

Diary: India 1996

I am starting to write this 9.30 in the evening of Sunday 24th. I had intended writing very briefly just as a reminder to myself but I realise that Libby will at least dutifully wade through it (as well as patiently listen to the verbal version) and if I write it well enough Hugh will read it with his marmite.

It never seems real that I am going away from Libby and the boys for weeks until I am in the taxi going up the road and then I really wish that I was not leaving. Of course now that I am such a distance away I think of them all of the time. I enjoyed my drive up with Dean and we made it in record time. I had enough time to do some shopping for presents (chocolate mainly) and also to have dinner of sausage and mash. A good decision, so that I did not need to eat on the plane. Although there were no window seats when I checked in, one became available right at the back of the plane and I had the luxury of having 2 empty seats beside me so I had a good sleep. Arrived over Tamil Nadu which was looking rather wet - obviously had huge amounts of rain. Very overcast in Madras. The name has now been changed to the Indian name of Chennai. My case was almost the last to appear so I was met by two agitated friends. One was a lecturer from the biochemistry Dept (Subramanian), and Surya who had come to Madras that morning by the 6 O'clock express. Prof Govindasami (who I was keen to see) was not available during my time in Madras. The son of the Vice chancellor had been murdered by another student and he was involved in the investigation. Then my second morning in Madras, a professor had visited the VC and become so upset that he had a heart attack and died. Prof Govind. Was then responsible for organising the funeral. We were put in Guindy campus on the airport side of Madras. As I had guessed when hinting to them that this place would be appropriate, it was very much quieter than the beach guest house which is on one of the main roads. Went with S by auto rickshaw through the rush hour in the rain to the Central station on the other side of Madras in order to buy rail tickets for going to Tirupati on Saturday. It was difficult this visit to be quite as sentimental as usual on returning to India because of the mess mud and muddle of India in the rain. The auto had no windscreen wiper which meant that we had a driver hanging out of the side all the time to see or to wipe the windscreen with a dirty hanky or to examine the exhaust. I later realised that this was merely to spit in the road. Beside the usual potholes to avoid we had the extra problem of the huge puddles and occasional wells. We passed the beach guest house which looked even more run down than before and I was glad to have avoided it. We booked our tickets air conditioned 1st class for 134 rupees (£2.50) for about one hundred miles. We then went to the Savera for dinner. This was the 4 star hotel I stayed at on my second visit 12 years ago. As seems to be the case with many big hotels they are losing their individuality and instead of regional restaurants they have international restaurants often with buffets where you mix Chinese Indian and Indonesian. We had the usual paneer (very soft cheese lumps) in very hot sauce and fried rice. I asked for one beer open and the other to take away; this was not usual and the waiter slithered behind the table with the beer in a brown paper bag and slipped it under my seat. The auto driver failed to find the guest house of the Anna University although he said it was just down the road. This led us to walk in dark in the rain and puddles for 30 minutes all around the huge campus following incompetent directions from people huddled in doorways or wrapped in polythene bags. We could not even chat to keep our spirits up because the flooded parts were filled to the brim with frogs croaking. We had to shout to be heard when we asked the way. Slept very well. I was of course pleased that Surya had come to meet me. Although not necessary, in the absence of Govindasamy, it was much easier having him to help. Breakfast was delivered to the room. We had ordered this the night before not knowing that the dining hall was closed. They send a boy out to get the food. My 'bread omelette was 4 slices of cold omelette wrapped around 4 slightly sweet slices of bread. Surya had puris. It was all tied up in little newspaper bundles with thin string. Later I asked if the dining hall was open at lunchtime and was pleased to hear that it is. When I tried to explain that we would be in to lunch it appeared that there was a mysterious problem. Eventually the embarrassed servant explained to me:- "you see, Sir, dining hall is open but no food is being provided". We had been told that Govind would come in the morning but he did not, so at 12 noon we drove in an autorickshaw to the long main shopping road (Anna Salai) and walked about in the muddy puddles, tripping over piles of bricks,

paving stones, sand, banana skins, wet paper bundles and many less pleasant things. Fortunately no rain. Traffic much worse than I remember. After half an hour we gave in and went for lunch to the luxurious Connemara hotel where the pianist was still playing the same selection of music in the restaurant as last year - every third piece was either 'abide with me' or 'Danny boy' with the same wrong note in it. Went back to guest house about 3 o'clock and I slept while S played Prince of Persia on computer. Subramanian then appeared and explained why Prof. Govindasamy had not turned up. He then advised us where there was a good fairly cheap restaurant and Surya invited him to join us which he was very pleased to do. Next morning (Saturday) we tried to go for a stroll around the campus but the rain drove us back in. The frogs were quiet but hopping all over the paths. Subramanian brought us an auto to take us to the station. We stopped on the way to have fried rice for lunch in a place recommended by the auto driver - he joined us (the usual thing apparently) in a small hotel I had noticed while sitting in a traffic jam on Thursday evening; the hotel was called The Traffic Jam Hotel. The station was the usual noisy smelly (fish) confusion. We could see our train at the end of a platform but to get to it we had to climb over the mail bags that it had unloaded carelessly and to fight against the trainload of passengers who had just got off. The rain occasionally blew in pleasant cool gusts across the platform. By the time we found our seats I had a raging headache which stayed for the whole of the 4 hour journey. It is about the same distance as Southampton is from London but takes nearly 4 times as long. I finished my first book, so have decided to ration myself a bit so that I do not run out. Tirupati station was worse than Madras. I felt no nostalgia about coming back. It was dark and very wet and I wanted my mum. Fortunately Surya pulled my big case, leaving me with the 3 smaller ones. I estimated that at any time I was in personal contact with at least 7 other people - usually 2 going the same direction, 3 going the opposite way, 2 standing still and 1 sitting on the floor getting crushed. This was merely horrible until I realised that all the ones on the floor all over the station were beggars - usually very old or who had had leprosy. Surya fought successfully for a rickshaw in the pouring rain but after the big bag was loaded in it there was only room for 2 legs - one each, the others being draped over the case or hanging out. The centre of Tirupati was mainly under water or mud so we had a terrible journey with my head screaming at me to stop. When we arrived at the guest house they said that they were not expecting me - a nice welcome. When I showed them the vice chancellor's letter they were embarrassed and said that it had not been confirmed. I think this was because they had failed to put me in a good room. I have the smallest ground floor room nearest to the road and with no windows to see out of. The cupboard had an old wasps nest in it and the floor was covered in sandy dirt. The frames for the mosquito nets were up with rather grey nets like fishing nets hung up to dry. We had a typical guest house dinner but with chapatis (they are very proud that they can cook these). The cooks both knew that I was expected so I will probably never know what the problem was with the chief steward. Three aspirins cured my headache and I felt happy to have arrived. As soon as Surya left to go home there was a knock on the door and the fat lady cook was standing there grinning at me and out from behind her jumped my small 'dummy' security man who hugged me like Hugh so I really felt welcome. He was so excited that I had sent the photos of us last year. He is now married but he still only looks 16. I gave him a present of the smallest maglite torch - less than 2 inches (5cm) long to replace his huge one that does not work. He then looked through the batch of family photos I brought with me saying what wonderful sons I have and my wife is beautiful lady (all true I tell him). Before I could get to sleep 3 other servants I recognized from last year arrived with various excuses to come and say hallo - as none of them speaks English we just stand there grinning and shaking hands. Before he left to go home I told Surya that I would be going to the church the next day (Sunday) to see Frances Kiran Kumar and his family. I thought that this might mean a lot of wandering about in the rain but there was no problem. After sleeping very well I was woken by a gecko dropping down onto the bed beside me. He didn't stay long. Surya then called to say that he had (very kindly) gone the previous night to Kiran's house to tell him I was in Tirupati. He then left and 20 minutes later, after puris for breakfast, Kiran arrived just as it started to pour with rain. There is no way of getting transport without a 10 minute walk so we missed church and decided we would go in the evening. Had a nice long chat with Kiran and listened to some music; I cannot say here what the music was because I have heard that Father Christmas plans to put

