

INDIA 1999

Chris

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This is an account of my two week visit to Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh in South India. The aim was to teach part of the MSc Biochemistry course to final year students in the Sri Venkateswara University, staying in their Guest House where I had previously stayed 6 times previously. This has usually been in November/December so that I missed much of the hard work of preparing for Christmas. This year I seemed to do little more to help beside being here while Libby as usual did most of the hard work. Because of the problems of getting tickets at such a popular period I'd no choice but to leave a little earlier than I would have preferred.

30th Dec 1998. I had spent from about 6 in morning to midnight getting ready the day before then fell asleep immediately and woke at 5.30. Poor Libby only had a few hours sleep so we crept about the house like newly woken zombies. The plan was to drive to Heathrow with Libby and Hugh who would come in for an hour or so and then drive on to my Mum's. We had a good drive so were there 2.5 hours before the flight. At check in I was told my Air India flight was not leaving until 2.0 (not 10.0) which would mean missing my Bombay connection to Madras. Immediately after this shock they said they would put me on the 9.00 flight instead. So we had to have a hurried farewell and I was on my way. I appreciate so much being taken up so conveniently to the airport but I felt a little guilty leaving Libby and Hugh so quickly, with no time to say much in the way of thanks for the lovely Christmas we had all spent together. For me the change in time was an advantage because I only had an hour scheduled for the connection at Mumbai and this gave me a little longer. I succumbed to the temptation to buy a small camera like John Shepherds' in the duty free at 60% of normal cost. It has a zoom, autofocus and flash and has already proved very convenient and the final product is excellent. Had a very good flight next to an Indian man reading Dorothy Hodgkin's biography - the first great British protein crystallographer. I surprised him by asking if he was also a protein crystallographer. He is (Acharya), and knows Meenakshi Ghosh, my collaborator at Oxford, very well. When I said I was at Southampton he asked if I was Anthony, Ghosh's collaborator. How's that for fame! He studied in Bombay and Bangalore where I visited and is now a lecturer at Bath - appointed by Rod Quayle when he was Vice Chancellor there. This all helped the journey go by a little faster. Food was excellent.

Arrived in Mumbai (old Bombay) with 2 hours to wait for my connection. The transfer area is, in effect, a large curved concourse decorated like a public lavatory, with a shiny stone floor, mirrored walls and very bright fluorescent lights. No baggage trolleys available so I wandered about, weighed down by my 15Kg hand luggage like a lopsided prowler. All the seats and recliners were occupied - usually by sleepers in shrouds. Fortunately in all this I came across an oasis of life; a small cafe blasting out Hindi film music but serving very good coffee. I continued to read my Ludlum escapist thriller. He churns out one huge book per year. Although they are all good stories, all the characters are caricatures and the background is not well researched; the "ironworks in the industrial region a few miles north of London" would take some finding. Perhaps he means ironworks like the 'Blacksmith' that Surya got to mend his gold signet ring.

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curry etc and I slept and read by the pool while Surya went to collect his final certificate from the Trade-Wings Management Institute in the City centre. We got a cheap rate for the hotel by checking out 12 hours after arriving and drove to Tirupati. We had to stop at roadside huts for tea frequently to keep the driver awake. We had left him last night to sleep in the car but he said the other drivers kept him awake. The journey lasted 4 hours, the first 2 being predominantly a continuous set of roadworks. Not so hot as there was some cloud but it was great relief to find ourselves in the Tamil Nadu countryside with emerald paddy fields, lines of ladies working in sapphire and ruby saris, palm trees and distant blue remembered hills.

Arriving in Tirupati was emotionally satisfying and was not spoilt by the guest house. My good room was not immediately available (I moved in next day) but it was good to arrive anyway. We almost immediately went out with the driver to eat at a small noisy fast food restaurant. Rice etc on banana leaves with Mirinda orange juice. The usual shock of feeling that my teeth might be falling out and my lips tingling from the chopped raw green chillies in the rice. We then returned the car to Ram Prasad and had to spend 20 minutes standing on their roof overlooking the temple chatting with his sister visiting from Boston. I had attended her wedding reception last year). As we were near Kiran's house we called in to wish them a happy new year. Most of the family was there but I had to spend most of the time talking with the father (D.C. Christopher Dass). As on all special occasions he gets his ex-air force man's rum quota and so was pretty drunk. He kept asking me belligerent questions that I could not understand. Everyone else thought it was funny so I suppose it must have been although I found it a bit embarrassing. Because of traditional respect for parents no-one intervened to protect me. Kiran then drove me home on his scooter. I gave him the guitar strings and the old CD player from Stuart and Raff which he thinks he will be able to mend, and the very cheap one I got in the Curry sale which he was delighted with.

