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TRAIN TO KASHMIR
A SCENIC ODYSSEY

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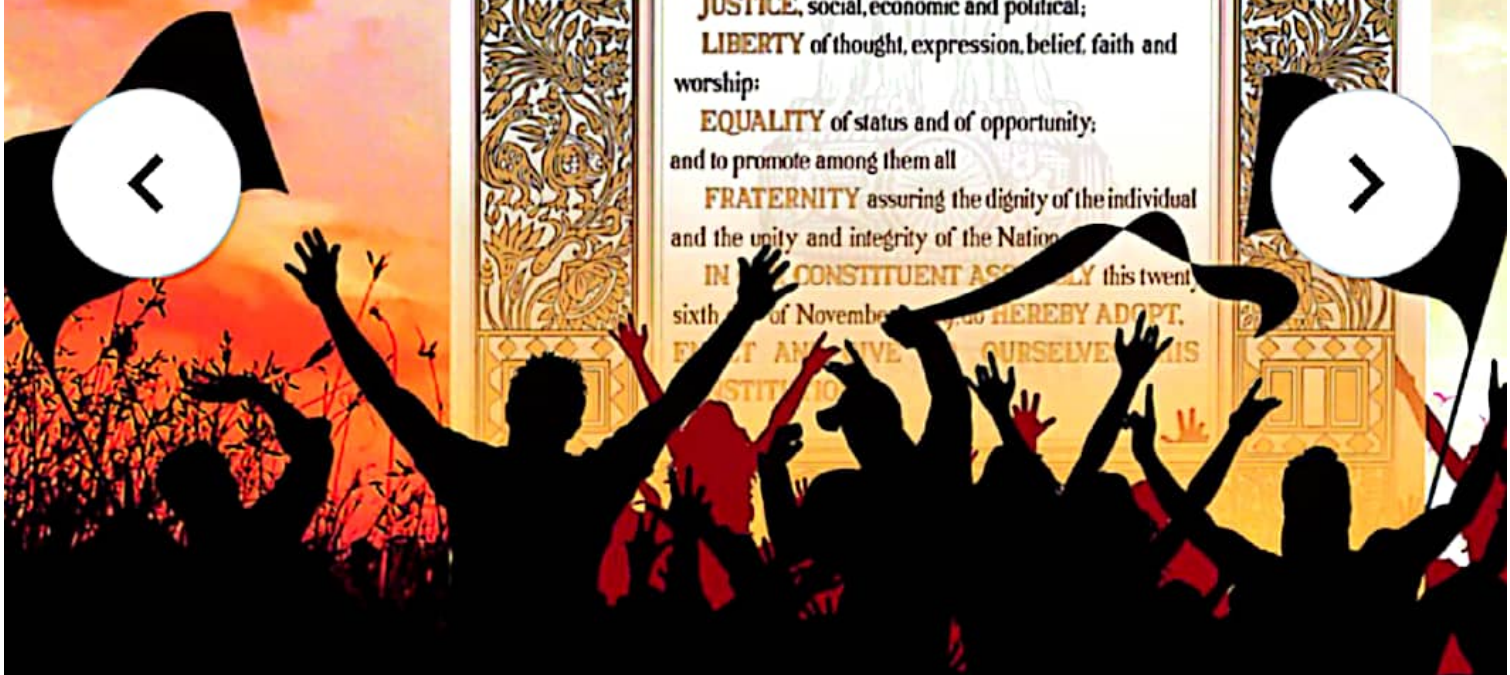
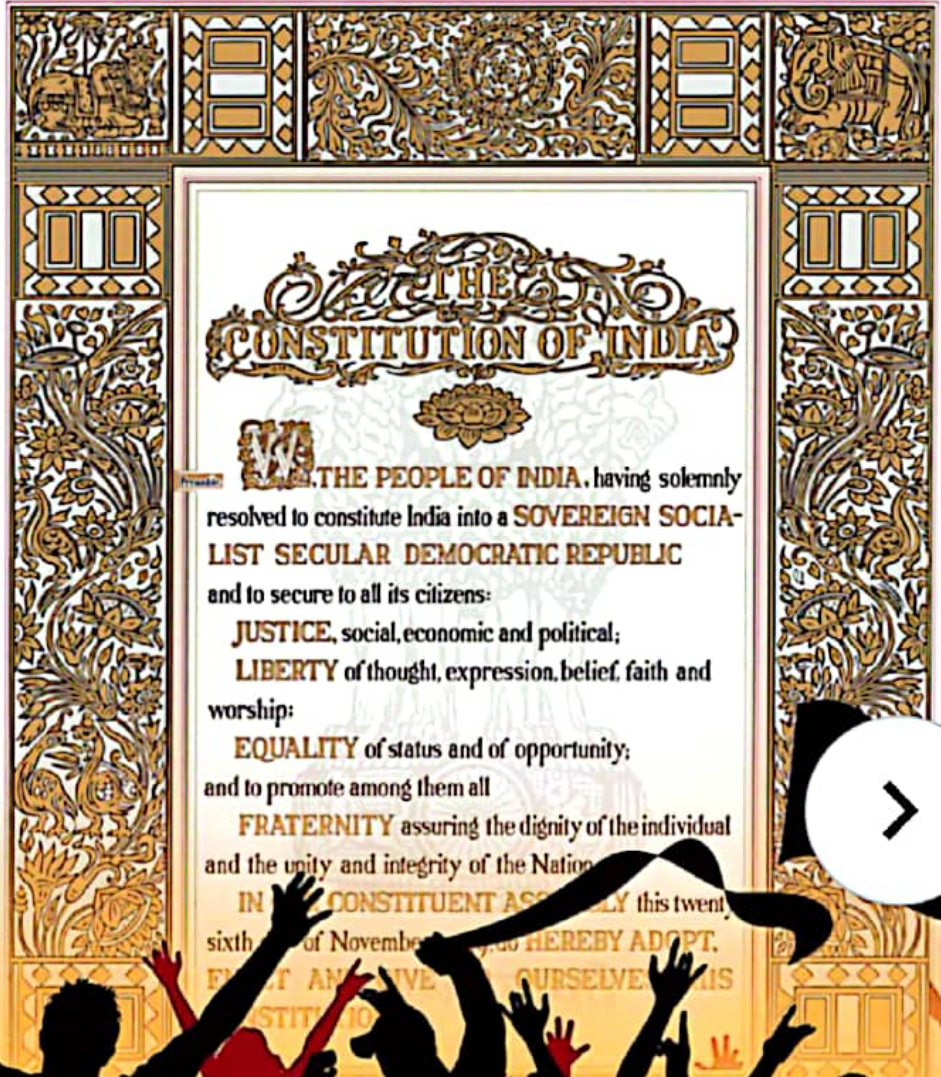
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One, two, buckle my shoe!