the same music in the stocking of Hugh Richard Anthony who may be reading this. Kiran loved it and is planning to use it on the church amplifier at Christmas time [When Surya heard it he giggled and said "I think you make joke sir; this is circus music"]. As always, I enjoyed showing him all the family pictures - mainly of our holiday mountains etc. Sun came out later so before lunch we went for my first walk in the countryside - out to the agricultural college. Because I had told him that to see birds it is best to be alone, he pointed out every bird he saw. These were all the usual ones (doves, bulbuls, crows, kites, sunbirds, babblers, bee eaters). As I was looking through binoculars at a sunbird (like a hummingbird with a long curved beak for getting at nectar), Kiran called out "stand still Chris, be quiet". I then heard a rustling slithering sound just above my head and there was the biggest snake I have ever seen in the wild moving up a branch a few feet away. It was about 4cm diameter, 1.2 metres long, and very poisonous. I was told that they are safe if they are not frightened so I now go round looking as snake-friendly as I can. It has worked so far. After lunch Kiran listened to tapes - on Surya's Walkman which he has lent me, while I slept like an aged parent for an hour. As I said, I had intended going to church with Kiran in the evening but he then said that he went to the short (2 hour) service in the morning in the church that is like Highfield, and then to the Catholic church in the evening which goes on for 3 hours and includes two 50 minute sermons in Telugu language. He went alone that evening. As I had told the cook that I would go out for dinner (so she could take evening off) I walked down the town for dinner. They have decided to make the road to town into a national highway which means that the central government will pay for it to be widened and good lights to be provided. I doubt, however, if they will pay the goats, cows, buffalo and elephants, tractors, bullock carts, and cycle rickshaws to find another route. It is well on its way to being finished and is already much safer. They have taken down the big arch that said welcome to Tirupati on it. After a stroll around the cricket ground, fielding the occasional (soft) ball and explaining that I do not play cricket, I allowed a group of 13 year olds to take me through the muddy town. One held my hand as if I was blind and geriatric while the other two competed with each other to find the driest route. One of them seemed to favour routes that involved climbing over rubbish piles (mainly soggy cardboard, banana skins and coconut husks usually guarded by a few pigs or a thin white cow whose only food seems to be the occasional heap of rubbish. I then slithered down the muddy Nethaji road to Surya's to confirm that I would be able to visit on Tuesday evening when his father would be home. I should have guessed that I would not be allowed to leave, his sister making me vegetable fried rice. She continues to look very beautiful and is probably the most intelligent of the family (I have written this to annoy Surya in case he reads this). After about 10 minutes Raja arrived to ask when I would be coming to Tirupati. He is a friend of Surya who is about my mum's height, very thin, and wants to be a wrestler - for which he needs to be at least as tall as me and weigh as much as two Phil Hands. When 3 more of Surya's friends arrived he decided there was no more room on the bed - there are no chairs in the room where we were listening to music (Michael Jackson) so we left, Surya with his friends and Raja to walk me back to the guest house and to look at family photos.

Monday started with S arriving with a paper with the good news that the weather was due to improve slightly. While I went and had puris for breakfast he revised his notes for his computer course using my lap top. It is odd eating breakfast consisting of slightly crisp inflated chapatis with a sort of spicy vegetable soup (puris), but it beats day after day of 'bread omelette'. At about ten o'clock I went off to hunt for work. Just before reaching the biochemistry department (in a new one-story building) I met one of the girls doing her PhD in the Department. She told me the department knew I was coming (a relief) and that 'I was awaited with eagerness'. I don't get that in Southampton. As usual, Dr Parthasarathy was sitting alone at an empty desk in an empty room being head of department. We chatted for a time then agreed to meet at 11 o'clock to sort out my programme. I then walked into Tirupati - much further than I expected - through the University grounds. These were all much greener than previously, due to the heavy rains. I went to call on Chandrasekhar (Prof. Venkaiah's 24 year old son) who is now a director of a private college that teaches computing. I was shown to his office by two men in black skirts and painted faces with wild beards and hair that had not been combed for weeks. They looked frightening but were only followers of the god Ayappa. He was keen to explain all about his work but I had to get back so he gave me a lift on his scooter. He suggests I should call and visit

again which of course I shall do. I met lazy Parthasarathy returning from his lecture. When we reached his office he called a secretary from the other end of the corridor and handed him his keys so that he could open the door for him. We wasted more time chatting aimlessly than I walked home for lunch. I spent exactly one hour with my Swiss army knife (an invaluable gift from my dear wife) undoing each stitch of my green trousers that held the uncomfortable patches on the knees. Trousers now perfectly comfortable but I felt half blind from the struggle to see the tiny stitches. At 2.30 arrived to make my programme with all 4 staff. We sat in the same empty room which echoes better than a bathroom while they all shouted at each other. After half an hour they concluded that I should do exactly as I had done last year (the obvious suggestion).

I have just returned from a crazy evening at Raja's house. He had been very keen for me to visit - especially to meet some of his friends and his family. Fortunately, Surya had decided that I would be unable to find the house and so had come to take me there. He was absolutely right. It seems that the heavy rains have not only wrecked the road surfaces, making huge potholes (like world war I shell holes full of mud and water) but also the underground drainage system has been wrecked. We went by auto rickshaw (little yellow 3-wheeler). I have decided I want to drive one when I grow up. Many of the narrow roads were impassable so we had to turn round and find alternative routes which were usually worse. The ride that usually takes 15 minutes took nearly 40 minutes and was great fun once I had decided that leaping into muddy shell holes to push the autorickshaw could be fun. At Raja's house we met his sister and mother (busy cooking) and went up on to the roof to eat kulfi ice cream and listen to Michael Jackson again (fortunately the roof was flat). Then down into the house to do the real business of the evening. Two of Raja's neighbours (16-17 yr old students) came in to meet me but neither of the boys could speak much English so I entertained them by tuning Raja's guitar for him. The boys' sisters then appeared. I had been told that they dearly wanted to meet his English friend and had many questions. They arrived and sat shyly silent on the end of the bed while I sat in a rocking chair. We got on better after I sent the boys back to the roof and we became accustomed to our odd accents. They all want to know about hobbies (mine and also Clive's and Hugh's); I suppose it is assumed that Libby's hobby is looking after us. So I have to explain by brilliant drawings what cellos, violins, kayaks and lego look like. We then ate rice and curried vegs before a ride home by the easy main road route, during which Surya explained that the whole purpose of the evening had been to get one of the girls that Raja likes into his house so he could talk to her. To do this he had to invite her 2 girl friends because they had brothers and it was OK to invite them but not the sisters. Once the boys had accepted the invitation the sisters could then be allowed to join in. The plan seems to have been satisfactory and the girls had left before Raja's father (a police chief) came home from work. His English is not good but he was politely struggling to talk to me when Surya suddenly remembered that I had some urgent shopping to do in the town bazaar; this was news to me but it was merely a plan to escape and let him have his dinner in peace. So here I am all ready to start work tomorrow. It is disappointing that I have hardly seen any sun and my accommodation is a bit too simple but as is probably obvious from what I have written that I am having a very happy time with my old friends but I miss you all very much especially this time of the day (night). I shall try to post a letter tomorrow. The postal strike has only just ended. Good night my dearest ones..