He left at 11.30 so I walked down to the telephone kiosk to phone home to wish you all a happy new year. Seven others had the same idea so there was a long queue. This meant that it was new year when I got through. It was so nice to hear you all.

Next door was where my little food shack used to be. This has gone and is replaced by a tea stand. So I saw in the new year drinking tea by the side of the road with a group of friendly engineering students. They were attacked in the middle of our conversation by other students flinging brightly coloured powder over them. They considerably avoided me. So my first human contact in the new year consisted of students, one blue, one red and one green. As soon as the attackers had gone their noisy way, the whitest of these three removed his glasses to clean them, leaving huge white eyes like a slightly irritated coloured panda. So home to bed on my first full day in India. It is now very late and I am sleepy. So, with on with the mosquito burner and sleep.

Thinking of you all. Hope you get some more holiday in Libby. You worked so hard over Christmas and I didn't give enough help (sorry). Goodnight; love from your lucky husband and dad.

1st Jan. I was woken at 5.30 by the dreadful din of racing trucks and buses, blaring and screeching by the window. All was forgiven by my welcome at breakfast time by the usual 2 cooks who were so pleased to see me that they actually carefully placed my plate on the table instead of the usual irritated casual clatter. I had slightly sweet gooey rice pudding with very hot spicy sauce. Having filled myself with this and wiped my eyes I found a second course of puris (inflated chapatis) with potato and onion mush (bhaji) which is a delicious breakfast. Immediately after breakfast Surya arrived with Raja, and I lay on the bed with the fan doing its job while I heard Raja's news for the year. They left and in walked Prof. Venkaiah and 4 students to welcome me and make some arrangement. As soon as Venkaiah left, Kiran arrived to take me to lunch travelling on his father's scooter. He warned me beforehand that I would be expected to pray and cut a new year cake. So he gave me a written list of all the family to pray for and I had to practice to get the pronunciation right. The house was full of brothers, sisters, brother's wives and 2 kids. When I arrived they were in there 'beds'. These are looped saris hanging from hooks in the ceiling. everyone who walked by gave them a shove so they were constantly gyrating and swinging dangerously. They even played

a game with them - aim to get them as close to the ceiling without falling out. Most of the family sat on a rug on the floor and an old man sang a Telugu song (I guess it was a Christian one but it sounded just like the Hindu priest's songs that are played out of loudspeakers in the villages first thing in the mornings). There were a few bible readings and then the climax of me gabbling all these names. When I asked if it was a special prayer, Kiran said "yes, you pray that we will all be healthy, wealthy and happy during the year". I asked if this was even if we don't really deserve to be and he said " especially if we don't deserve it". Father was still a bit sozzled from previous night but he was easier to deal with. I then had to cut a pink and white cream cake. After my ceremonial cut, the father came over and cut a bite sized chunk and stuffed it in my mouth in what seems to be a traditional thing - serving one another. If you call service being force fed disgustingly sweet, messy pink cream cake. For good fortune (theirs) I then had to go round stuffing everyone else's face including the little kids. All this was photographed for posterity. Next was pass the baby (12 months) game. Everyone wanted to hold him and to wish him a happy new year. I found it was a bit like passing the parcel, the winner (me) being the one he chose to pee over. I was assured that this would bring good luck. I was soaked but a quick wipe with a towel was all that could be done so I spent the next hour feeling as if I had wet myself. No, I cannot really remember what this is like; and no it is not a promise of things to come.

Kiran then drove me back. I had a shower and set off for an afternoon walk through the dairy farm towards the village during a beautiful sunset. As I walked past the cow shed I was stopped by a group of shouting men in usual khaki shorts and vests of the dairy workers. It was Punga... who I have seen most previous years at his house in the village. He came up with a dazzling white smile, contrasting well with his khaki clothes and khaki skin - the result of a thick layer of cow and elephant muck all over him. So I took the obligatory photos of them all and carried on my walk, after agreeing that I would visit his house next morning at 6.15 in the morning. I was sad to find they have cut down my favourite grove of palm trees where all the parakeets previously lived and where I had seen some of the most interesting birds including Indian Pitta (sounds like bread) and the coucals. This is to build a bypass. As soon as I returned Surya appeared with Mahdu to take me to eat. Mahdu works in a place that produces laminated pictures - he made the ones I have at home. We crammed 3 of us onto the 125cc bike to drive through the chaos of early evening Tirupati, weaving through crowds of bikes, rickshaws, yellow 3 wheelers (autos), pigs, goats, cows, buffalo, ox carts, children, scooters, jeeps, buses, lorries etc. All of these have a preference for the middle of the road - to avoid the potholes and families sitting selling stuff at the sides of the roads. We had the usual rice with chillies and then back to guest house where Raja was supposed to come at 8.30. To get here in time Surya drove us in the dark through the University grounds with a flickering headlight (ie it occasionally flickered on), hitting sleeping policemen (one literally I think) at high speed to see if he could unseat me; he later said that he thought my little nervous grunts were "my expression of appreciation, sir, for my safe driving". Raja did not come but left a message that he would be here tomorrow (to jump ahead this arrangement was also cancelled).

