

Abroad with the Family

Our eldest daughter had got married and having spent the first three years of her married life in London, she was insistent that we visit the country. Our eldest son Barindra Kumar was also there for higher studies. So it was a good time for us to visit the foreign shores. In August 1949, we set sail for England with our three younger children. It was a long voyage and took us twenty one days to reach our destination. My younger daughter and I spent most of the time lying down as we were violently sea sick. The entire journey was a harrowing experience for us. Dr. Das and our two sons were not so badly affected. We docked at Tilbury port and were overjoyed to see Barin waiting to receive us. He took us to London where we had rented a house in the suburbs for the duration of our stay.

IN LONDON

Life in London, I discovered, had a different pace. There were no servants to do the household work. I did the cooking while my children did the cleaning. We kept a cleaner who came in once a week to do the heavy work. She charged an exorbitant amount of one pound for her services each time she reported for duty.

The houses in London were all multistoried as space was precious. Most of them had greyish exteriors which were not aesthetically pleasing. But the interiors were very conveniently

organised with all necessary gadgets. This made working easy and with the family helping me, I managed the housework efficiently.

The city with its rich historical heritage attracted tourists from all over the world. All these sights were made easily accessible to the visitors. Tourist buses were available in plenty, with guides explaining the significance of each landmark. Wherever it was necessary to disembark from the bus, the tourists were looked after well and guided to each heritage sight considerably. Everyone observed the principle of queuing up. So discipline was maintained. While sight seeing, shopping, travelling or in the movie halls and the theatres, nobody had to be told to stand in a queue.

One afternoon Dr. Das and I had gone towards the Parliament House, leaving the children behind. We saw a long line of people stretching right up to the doorway of the Parliament House. We asked one of them why they were queuing up. He told us that the people were standing in a queue to enter the Parliament as they were interested in watching the proceedings. We joined the line at the end. It was about 2 pm. The serpentine queue moved slowly and by 4 pm we were chilled to the bone. We thought of walking away but then we saw that there were a lot of people behind us as well. The patience shown by all these people made both of us reluctant to leave. At about 4:30 pm, we entered the Parliament House. But our waiting was not over. We had to queue up in three different places inside the building and finally at about 7 pm, we got to sit down in the galleries to hear the speeches. When we came out there were still people lining up to enter. I was very impressed by this tacit acceptance of discipline. It was a salutary lesson for us who came from a country of chaos and confusion. Both Dr. Das and I were amazed at how the English people responded so sportingly to regulations and to an orderly way of life.

London seemed to me to be overflowing with shops. The streets were lined with tall buildings, the ground floors of which were usually occupied by shops. The window displays exhibited an

artistic array of all kinds of goods, including jewellery. People could see all the goods while walking on the streets. This concept of 'window shopping' was unknown to us before we went to London. Only those interested in buying would walk in through the doorways of the shops to buy. Bargaining was unheard of as, normally, nothing was overpriced. The shops opened at office time and closed down at 6.00 pm every weekday and at 1.00 pm on Saturdays. Sundays were holidays for all. At first, I was surprised to see the expensive items displayed near the glass windows so close to the roadside. Wasn't there a risk of someone smashing the glass and stealing the goods? Then I realised that the English people were basically honest and did not lust for things that did not belong to them. If some object was lost and found on the road or in a public place, it would be taken to a place reserved for lost and found property. The owner would enquire in this place and most often would recover his lost goods.

One day, while walking around, I saw a pile of newspapers lying on the sidewalk with some money left on the top of the pile. I was shocked at the carelessness of people leaving cash lying around. Then I got to know that the newspaper vendor had left the papers there so that whoever wanted a paper would pay for it and pick up his copy and even take back the change if and when the need arose! That explained the money lying there. When the papers would be sold out the vendor would come and collect the money.

In the same way, milk bottles were delivered at the doorstep. Till the houseowner picked up his bottles, no one would touch them. I know that comparisons are odious, but these instances made me think of my own country. If a bottle full of milk was lying around for a period of time, would the houseowner in India ever get it intact?