On Tuesday I gave my first lecture to biochemists and had the usual problem of breaking chalk ; after about 10 minutes when I have broken enough I walk about as I lecture accompanied by the sound of crunching chalk. It is so dusty it flies up onto my arms where it catches on the hair providing me with white gloves. There are more students than previously because they have started a bio-technology course and they also do the biochemistry lectures. The weather was better, although very cloudy and low pressure (as seen on my wonder watch), but it is nice and warm. After my lecture I was sitting outside preparing the afternoon lecture when I sensed someone standing half behind me. When I looked round there was a thin student smiling shyly and holding out a rose to me; this was followed by an invitation to attend a special event in which the 2nd year students welcome the first years. So of course I accepted and then had to chat to the student and show family photos etc. His name is Nagaraju (Raju

for short) and he came because he had seen me admiring the welcome message they had made out of flowers on the floor of the entrance to the lecture theatre. His family is quite well-off because he rides a moped but his English is not very good. After my afternoon lecture I was about to go the special party when Raju came up beside me (always very quietly and smiling with his wobbly head) and whispered to me to ask me to be the chief guest. This meant I had to sit at a table in the front and after listening to speeches by students and staff I had to give a speech which was really just a set of funny stories which they seem to like. I told them that their decorations were just like our Christmas decorations and that I had been to 6 previous parties like this one and their decorations were the best. They are very easy to please so this brought a lot of applause. I then had to shake hands with all the students with Raju guarding me. I think he feels that I am his discovery and so I must not be allowed to wander too far. After the party I walked into town to have dinner with Surya's family. It was a gentle warm evening and the roads were at last dry so I walked by myself around the bazaar part of the town (Prakasam Road) up from the town club to the temple area. I am very pleased to find that I love this place just as much as previously. I am even recognised by some of the rickshaw boys and the people selling things near the temple. I am always amazed by the number of people and animals just wandering about or doing their bits of business. The shops are all half open onto the street so everything is all mixed together. I watched a little group where there was a boy mending punctures sitting on the pile of coconuts a girl was selling (to give to the god) immediately beside a very old man selling underpants strewn across the side of the road. A cow had to be diverted from eating a pair (they don't look very edible - I think they are second hand, or second bottom). Their loudspeaker has improved so the music they play in the temple courtyard is really quite peaceful. Dinner was very simple and of course it was very nice to be with my second family.

Yesterday (Wednesday) I realised that I have been here a week already and I have only just started to do my work (I am preparing a set of advanced lectures for my research group on a subject that is rather difficult). My taking part in the party the day before has made the students very much more responsive because they have got over their initial shyness. Raju stands outside and waits for me and leads me by the hand into the lecture theatre. In the afternoon I strolled down to the town club to get an autorickshaw to go to dinner with Kiran's family in Giripuram. The driver said he wanted 100 rupees (£2) so I laughed and walked away. He trotted after me telling me it was a mistake and that he would take me for 15 rupees (30p). Kiran is unique because if he says 5 o'clock he means exactly that so when I arrived at five minutes past he was just about to go and phone to see what I was doing. His house is being repaired and so they all live next door with relations and with all their belongings lying around. This included his father who was asleep completely wrapped in a white shroud - pulled over his head-looking as if he was about to be taken out to be buried. Talked until I was hoarse with news of the family (more photos) then had a bit of peace as Kiran played his guitar - learning carols at the moment. Kiran and I were then led into a small room with no windows next to the kitchen - also with no windows, to eat dinner. The first non-vegetarian food since I arrived, delicious curried roast chicken plus noodles - made especially by Kiran. We had to eat with father mother and niece standing watching. They like seeing me struggling to eat properly with my fingers. At 8.30 I realised that they would not sit down to eat until I had left so I walked back down to the town with Kiran with the whole extended family standing out in the street waving furiously goodbye and cheering enthusiastically because I had managed to remember the Telugu words for goodbye taught me by Kiran's father. It took me about half an hour to learn 8 words. The word for Goodbye is complicated because it really means 'I am going' plus 'I will come back' so it is similar to au revoir. As the night was young I called into the student hostel in response to a pleading invitation given after the lecture that afternoon by Raju and friends. The hostels are all part of the University campus and set well back among the parklands. It is almost dark (very few street lights) so I had to ask directions from the students all wandering around. This took time because each of them wanted to know where I am from etc. Fortunately the 3rd student I asked knew Raju and so took me off there. The student room contained 3 beds consisting of a flat sheet of green metal on short legs. There was one shelf and most clothes were hung on wires criss-crossing the room. So I had to sit on the bed surrounded by the students all peering through trouser legs. They all wore

their lungis (skirts) and insisted that I sit next to Raju who they said was "overcame with joyfulness because I had come". I then had 2 hours of questions about life in England and religion and politics etc. Three of them insisted on walking all the way back to the guesthouse which was locked. After banging on the door a security man opened up and we walked into the big entrance hall which had 6 or 7 bodies lying on the floor all wrapped up in their shawls. As they are on duty they felt they should all stagger to their feet, so it looked like a Stanley Spencer picture of the resurrection at Cookham.

Today is Thursday (I am writing this while waiting for Surya who is coming to dinner). In fact he has just arrived with a map of Tirupati. This is a very rare document as everyone here knows every place. Off to dinner. Bye.

I am now writing this instalment on Sunday night while listening to Beethoven's 9th Symphony on a Walkman. Yesterday was a normal workday - they only have Sundays off. I was woken at about 6 o'clock so decided to get up and go for a walk. The weather has now settled down to typical Tirupati hot sunny weather. They were continuing to chop down the trees along the main road - to widen it. Some are huge old trees; it seems such a shame. They cut them by the old way of hacking at them with small axes and then pulling on a rope to get them to fall the right way. They then lie right across the road holding up the traffic until a swarm of men and boys have sawn off enough branches to clear the way again. More houses have been built where I go for my country walk but there is still plenty of countryside near and all my favourite places have remained. Raju was not in my lecture this morning; he arrived just as I was about to go back to the guest house and was very apologetic, holding my hand between his and saying sorry sir sorry sir etc. He then asked if I would go with them to a film that evening and would I bring Surya - who they want to meet; so I agreed and at last got back to do some work but I only managed one hour before Raja the wrestler appeared with a present of 2 lollipops and a packet of polos. I managed to get some work done by starting him to play computer games so I could get on. He stayed on to lunch and walked back with me in scorching heat at 2 o'clock for my lecture. The students all seemed asleep. On the way back at 3.15 I was overtaken by Nurendra and Pravan on their moped. Nurendra was about to go off for a few days to his village about 12 miles away so was chasing me to say goodbye. Needless to say they walked all the way back (its about a 20 minute walk) and then decided to stay "to keep me company" - in fact to stop me working. They both speak good English and so it was very enjoyable. I learned a lot about the Department squabbles. Apparently one of the staff wanted to be Head of Department so when another (Parthasarathy) was appointed as Head instead he took him to court and lost the case. He is still in the Department and is rather obstructive about most things. They both decided it was time to go - they had stayed an extra hour they told me, hoping that Surya would come. He did so about 10 minutes after they left telling me that he had come late so that he did not interrupt me with my students. He had a bad headache so did not have dinner, but slept instead. We had arranged to go to the late showing of the film so I had to go to D-block of the student hostels (pronounced D-black). We decided to go down to the hostels on the ramshackle town bus. It was held up at the level crossing up the road so did not want to stop for us and we had to leap on as it was going. As the road is being rebuilt and widened the bus swerves from side to side to miss the piles of sand etc. It sometimes fails and I was flung out of my seat as we hit a heap of rocks. Fortunately I was hanging on tight and was caught by Surya and the conductor. Surya went on home and I found my way to D-black where there were 7 students all dressed up to go. We decided to go to a typical Telugu language film as I had never seen one before. We went by town bus quite peacefully except for the chicken which had got on accidentally earlier and was hunting for a way out. The cinema was nice and cool with great banks of fans overhead and on the walls hissing quietly at us. The sound was turned up high enough to be painful, especially during the singing and dancing part. This is a main feature of this sort of film. Whatever the story it will be interrupted at least 6 times for a long song and dance sequence, We sat in the sloping circle seats which were quite comfortable. The film lasted 3 hours including a ten minute interval. Throughout Raju kept putting his head on my shoulder to whisper the meaning of what was going on. As he could hardly speak English this was an odd experience. I had two things going on at the same time neither of which I could understand. When he got frustrated he asked advice from the students we were with and also from people in front of us and behind us.

