

INDIA THROUGH A TRAVELLER'S EYES

Pearl S. Buck

PEARL S. BUCK (1892- 1973), American by birth, was reared in China by her missionary parents. She taught in a Chinese University. She is known for her travelogue and memoirs. She wrote personal accounts of her visits to different countries in simple, lucid and effortless English. She won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1938. Notable among her chief works are *The God's Earth* (1931), a novel on China and 'Come, My Beloved', with India as background. The present piece 'India Through a Traveller's Eyes' is an extract from *My Several Worlds*, which is a personal record of her life. It shows her love for the poorest people living in Indian villages.



A. Work in small groups and discuss the following:

1. Have you ever visited places outside your state?
2. Did you notice any difference in terms of life-style and civic sense there?
3. Which aspect of their life has impressed you most?

INDIA THROUGH A TRAVELLER'S EYES

1. India had always been part of the background of my life, but I had never seen it whole and for myself until now. Yet the stories that our Indian family doctor and his wife told me when I was child had woven themselves into my growing dreams, and I had long read everything that I could find about that country. From my father I had learned of it through Buddhism and the life history of the Lord Buddha.
2. The very word *colour* reminds me of the variety of hue that is Indian life, as various as our own American human scene. In Kashmir, where the white barbarian invaders from Europe long ago penetrated India, the people are often fair. Auburn-haired,

blue-eyed women are beauties there. A young Indian friend of mine has recently married a Kashmiri man who, though his hair is dark, has eyes of a clear green. The skin colour of the Kashmiri is a lovely cream and the features are as **classic** as the Greek. But all the people of India must be reckoned as belonging to the **Caucasian race**, whatever the colour of the skin in the South, though it be as black as any African's.

3. And India has an amazing way of appearing **unexpectedly** in other life, as for example, today in the life of South Africa, the Indians make a third group between the South Africans, and the black and white. For that matter there was our Indian family doctor, and why should there have been an Indian doctor in a Chinese port to tend an American family? And rumours of India persist, for they are a memorable people, dramatic and passionate and finding dramatic lives.
4. You see how India has a way of **permeating** human life? And consider how India has managed, merely by maintaining her **independence**, and yes, by producing superior individuals, to influence the world in these few short years of freedom, they have put to good use the benefits the English gave and left, the knowledge of the West, the pure and **exquisitely enunciated** English tongue of men and women educated on both sides of the globe – witness Nehru and with him a host of men learning how to govern, and the first woman to be the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations a woman of India, and the man in charge of the prisoner exchange in Korea an Indian General, who won trust from all. Even the **blustering** and accusation at home and abroad have not changed the quiet confidence of the new India, and this confidence, founded in unyielding idealism, permeates our world life.
5. What did I go to India to see? Not the Taj Mahal, although I did see it and by moonlight, not Fatehpur Sikri, although I did see it, and not the glories of empire in New Delhi, although I did see them. I went to India to see and listen to two groups of people, the young intellectuals in the cities and the peasants in the villages. These I met in little rooms in the city, in little houses in the villages, and I heard their plans for freedom. Already the intellectuals believed that another World War was inevitable. They had been bitterly disappointed after the First World War by what they felt were the broken promises of England. The English, they declared, had no real purpose to restore India to the people. I could believe it, fresh as I was from China, where the period of People's Tutelage seemed endless and self government further off every year. 'When you are ready for independence,' conquerors have always said to their subjects, etcetera! But who is to decide when that moment comes, and how can people learn to govern themselves except by doing it? So the intellectuals in India were restless and **embittered**, and I sat through hours watching their flashing dark eyes and

hearing the endless flow of language, the purest English, into which they poured their feelings.