One day, my daughter and I had gone on a bus trip. Both of us were dressed in our traditional two piece attire of *riha* and *mekhela*. An elderly lady took the seat next to us. We were aware that she

watched us with great interest for sometime. When she got up to descend from the bus, she paused for a minute beside us and spoke to us in a gentle voice, "I am sorry I was staring at you. Both of you are so decent that you did not react at all. Please forgive me," She then left the bus. We were once again touched by the courtesies of the English people.

In London, public transport was provided and managed by the Government. In each household, both men and women kept busy with work outside and within the house. Except for the very rich, no one could afford household help. So, the lady of the house had a full time job, cooking, cleaning and shopping. The men helped their wives whenever they could. The babies were taken along in prams when the mothers went shopping. There were places to keep the babies safely, and after the shopping was over, mothers would collect them.

One noticeable characteristic of the English that struck me during my short stay was that no work was considered to be beneath one's dignity. Hard work and diligence were highly appreciated. This healthy attitude towards work impressed me greatly. The people were conditioned to live within their means and were never afraid of what others might say. This trait was in stark contrast to our Indian mindset of being constantly pressurised by social criticism.

Another aspect of English life which drew my attention and interest was the excellent utilization of space in the city of London. The city was chock-a-block with buildings, both commercial and residential. The parks that dotted the city provided the green zones. Very few houses had a front or a backyard. In fact, I saw mothers keeping their babies in prams on the roadside so that the little ones could soak in some sunshine. But even though the city was so crowded, there was no disorder anywhere because the public was so consciously disciplined.

My primary intention for making this trip abroad was to visit schools and colleges in England. I had tied up with India House for the necessary permissions. My first visit was to the Domestic Science

Training College in London. My research told me that initially the College had been opened for teaching cookery to girls. Then it gradually expanded into a massive training institute for all the branches of Domestic Science. The Government took care of half of its funding, specially in the buying of equipment. The College had two separate senior and junior divisions. The first four years comprised the undergraduate degree course. A student could become a teacher after completing this course. Then, there was a higher course of two years which enabled one to work in the hospitality industry. The basic education needed for admission was the clearance of the school final examination. I was told that there were about three hundred students in the College and the faculty consisted only of women.

I was received by the Principal of the College and taken to the cafeteria where the Heads of various departments were enjoying a tea break. I was offered tea and they wanted to know the purpose of my visit. When I told them that I was interested in learning about the functioning of the College, they decided amongst themselves where each one was going to take me.

The Head of Science first took me to her department. Then the Head of the senior section of Food and Nutrition escorted me to the kitchen where the students were preparing food. My next stop was at the junior section kitchen. After that I was taken by the Head of Tailoring to her department. When I finally came back to the Principal's office, I asked her about the huge quantities of food that was being prepared in the kitchens. She told me that the students had their lunch in college and people from some of the neighbouring offices came here for lunch as well. Their eating place was separate and it was a revenue generating enterprise for the College.

The Bedford College for Women was the second institution I visited. This was a Government Girls' College with an enrolment of about eight hundred girls. The College catered to undergraduate students and also provided research facilities for Ph.d scholars. There was a balanced ratio of teachers from both sexes but the Principal,

Registrar and tutors were all women. Dr. Das had accompanied me to this college and we were made to sit in the Registrar's office. The Principal also welcomed us and the tutors and the Registrar gave us a tour of the College.

I was impressed by the size of the well stocked library. There was a staff of nine people working under the Librarian in the pleasantly furnished building. The infrastructure of the College was so good that I felt sad thinking about our own working conditions. Bedford College provided facilities for male scholars to pursue their Ph.Ds and we were told that there was a scholar from Assam. We went around the huge campus for about three hours. We were offered refreshments but had to refuse as we were getting late for another appointment. The Registrar and the tutors saw us off at the gate of the College.