Everyone seemed to enjoy all of this. Fortunately it was a funny film and so most of the time was spent laughing and failing to explain jokes. We then poured out into a deserted Tirupati (except for all the people coming out of the 8 cinemas in the region). No buses available at that time of the night (rather early morning) so we walked all the way home. This involved walking up the main road 6 abreast all holding hands with Raju on my left and the others taking turns on my right. We reached the guest house at a quarter to two so had to wake up the security people again.

I was woken only 5 hours later by cook with tea. I failed to get to sleep again so walked to village to deliver photos to my family there. They were sitting exactly where I left them last year - sitting in a row on the concrete bench that all the village houses have fixed into their outer walls. We carried on as if I had only popped off into the bushes to have a pee. They rummaged in my bag for binoculars which were passed from one to another. There was one novelty - a group of 3 extremely old crones with about 4 teeth between them, filthy saris and long straggly grey hair. They all looked through the binoculars the wrong way round but still found it an exciting experience. Unfortunately I had promised to go to church and lunch with Kiran who was calling for me promptly at a quarter to nine, so I had to rush away with promises to come back in the week. Having rushed back in a morning that was rapidly heating up, Kiran didn't come until 9.30 rather upset that I could not go to lunch because his aunt had arrived with 3 children etc. We went down to the church in an autorickshaw. Church was only half full but gradually filled. They only had seats in the back half. The front had carpets all over the floor and people sat cross legged on these. We sang 'Just as I am' and rock of ages and other old favourites with the choir and violin amplified so much that it was as painful as last night's film. When Kiran whispered that the sermon was about to start and would be at least one hour long I suggested we leave. He walked down into the town with me and then returned for the sermon. Being left with no plans on my one day off was frustrating but I went for a lovely wander down through cricket ground and round the small streets in a lovely lazy atmosphere; it was similar to the early evening with crowds milling about but all in hot daylight. Went to Suryas and had a lovely chat with Sawana his sister. Then had lunch - as always sitting on the bed as they have no chairs. Just me and Surya - the woman eat separately after they have done their duty and fed us. We then hired (for £10) a small van and went up to the Tirumula hills where the famous god Sri Venkateswara lives. Average number of his visitors per day is 50,000. We just walked about in the cool hills. The price to be paid for this is a hair raising journey up winding roads with a driver who felt it was a failure if he didn't overtake at least one other bus or car on each bend. Just as I thought that we should never make it we passed a sign that said 'KEEP YOUR NERVES ON THE CURVES' so I realised that the whole thing is a game then it becomes fun.

The symphony is finished and I must make up for last night so goodnight my dears.

Thursday morning; 5th December. Christmas 20 days away. I have written nothing since Sunday night. This is more difficult to write than an ordinary diary because I keep thinking that Hugh will read it (and Libby I hope) - I am not sure that Clive knows how to read if it is not on a computer screen. One reason I stopped writing daily is that I became somewhat ill (as they say here) on Monday. In my morning lecture I suddenly felt very very tired and when my 6th piece of chalk broke I gave up - I had given them half an hour anyway. I was told that the ex chief minister of the state had passed by and so there was a holiday for the rest of the day. This seemed a funny reason for a holiday but when I later laughed about this I was told "no sir you have made an unfortunate misunderstanding of the situation; the minister has died sir he is with us no longer". Raja appeared just before lunch which was brought to the room because they had so many guests for lunch in the dining hall. I realised that I was not well when the site of the chapattis and mess of fried and mangled vegetables made me want to go home to mummy. Raja left and I lay on my bed feeling alternately very hot or very cold, half awake and half asleep with the blasting hooting squawking shrieking buses lorries autos and tractors went by; my room is very close to the road and the traffic is twice as heavy as in the past. Rajiv Dixit then appeared and sat beside the bed looking very concerned and stroking my arm and taking my pulse and saying o dear sir what to do what to do. Then Surya arrived and wanted to get a doctor but he sat and played computer games while I slept feeling seasick. I then did a spectacular vomit all around the bathroom -

I only just made it to the bathroom as so sprayed everywhere. [It is not advisable to eat this during your breakfast]. Fortunately the bathroom floor is 3 inches below the rest of the flat and is made of marble. So when I was empty I filled up the huge buckets that we use for washing in and through ^{the} water everywhere then left my sprayed trousers in one of them. All this made me feel much better so I sent Surya home and went to sleep. Felt much better next morning; Surya came early in the morning and gave me a long lecture on friendship; "friends are for sadness as much as for happiness so why did you send me home? I should have sat by your bed all night but you would not let me; have I stopped being your friend?" So I tried to explain that I just wanted to sulk by myself but I had to promise if ever I am ill again he must sit on the floor all night. That day I gave my lectures but I can't remember what else I did. I do remember I finished the evening by calling in to see my friends in D block. Raju, the best student but the worst speaker of English wanted to tell me ^{all} about his home so the others all joined in to translate. He lives in a small village near Vijayawada - about 30 miles away where he has 5 hectares (about 25 acres) of his own land where he grows paddy (rice), some coconuts, a few bananas, mangos, peanuts and cotton. He had brought a lot of seeds from his village and the next day the students were planning to make a garden around the biochemistry department because it was to be a holiday for the cremation of the chief minister. After our talk they ^{tried} to insist that I should stay the night in their hostel. Their room mainly consists of 3 beds made of plain sheets of metal with no bedding. I explained that I would really love to do this sometime but that I had private matters to deal with. This is always a good thing to say to escape from a difficult situation. They then insisted on walking the 20 minute walk back to the guest house with me. We awakened the apparently dead security man to let us in, then they stayed another hour talking. Yesterday (Wednesday) was a holiday for the cremation of the chief minister so I got up late at 8 o'clock and seeing that the weather was likely to be only a bit hot because of clouds I set out on a long walk through the villages. As I approached a village called Gollapallai a 19 year old student stopped me to ask the usual questions; he was studying at college for BSc in maths physics and chemistry. He then took me to his house where I was given coffee by his fat old aunty; she could not speak English so asked me questions in Telugu then wondered why I was not answering. Gradually the little room filled with other boys on holiday and they decided I should walk another kilometre to their special little temple. It was in the middle of a grove of mango trees so beautiful and cool. It was closed but they made me peer in to see the little god who looked like a fat little golliwog with a skirt. We then walked between the paddy fields on raised mud banks. They wanted to show off about their new well which was about 8 metres deep and 3 metres across. It has a little electric motor that pumps water all around the fields. I had had no breakfast so I walked along chewing sugar cane which is hacked off the stems - like long bamboo poles - with a vicious curved chopper. It is like gnawing a stick but it tastes sweet and a bit juicy. Then we went on a half mile detour to find a coconut palm for one of the boys to climb. It seems to have a smooth trunk but he managed it OK then threw down 4 green coconuts which we caught. He lay down to recover while another boy hacked off the end until there was a small hole for drinking the milk which was very good as I was thirsty but looked like dirty dishwater and tasted of nothing much. I said goodbye to all of the boys except one who wanted me to go to his house to see his goat and 4 cows and 1 water buffalo. To help his family pay for his education (he is 16 yrs old) he grows silkworms in a sort of thatched barn. The worms are white and 4 cm long and live in 1 metre diameter palm leaf trays all stacked on top of each other. He feeds them on mulberry leaves which is the only thing they will eat. Usually this is a sort of tree but they just grow the young plants until they are about 30 cm high; I then had to go and inspect his small mulberry field. This gave me a nice surprise because the wind had started to blow quite strongly and as we came round the corner of the sugar cane field about 30 egrets - white herons like we saw at the Arne bird sanctuary - flew up. As each of them flew above the level of the sugar cane they were caught by the wind and flung high into the air like someone tearing off bits of toilet paper in a gale (Government health warning: do not attempt to wipe your bottom with an egret).

