

# Eastern Eyes on Bernard Shaw

G.B.S. disliked travelling as much as Charlotte Shaw relished it. In December, 1932, Charlotte induced him to embark on a world cruise aboard the *Empress of Britain*. As with other cruises he had taken, this more lengthy one produced little pleasure for Shaw, who appeared to dislike both the ennui at sea and the guided tours on land. However early in the voyage he sat in a deck chair and wrote *Village Wooing*, dating it from the Sunda Strait, January, 1933.

Shaw spent much of his time in India and China, not all of it pleasantly. From Bombay, on 13 January, 1933, he wrote to Lady Astor of his predicaments as tourist and celebrity:

"We are alive, but that is all. We started tired to death, hoping for rest; but this ship keeps stopping in ports where the water is too filthy to bathe in and shooting us ashore for impossible excursions to see the insides of railway carriages, and to be let out, like little dogs, for a few minutes exercise and a glimpse of a temple or a hotel meal or a cobra-mongoose fight. We absolutely refused, and were roasted for a week at Luxor and are now roasting at Bombay for another week . . . . [A Begum] concentrated all the native nobility on me at a grand reception full of Nizamesses and Indian highnesses . . . I have been hung with flowers in the temples and drenched with rosewater and dabbed with vermilion in the houses; and the ship is infested with pilgrims to my shrine . . ."

In China he visited Shanghai and Hong Kong, in the Crown Colony as the guest of Sir Robert Ho Tung, who had a private temple in his home. Shaw remembered the temple and, when he was nearly ninety, introduced the setting into one of his last plays, *Buoyant Billions*.

## Bernard Shaw in Bombay

by Hiralal Amritlal Shah<sup>1</sup>

In January, 1933 the ocean liner *Empress of Britain* anchored in Bombay Harbor. Among the tourists on board, on a world cruise, were Mr. and Mrs. George Bernard Shaw.

The morning of the ship's arrival I received a telephone call from the secretary of Sir Prabhaskar Pattani, one of India's most outstanding administrators, soon about to become a member of the Indian delegation to the League of Nations. "Sir Pattani," the secretary stated, "writes from Bhavnagar that Mr. Bernard Shaw wishes to see the Jain Temples. It would be fine if some arrangements can be made." I undertook this as my personal responsibility.

The steamer was at sea some miles from the landing wharf, but was linked to land by a ferry service which plied at regular intervals from shore to ship and back. At about one p. m. Mr. and Mrs. Shaw debarked, to be greeted by Shri Hari Prasad and Shri Shantibhai, the two secretaries of Sir Pattani. They introduced me to the Shaws and then left them in my hands for the desired tour.

<sup>1</sup> Hiralal Amritlal Shah first published his reminiscences in the Gujarati language, in the fortnightly Bombay journal, *Prabuddha Jain*, on 15 November, 1950, just after Shaw's death. It is here adapted from his own English rendering of the original text.

The Shaws climbed into my French-manufactured *Delage*, a cream-coloured, six-seater open touring car, and my chauffeur drove us rather leisurely through the city, at times halting the car to view street scenes, until we finally came to the Pydhunie section of Bombay. Here was a huge Jain Temple dedicated to the deity Shri Godi Parshwanathji. The car stopped before it.

Since shoes and stockings had to be removed before entering the temple, Mrs. Shaw preferred to wait in the car while Mr. Shaw and I examined the interior. He closely and eagerly inspected everything to be seen. After visiting all parts of the temple we returned to the car. I then informed Mr. Shaw that there was another fine temple worth his visit, if he had time to include it in his itinerary. He was extremely willing, saying that he was glad to have the opportunity.

The organizers of the reception, unknown to the Shaws, had added to it an overambitious program of dramatic entertainment, including the honoured guests.

We proceeded to the Walkeshwar Hills to see the Babu's Jain Marble Temple, built on a hilltop. Mr. Shaw expressed delight at the panoramic view that spread before his eyes. Inside, in its sanctum, stood the huge central marble image of Tirthankara (Prophet), and Mr. Shaw was able to observe it at close range. I explained to him how the image showed the expressions of Yogi in *Dhyana* (meditation), seated cross-legged in *Padmasana* posture (that is, each leg resting on the other thigh, the palms of the hands opened out and resting one on the other in the center, above the legs; the gaze of the eyes fixed on the tip of the nose; the body remaining perfectly erect and in a sitting position, while controlling the breath).

