

An excerpt from

**CROSSINGS AT BENARAS JUNCTION**  
**A Play in Three or Four Acts**

**By Kaushik Basu**

**Act IV**

*Bustling platform in New Delhi Railway station. Familiar sounds: “chai garam, chai garam, ...”; “badhia amrood”; .... In the background is the train, with two compartments in view—the right one (which I will call compartment 1) is in full view and the left one (comp. 2) is partial. Once the train starts, the platform scene will vanish, and the two compartments is the view that the audience will see. Then on, the action will shift between the two compartments and the director may like to have some arrangement for shifting the two compartments slightly, so as to bring more centre-stage the compartment which is in focus.*

*Eventually the following people will enter the train and occupy the seats in the train as follows: Compartment 1, right to left: Bentley, Jenny, Ghosh, Mrs. Trehan, Mr. Trehan, Siddharth. Compartment 2, right to left: Siddharth (after the TC asks him to move), Kavita. Gautam will be initially on the bunk in compartment 1 but will move later to the bunk in comp 2.*

*People are jostling on the platform; coolies are getting in and out of the train. Lachhu comes into view with a huge placard, which reads **G A T T**, and below it, in parenthesis, (**formerly W T O**). He looks around and then goes off stage from the left. Kavita enters, self-conscious about her crutches. Lachhu is with her and helps her to her seat. Mr. Ghosh, Gautam and Jenny have also entered the platform, entered the train and taken their seats. Gautam climbs onto the bunk.*

GHOSH. Good evening.

JENNY. *(smiles)* Good evening.

GHOSH. Am I right in presuming that your good-self is a tourist going to Benaras?

JENNY. You guessed right.

GHOSH. You are very young. Are you traveling alone or with mother father?

JENNY. *(giggles)* I am not alone. We are a large group of Americans and Europeans, taking this wonderful tour organized by Ganga Travel and Tours.

GHOSH. You are, I should say, keenly interested in Indian history?

JENNY. I am. But even apart from history, India is such a wonderful country, full of lovely people. It gives one a sense of peace that one cannot find anywhere else, certainly not in New York. ... I suppose I have come to India to discover myself.

GHOSH. (*laughs appreciatively*). Discover Mysore? You are interested in Tippoo Sultan's life? But then you have to go to South India. The best way is to go to Bangalore and take a bus.

JENNY. What I mean is I want to find my soul. In America you have your body, even your mind, but all too often we forget about our soul. They say you can always find your soul in Benaras.

*From the left side of the platform enter Mr. and Mrs. Trehan, coolies in tow (there can also be some young relatives who have come to help them board the train and will leave before the train starts). (Mr.) Trehan is limping and Mrs. Trehan seems to be finding this funny.*

TREHAN. Aare baba you may laugh as much as you want. The first thing I will search for on reaching Benaras is for sole.

*Takes off his left shoe and examines the sole, or rather its absence.*

They charge so much money for shoes these days and the sole comes off on the first day. Laugh, laugh. You have never walked with shoe with no sole.

*They clamber into the train and are settling into their seats. The earlier conversation occurred at a distance where Jenny could not have heard him.*

JENNY. (*to Ghosh*) In the west people behave as if the soul does not matter.

*The word 'soul' catches Trehan's attention.*

TREHAN. They are fools I tell you. Total nincompoops. Sole is the most important thing.

JENNY. (*nods sweetly*) This is what I like about you Indians, you realize what is truly important in life.

TREHAN. For smooth transportation through life, I tell you, there is nothing as important as a good sole.

JENNY. Exactly. I was telling this gentleman ...

GHOSH. Ghosh. My name is Ghosh.

JENNY. I was telling Mr. Gosh that I am going to Benaras to find my soul.

TREHAN. (*shakes hands with Jenny in appreciation*) I will not go so far as to say I am going to Benaras with the only purpose of finding a sole; but *on* reaching Benaras the first thing I will do is certainly to buy a sole.

JENNY. (*laughs*) You will *buy* a sole?

TREHAN. Yes. Some mochi may give it to you free but I would not trust the quality. Too many people are doing the shoddy work in India.

MRS. TREHAN. Kamaal kar diya. Ek to atman ke baare me baat kar rahi hai, ek joota ke.