yet what to do. Even if you are from India, it is possible that you do not know enough of Delhi and the rest of your own country. And so you'd play by ear!

Then there is the financial aspect. You may be on a budget or you may be able to spend more and do a luxury tour.

This book is going to cater to your time schedules and budgetary compulsions. The sightseeing section will take you on a roller-coaster ride of Delhi. It is possible that an Indian may be as ignorant about his country as a foreigner. Abroad too, many of them may not have left their hometown all of



Having the best of both worlds: Roadside food in air-conditioned environs at the Habitat

their lives. A foreign tourist can be pardoned if he thinks India is somewhere between Afghanistan and Pakistan. If you have only glanced through Delhi and its famous monuments and driven on in three hours, you can still read about these monuments at leisure. And you can settle for the researched history section in bluish-grey boxes to further satisfy your appetite, if you are hungry for more.

Very conscientiously, I pronounce this book different and more useful to the tourists — domestic and foreign alike — and students of history than any other travelogue of the same genus. I have the added advantage of assessing the needs of different kinds of tourists and their requirements to do customized tours. Yes, you are right. I have been doing such tours for two decades now. Most travel books are confusing in that despite the accounts of history and the details of monuments given in them, it is difficult to trace them or to connect them to what you have read about them. Even standing in front of the Red Fort with one such book in hand, you would neither identify the places written therein nor their history.

In this book, you read and 'see' history. For example, the history of the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid is intertwined with detailed directions to reach there, pointing out landmarks, well-known joints, buildings with a meaning, even the number of traffic lights you may come across on way. I have described the scenes on the roads and around and their implications for us today. This way you will know how the city works and your tour will not be restricted to monuments alone. With this book in hand, you will not have to take a Guide necessarily. With Hop On Hop Off (HOHO) buses, like the ones in Europe, introduced during the Commonwealth Games (CWG) in Delhi, this book is going to be very, very handy, informative, useful and good value for money.

I have tried in this book to reach out to foreign and domestic tourists with equal respect. And if I have taken pains to describe a thing, a lifestyle or a place in detail, which may sound very familiar to an occasional Indian, please remember that there are millions of Indians who may be as unfamiliar with those details as a foreigner would be. So, I have taken into account Indian tourists who have not gone out and explored India and treated them at par with the foreign ones. For an Indian living in a southern town, Delhi in the north is often a mysterious place far away from his visual range and comprehension. It is a culture as much alien to him as to a foreign visitor. I have to resort to the minimum common denominator for both to understand. For example, it would interest tourists — Indians and foreigners alike — to note how 'yes' is indicated in the south and in the rest of India. We say 'yes' by moving our face up and down; in south India, they move it from left to right, something that may mean 'no' anywhere else in the world. Implications could be disastrous if your girl from south is nodding 'yes' to you for a date and you take it as a 'no'!

Culturally, this country falls somewhere between the orthodox and the modern. It's technically possible to make the traditional sari sexier than a tight T-shirt and a pair of jeans, but the latter is still accepted only grudgingly in rural



HOHO bus: A good option for tourists to see Delhi

and semi-urban areas. Indians are notorious in 'Indianizing' everything they like. The numerous 'Chinese fast food' joints dotting the country serve food that is neither Chinese nor Indian. The vegetarian McDonald's and the spices used in Lebanese food stalls on the roadside are such examples.

Unlike other travel books, this book is equally applicable when you reach inside a monument. It does not leave you toiling to discover points of interest or to connect them to what is written. Just follow the directions given. Sometimes, you may come by Metro or by a HOHO bus shown above and then approach a monument on foot. In that case, you would invariably identify a landmark mentioned in the book. From that point onwards, it is easy to go all the rest of the way to the monument and inside. Very often, you miss out on things you do not know about. Here you would find a catalogue of things worth doing and places worth visiting and then 'choosing' what you may wish to do.

I do not write to sensationalize. Most things written here are established bits of history. The bits of fiction are only to tickle you and you'd know them when you come across those.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book has been divided into two segments: sightseeing and history. Strictly speaking, they are not separate parts. While sightseeing forms the base of the book, history complements it. I have intertwined the two. Mostly, the history part has been printed in bluish-grey coloured boxes. If you are in a hurry, you may skip these boxes. But if you want to know about the history of Delhi along with sightseeing, you don't need to go to another section. The history in these boxes starts from circa 2000 BCE. It covers in detail the period from Mahmud

Ghaznavi's tirades in 10th century till Aurangzeb's death in 1707, when the Mughal dynasty came to an implicit end and the British started putting their feet firmly on the Indian soil. It then traverses till the times today. This part is well researched. It is beneficial to a student of history as well as to a serious traveller who wants to know more. And it goes hand in hand with the sightseeing part.