6. The plan then was that when the Second World War broke, India would rebel immediately against England and compel her, by this **complication**, to set her free. They would not be forced, as they declared they had been in the First World War, to fight at England's command.
7. 'And then,' I asked.
8. 'And then,' young India said proudly, 'we will ourselves decide whether we wish to fight at England's side – or against her.'
9. What they did not reckon on, when the time came, was the **savagery** of **Nazism** and the aggressions of Japan in Asia. When they perceived that they must choose between the Axis and the English, they chose the English, aware that in spite of many injustices they were choosing between barbarism and civilization. They postponed their plans for freedom, Gandhi meanwhile doing his work within his own country until the war was over, and by then the wisest minds in England, understanding the new world, returned India to her people, in spite of all opposition from English men and others who did not have sufficient understanding of Asia to know what wisdom was. Not even Churchill's **prophecy** of **blood bath**, partly fulfilled at that, could prevent the inevitable. India had waited as long as she could, and peasants and intellectuals were on the same side in the old **invincible** combination. It was Gandhi's strength that made him know very early that both peasant and intellectual must be won to work together for their country, his hold was equally strong upon both, and so he achieved his end, without war. Perhaps, we Americans do not yet fully understand the great lesson that India has to teach in thus winning her freedom. Beside her mighty triumph of a bloodless revolution our War of Independence shrinks in size and concept. India has taught humanity a lesson, and it is to our peril if we do not learn it. The lesson? That war and killing achieve nothing but loss, and that a noble end is assured only if the means to attain it are of a piece with it and also noble.
10. The real **indictment** against **colonialism**, however, was to be found in the villages of India. There was rot at the top, too in the thousands of young intellectuals trained in English schools for jobs that did not exist except in the limited Civil Service. The towns and cities were **frothing** with unhappy young men, cultured and well educated, who could find no jobs and were not allowed by the old superstructure of empire to create them. But the real proof of evil, I say again, was in the miserable villages. I thought I had seen poverty enough in China, yet when I saw the Indian villages I knew that the Chinese peasant was rich in comparison. Only the Russian peasant I had seen years before could compare with the Indian villager, although that Russian was a very different creature, and inferior in many ways. For the Indian peasant was like the Chinese in

being a person innately civilized. The maturing culture of an organised human family life and profound philosophical religions had shaped his mind and soul, even though he could not read and write. And the children, the little children of the Indian villages, how they tore at my heart, thin, big bellied, and all with huge sad dark eyes! I wondered that any Englishman could look at them and not accuse himself. Three hundred years of English occupation and rule, and could there be children like this? Yes, and millions of them! And the final indictment surely was that the life span in India was only twenty-seven years. Twenty-seven years! No wonder, then, that life was hastened, that a man married very young so that there could be children, as many as possible, before he died. I loved England, remembering all the happy journeys there, but in India I saw an England I did not know. And I was forced to see that if the English, in many ways the finest people on earth, people who blazed the way for all of us to achieve the right of men to rule themselves, if colonialism could so corrupt even these, then indeed none of us could dare become the rulers of empire.

B.1.1. Read the following sentences and write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements:

- i. Pearl S. Buck had an Indian family doctor.
- ii. The Mongolian from Europe invaded Kashmir.
- iii. According to the writer, the Indians belonged to the Caucasian race.
- iv. The first woman President of the General Assembly of the United State was an Indian.
- v. The writer wanted to listen to four groups of people.
- vi. The young Indian intellectuals were disappointed with the English rule.
- vii. Indians were willing to fight in the Second World War at England's command.
- viii. Indians believed in the nobility of means to achieve a noble end.
- ix. The worst effect of colonisation was seen in towns, in the form of unemployment.
- x. Indians, under the British rule, had a life span of just twenty seven years.

B.1. 2. Answer the following questions briefly :

- 1) What does the word 'colour' remind the writer of?
- 2) What were the benefits of the English rule?
- 3) Why were the intellectuals in India restless and embittered?
- 4) What was the 'great lesson' that India had to teach the West?
- 5) Where was the real indictment against the colonisation to be found?
- 6) Why was the writer moved at the sight of the children of the Indian villages?