I was rather dreading the 4 mile walk home and so was rather relieved to see an auto bumping along the track towards me. He took me back to the guest house feeling very pleased with myself. I had arranged to have lunch at guest house with Surya but he was worried about me still being ill (which of

course I was not) so had cycled up to see me. He guessed I had gone for a walk and so cycled up to the dairy farm where I usually start my walk. He said that then he had got diverted into sitting talking to the two elephants there. The large one is still the one that was there and the much smaller one was born about 6 years ago. My favourite room became available that day so we moved all my stuff into it. This is the same room that I had last year where I can sit outside on my private veranda and work which I did all afternoon. Kiran then came to collect me for dinner at his family house. First we listened to bits of my orchestra on Surya's walkman which he has left with me but we found that it needs adjusting and so makes everything sound like Mrs Mayle's orchestra tuning up. We went by town bus to his house in Giripuram. I did not like these buses but now I prefer them provided they are not too full. They are more interesting than the little autos because you can see more and there are always interesting people and animals on them. It is a bit like a fairground ride as we are flung about inside. They have no windows - only bars to stop people falling out so it is a bit like a travelling jail. We had nice supper - just me at first until I insisted that Kiran join me. The women and younger men usually stand and watch the father eating first. We had roast lamb (a bit like Kentucky roast lamb but very hot) with some kind of jam and what they call roast bread - a sort of fried bread. We also had noodles that Kiran had made. Because of this I was kind and said how good they were (they were rather dull in fact) and so he insisted that he will bring some for my breakfast on Sunday morning. We then listened to a bit of Beethoven's 9th Symphony on his Walkman - one earpiece each. "Come on Chris", he said, "put the loudspeaker in your ear" (Do not attempt this at home). Then a gentle stroll in the hot dusty night air smelling of jasmine and incense down to the town club and home to bed. My new room is further from the road so I had a good night's sleep. And here I am up to date with my diary drinking milky sweet tea and about to start more work. I forgot to mention that after my lecture this morning I decided to be independent and go to the town to get Surya's Walkman adjusted. I got a lift on a scooter to town but we had to stop because of a procession of many hundreds of school children - all in different uniforms carrying banners and shouting slogans. They were advertising the new anti polio vaccination programme; they were all going off to be jabbed. The shop did not do repairs but told me the address of one that does so I staggered away in the heat and dust and noise and yelling children, balancing on big slabs of granite that only half cover the town's drains back to the stand for catching an auto back here. Just finished washing my clothes. Later: Another storm seems to be threatening with black clouds in the distance. Instead of the usual 30 students only 7 came to my afternoon lecture which was about my own research. They were all very interested and so it was very enjoyable. My most devoted student Raju was not there but he met me on the way home - he had come to tell me he was sorry he was unable to come to the lecture. He said he was in a great hurry but he would walk back with me to the guest house to keep me company; all the way he was trying to tell me in his very broken English that Ghandi was not so great because he did not fight but only offered passive resistance to the British instead of shooting them. I asked him if he thought all Englishmen were bad -- Oh no sir you are a beautiful Englishman. I am glad someone appreciates my finer points but I suspect that he hadn't quite got the right word. By the time we arrived home he had forgotten he was in a hurry and came in and gave me a lecture on how evolution theory is not true. He claimed he could prove all sorts of things about god by scientific method. All slightly crazy but good fun. His full name is Nagaraju which means royal snake = cobra. He stayed for 2 hours.

All week the head of department, Dr Parthasarathy, has been suggesting that I come to his house one evening so I had arranged to go this evening. He collected me on his motor scooter at about 5.30 and we slowly navigated through the dusty streets at about 15 miles an hour. At his house his son (age 18) came and joined us and we looked at family photos. The father then told me the son had many interesting questions to ask me but the son, obviously very embarrassed, sat struggling to think what he was supposed to ask. Eventually he asked how big is London so I told him and he could think of nothing else to ask. Apparently mother Theresa of Calcutta is very ill and if she dies there will be another national holiday tomorrow. I had expected to be given dinner at the house - as has always happened when I have been invited out for the evening but I was given a cup of tea, some crisps and a sort of small sweet Cornish pasty. As nothing else seemed to be happening at 6.40 I asked if it would

be possible to give me a lift back to the town later, and he leapt out of the chair as he had been waiting for me to go and walked straight out the door! 10 minutes later I was back at the town club. This is the name of the road junction near the beginning of the shopping part of the town; it has an island in the middle that suggests it is a roundabout and a policeman standing on it. No-one has told the auto drivers and rickshaw boys and the scooters and bikes and pigs goats cows etc that they should go round in only one direction. The policeman knows but he has given up and stands talking to friends in the middle or reading a paper, blowing his whistle at nothing in particular - which everyone ignores. I called in at the Frontier computer college to see Chandu (son of Prof. Venkaiah) who is a director. He asked if Surya is going to join his college, but I had to tell him that he had already paid his 6-monthly fees for one of the other 6 computer colleges just down the road. No problem, he said tell him to come here - we are open all the time from 6 in the morning till 10 at night. When I explained again that Surya couldn't pay for two colleges, he said, no sir, he must come to ours free, he is your friend and so our friend he will have two educations for the price of one. We are meeting later to make all this formal. It is a good idea because his college teaches how to mend computers as well as teaching about programmes. Feeling rather empty I called in at Surya's where it is just assumed I will turn up sit on the bed and be given something to eat. Which I did and was. Surya and his father were doing some work so I left soon after eating a plate of rice and curried cauliflower while listening to Tchaikovsky's 5th symphony. I drifted slowly round the courtyards of the temple then came the long trek home. Its about 25 minute walk. As it was not very late I did a little work then made the mistake of looking at some of the games on my gameboy that I had not seen before. This included Jezzball which I then got hooked on, and spent more than an hour playing.

I am now writing this the next day (Friday, 9.0 pm). Woke this morning to a dark damp morning with the hill covered in low cloud. As I walked across the muddy windy courtyard I was smacked in the face by a wet Hindu (the newspaper, not the cook). After I pulled it off my head I saw the headline reporting Another Cyclone hits Chitoor district. So I was slapped in the face by a cyclone. I marched off to my lecture through the rain slightly protected by my green waterproof. It is waterproof but the rain pours down the sleeves into the pockets and eventually all the rain pours over my trousers. So I arrived soaked. Eventually about 16 students turned up including Nurendra who had taken off a few days to visit his home village. Had a nice lecture and was invited to go to lunch with two old friends on the staff of the virology department (Saigopal and Sreevasulu). Walked back in dry to guest house having dried out in my lecture by standing under the big overhead fan. Hoped to get some work done but Raja turned up. I could not tell him to go because he said he had been three times the day before and not found me - because he did not know I had changed rooms. This room is so good in this weather because I can do as I did first thing this morning and sit on my little veranda and watch the rain while I am working. I showed Raja the game Jezzball and we played this till lunchtime when the staff turned up to take me to lunch. Of course it then started to rain so we waited until it was only a drizzle and set off on the two scooters. We crossed to the other side of town to the Myaura hotel and sat in the cool dark restaurant where I had fried rice followed by icecream - a welcome change from guest house curried vegetables. Soon after we set off, the sky fell on us. I don't think that I have ever felt so wet. The scooter slithered the two miles back, in and out of the shell holes through rivers of mud and sand, trying to dodge all the other cyclists and scooters doing the same thing. A special hazard here is the cyclists and scooter riders who insist on carrying their unfurled umbrellas while cycling or driving. This makes the rider very unstable and threatens to blind all other road users. No one travels at more than about 15 miles per hour so it is not too dangerous although there are always at least 3 other vehicles that I could touch at any one time - if I dared release my tight grip on the back of the scooter. When walking in the mountains in really wet weather it is never so bad once your feet are completely wet and there is no point anymore in keeping out of the wettest parts. The same is true on a motor scooter although I never thought that the reason I would become relaxed is that I had actually been up to my ankles in muddy water while sitting on a scooter. When we got back to the guest house we found the grounds completely under water so we parked in the flood and went onto my verandah. I had assumed that I would skip my lecture and go in and get warm and dry but they phoned and confirmed that the students were waiting for me