My next stop was at the Maria Grey Training College for Girls. This was a comparatively smaller College with about 150 students. The Vice Principal showed me around the classes. Interestingly, I saw an Indian lady attending classes. I was told her name was Mrs. Singha. Since she was sitting in an ongoing class, I could not chat with her. I came back home at about 2.00 pm.

The following day, I went to the South Hampstead Grammar School. The Secretary was waiting to receive me as the Principal was taking a class. She took me to see the premises. When I asked her why the school was called a Grammar School, she could not give me a convincing answer and said that the name had come down through the years. At the time I was going round the school, all the classes were doing written work. I saw that in the Public Administration class, students were trying to draw a sketch of the Parliament House. Varied subjects such as Mathematics, English, Music and Physical Training were in progress. I was then taken to the junior section of the school which was housed in a separate building. The younger students were more boisterous and were constantly supervised by teachers even during the play hour. Guardians dropped them in school in the morning. They were taught

to bathe and tidy themselves in the school. Lunch was provided and the girls were picked up by guardians at about 5.00 pm. The little ones were taught to study through games. Discipline was also instilled in them but mainly through play and in a gentle manner.

IN LEEDS

From London we travelled to Leeds as we wanted to visit the University of Leeds. It was the time for new admissions and we wanted to admit our youngest daughter. I was very impressed with the entire process of admission. The Heads of all the departments sat in a big hall, dressed in their traditional academic robes. The departments were easily recognisable and the students filled up their forms and submitted them to the Head of whichever department they had chosen. The Heads checked the forms, pointing out errors, if any. The forms were then taken by the students to the clerks and submitted with the required fees.

Throughout my stay in England, I was fascinated by the sincerity and the excellent work ethics of the English people. They were not concerned with the kind of work they were doing. Their focus was on the fact that everything should be done well. This attitude was eminently laudable and I realised that these sterling qualities went a long way in making the nation so progressive. All the public institutions functioned smoothly and efficiently because the people were committed and spared no effort. I felt that this spirit of social commitment and pride in their country's stature was something we needed to emulate. Public funds were never mishandled. Hence, all institutions thrived.

IN STOCKHOLM

We extended our trip from England to the Continent, a common way of referring to Europe. Our son, Barindranath, had arranged our tour through the famous travel agents Thomas Cook. On 11th October, 1949, at 3.00 pm, we left London for Tilbury by train. After reaching the seaside town, we boarded the ship for Sweden. We reached our destination on the 13th and proceeded to Stockholm by train. A Norwegian lady helped us a lot during this time. Dr. Das and I were strangers in a foreign land and could not speak the local language. She understood our difficulties and escorted us from the port to the railway station. When it was time for us to bid her goodbye, she told us, "I am proud to be acquainted with you. I have never met anyone from India before."

Sweden's picturesque landscapes which we observed during our train journey, enchanted us. Everything looked like a picture postcard. Small houses dotted the countryside with open space all around. In some areas, we saw that harvesting was over. In others, the soil was being prepared for fresh cultivation. We noticed that the population was very sparse. Even people working in the fields were not too many. Yet the land was not left fallow and every inch was utilised productively. It was almost as if the people in these countries did not believe in idling away and did their work on time and with utmost sincerity. Even the villagers seemed to be fully aware of the values of punctuality and hard work.

There were two other gentlemen in our compartment, both busy reading newspapers in an unknown language. This was an indication that they were not English. One of them got down early while the other continued to travel with us. Dr. Das asked him when lunch would be served. He went to find out and came back to inform us that it would be served at 1:30 pm. We could not follow what he was saying. So he showed us the time by pointing to his watch. We realised that he had remained silent for so long because he did not know English. But he was being helpful

in his own way. We did not trouble him any more for the rest of our journey.

We reached Stockholm at about 3.00 pm. An employee of Thomas Cook was at the station to receive us and to take us to our hotel. The agency had taken charge of all our travel arrangements in the Continent. This was a great help because most Europeans were not conversant with English. When we took bus trips, it was difficult to communicate with fellow travellers.