11. It seemed to me, as I lived with Indian friends, new and old, that all the ills of India could easily have been mended if there had been a government whose purpose was first of all to benefit the people rather than to live upon them. The desert-dry country, for example, the fruitless land between Bombay and Madras, was already **famished** although it was only February, and the sun hot enough to fertilize any seed, had there been water. And why was there no water? Why not sink **artesian wells**, or even dig shallow wells, since I was told, the water table was high? But the **enervated** and exhausted people had not the strength to take such initiative after the years of colonialism. It was more than that. The worst result, perhaps, of the colonial system was to provide the subject people with an infinite excuse against work and so against helping themselves. 'You are responsible for me,' is always the sullen attitude of the subject to the ruler. 'You have undertaken to feed me and clothe me and govern me. If I die it is your fault.' There were always the British to blame, and certainly the blame was not always just. Yet essentially perhaps it was, for when the heart of a people is gone, their spirit dies with it.
12. Looking back, I find that among the many impressions of the people of India, absorbed while I lived among them, and still clear in my mind, is their reverence for great men and women. Leadership in India can only be continued by those whom the followers consider to be good – that is, capable of **renunciation**, therefore, not self-seeking. This one quality for them contains all others. A person able to renounce personal benefit for the sake of an idealistic and is by that very fact also honest, also high-minded, therefore also trustworthy. I felt that the people, even those who know themselves venal and full of faults, searched for such persons.
13. The devotion given nationally to Gandhi and finally even internationally is well known, but I found the same homage paid to local persons who in their measure were also leaders because of their selflessness. Thus I remember a certain Indian village where I had been invited to visit in the home of a family of some modern education, though not much, and some means, though not wealth. The house was mud-walled and the roof was made of thatch. Inside were several rooms, however, the floors smooth and polished with the usual mixture of cow dung and water. The active master of the house was not the head of the family, but a younger brother. This I discovered when I arrived, for before we entered the house, my host led me to a curious sort of cage standing well above the ground on four posts. Inside the cage, made of wire netting, I saw to my amazement an ageing man lying on his back, his head supported by a pillow.
14. 'My eldest brother,' my host explained. 'He has had a stroke of paralysis, and though we beg him to live in the house, he chooses to live out here so that he may be ready to listen to the villagers when they come to him.'

15. My host spoke fair English, but the elder brother spoke none; and we could only exchange greetings and look at each other with friendliness. What I saw was intelligent thin, pain-sharpened face, whose eyes were at once wise and piercing. The body was quite helpless, but it was scrupulously clean and the cotton garments were snow-white. We exchanged a few remarks, and then a group of villagers approached, not to see me but to talk with the elder brother, and so my host led me into the house to meet his young wife and children.
16. All during my stay I watched that cage, and seldom indeed did I see it except surrounded by people, and never, as long as daylight lasted, without at least one man squatting on the ground, talking earnestly and then listening. My host said, 'My brother has always been our wise man. Now he is our saint.'
17. My host, I observed, had his own place, too, in the village life, for twice while we were seating our luncheon that day he rose from his corner of the room and went out, to answer a shout, apparently from a neighbour. When he came back he made the same explanation.
18. 'I was called to kill a dangerous snake.'
19. The luncheon was plain country fare, lentils, rice, spinach boiled very much, condiments. Before we ate, an old cousin brought in a brass ewer of water and a clean homespun towel for us to cleanse our hands with, a necessary preliminary to eating with the fingers. Chopsticks I had used all my life and preferred them to knife and fork, but after I had got used to eating with my right hand, I liked it as well. After all, what is so clean as one's own right hand washed? And from babyhood the Indian children are taught that the right hand is for clean services such as eating, and the left hand may perform the more lowly tasks.
20. Another cleanliness was that our food was served on fresh green banana leaves instead of plates. Well-cooked rice piled on a broad green leaf is a pleasant sight and stimulates the appetite. In any household where caste was observed the food was placed on such leaves or on dishes of fresh pottery, broken after we had finished with them. My host fulfilled the requirements of his caste by eating in the opposite corner of the room, and sitting on the floor with his back to us. By now I had learned to overcome my first feeling about a distance such as this. It was simply a private devotion to a religious feeling and not inhospitality.
21. Religion is ever-present in Indian life, in its best as well as in its worst aspects, for there, as elsewhere, fanaticism reaches into evil. I liked the simple acceptance of religious motive, however, and the perfect freedom to behave as one's religion moved the soul. Thus in my first Indian family, an intellectual and fairly well-to-do one, while I sat and talked with my hostess in her living-room, an Indian gentleman came in without

