

The hotel and the shrine

by Suchita Malik

IT happened to be my first visit to Japan, the much acclaimed land of the rising sun, and I got an opportunity to discover the Tokyo town on my own. I visited a couple of tourist spots, including the Asakusa temple, a much acclaimed Shinto shrine followed by a shopping spree in the narrow lane almost leading to and far from it.

Richer by a couple of buys and poorer by thousands of Yens, I came back to the hotel and chose to wait for my husband in the lobby itself enjoying the vibrant ambience of the place.

I waited for him for about an hour hoping that he would be back after finishing with his official engagements and then decided to retire to my room for a catnap.

My peaceful sleep was soon dis-

turbed by a loud hankering bell and I found my husband asking me to get up and get ready for an evening excursion, if I so wanted. As I prepared to get ready, I looked for my handbag but could not locate it anywhere. A hurried recalling of my itinerary led me to believe that the clutch-bag was probably left behind in the lobby itself where I had waited not long ago. A quick walk down the elevator and I was back in the lobby looking desperately for my lost treasure and looking askance at people around. The fruitless search ended in a casual query at the reception counter as the last resort.

Lo and behold! The polite hosts suddenly came into devilish activity and soon located the guard in charge of that corridor who, in turn, quietly and graciously produced the handbag from

behind a counter and that too neatly wrapped in a polythene cover and asked me to check the contents promptly. A careful search through the interior of the purse testified the presence of the all-important passport as well as the trinkets of the travel jewellery, not to talk of the over-precious yens.

All this, and that too with the most humble smile, the half-bent posture and a determined resolve not to accept any reward except a simple "thank you". I was greatly taken in by the sheer honesty and strength of character of the "nationalistic" hosts while being acutely conscious of our own lack of it somewhere in our hearts.

The next couple of days saw us saunter through some of the most scenic places around till we came to the

last leg of our visit to the most spectacular Japanese shrine in Kyoto where we were expected to take off our shoes at the entrance. As we did so most reverently, our guide politely asked us to take a polythene bag from the nearby box, put our shoes into it and carry it along as we moved through the shrine. Our baffled look did not take her long to explain to us the fear of a theft of shoes.

As I burst into laughter, it was only my husband who could understand the irony behind the enigma of the hotel and the shrine. This time, it was for the guide to give us a baffled look in a bemused manner. We had a hard time explaining to her the weirdest of the situations. "The hotel and the shrine" will remain embedded in my memory for a long time, I suppose. ■