“Darling,” I said to my life companion of more years than I care to remember, “Do you think there is any correlation between pain in the feet and attending prayer meetings?”

“You really are a stupid old man!” said the light of my life. “Can’t you think of anything more bizarre so late at night?”

I kept quiet. If the wife calls you a stupid old man, it is futile to expect sympathy. But my feet had been killing me ever since I attended the prayer meeting that evening. After the missus switched the lights off, I tentatively massaged my toes. Next morning, my feet started hurting almost as if I had slipped my shoes on.

In my slim and trim days, I had always believed that a civilised person should never wear anything other than Oxfords, with five eyelets for laces. Unfortunately, time, a bad back and doctor’s advice not to bend forwards destroy such arrogant beliefs. Perforce, I have had to change from Oxfords to moccasins, which I slip into easily without needing to bend down to tie laces. This is just as well because, with my waistline, I can’t see my feet no matter how hard I try.

The pain in my toes increased after breakfast, so I phoned my doctor.

“Are the shoes new?” he asked.

“Yes, they are,” I said, “But I’ve been wearing them now for more than a week without any problems.” The doc asked me to check if there was any swelling in my feet. “Some of your BP medication can do that, you know.”

I ponderously sank into a chair and stretched my legs out. As far as I could make out, there was no swelling, but I certainly needed a pedicure. Unthinkingly, I said to the doctor, “My feet are not swollen, but I

need a pedicure.”

“What? What did you say?”

“Oh, nothing doc.”

For the rest of the day, I limped around, but by evening the pain was worse. At dinner, I conversationally told the missus that I was probably dying in instalments, starting with the toes, but her attention was focused on a gravy stain on the tablecloth. Wives are like that—always more concerned about damned spots than husbands. (Ask Macbeth!)

Without further complaint, I went to bed with my painful feet. As I tossed and turned sleeplessly, I reasoned that either my feet were swelling or the shoes were shrinking. The swelling had been ruled out, ergo the shoes must be shrinking! I remembered that the salesman had said that expensive leather shoes gradually ‘grow’ to fit better. I decided to speed up the process, so at about two in the morning, I got up, wore the moccasins and crawled back into bed. In the morning, the missus saw the muddy streaks on the sheets and screamed at me nonstop for an hour. Wives are like that—always more concerned about dirty linen than husbands. (Ask Macbeth!)

I then turned to the two acknowledged ‘Vishwa Gurus’—Google and YouTube! I had no idea there was a global tight-shoe epidemic! Why else would there be so many videos demonstrating remedies for shoe enlargement? The commonest was something called a ‘shoe-stretcher,’ but it cost much more than my moccasins. I tried other prescriptions, including polishing with peanut butter, applying quinoa paste and spraying cider vinegar, touted to be an all-purpose nostrum. I hung the shoes on a Neem tree. I left them out in the moonlight. I left them