speaking to us and moved gracefully to the far end of the room, his bare feet silent upon the floor. There he knelt his head bowed, and so remained for perhaps a quarter of an hour. When I glanced at him curiously my hostess said in a manner entirely casual. 'It is my husband's eldest brother. He comes here during the day at his prayer times, since his own home is at some distance from his place of business.'

22. When the prayer was over the brother went away again, and it was not until later that I met him, and then it was outside of prayer hours.
23. My life has been too crowded with travels and many people for me to put it all within the covers of one book, however, and indeed all my books have not been enough to tell the things I would like to tell. Years after I left India I wrote **Come, My Beloved** against its background. Strange, the Americans, except for a few, have not understood the real meaning of that book, but the Indian readers understand. We have not lived long enough, perhaps, to know universally that the price of achievement, whatever the goal, is an absolute.
24. In my book I chose three Christian **missionaries** to prove it, for of all the people that I have ever known the missionary is, in his way, the most dedicated, the most single-hearted. He believes that God is the One, the Father of mankind and that all men are brothers. At least the Christian says he so believes and so he preaches. Then why has he failed to change the world in spite of his sacrifices? Alas, they have not been enough, and he has not been willing to pay the full price for faith. He pays only part, unable to accept utterly the full meaning of his creed. I see the same refusal here in my own country, over and over again, and not only among Christians. But the people of India know what it is to be willing to pay the last full measure of the cost of and **idealism**. They understand, and to them my book is not a **puzzlement**.

B.2.1. Read the following sentences and write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements:

- i. The writer blames the English rule for all the ills of India.
- ii. Colonisation had made the Indian enervated and exhausted.
- iii. Long period of slavery made the people quite dependent.
- iv. According to the writer, selflessness is the main quality of a leader.
- v. Very few people in villages had respect for age and experience.
- vi. The writer did not like the idea of eating with right hand.
- vii. Indians are by nature religious.
- viii. The book 'Come, My Beloved' has Indian background.
- ix. A Christian missionary believes that 'God is the one'.

B.2. 2. Answer the following questions briefly :

- 1) Why was the land between Bombay and Madras famished?
- 2) Why did the Indian always blame the British for their suffering?
- 3) Who was the real master of the house which Buck visited?
- 4) Why did the writer not mind her host eating in the opposite corner of the room?
- 5) What does she mean by saying 'Religion is ever present in Indian life'?
- 6) What are her views on the Christian missionaries?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

barbarian (adj): savage, uncivilized

auburn-haired (adj): having hair of golden brown colour

classic (adj): standard

Caucasian race (n): a fair skinned race, belonging to the Caucasus region in the USSR

permeating (v): penetrating

exquisitely enunciated (adv): pronounced in an extremely fine way

blustering (n): angry talk

embittered (adj): resentful

savagery (n): barbaric cruelty

complication (n): the difficult situation

Nazism (n): The philosophy believed in by the National Socialist German Workers Party, reorganised on military lines by Hitler

prophecy (n): forecast

blood bath (n.phr.): bloodshed

invincible (adj): unconquerable

indictment (n): charge

colonisation (n): the process by which colonies are set up and governed

frothing (pp): bubbling

famished (v): starved

artesian wells (n): wells through which water comes to the surface due to high water level.