Since the tour of Delhi entails the British era too with its buildings and monuments, a considerable volume of British history has also been told in the process. This book goes beyond a guidebook written mainly for the tourists. It is a factual history of Delhi woven into an equally innovative tour guidebook. It is like sightseeing history. For a broader perspective, I have also tried to give details of events happening in other parts of the world in contemporary times.

Also, the book has been written in English by an Indian. Indian writers in English find themselves on a defensive wicket since they choose to write in the language of those the country had driven out. If you wish to explore India, you'll probably want to read an account of it in English written by an Indian.

English should not come as a shock, whichever way it is spoken or written, as long as it communicates. At every corner in London, you have the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish speaking English worse than an illiterate in India. The Indian fails to understand why he is ridiculed back home for not speaking 'correct' English when no one in the West speaks 'correct' English. When a German or French or Spanish speaks English with a native accent, why is the Indian expected to speak 'correct' English? As it stands, with so many dialects, the Queen's English has taken a backseat. It is more tolerant and accommodative of the ones spoken around the Queen's city, London. Wonder if the Queen herself speaks the Queen's English.

Writing without familiarity is a predicament I wrote about in my first book on Samuel Johnson's poetry. I was then doing my Master's in English Literature from the University of Delhi. I felt that a Helen Gardner or an FR Leavis writing on Shakespeare would be more read in India and abroad than a Dinesh Kapoor. I realized this better when I visited Stratford-on-Avon in England. Suddenly, Shakespeare was not just a distant figure. He became 'known' to me after I saw the path he took to visit Anne, his girlfriend much older than him and later his wife. I saw his bed — a rarity in those days —, his writing table, pen and inkpot and the rooms and the lifestyle he lived therein! Until then, he was as remote to me as Kalidas or Ghalib would be to a British or an American student. This experience made me resolute not to write about people and places I had never been to. I know my Delhi like the back of my hand. And I write about it like a native British historian may do about London.

If you are like me, you'd probably want a lot of history. I like Italy, China and Portugal because of the amazing history ingrained in every stone, street, sculpture and paintings in their cities. Rome was not built in a day. Neither was Delhi.

Personalized, guided tours are rare and expensive in Europe. Thankfully, these are not so in Delhi. You'd expect a lot of information from your guide, if you hire one besides this book. For, in Delhi, every 100 metres there is something to talk



The guide he carries the burden of history

about, to notify, and to chat about. Every avenue, every boulevard has a past and a present. A passionate guide would want to put you in the picture. I am your guide speaking through this book. I am your historian trying to explain Indian history to you in a readable text.

The recorded history of India starts with the invasion of Alexander in 327 BCE and the historian was Megasthenes. The recorded history of Delhi starts with the advent of the Turks, who found settling here a more potent option than merely plundering the country. Unlike strands of their activities gathered from scattered accounts, the history started getting recorded from 1192 onwards. From this date, we can reasonably re-create events as they happened — in chronological order. It was no more the deceitful writing of a few sycophants from the ruling court. Or the bards who told us what suited their rulers of the day. However, most of the facts in history are no less dramatic than a bard's account.

The important thing is to ask. The more you ask, the better it is for all of us. What is that cow or temple or 'crawling' girl doing in the middle of the road? Is the bull too a holy animal? Is that a monk? What is the difference between a monk and a *sadhu*? What does a dot, a sari, a *pugree*, a hat or a cap signify? How many religions, languages, races and castes are there? And why so many? Why are marriages arranged? Infant marriages, manners, social behaviour, etc. There are endless questions and I have dealt with most of them. But let curiosity be the virtue of the tour. You'd benefit. Some practical problems have been

attended to in the troubleshooting section at the end of the book.

Asking questions is one of the best ways to 'learn' about India. Remember, no question is silly or small. If you happen to be with a guide, ask him questions. For a competent guide, every query asked is a subject. Your curious questions, however naive, provide a guide with topics to talk about.

Although things are changing now, for the most part an Indian thinks that hiring a guide is an avoidable expense. Nothing is farther from the truth. In fact, after arranging for leave from your work, after saving money for the tour and after having travelled all the way from your home to Delhi, this little expense in hiring a good transport and a guide will be the only return you will get from everything you have invested on the trip. For, a dilapidated wall of stones is just a wall unless you are told that here the cannons once roared to push the enemy away, or under this wall the caravan of the Mughal emperor was looted in defiance of his sovereignty. All that toil and money was spent for this moment — to visit and understand this monument which you are about to visit. Try and pick a knowledgeable guide; none would cost you more than a thousand rupees or two for an entire day. But it would be money well spent. Good guides are difficult to find and travel books don't talk to you. This book does. You can buy this book and I am sure it would substitute splendidly for a guide.

