

India: "The one land all men desire to see"

Mark Twain's views of India from *Following the Equator*

Compiled by
Ramesh Khanna, MD

"This is indeed India! The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendor and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of a hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods, cradle of the human race birth place of human speech, mother of history, grand mother of legend,

to pay his growing debt. The lecture tour provided him some money, while a look at the world provided him with the material for *Following the Equator*, Twain's final travel book. A deft humorist, masterful satirist, great novelist, memorable travel writer and gifted essayist, Twain went on to become one of America's most popular writers.

first civilization; she had the first accumulation of material wealth; she was populous with deep thinkers and subtle intellects; she had mines, and woods, and a fruitful soil. It would seem as if she should have kept the lead, and should be today not the meek dependent of an alien master, but mistress of the world, and delivering law and command to every tribe and nation in it. But, in truth, there was never any possibility of such supremacy for her. If there had been but one India and one language - but there were eighty of them! Where there are eighty nations and several hundred governments, fighting and quarreling

HIGH TIMES IN THE CAPITAL OF THE DECCAN.
"MARK TWAIN"
"AT HOME"
POONA GYMKHANA.
WEDNESDAY, 29TH JANUARY
PLAN OF HOUSE: PHILLIPS & CO., LD.

In India

Mark Twain

On India

great-grandmother of tradition, whose yesterdays bear date with the mouldering antiquities of the rest of the nations - the one sole country under the sun that is endowed with an imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for lettered and ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bond and free, the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the globe combined."

These are the words of Mark Twain, who, along with his wife Olivia and their daughter Clara, visited India in 1896 during a round-the-world lecture tour. For several years, Twain had undergone a series of financial setbacks. He was forced to embark on a world-wide lecture tour to raise money

On India

"There is only one India! It is the only country that has a monopoly of grand and imposing specialities. When another country has a remarkable thing, it cannot have it all to itself; some other country has a duplicate. But India - that is different. Its marvels are its own; the patents cannot be infringed; imitations are not always possible. And think of the size of them, the majesty of them, the weird and outlandish character of the most of them!

"It takes eighty nations, speaking eighty languages, to people her, and they number three hundred million.

"India had the start of the whole world in the beginning of things. She had the

must be the common business of life; unity of purpose and policy are impossible; out of such elements supremacy in the world cannot come."

In India

On arrival in Bombay on January 20, 1896, Twain wrote, "A bewitching place, a bewildering place, an enchanting place ..." In retrospect a year later, while working on the book "Following the Equator," he wrote, "even now, after the lapse of a year, the delirium (of) those days in Bombay has not left me, and I hope never will."

On visit to Benares, Twain exclaimed, "Yes, the city of Benares is in effect just a big church, a religious hive whose very cell is a temple, a shrine or a mosque; and whose every conceiv-