Around the central shrine, in the surrounding walls, in individual niches, there were numerous small images of various gods and goddesses. Mr. Shaw then directed his attention to the details of these images and observed them intensely, putting several queries to me. I explained to him the different characteristics of these images and of such other types as the God "Harina Naigameshi," etc. "When the people see these sculptured images," he asked, "do they accept them, in their beliefs and in their thoughts, conceived as such, in concrete form and shape?" I affirmed this.

After concluding this visit, Mr. Shaw told me about the next item in his itinerary and invited me to keep him company there, a red-painted bungalow with a crescent mark on the gates. The Shaw couple were to get a reception there, sponsored by the "Three Arts Circle." Chief among its sponsors was a lady called Atiya Begum. When we arrived, music and dances. Enthusiastically, they took us to the inner hall, switched we were taken to the terrace at the rear of the house, which commanded a fine view of Bombay and its sea-face. Here tea, drinks, and light refreshments were set out on tables, and everyone partook while mingling with off the lights, and let the entertainment begin. It did not take long before I saw that Mr. Shaw had taken out his pocket watch. It was a dull affair, a jumble which reached a low grade in artistic taste and was exceeding both the time limitations and the patience of the guests. The more the show dragged along, the more Mr. Shaw became restive. He whispered to me that it was 4:30 p. m., and that he wanted to leave for his ship by the early evening ferry.

He stood up and told one of his hosts that his time was up and that he had to go, but the host took it rather lightly, assuming that, out of courtesy, his guest would remain. But Mr Shaw made straight for the portico, walking fast, his tall figure taking long strides. We had to run after him.

We were all rather silent in the car at first, until Mr. Shaw remarked, "There was nothing in that show. Such things and such people are met at every port in every country. My time has been wasted." Indeed, the entertainment did no justice to Indian culture. On the way in the car, Mr. Salivateeswaran, a journalist who represented *The Daily Hindu of Madras* and several foreign papers, put several questions to Mr. Shaw. In reply to one of them he observed, "I have no faith in the parliamentary system of government. Look at Mussolini. He speaks what he means and what is being said is carried out. There is no secondary sense to be drawn out from what he says . . ." As I understood Mr. Shaw then, divergence between utterance and practice in politics and government was repugnant to him.

After bringing the Shaw couple to the ferry at the wharf we begged our leave. "What of the car charges?" Mr. Shaw asked, opening his purse and insisting on making payment. I told him then that the car and chauffeur were mine: there was no question of charges. We then parted company.

Reaching home and ruminating over the day's events, I felt sorry that Mr. Shaw had no opportunity to see the best of Indian religion and art, and determined to show to him a sample of the best of both. My fine collection of photographs, I thought, would wipe away the unfortunate trials he had experienced. Next forenoon I took two friends and my son and daughter to the boat-ferry. Reaching the boat, we were told by an officer that Mr. Shaw only received visitors by appointment. We had none. Learning his room number, I took my portfolio and searched for his cabin. When I found it I gave two strokes on the door and a voice answered, "Come in."

I found Mr. and Mrs. Shaw relaxing on their beds. They were struck with wonder at seeing me, having figured that some attendant of the boat had been at the door. With a single jerk, the straight, tall figure of Mr. Shaw came out of bed — like a stiff cane — and stood upright. Very politely, he told me, "Please excuse me — I am not dressed."

"I have with me," I told him, "some materials worth your gaze, and my zeal to show them to you has brought me down here." With these words, I opened my portfolio. Seeing its contents, he instantly told me to wait with my party on the deck above for about fifteen minutes.

For an hour and a half, Mr. Shaw looked over the photographs intently, aided in figuring out the details of architecture, sculpture and costume by a magnifying glass I had brought with me. He was disappointed to learn that there were such wonderful temple arts and sculptures nearby, for it was too late to include in his itinerary beautiful spots like the Delwada Temples on Mount Abu. For more than an hour afterwards, Mr. Shaw chatted with our party on deck. We then came to know that he was a strict vegetarian, partaking mostly of fruits and vegetables. I had always been curious as to how such a Westerner would look in person — skin, colour, glow, demeanor. I admired Mr. Shaw's agility, exuberance and splendid health at age seventy-seven. His eyes twinkled and he lacked neither interest nor curiosity. To see him was one of the great pleasures and memories of my life.