so I was driven off immediately in rain that was merely pouring. Had another nice small informal lecture while drying out under the fan - the only problem being that the clouds of chalk tended to stick all over my wet hair. Afterwards, the rain having stopped I called in at the virology department to be shown round (this was the price of my lunch). Then walked back in the dry and did some work. Back came the rain just in time for me to set off for dinner at Raja's family. Fortunately before I was completely soaked an autorickshaw came along and took me there - once again negotiating about ten building sites of rubble, sandpiles, rockpiles and bags of cement. The drivers tend to specialise it seems; this one was into building sites; others go for piles of household rubbish, while others seem to be attracted to old rubber tyres and bits of bike. Spent an hour watching Japan play Syria at football. Many Indian homes have cable TV - the only kind available and they have 14 channels to choose from. They never argue over what to watch. They seem to take turns in picking up the controller and going off channel hopping, so beside the football I also watched 4 films in Telugu (all with squawking (good word for scrabble) singers and rather fat dancers, the World news (John Major having a terrible time - good), weather forecast (cyclone should be gone within two days) and horrible adverts for rat poison. I was fed in the usual way, just me and Raja sitting on a bed with 2 friends, an uncle, his father and mother watching. All seemed amused at my incompetence at eating chapati and stuff with my fingers. Had rather horrible garlicky hot peas and slimy very horrible runner beans (they hadn't run far enough for me) - all the time making appreciative noises. I managed to get it down by drowning it in two bottles of Thums up, belching appreciatively. As Raja does not like to remain in the house when his father is there we soon left and had another walk in pouring rain through usual puddles of muddy water (it was completely dark so I just hope it was muddy water and not something worse). Finally found an auto rickshaw and I persuaded Raja that he should go home and get dry; I had my waterproof on but was still soaked; he would have dissolved if he didn't get indoors quickly. Had another bumpy blind slithery trip through the sand and slime back home. Nice and early so I have time to write this.

How I would like to be at home with warm dry clothes, carpets instead of gritty floors, cars and most of all my Libby Clive Huge and Ms Bevan. Goodnight my dears.

Wed 11th. I am writing this in Bangalore, about 150 miles from Tirupati.

I shall try to write a brief summary of what I can remember of the last few days. I had lectures on Saturday, the second of which was supposed to be mainly based on use of the computer models of my protein structures. But first the lecturer with the password turned up late and then I found that I did not have all the right files. I prevented the whole class coming back to the guest house in the rain but could not shake off Nurendra and Parvaan. They came back and insisted on staying and playing cards (a game like rummy). Raju then appeared, and disappointed that his friends were there lay down on his tummy on the bed where we were playing cards and fell asleep. So he became the card table. Eventually Surya turned up and they all eventually met which is what they had hoped. Surya joined me at cards and we immediately started to win. Nurendra and Pavaan eventually left, having failed to wake Raju. As soon as they were gone he woke himself up and introduced himself to Surya. They then ignored me and gossiped for about an hour. They seem to have become very good friends and were making plans to keep in touch. Raju left looking rather forlorn in the drizzle. We then became trapped by a storm in the evening so instead of going to his house as planned (and to see Chandrasekar) we ate at the guest house and he stayed the night. He got hooked on jezzball and so sat on his bed half the night playing. Next morning (Sunday) Kiran turned up with breakfast in stainless steel tins - chapatis, eggy curried noodles and fried bread. He had previously invited me to church and lunch at his house. He is leaving to go on a college trip to Goa before I return from Bangalore so this is his last day with me. Soon after Surya left there was a downpour so church off and I spent a very good morning writing the last section of my work while Kiran played jezzball. Lunch at his house had been cancelled so we had lunch at guest house. At 3.00 it was time for him to leave to go round issuing invitations to a special service to celebrate a family wedding. So we had a sad chat and he went to stand and wait for the town bus while I walked

down the road to buy biscuits etc. I turned round every 20 metres to see him still standing waving goodbye. I expected to see the bus go by but it never came and I set off to walk back and soon saw a moped go hurtling by with Kiran on the back waving wildly, as he disappeared into the dusty distance. The saddest thing about visits here is the goodbyes. I did some clothes washing - in cold water then walked into town. I had taken no slides up to this point because there seemed no point in producing rather dull wet pictures. I then decided that I would try to get a set of slides showing what Tirupati is like in the wet and had some fun finding the least pleasant viewpoints instead of the usual pretty pictures. I often wonder what you are all doing and as I wondered I realised that it was Sunday night and I should be able to get everyone in at home. To telephone STD you go to a tiny little hut or room between two shops where there was a man making tea in little glasses for people to drink while standing around in the mud and behind his table was the phone. After getting through a little screen comes up with the cost of the call as it is progressing. I had tried once previously but failed to get through. This time the phone was picked up by a surprised Clive, who in an unguarded moment seemed pleased hear me. I was certainly pleased to hear him. Then Hughie came chirping on the line; it seemed so strange to be standing there with about ten men standing slurping their tea all staring at this odd site of an excited Englishman; They kept pointing in amazement at the huge bill that was accelerating on the little screen - reaching about 200 rupees by the time I stopped - about a weeks wages for some of them. Very disappointed to miss Libby (at Kays). [I have tried twice more but failed to get through].

I felt really odd then walking down the muddy street, dodging the black pigs and brightly coloured rickshaws while feeling for a few minutes that I was home. Had a nice walk around the Temple area and called into Surya's for tea. We went up on the roof to take some very grey photos with fast rain clouds making a very dramatic backing to the huge temple gateway (Gopuram). Then as it started to rain we sat on a couple of sacks of raw cotton for an hour in the little entrance to the stairs and watched the rain over the rooftops and the distant hills, feeling very contented. Left soon after having a chapati, raw onions and some dahl and set off to walk home. Opposite the town club I was stopped by two men in black flowing robes with faces painted with big streaks of ash on the forehead and and big red daubs in the middle. They looked really wild but were merely followers of Ayappa. They were Chandrasekers assistants in the computer school and dragged me down the road to buy me some tea and biscuits. They are very keen that I call in to the school soon but I have not managed yet. Called into to say hallo and goodbye to Raju who was very keen that I should stay the night on one of the iron beds but I avoided this.

I was off to Bangalore on the Monday which started with a very profitable 4 hours typing which finished the main bulk of work. Surya was due to come at 11.30 to have an early lunch and to go to the special bus stand for Bangalore for the one o'clock express bus. I was all packed and no sign of him. So had lunch feeling to nervous to eat the usual rather boring curried veg (I am not sure that it is possible to be bored with a mouth full of what felt like burning beans). Still no sign of Surya, so getting desperate because there is only one bus and seats must be booked on it, I fortunately found my dummy security man Manohar who said he would run down the road to get a three wheeler and he would try to get me there on time. He was just about to run off at 12.30 when Surya came hurtling into the grounds in an auto and off we went [he'd had some unexpected family duties]. My panic was completely unnecessary as the bus was half an hour late in arriving and after Surya went off I waited another hour before it left. Had a dull damp journey accompanied by a very noisy Telugu film full of sentimental songs and extreme, badly acted, violence. The lower half of the screen has a continual flow of adverts at the same time as the film. At one point there was a close up of the hero's face lying in a pool of blood and an advert below recommending a cream for 'quickly healing up those irritating little wounds'. He must have used some as he was soon on his feet again. After 7 hours we arrived in Bangalore where I got a very new looking auto to drive me through the clean streets to the Institute guest house. I was met by the superintendent. I hardly recognised him but he came forward all huge smile and handshakes to remind me that 2 years ago when I was here I had told him that he ran the best guest house in India; he had therefore reserved the best room for me - the same as I had had previously. The grinning cook who also remembered me heated up some curry and then appeared with a bread and butter pudding specially

cooked as I had told him last year (so he said) that it was as good as my mother made it. Bangalore was really cold. I had not seen that all the windows were open behind the curtains so I was awoken by cold and crows and by the local Muslim calls to prayer at 5.30.

