



ALL ALONE IN THE CINEMA

Wednesday, March 29, 2017 – from Jagdalpur to Visakapathnam

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When I look at old photographs, a set of dysfunctional cells in my head, which dislike conforming to the rules of reality, end up disorienting me.

The peculiarities of camera technology of a particular epoch in conjunction with the passage of time naturally cause photographs to become slightly blurred, their outlines to become hazy, their colours to fade or turn gaudy. And no matter how natural this process seems to me, I am always swamped by the utterly illogical feeling that these photos were not created by my world, that those days must have indeed been like these pictures: fuzzy, a tad shadowy, grainy, sepia-tone, ilfochrome.

Astonishingly, this defective logic manifests in me not only when I look at photos shot before my time, but also snapshots from my childhood

and youth. Didn't my first love actually have a slightly porous skin? Wasn't my bonanza bike this venomous green? Wasn't my grandmother always a bit out of focus? And her house de facto black-and-white?

The appearance of the air-conditioned compartment of the train I'm taking from Jagdalpur to Vishakapatnam is so yellowed, scratched and tarnished that it looks right out of a vintage photograph. This look is enhanced by the rounded corners edged with aluminum profiles that make the windows look like the images in an old-fashioned photo album decorated with a black, embossed flower tendril or gilt letter. Furthermore, it is dark in my compartment as only the emergency lighting is functioning. I'm also all alone – a rare feat on an Indian Railway train. It is only



now that I realise how very odd that is; since the train set out I have not seen any ticket conductor or other passengers; nor heard the coffee- or chai-wallah, water or vada sellers, who otherwise constantly call through the vestibules. Can it be that I have accidentally boarded a part of the train that is actually being pulled out of service through the countryside?

I am unsurprised by the experience of sitting all on my own in this gloomy cinema evokes feelings akin to those that vintage photographs do. Isn't the

reality, the true picture of India, which I have been travelling through for many weeks now, not always brownish, dusty, and slightly distorted?

In an hour I will be in Visakapathnam. At the latest. Then the world will automatically find its way back to its right colours, and my head will have to apologise for its capricious somersaults. And, if not? What would I be in such a yellowed reality, in sepia tone? And who?

Translated from German by Gunvanthi Balaram.