enervated (pp/adj): weakened

renunciation (n): process of giving up self interest

luncheon (n): meal

stimulates (v): activates, arouses

fanaticism (n):

evil (n): sin, wrong

missionaries (v): persons sent to propagate religion

idealism (n): belief in ideal ways of life

puzzlement (n): confusion, bafflement

C. 1. Long Answer Questions

1. How does Pearl S. Buck describe Kashmir?
2. How has India influenced the world in the post Independent era?
3. Why had the Indian intellectuals decided not to support the British in the Second World War?
4. What lesson had India taught the humanity by gaining Independence?
5. What was the psychological impact of colonisation on Indian people?
6. Who, according to Buck, could be the real leaders of Indian people?
7. What are some of the features of Indian family life, as noticed by Buck?
8. Why did the writer believe that her book **Come, My Beloved** was not a puzzlement to the people of India?

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

1. Salient features of Indian family life
2. Joint family Vs nucleus-family

C. 3. COMPOSITION

1. You have a pen Friend in America who wants to know about India. Write a letter to your friend describing some of the values that govern Indian family life.
2. Write a paragraph in about 100 words on India's contribution to world peace

D. WORD STUDY**D.1. Dictionary Use**

Ex. 1. Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common:

evil find penetrate lives educate globe witness

D.2. Word-formation

Read the following sentence carefully:

*India had always been part of the **background** of my life, but I had never seen it whole and for **myself** until now.*

In the sentence given above **background** is made of **back** and **ground**. similarly **myself** is made of **my** and **self**.

Form compound words using the words given below:

| | | | | | |
|--------|--------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
| every | blue | home | chop | baby | over |
| thing | eyed | made | spun | sticks | hood |
| come | living | room | out | side | in |
| deed | well | day | house | hold | snow |
| faced | white | light | trust | worthy | mud |
| walled | self | seeking | high | minded | water |
| bird | new | cooked | born | hearted | ever |
| green | how | single | glass | house | |

D.3. Word-meaning

Ex 1. Match the words given in **Column A** with their meanings given in **Column B**:

Column A

1. creed
2. piercing
3. exhausted
4. profound
5. inferior
6. peril
7. rot

Column B

- a. of poor quality
- b. deep and subtle
- c. penetrating
- d. drained of all strength
- e. a set of beliefs
- f. decayed
- g. danger

D. 4. Phrases

Ex.1. Read the lesson carefully and find out the sentences in which the following phrases have been used. Then use these phrases in sentences of your own:

| | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| further off | in spite of | live upon | search for |
| as long as | serve on | put in | |

E. GRAMMAR

Ex.1. Read the following sentences, taken from the lesson, carefully:

- a) *They could not be forced to fight at England's command.*
- b) *No wonder, then, that life was hastened.*

In both the sentences in passive voice given above, the 'agent' or 'doer' is not specified. We do not specify doer when it is (i) obvious from the context, (ii) not needed, and (iii) not known.

Find sentences in the lesson where the passive structure has been used without a specified doer.

Ex.2. Change the following sentences as directed:

- i. The features of the Kashmiri are as classic as the Greek. (from positive to comparative)
- ii. My host said, "I was called to kill a dangerous snake." (from direct to indirect speech)
- iii. My life has been too crowded with travels and many people for me to put it all within the covers of one book. (Remove 'too')
- iv. What did I go to India to see? (from interrogative to assertive)

F. ACTIVITY

Ex.1. Organise an inter class debate on:

- a) British rule over India was not so good.
- b) Political independence is not enough

Ex.2. Travellers from various countries have visited India at different times. Prepare a chart mentioning:

- a) Names of foreign visitors who have visited India
- b) The period during which they came
- c) The purpose of their visit