Stockholm was a beautiful and clean city. We were shown the Palace of the Swedish King and many other heritage sights by our tour guide. One novel feature of the Swedish people which we noticed was that they were approachable and friendly. Even the children playing by the river banks came running to greet us when our bus was passing by.

The Stockholm Town Hall was a very imposing landmark. We spotted a lady in a sari as we went in. She was busy arranging artefacts for an exhibition. I went up to her and said, "I could not resist coming over to meet you when I saw that you are wearing our national dress." She smilingly shook hands with me and introduced me to a quiet, elderly Swedish lady standing nearby, "This is my mother-in-law. I have married a Swedish man." She told me that she had been recently married. We continued our tour of the city after visiting the Town Hall.

Another interesting fact attracted our attention in Sweden. There were many huge hospitals with the capacity to accommodate as many as 1500 patients throughout the country. In Stockholm itself, we were told, that there were thirty two hospitals.

We returned to our hotel in the evening after the day long sight seeing trip. In the hotel, no one knew English except for the manager. The evening had turned chilly. So we asked the room attendant to put on the heater. The boy could not understand what he was being asked to do. But he had the presence of mind to call the manager. Dr. Das explained to him what the problem was. And the manager in turn, instructed the boy in Swedish. He hurriedly

switched on the heater and highly embarrassed, beat a hasty retreat from our room.

The next day, we wanted to go sightseeing on a tram. But whenever we tried to stop someone and ask for directions, the people avoided us. We were totally lost and confused. Then, a gentleman came across on his own and asked us in English if he could help us in any way. We told him about our problem with the tram lines. He took us to the tram stand and explained to us how to commute from there. We found that public transport in Stockholm was highly developed because many people availed of it. Bicycles were also a popular mode of transport. Lines of cycles were seen parked on the roadside and near the parks.

We went to see the Prince Gallery by tram. As we walked into the Gallery, we saw a small boy crying. This was the first time I saw a child crying ever since we left the Indian shores. Life in these affluent western countries seemed to be so well organised and prosperous, that tears, pain and suffering seemed to be out of place in their fairy tale like universe, at least superficially.

After spending two days in Stockholm, we went to Denmark by train. We boarded at about 8 pm in the evening and shared our compartment with three young Danish men. They all knew a little bit of English and were not as reserved as the English. The entire night passed amidst chattering and they included us in their merry making. They were also very helpful when we had to get our passports checked by the concerned authorities.

We continued the next part of our journey by ship and struck up a conversation with a Finnish lady who travelled with us. She told us that had Sweden and Denmark not helped Finland during the Second World War, Finland would not have survived the War. Sweden, in fact, had played a stellar role amongst the neighbours, in the Finnish struggle for survival. Many Finnish children were taken to Sweden and were supported by the Government. Sweden's phenomenal economic prosperity had enabled it to help its neighbouring country. She further told us

that Russia's contribution as a neighbour has been a terribly negative one for Finland. The best machinery manufactured in Finland was taken away by the Russians. This kind of extortion would continue till 1952 because of a prior agreement between the two countries. Her insights into her country's troubled history provided us with a lot of useful information about the European political and social equations. She told us that of all European women, the Finnish were the most progressive in educating themselves. They have left their mark in different areas of life such as trade, commerce, crafts, and culture and there was a move to induct Finnish women as priests in the Church.

IN COPENHAGEN

We disembarked in Denmark and took a train to the capital city of Copenhagen. This time our travel companion was a Danish lady. She introduced herself to us and started a conversation. I had earlier noticed that the majority of Swedish women were educated in their own language and therefore, could not communicate easily with non-Swedish people. But Danish and Finnish women could speak adequate English. And, they were friendly and helpful to strangers. Our Danish companion was hospitable to the extent of asking us to stay with her during our visit. When we expressed our inability to do so, she left her address with us so that sometime in future, we could accept her offer. She was gracious enough to escort us to the hotel we were booked in. We found that it was conveniently located near the railway station.