TWO WAYS OF DOING TOURS

There are two ways of doing tours. The first is the conventional one: arrive with an itinerary written by someone far removed from ground realities — probably not updated for a long time. Check in. Morning breakfast. The guide arrives with a car.



You sit in the back seat, seeing things, listening to the guide. You stop at monuments. You go inside them or you don't. You shop or you don't. You travel back to the comforts of your hotel. The second mode is to do it with this book.

This is more so when it comes to domestic tourists. Most of them come these days as prepared as their western counterparts. I am writing this book to suit the needs of both the domestic and foreign tourists. Irrespective of the caste, creed and social strata you come from, irrespective of the part of India or globe you come from, and irrespective of the budget you have set for the tour, this book, I guarantee, will help you find your way in Delhi and understand the city clearly. If I try to emphasize on, say, the number of gods in India, a domestic tourist may feel he knows it all. But please remember that a tourist may in one respect or the other not know a particular fact unless it is pointed out to him. No one knows India completely. Hence, I have gone into greater details at certain places, even if they sound familiar to a Delhiite.

If all you wanted were comforts like those at home, stay at home. But if you really want a memorable tour, do some preparations. You are not on a vacation; you are on a tour. You need a good pair of walking shoes and a camera, to begin with. You may have to walk a lot inside the monuments. And clothes to suit the weather. In Delhi, it never snows. The temperature is normally enjoyable October through March. You need very light woollies, even on a day predicted by the Met Department to be cool. In fact, especially when predicted by the Met!

In addition to shoes and a camera, it is advisable to be equipped with a pair of goggles and a pen to write the name of a street. Carry your hotel card bearing the address and phone number of your hotel. A cap and an umbrella will do you well in summer sunshine or in rainy weather. Your wallet or purse can have your passport and your plastic money (credit card). You may carry some Indian currency (spending money, maybe a thousand rupees, equivalent to approx. \$20) for a rickshaw tour, a banana lunch and a tip to someone who did something for you out of the blues. Tuck it all in safety somewhere under your shirt. And please do not tip a beggar; it's illegal.

Before you leave for the tour, read about the places you are going to. Then read after you have seen them. Before you get on with fun, take this one serious step and you'd never regret you took this book up and paid for it.

You are all set to go. It may be important for you to decide which part of Delhi you would want to start your sightseeing from. Sometimes, it is the location of your hotel which decides the starting point of the tour.

I have taken the route which begins from recent times like Connaught Place and goes back in time to the first recorded foreign settlement in India — the Qutab Minar. CP (Connaught Place) is the centre of Delhi, from where we may go to the north end of



Connaught Place: The heart of Delhi

the city and then to the south, traversing through history, monuments, art and culture of the city. Most monuments are located oblong north-south. On the east was the river, and the west had the hills. If, however, you wish to start from the beginning, read this book backward, starting from the last chapter for a chronological tour of Delhi.

YOUR TOUR BEGINS

For our purpose, I am starting from the heart of Delhi — Connaught Place. I am mentioning *Hotel Imperial*, as this hotel has some spectacular memorabilia and is one of the oldest five-star deluxe hotels built in 1933. Delhi is like the figure of 8 for the purpose of touring. We start from the centre, take a round, and pass through or near the centre again to take another round. When you look at the map of Delhi, you would know.

A smile for your driver and for all and sundry who'd keep greeting you from your room till you leave in your car, is recommended. This tradition of greeting is in the spirit of "*Atithi devo bhava*", meaning "let the guest be the God!" You are a god having come as a guest to this land, except that, unlike the tradition, you are a paying god! Having said that, hospitality is part of Indian culture and even if hell breaks loose, most often you'd hear your driver saying, "Don't worry, Sir. No problem. It'll be okay."

Never read while the car is moving. It will deprive you of the kaleidoscopic images passing alongside you. Reading and looking around don't mix. Just sit back and relax. Now is the time to let the fun side of you take over.

You may want to stop for a minute at one or two points in Old Delhi. Ask the driver to pull up on the side while you read and identify things around. If there is something to talk about every 100 metres in New Delhi, there is something to talk about every 10 metres in the walled city of Old Delhi.

Well, for now, you are happily entrenched at the back, cushioned seat of your car with eyes wide open for the Indian experience to begin officially.