2nd Jan. Libby's birthday; I lay and meditated on her unselfish love and care for all of us. I hope the boys let her know how much she is appreciated. The night had been cold enough to use a blanket. No sheets and the blankets have hairy tassels at both ends which have knack of finding entrances to nose mouth and ears during the night. I woke at 6 and walked, coughing through the cold air, to the village to visit my old friend. Although I remembered the house I could see no-one around and felt sensitive about banging on doors so early; none of them speak much English so I could not ask about him. So walked back through pink dawn. Had boring breakfast of omelette and square sweetish dull bread with 3 cups of tea served in 3 separate cups (I had asked for lots of tea). Manohar (previous security guard) appeared to wish me a happy new year. He now has 2 children and wants me to visit them and to drink whiskey with him and his friends. As none of them speaks much English this would be a bit dull so I have avoided this so far. Venkaiah had said that I should come any time in the morning but at 9.20 a student turned up to tell me they were waiting for me.

When I arrived I found 10 of the final year MSc final year students waiting for me. I recognised most of them. Venkaiah then explained that the State Chief Minister had just decreed that all government employees must spend at least 5 hours every day of this week in Social Service. That is, all students and staff have to go out and help clean up the place or to help drain wet places to drive out mosquitoes or clean walls of graffiti etc. etc. So the students are attending my lectures and doing this work. Also the lecturers. The programme they are involved in is called the Green and Clean Programme. They all stand around with machetes in their hands watching the 2 low paid lab orderlies cutting the grass. They say they want me to do something with a crowbar tomorrow so they can send a photo to the paper and say that even visiting professors are forced to do this slave labour. I gave 2 consecutive lectures on oxidative phosphorylation and then, very dry, wandered back to lunch which was excellent, in spite of my teeth dropping out from eating too many chillies. It has been a beautiful day with a little cloud but mainly sunny with a breeze. Thinking of all of you at home! Kiran turned up after lunch and we spent most of the afternoon listening to music. As he was planning to stay all afternoon I did what I had planned and sat in the sun to collect some vitamin D and raise my morale (high already). This is what Surya calls my glamour activity. Kiran sat in the dark in my room playing (alternately) Celine Dion in French and Wagner in German. As the golden evening period arrived I insisted we go for a walk in the agricultural college grounds. Very peaceful and nice walk was terminated by Surya roaring up on the motorbike to drive us back. Kiran left and we went to Surya's new home. Much further than previously but in a nicer quiet area. They have the whole of one floor for their flat so now Surya has his own room. He used to sleep in the 'lounge' - only about 2.5 metres square (when visitors came and he was sleepy he used to go to the worst film just down the local cinema and sleep there). I nearly caused a disaster when I went to sit down on a bed and was about to throw a cushion to the back only to discover it was Surya's tiny blind grandfather tucked up with his lungis over his head. Had some nice food and then came back on the town bus. Always an exciting ride.

Walked down the road with Manohar at about 10.30 to phone home to wish Libby a happy birthday. After waiting for 4 others to finish their calls (20 minutes) the lines were engaged. After waiting longer I got through eventually only to hear that she was at pictures to see ANTZ with Hugh. Had nice chat with Clive and Karen who told me that Kay had died. Clive reminded me that Karen's mother had died on my birthday but I think this correlation is not significant.

Today's joke (from Raja): When the elephant and the ant were playing hide and seek how did the elephant know the ant was hiding in the temple? He saw his sandals placed outside.

It is now 11.50 and so to bed. Goodnight to you all and to LIBBY, LOTS of LOVE and A HAPPY BIRTHDAY. So sorry I missed you.