The people of Denmark appeared to me to be cheerful and fun loving. The young children I met in trains were lively. We took a train trip across Denmark to see the countryside. After travelling for about an hour, we crossed a river by ferry boat and again boarded a train which took us through the entire length of the small country. I saw villages with small cottages and lots of empty

spaces. This time, our compartment was shared by a German gentleman who provided us information about the passing landscape. He told us that the population of Denmark was very small, about 40 lakhs only. Of that, almost 15 lakhs lived in Copenhagen. As we passed, we saw thatched cottages in some places. The remnants of German destruction during the Second World War were still evident. A part of Denmark had been occupied by Germany and the ruins of the bombed houses dotted the countryside, reminding everyone of those terrible times.

Our German companion was the station master of a German border outpost. He informed us that the total population of undivided Germany was six crores and sixty lakhs. But after partition, West Germany now had a population of about 4 crores and 5 lakhs. When we reached our station, our new friend gave us a huge respite by arranging matters so that our luggage was not checked. We heard him talk to the Inspector who had come in. The only word I understood was "Indian". We got down on German soil and had our passports checked and bid goodbye to our German friend.

In the next phase of our journey, we were joined by a Danish gentleman. He told us that we were now going to see the longest bridge in Europe, one which linked the Baltic to the North Sea. This bridge was about four miles long and we saw the lights lining it reflected in the water. Our Danish friend filled us in with many details about his country. Denmark, we learnt, was not as rich as Germany or Sweden. Its exports were primarily dairy, cheese, butter and eggs. There were several cycle factories in Denmark. He himself owned a factory that manufactured pumps which he exported. We reached his station at night and he got down. We were then joined by a German, who was very eager to talk to us when he got to know our nationality. He enlightened me about the primary education in Germany. It was compulsory but not state sponsored as in England, where the Government provided free education to children upto the age of fourteen. Another German family accompanied us as we travelled the last lap of our journey to Zurich.

IN ZURICH

The German family let us know that they were going to fly to the U.S.A from Zurich. The gentleman was a doctor and worked there. He talked about how people from all nationalities were appreciated in the U.S and how American hospitals opened their doors to qualified foreign doctors. As we travelled across Germany, we saw that the villages and the houses were larger than in the Northern countries. Cultivation was systematic and I noticed that the fields had shade trees growing just like in our tea gardens. The roads were in good condition and the roadsides were filled with workshops and factories. The people appeared to be active and brisk. Men and women worked together in the fields. Another characteristic that I marked was that the German people were friendly and considerate. The family that had travelled with us got down with us in Zurich. Dr. Das had accidentally left behind his overcoat in the carriage. The German doctor had brought it along for him and handed it to Dr. Das before leaving the station. This little gesture spoke volumes about their helpful natures. We were then taken to our hotel by a representative of Thomas Cook.

The next day we went on a bus trip of the city and met the German family once again. Zurich was a picturesque city. We stopped at a vantage point on the river front. From this high position, we could enjoy a panoramic view of the city. It reminded me strongly of the scenic beauty of Shillong. Afterwards, we were shown the Congress Hall, The United Nations Hall, University Colleges, Schools, hospitals, different Polytechnics, the Agricultural College and the Science College. At one place, we were asked to get down from the bus and go inside a sprawling building. Inside, there was a huge swimming pool where some children were swimming. This sports complex was maintained by the Government. The centre of the pool was about 10 feet deep. We were told that the water was changed three times a day. People could use the pool by paying a nominal fee.

Zurich was the commercial hub of Switzerland. There were also many heritage sights in the city. We were shown churches which were built as early as the 11th and 12th centuries. We came back to the hotel at lunchtime and after a short rest went out again at 2.00 pm. This time we were taken to Italyburg from where we enjoyed the majestic sight of the Alps. We went there by electric train. The circuitous way led to a high viewing point surrounded by high fencing. Benches and chairs were placed for sightseers to relax and enjoy the magnificent view. There was a higher point which one could climb up to with a ladder to see a fuller view of the city and the river. Since it was a precarious climb, Dr. Das and I decided not to venture up there. We were happy to enjoy the spectacular sight from the lower area. It was the sunset hour. The combined beauty of the setting sun, the snow capped mountains and the winding river below took our breath away. Several electric trains plied on this route carrying passengers up and down the hilly terrain. We returned to the city at 5:15 pm. Zurich too had a very efficient public transport system.