As your plane touches the runway, you get to see the scramble to get down even before the plane has come to a halt. Next comes the rushing into the waiting bus to be greeted by probable delays in baggage, and the scene in general at the airport. Welcome to the wonderful chaotic world of India! However, the Delhi airport boasts of being the second best airport in the world today. It is new and therefore swanky. The challenge is to keep it that way. My opinion is that if the work culture and mindset of the employees there is changed for the better, this airport will remain the pride of our nation. I had to persuade and convince the man running the cart there that I needed and deserved to use the cart. I am glad I did. Because contrary to his waving me off, saying the baggage belt was round the corner, it was almost a kilometre away. After a fiasco at the Madrid airport by the Turkish Airlines (they behaved like our brethren, trying to extract the undeserved euros from gullible travellers) and a 12-hour journey, I had been exhausted. On the flip side, however, the man's comment that I was young enough to walk that distance was quite heartening.

Finally, there is one thing that I can't include in this book: An open mind is something you have to come up with yourself. By open mind, I mean that you



Hotel Imperial: It has some spectacular memorabilia

should not treat everyone as illiterate for the most part. You should also not take an untidily dressed man as an idiot. For all you know, he may be a poor genius. All the poor-looking fellows are not uneducated; neither are all rich, educated. I am probably protecting my person for good.

By now you should have a fair idea that Delhi can be done in a quick tour in three hours or in a leisurely one in three days. However, for quick reference, I would like to give you more specific itineraries.

- 1) For a **three-hour tour of Delhi**, you may do any two of these three important monuments: **Qutab, Humayun's Tomb, Red Fort**. You may read about these in related chapters. The idea is to spend an hour each inside the monuments and an hour for commuting to these. They are spread all over Delhi and you would get a fairly good idea of the life on Delhi streets. On your way to monuments, you may drive past the India Gate, President House, parliament and many more buildings of interest.
- 2) If you have **two days in Delhi**: Each day, take only half of Delhi. It does not matter which part of Delhi. It can be either Old or New Delhi. The book guides you to the places and how to reach there.
- 3) If you have **three days** to spare, you know where to go. The North Delhi tour and detours can be added as per the book.

In the subsequent chapters, everything has been written in detail to give you a meaningful tour of Delhi.

Summary

- The book is equally helpful for Indians and foreigners both. It substitutes for a guide.
- Important do's and don'ts while getting ready for the Delhi tour
- Preparing for the shock some may experience at the airport itself
- Getting to know what to expect and how to make best value for money
- Options to tour Delhi in various durations: three hours to three days

Activity

Read before you start or after you end your tour of Delhi. Pass a question around like "When was Qutab Minar built?" and have fun. Most tourists tend to forget dates — understandably so — even before they have stepped out of the monument. This could be one way of enjoying dates.

View from the ground

Delhi is a melting pot of various cultures, traditions, languages, religions, and people from all castes and creeds and civilizations. From 1200 BCE onwards, it has been the capital city, with few exceptions. All those who ruled from the city have left their footprints on this soil. For the benefit of the traveller, it would be saner to mention what was right with it immediately after Independence in 1947 than to count its endless corruption-infested wrongs.

Delhi was in a mess after Partition. It is still in a mess but there is "a method

in its madness". When you come to Delhi, you'd find chunks of world-class infrastructure (airports and malls, for example) mingled with shocking poverty. In a bizarre attempt to reduce the percentage of people living below poverty line (BPL), the Government has categorized people earning more than ₹20 per day as being above poverty line. ₹20 is equivalent to less than half an American dollar! This is being touted as a joke.

It is necessary to have an open mind. As a North Indian, I have yet to fathom the complexities of South, East and West India. Not that I have solved the puzzle of what it is being a North Indian. But I am trying.

Expect fleecing, touts, overcharging, good and bad behaviour, massive mismanagement, flight goof-ups and all that. I am not justifying these wrongs, but they happen with tourists at most places in the world. I have suggested ways to deal with them in Delhi. Where it does not happen, like in Singapore, the tourist trade blooms. There is an awareness campaign about how to treat tourists amiably and it is showing. Foreign footfalls are increasing.

On the flip side, there is much to choose from the buffet called India, unlike any other country, including Italy, China and Egypt. Despite and because of everything, knowledge, information, entertainment and wisdom are guaranteed. For example, if you are stranded on an Indian railway platform waiting for a delayed train, there is so much for you to see. I can't describe the scene because each platform presents a unique picture. It is your innovation, your capability and intention to turn every inconvenience, every bit of mismanagement into an opportunity that will help you understand India. Treat them as bonus. As extra that was not charged from you when you booked the tour. If there is a traffic jam, you have so much spread in front of you to savour. Do not come to see monuments alone. Your trip encompasses scenes unwritten in the itinerary sent to you by your travel agents. I wish that you encounter such inconveniences. You would see some things that you could not bargain for all the resources at your disposal.