Yesterday was the first day of the conference and today I gave my lecture at 9 in the morning. I think it went well and I have spent the day answering questions about it so it must have been listened to. It is now 10.45, so I shall have a hot shower and creep beneath my three blankets. And sleep well. Thinking of you all, and looking forward to Christmas, 2 weeks away.

I am now writing this on Saturday night. In Tirupati. The conference was Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. All very successful and worthwhile. A lot of the time out of the main lectures was spent judging the poster competition. I was the overseas representative. [with prof Burma, Murthy and a lady whose name I did not catch]. The standard was very high and we had some typical Indian committee meetings - to decide the results - as if we had 3 Akhtars all talking at the same time. We decided to have 8 winners and they all got £5 each - quite a lot for them. Because I had to spend so much time with the posters I got to meet a very large number of research students etc - from all over India but a large group from Bangalore. Most were a high standard. There were only about 6 overseas visitors, one of whom was Burley whose paper on transcription factor structure I had presented at Journal club. Another was Dave Boxer a physicist who was an expert on the subject of the book I have been studying here so we had some very useful conversations. Because the people who had invited me were organising the conference I had little time to talk to them so the director and others are plotting to get me back next year to give a series of lectures - a big honour as it is the most prestigious institute in India. It rained most of the week. On the last night

John Prabakar phoned to say that he had been unable to visit because he could not get out of Madras because the whole city was flooded; this was on the news that night - the whole city was at a standstill. When I arrived in Bangalore I was given a fax from the Department containing criticisms of my grant application to be replied to by that day. Fortunately I was able to take the afternoon off and to write a reply on my laptop, print it out in the department, and because we are 5 hours ahead of UK, I got it to the fax machine by the end of that day. One of the referees said that one particular part had very little interest but after my talk, in the question session, the director asked me about that subject and said it was extremely exciting. I explained that the referee had said it was dull so the chairman suggested that the whole conference should send a fax to the research council supporting the application; it so happened that the head of the research council (Tom Blundell was in the meeting so he apologised afterwards). On Friday morning at seven o'clock got an auto down to the huge chaotic bus station with Ramanaiah who found my bus which was only half full and so I had plenty of room. About an hour after we left someone behind me asked to borrow my paper, then I saw him peering round the edge of the seat at me, so I beckoned him and said Randi, Kurchony - 2 out of my 8 words of Telugu which mean come here sit down. I meant that he should sit for a minute just to satisfy his curiosity but he immediately moved in with his bags. He did not speak much English and was very excited about my few Telugu words. His name is same as my best student here - Nagaraju- and he comes from a village near Tirupati. His father is a farmer but he works in Bangalore exporting leather jackets to Germany. He was quite good company and helped pass the 7 hour journey. Rain started again as we reached Tirupati. It had been raining hard all week and we drove through quite deep floods to get back to the guest house. Just before reaching Tirupati in the bus we stopped at Chitoor bus station which was a huge expanse of water with people wading to get to the buses. Parts of the flood were more like a river of brown gravy and the drivers had to guess where the road was underneath. The holes under the water were so huge that the bus felt about to tip over as we slithered into them and then clambered out; there were about 15 buses doing this together looking like a herd of drunk hippos.

I arrived back, glad to be here at about 3.30. I had not been able to face the dark grubby cafe we stopped at lunchtime; the food was served on banana leaves and appeared to be little heaps of chewed greens which had to be eaten - with rice with fingers. When I got here I remembered that Ramanaiah's wife had given me a little plastic box of food when I left. It contained 5 dry chapatis. I was starving so chopped up half a bar of dark chocolate and rolled it up in the chapatis like chocolate croissants. I

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strolled between downpours to the department to tell them I was back. Didn't see any of the students but apparently they saw me. I went of down town calling in at the hostel to see Raju - he was not there but had nice gossip with Nurendra. He asked if I would like to join them to watch the hockey match between India and their great enemy Pakistan on tele. I imagined nice comfy armchairs to flop in and watch tele but found it was a completely bare room with stone floor on which we sat like children at Sunday school. India lost but every time they got near scoring the row was horrific. The whole of the hostel is like that. All concrete cells with 3 students in each opening onto balconies going all round the inside of a big square courtyard. This is filled with trees where the noisy mynah birds (like starlings) roost. Everything echoes everywhere so the din is almost painful. Then walked in rain down to Nethaji road to Surya's. He had been to Hyderabad and Vijayawada (300 miles away), had arrived at 3.30 and gone to see me at the guest house so our paths had crossed. He eventually turned up after I had had a nice long chat with his sister Swana. On the way home early I called again to see Raju and was told that he had been to see me and our paths had also crossed. As soon as I arrived there was a powercut so I was left in complete darkness as if shut in a cupboard for 15 minutes while they found Raju. He was very pleased to see me and we struggled for some time with his crazy accent and English while I tried to explain about the conference. As always he tried to make me stay the night in their cell, but in the end had to be satisfied with walking back with me. It is probable that he will go to Bangalore next year to do a project so he wanted to know all about it.

This morning (Saturday) was a holiday (2nd and 4th Saturdays each month) and amazingly it was dry and sunny for about 2 hours. Nurendra and Giri arrived wanting me to give them a tutorial on chemiosmotic hypothesis and soon after Surya came and then Raja. So I sat on veranda giving my tutorial while the others played computer games. After lunch went in rain to the pictures to see Under Seige II - very noisy and violent American film. Only about a quarter full. Came back with Raja who soon left so I could have a read and then sleep for 2 hours. Then another walk in drizzle into flooded town. The river at the town club roundabout is ankle deep. I was supposed to be going to the Bimas de luxe hotel for dinner with Chendu (Prof Venkaiah's son) and Surya to discuss his computing course but he didn't turn up so we went without him and then home through more floods in an auto and here I am again. Sorry this has all becomes a bit boring; I am writing this really for my benefit now. When I got back your lovely diary was waiting for me Libby. I read it with my chocolate chapatis. It was so nice hearing about a sensible life even if it is a few thousand miles away. Anyway, I shall be home in 6 days time. I am rather surprised how much I am managing to enjoy this place in the rains and floods with sandals full of mud etc. So now to bed which I found this morning I was sharing with a dead gecko. Goodnight my dears.

