India In Mind Vintage Departures By Pankaj Mishra

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"Klappentext Ever since Herodotus reported that it was home to gold-digging ants, travelers have been intrigued by India in all its beguiling complexity. This superb anthology gives us some of the best fiction, nonfiction, and poetry that has been written about the world's second most populous nation over the past two centuries. From Mark Twain's puzzled fascination with Indian castes and customs, to Allen Ginsberg's awe at the country's spiritual and natural splendors, or from J. R. Ackerley's delightful recollections of his visits with an eccentric gay Maharajah, to Gore Vidal's unforgettable scene in his novel Creation, in which his character finally meets the Buddha and is bewildered-all twenty-five selections in India in Mind' reveal a place that evokes, in the traveler, reactions ranging from fear and perplexity to astonishment and wonder. Edited and with an introduction and chapter notes by the award-winning novelist Pankaj Mishra, 'India in Mind is a marvel of sympathy, sensitivity, and perception, not to mention outstanding writing. Über den Autor und weitere Mitwirkende Pankaj Mishra was born in North India in 1969 and now lives in London and India. He is the author of The Romantics, which won the Los Angeles Times?s Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction, and An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World. He is a regular contributor to The New York Review of Books, Granta, and The Times Literary Supplement. Leseprobe. Abdruck erfolgt mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber. Alle Rechte vorbehalten. J. R. Ackerley (1896-1967) J. R. Ackerley was born in England. His father was a business tycoon and secretly maintained two separate households. Ackerley himself was no less unconventional and was certainly franker about his homosexuality and the greatest love of his life: his dog Tulip, who was brilliantly commemorated by Ackerley in My Dog Tulip (1956). He fought at Somme in World War I and saw his brother killed there. After serving eight months as prisoner of war in a German camp, he studied at Cambridge University where he met, among other furtive gay men, E. M. Forster, who had visited India in 1922 and had spent some time at the court of a campy Maharajah. As it turned out, the Maharajah was then looking for a secretary and had even written to H Rider Haggard for help in locating someone who resembled Olaf, a character in Haggard's The Wanderer's Necklace. The Maharajah wasn't impressed by Ackerley's good looks but fell for his poems. Ackerley later described his five months at Chhokrapur ('City of Boys'), his jokey name for the Maharajah's capital, in Hindoo Holiday (1932), which is one of the more witty products of the Anglo-Indian encounter. Ackerley shared none of the racial and political prejudices of the Englishmen of his class; the five months were, on the whole, great fun. As this excerpt shows, he and the Maharajah were perfectly matched as eccentrics.from HINDOO HOLIDAYJanuary 7thl spoke to His Highness yesterday about a tutor for myself (he is very anxious for me to learn to speak Hindi), and taking advantage of some remark of his on Zeus and Ganymede, asked whether I might not have his valet to teach me.'I suppose he is indispensable to you?' I asked.'No, he is not indispensable to me. I will send him to you if you wish. I will send him to you tomorrow morning."Do you think he will be pleased to come?"Oh, he will be very pleasedespecially if you pay him two or three rupees a month. 'After this neither of us said anything for some time, and then His Highness remarked with finality: 'No, he is not at all indispensable to me. But this morning a tonga arrived at the Guest House bearing two men I had never seen before, with a letter from His Highness. It ran as follows: 'Dear Mr. Ackerley,-Here are two men who know English and Hindi very well. The bearer of this is called Gupta, he is my assistant librarian of Hindi books; and the other called Champa Lal, he is my icemaker. You can choose any one of them, and they will do for preliminary work well. Perhaps they might ask for some wages, and I think two rupees per month will do. Excuse pencil and paper. To which I replied: Dear Maharajah Sahib, Your messengers have arrived, but I do not know quite what to do. Indeed they have both uttered remarks in English, but neither of them appears to understand my replies. I thought to myself, there is nothing to choose between them in looks; I will take the one who is the sharper in wits. So I returned to them and said:'I only want one of you. Which of you speaks the better English, for I will engage him?'The silence was at last broken by the icemaker, who said:-'I do not understand.'-and then by the assistant librarian, who said:'Your English is very high.'I return them both, and hope I may still be allowed to have the dispensable valet, this morning or at 2:30 p.m., for even if he cannot teach me Hindi, I should like to make a drawing of him. The valet came this afternoon. I was lying on my sofa reading, when the light flicked across the page, and looking up I saw him standing in the curtained doorway. He bobbed a nervous salaam; I beckoned him inside, and

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throwing a rapid glance over his shoulder, he shuffled his laceless European shoes from his bare feet, pulled the curtain right back so that the open doorway was unveiled, and came a few paces further into the room. I indicated a chair, but it was too near me; he took the first at hand, and moved it back so that it stood in the doorway. I had already learnt a few Hindi phrases by heart: 'Good day,' 'How are you?' 'It is a nice day,' 'Don't talk so fast'; but I found I did not now believe in their pronunciation as much as when I had addressed them to myself; and since he only nodded to the first three, or uttered a throaty monosyllabic sound. I had no opportunity to air my 'Don't talk so fast' composition, which therefore remains in my memory as the only phrase I got right. He was clearly very ill at ease, and anxious to please; but I soon realized that he did not really understand anything I said and was trying to guess from my expression what his response should be, so that most of the time a timid smile trembled on his lips and eyes, ready to vanish at the slightest sign of severity. And whenever I looked for a moment to consult my dictionary, his head went round at once, I noticed, to the open door, through which he could see across the gravel space the usual crowd of servants drowsing in the shade of the neem tree in front of the kitchen. So I gave it up at last and said I was going to draw him, but the moment I rose to get my sketchbook he was out of his chair and watching me in apparent alarm. I tried to convey with smiles and gestures that my intention was quite harmless, but although I got him to sit down again, I could not get him to sit still, and at length, in despair, told him to close the doors, for I could not go on if he kept turning round to look out of them. He began immediately to talk to me very rapidly, and since I did not know what he was saying, I got up to close them myself; but again he sprang up and barred my way, still chattering and gazing at me in what seemed to be a pleading manner. I stood still, wondering what was the trouble, and he at once began beckoning, in great agitation, to one of his friends outside, throwing me, at the same time, nervous, placating smiles. Soon the friend arrived, the young clerk who called on me the other day. What is the matter with your friend? I asked. He say I must stay with him, said the clerk. Why? He is much frightened. This was all I could get. He did not know why his friend was frightened, or if he did know he would not say. But at any rate it was clear enough that I must have both or neither, so I told the clerk he had better stay, though I did not want him-being a shy and, as will perhaps already have been noticed, a rather inexpert artist. A little later, forgetting the valet's fear, I asked his friend, who had access to the storeroom, if he would get me some more cigarettes, for I had run out of them; but the moment he moved the valet caught hold of his hand, and, even when the mission was explained, would not let him go. The drawing was indeed not good, and Narayan did not scruple to say so. Narayan is the name of the clerk; his friend, the valet, being called Sharma. January 8thTom-tom Hill is my favorite walk because of the view. There is a ruined shrine with a fallen idol on its summit, and it is called Tomtom Hill because a drum used to be beaten there years ago to assemble the people or to notify them of certain times and events. From the backyard of my house the stony slope climbs steadily up to a pretty white temple in its cluster of cypresses. The temple is dedicated to Hanuman, the Monkey-headed God of Physical Power, and the worshippers are often to be seen and heard on its terrace; but I have not yet found courage to enter it, being still ignorant of customs and observances, and afraid of making mistakes. Indeed I have never even ventured..."

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