IN GENEVA

We left for Geneva after two days in Zurich. The weather was glorious and the hilly landscape with rows of haystacks looked quaint and charming. Fields of crops were interspersed with meadows where flocks of cattle were grazing. The Alps towered over us almost touching the clouds. And on the foothills nestled attractive villages and towns. A person travelling with us told us that the journey from Zurich to Geneva was quite long. After a few stations the gentleman got ready to leave the train as his station was approaching. We had forgotten to ask him how much longer we would have to travel. But he came up to us on his own and told us that the station following his was Geneva. We were greatly touched by his concern.

On reaching Geneva, we found an employee of the hotel we were staying in waiting for us. This hotel was luxurious one. There were lifts to take us up to the higher floors. We were shown how to operate them. I noticed that most of the attendants in the hotel were women. This was a common feature in both the Swiss cities. Everyone was accorded a warm welcome on arrival in the lobby as well in the dining room. Even in the station, when I was waiting near our luggage while Dr. Das had gone to get some change, I had seen that whoever crossed me, would smile at me. At first, I found it a little strange about unknown people greeting me. But I soon realised that the Swiss people were accustomed to extending such little courtesies.

Following the pattern we had adhered to in the other cities visited, in Geneva too, we went to see the local sights by bus. On the first day, as the number of tourists were few, we had to wait for a long time for the bus to fill up. Geneva had a population of about 200,000, much less than Zurich. We were taken to see the United Nations Buildings which were very impressive as Geneva was a headquarter. The UN Labour Building had stone statues of the first few labour leaders placed in conspicuous positions. The house where the Belgian King had spent seven years was also a part of the tour sights. After that we were taken to see Calvin College which was the nucleus around which Geneva University developed. Museums, old cathedrals and the United Nations Red Cross Hall were next in our itinerary. We visited the Church founded by John Knox, the famous reformer. Even though centuries old, it was remarkably well preserved.

Our next stopover was at a place of unusual scenic beauty. We were taken to see the confluence of the two rivers - the Rhone and the Aar. The water of one was muddy, warm, with a hint of blue while the other was clear, cold and colourless. The two rivers converged at this particular point near Geneva.

Geneva, it seemed to me, had a mixed cultural heritage. When I asked our guide about it, he agreed with me. The city, the tour

guide informed us, was ruled by the Romans at one time and, after that, by the Germans. So landmarks celebrating both cultures were evident. Four languages were used in Geneva. They were Swiss, German, French and Italian, the last one being the least used.

We visited the museum in Geneva, and found that it was much smaller in size than the museums in London. The flow of visitors was also limited. When we were there, we saw only about three couples coming in. The next day, we took a bus trip again. Everyone was handed a road map to acquaint themselves with the route that was being followed. We noticed that even small children knew how to use a map. After the trip was over, we walked back to the hotel, taking the riverside road. There was a big boat unloading huge boulders into the river. The water was crystal clear and in the particular area where the rocks had been deposited, one could see through the water right up to the river bed. I realised that the rocks were instrumental in keeping the river water clear. We came back to the hotel, marvelling at the meticulous attention paid to details in these countries. That evening after dinner, we left for Paris by train.

IN PARIS

The overnight journey to Paris was an uncomfortable one as the train did not run smoothly. We reached the City of Dreams at 7.00 am. Once again, a person from Thomas Cook was there to take us to our hotel. We had breakfast and set out to see the sights of the city. One novel method I noticed in Paris was that coupons had to be bought at the hotel for using their taxis and these cars dropped us at the desired bus terminus. There we bought tickets for the bus trip and began our city tour. We visited the famous Opera House, a huge park spanning 2000 acres of land, cathedrals and the Presidential Palace. The Eiffel Tower was just as we had imagined it to be. Next on our list was Napoleon's house. The

mansion had many elaborate engravings and embellishments, all beautifully preserved.