Last bit written at home This is really for my sake as a reminder of the last few days. Sunday started dryish. In the afternoon went to my favourite temple on the edge of the town after a walk around the main part of town looking for an umbrella (to buy that is). The main Ghandi road was completely under water so I waded up and down looking but failing to find an umbrella shop. Met Surya at the cross roads where the road from the higher part of town met Ghandi road -with the water pouring down like two rivers meeting. We stood in water nearly up to our knees waiting to find an auto willing to take us up river toward the temple. Had an exciting drive with water washing into the auto as we dropped into the holes on the way up river. Arrived at the temple to find an incredible scene. The first time that I went there it was so hot and sunny with the huge water tank providing a cool place to sit - on the steps leading down to it. This time the place was filled with the sound of a huge waterfall crashing down the red cliffs into the tank which was full of Ayappa devotees in their undies swimming and washing before going in to visit their little god. The spray from the huge waterfall filled the air and somehow made everyone in very high spirits. A group of Surya's old college friends appeared and interrogated me then took photos of me with each of them in turn. We then went for a walk to buy an umbrella and then to Shiva Ku mar's house (Surya's old tutor). We did not want to do this but he would think badly of S if we did not go. He then tried to get me to go to dinner the next day. He even tried to get me to leave the dinner I had arranged to go to dinner with him in the middle. Eventually Surya persuaded him that it would be better to buy me a nice present than I would remember him; that is where the 'gold and

jewelry' pot came from. He left it for Surya to buy. Then went to the same hotel that we had visited last year in the dark when it was half finished and we staggered about during a power cut. It was no further forward in finishing this year but there was some light this time. Realised that we had had a whole day with no rain and had a nice stroll home in the warm evening. On the last two days gave 4 lectures on Biotechnology. Can't remember what I did on Monday except that I went to Surya's for farewell dinner in the evening. Sad to say goodbye to my dear family there. Tuesday was my last full day so went for short walk in morning around the dairy farm area. Saw 3 hoopoes together sitting on a telegraph wire - reminding what I had been missing by not being able to go for walks in the country. After my last lecture Nagaraju had arranged tea and bikkies for us all in the lecture theatre but the students soon drifted away so there was no real ending to the course to have a final chat. I went and had final chat with Parthasarathy and other lecturers, said goodbye to Suban and then walked home. Nagaraju then came for final chat and private goodbye until at seven o'clock Nurendra, Pavan and Surya arrived and we crushed into one auto to go off for dinner at the Bhimas Paradise hotel where Prof Venkaiah's son Chendu joined us to discuss computing courses. Had very nice goodbye dinner then back to guest house with Nagaraju and sad goodbyes. Because the roads between Tirupati and Madras were too badly damaged we had decided to go by train. Next morning I had just finished packing and Raja arrived to say goodbye followed by Giri and Nurendra and a couple of others. Nagaraju came to join us for a formal public goodbye and presentation of a book on biotechnology and a card asking me to always remember him. Surya then arrived with an auto and off we went for the last bumpy ride through town - still flooded but the rate of flow seems to have gone down a bit. Called in to say goodbye to Surya's father in his office at the station and then walked across the railway lines to find my platform and our seats, only to find that the airconditioned (1st class) coach had been removed. So with 5 minutes to go we had to find alternative seats which had to be in second class which has no windows - only bars and thin sheets of foam on metal seats. It was so crowded that those without seats sat on those who had them; fortunately I seemed to be excluded and Surya also escaped. Had uneventful ride to Madras and even had no problem with taxi drivers. Only problem was getting out of the train. As soon as we arrived those waiting leaped onto the train and also rushed at the windows to throw things in to claim a seat. We then had to fight our way out through the hundreds of people fighting to get on. Ten minutes later we were on the platform, exhausted but free. As we booked in at the Savera I found a pair of arms wrapped around me and found a grinning John Prabakar with a friend to meet us. The friend was the son of an old man who John had asked me to help by sending a letter to the British High commission to get a visa. This had enabled him to come to England to visit his other son. After settling into room spent time chatting and showing pictures, we had dinner in the Chariot room, finishing with ridiculous ice creams covered in nuts and crystallized fruit - called fondest remembrance and excitement. John explained more fully than previously what his various types of business were - most of them half illegal, like most businesses in India. He has some plan to come to UK based on a false proposal to come to study I think. He tells me he has not seen Neville Francis for 2 years proving Neville was deceiving me so I don't feel bad about not being welcoming to him when he wanted to come here. John then wanted to arrange to meet the next day but I persuaded him not to come; that was to be a special 'goodbye' day for Surya. He seemed a bit upset when he realised John was trying to arrange to come to the airport so I managed to prevent that also.

On our last full day we repeated what we did last year and hired an old ambassador car with young driver to take us to the crocodile farm and on to the town Mahabalipuram where the 7th century temples are half submerged in the sea. It was a nice sunny day and we had a lovely drive - once out of Madras. Things are changing very fast, Madras itself becoming more crowded with high rise buildings and traffic but without losing its cows and beggars. Which reminds me of a nice story. At temples notices are often posted DO NOT ENCOURAGE BEGGARS. This led a student to ask me if we encourage beggars. O yes, I said, we call them like little dogs so they come up and beg. This brilliant joke was passed around for two days. At Mahabalipuram we were followed by beggars with monkeys, one of which grabbed my trousers so tightly I had to hit it with my bag to let go. Then while sitting looking at some of the old temple buildings carved out of huge single blocks of granite, a man came up trying to sell some

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 'genuine' moonstones - only 20 dollars for 3!. Having brushed him off he came up to Surya and sold him 4 for 50 rupees each. Another man came up later and sold us 5 for total of 50 rupees. He is worried that he has been cheated but was comforted when I told him that we had spent no more than we would have done on an ice cream. Went for a long walk down beach which was spoilt by unmentionable rubbish; this petered out eventually and we sat and watched the fishing boats made from logs crashing in through the surf. We then got our driver take us up the coast a little way to a beach resort hotel - in fact it was only a palm leaf roof over a few tables but we had lovely lunch (I had fish) with cold beer followed by icecream. Came back to hotel in late afternoon and I finished packing. Surya then became rather agitated and said that we must go out to do some shopping - he needed to buy some Christmas cards. We failed to find any and spent about an hour crossing very busy roads hunting in the dark on pavements of smashed paving stones covered in bundles of cloth (usually old women asleep) for somewhere that sold cards. Before we gave up I managed to trip on some metal spike and flew along the pavement grabbing Surya's arm (breaking his watchstrap), finally crashing in pain into the gutter. I seemed to have got metal splinters in my big toe and it was very badly bruised. Surya tried to keep on with our quest until I sulked and said I was returning to the hotel alone. He then gave in and bought some new year cards instead then was so kind in helping me back, hobbling like (as he said) a poor old man. It later turned out that he was very keen to send all our family special cards. I explained that just to receive the from him would be special so he cheered up. He later spent half an hour struggling to compose messages on them. We had dinner in the highest restaurant in Madras - called the Minar (means high). Had some of the nicest vegetarian food ever - covered in sheets of silver foil, accompanied by singer (blind man), drummer and violin, singing Gazals - mournful love songs mainly. He was the same singer as I had heard 10 years earlier in the Connemara hotel and who had made me like Indian music. It was a lovely final meal in India, mixed with sadness of leaving but with a deep contentment that I would soon be home. We then returned for Surya to write his cards and me to watch film 96 with Barry Norman. I phoned home and got advice on damaged foot from Hughie and so sat on a bed with my foot in a waste paper binfull of cold water. Surya was delighted to have a little chat to Hugh and was amazed at the happy friendly way Clive and I talked to each other. We managed to get to sleep by midnight to get up at 4 o'clock. By 4.30 we were in a taxi going through empty streets of Madras to airport. Surya had hoped to be able to come in but I was glad this was not possible, there is never anything important enough to say when you know it is the last 20 minutes before leaving. So, amongst the crowds at the entrance, jostling together with many other families parting, we said a quick goodbye, bravely smiling, but feeling sad. Then the lonely tedious business of checking in, nervous that they might have forgotten my seat, followed by one hour wait to board. Eleven hour flight home seemed very long although I had a whole row of seats to sleep on; I was kept awake by a boring man from Manchester who was telling everyone what a great expert on India he is. It did not seem the same country to me, the way he described it, and a bit of an insult to my dear friends there. In a sleepless daze I eventually got into a wet Heathrow, to my car and then to home. One of the best things about going away is the returning to my home, especially decorated and homely for Christmas.

Well, I suppose that is the end of another visit. It was wonderful to live again with some of my special friends, to meet another nice gang of students and make some more friends. I am always nervous that some time I will visit India and wonder what I had previously found so special about the place; but that did not happen in spite of the grim weather and the mess it caused.

For anyone who has read this far, thank you very much for sharing this experience with me; I hope I appear better for it, as I feel that I am, or at least should be.

With all the love in the world, from Chris.