After our morning's sight seeing was over, we were brought back by the bus to our starting point. We went back to the hotel for a short rest. During our morning's excursion, we had met a Bengali doctor. He accompanied us when we went out at 2.00 pm to visit the Palace of Versailles. The magnificent palace with its rich history filled us with awe from the moment we entered its portals. There was a huge stone statue of Louis XIV on horseback in the front courtyard. We relived the days of the French Revolution as the guide narrated the story of how the people of Paris had stormed into the palace to kill the Queen. The Swiss Guards had helped the Queen's attendants to smuggle her into the King's quarters.

The Palace grounds were extensive and consisted of three buildings with beautifully laid out gardens, lakes and shrubbery. There were lodgings for the King's courtiers within the palace walls. We were then taken to see the spot where the King, Queen and other Royalists were guillotined mercilessly during the Revolution. Statues of the royal family now lined the area. At night the entire palace grounds were illuminated with coloured lights and the statues silhouetted against the lights created a spectacular sight. We lingered on in this historical place for a long time and came back to our hotel at about 6.00 pm.

The next day, we took a tram ride to the famous Louvre Museum. There were lots of exquisite sculptures and paintings about which we had so far only heard and read. I noticed that a large number of the sculptures were nudes. The female figures were, however, dressed in what seemed like two piece outfits, a pleated skirt and a flowing cloth which strongly resembled an Assamese *sador*, all carved out of stone. Some had their heads covered. These dresses had no semblance to what is worn by European women today. Certain male statues such as the famous Greek poets, were clothed in a single piece of cloth wrapped round their bodies. Some were dressed in loose, flowing gowns and others in two piece outfits

similar to the women. I was struck by their resemblance to our Indian way of dressing. A few of the famous men from ancient times even had their long hair tied in a bun.

The Museum was impeccably maintained. The ambience created was so effective that while we looked at the paintings and the sculptures, we felt as if we were transported back in time.

There were a great number of people thronging into the museum. We saw rows of buses parked neatly in the front. After we finished our detailed tour, we came back to the hotel.

Paris had always been the cultural hub of the world and the night life of the city also provided a medley of entertainment. This aspect of Parisian life attracted a vast number of visitors to the city. The evenings were magical when the streets were lit up with red and blue lights and it seemed to me that there were more people out on the streets at night than during the day. People were seen to be enjoying themselves, all lively and merry. Voices resonated everywhere. I found this a marked contrast from the quietness of the London streets. In Paris, we could hear passers by shouting and talking in loud voices even after we retired for the night.

We found that eating out in Paris was very expensive and food was not plentiful. It was almost as if the ravages of the War lingered on to a certain extent. However, the Parisians, it seemed to me, preferred to have a good time rather than work hard for a livelihood.

When the time came for us to leave Paris, we were faced with a serious problem. In all the other cities we had visited, the employees of Thomas Cook had taken care of our travel arrangements and we had a hassle free time. But, in Paris, the person from the travel agency did not turn up on time. We waited for him till it was almost time for our train to leave. When there were only about twenty minutes left, we decided to take a taxi to the station. We followed our porter to the train, getting more and more worked up. There was a gentleman waiting nearby. He asked us whether we had tickets. After we showed him our tickets, he asked us whether

we had reservation tickets. When we replied in the negative, he told us to wait for a while, and disappeared. He came back soon with two reservation tickets for us, telling us that we would not be able to get good seats without them. He then introduced himself to us as a French Railways employee. Both of us were greatly impressed with his concern for two total strangers.

We travelled by train to Calais. From there, we had to take the ferry to Dover. The transition was made smoothly without any mishaps. The ferry crossing was smooth and uneventful and we landed in Dover safely. We, thereafter, took a train to London and were reunited with our children. After spending the last few days in London, we began our long journey back to India.