Jan 3rd: Hello again. Started the day being woken from a deep sleep at 7.30 by Samanaya (= Sambaiah) the cook to ask if I wanted early morning tea. I declined which was stupid as I was awake anyway. So I arranged my first two lectures on molecular biology and the genetic code for the morning lectures (2 lectures on a Sunday morning!). Had my nice breakfast of puris and very hot potato bahji with 3 cups of tea. I was horrified to find the day is cloudy. Came back from breakfast to find Raja here to celebrate his 23rd birthday which we did with a cup of luke warm Thums Up and 2 pieces of rum chocolate. Went off to lecture at 10.0 only to find the place locked up and everywhere deserted. They all came together 15 minutes later. So gave 2 consecutive lectures and returned for lunch to find Surya waiting with the paper, and detergent for washing clothes and a clothes line and to make arrangements for getting to Raja's party tonight. He stayed until 2 when I sat in the sun reading the paper for an hour. Kiran arrived to listen to music and play on computer while I rather selfishly ignored him and prepared my protein synthesis lectures. These are difficult and needed updating. It is more difficult to prepare to give 2 lectures at a time. Surya was supposed to come at 5.30 to take me to Raja's but he was late so I had a phone call from Raja to ask me if I was OK because his mother had cooked especially for me. Telephone system is much improved; previously I used to have to dash across the sandy car park between my separate room and the main

foyer. Now they dash across it to me with the mobile phone. Eventually S came and we set off to walk down a delightfully peaceful Sunday road. Raja then appeared on his brothers motorbike so we had a less peaceful journey - 3 crammed on the bike over very sandy bumpy rough back roads. The 'party' consisted of me sitting on a bench eating from an array of special dishes prepared specially for me (non veg) while there was a flow of friends of Raja wandering in picking up a plate of fried rice and chillies and sitting on the bed chatting and then wandering off. Raja kept jumping up to check all were happy, then someone would get off the bed to come and sit by me to chat. I was the only constantly positioned person while all flowed about me. In the background was a telly switching every few minutes between 3 films in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. actually they looked like the same film but I was assured they were not. This was then changed by Raja whose favourite programme is one broadcast by National Geographic magazine which was telling us all about Bali arts and crafts. We then went off to a distant trade fair/exhibition/funfair outdoors near the Guestline Bliss hotel. The main attraction was a huge Ferris wheel which went at terrifying pace. That was just watching. Cowardly Chris volunteered to photograph it all. We had previously met many of Raja's and Surya's friends so I was happily ignored until they realised too late that I was escaping. One of Raja's student friends also avoided this experience and latched onto me (*mutual*) for the rest of the evening. He is planning to join the navy and is worried that they will make him climb up masts and he is worried about being sick on to the crew below. I assured him that he would not have to do that and he accepted me as an authority on such things (as I am) and said I had made him very happy (I like to spread a little happiness). I was then invited to his mothers house for dinner later in the week and we all set off home. I then discovered that our journey to the fair was gentle compared with the 3 man motorbike trip home with Surya driving. The result of these rides is a great feeling of wellbeing (just at being alive I suppose). I should have taken the opportunity at the fair of entering one of the booths and having a "Cheque of my Hellth". This reminds me that one of the irritating things about Robert Ludlum's books is that they don't seem to have been proofread only (spellchecked); at restaurants 'checks' are picked up and football players are 'bodychequed'.

4th Jan. I feel so pleased to be able to write this. Just after I had written the last sentence last night I put the computer down and when I picked it up again it had gone dead. Nothing I could do would revive it; the screen was in a black sulk. So was I as there is nothing to do with a lap top if it goes wrong - it must be returned to the manufacturer.

I decided I needed comfort so combined this with another attempt to get you Libby to wish you a late happy birthday; so I walked down the road half a mile to the STD phone booth only to find it closed.

I woke in the night having a nightmare about computers and stayed awake for an hour or so. As a result I overslept and had a horrible cold breakfast; what was good yesterday - hot globe-like puris with delicious green potato bhaji soupy stuff - was disgusting cold. The puris were deflated greasy dishcloths and the green potato seemed like something on the pavement outside a pub on sunday mornings. Being a good Englishman I used my stiff upper lip and shovelled it in while thinking of home. I then rushed to my lecture on a hot sunny morning which raised morale sufficiently to give 2 enjoyable (for me) lectures. Some more of last years students have turned up including a very enthusiastic boy from the biotechnology class who "heard the rumour of your presence amongst us and came joyfully to your inspiring lecture sir" (just as it should be). Prof Venkaiah came late because he had been to get his white hair cut black. I walked back in the sun through the wilder parts of the campus which was full of staff and students doing their social service. This is supposed to help the poor but what they are doing is clearing the rough bushes to plant pretty gardens for themselves. This removes the main source of fuel for cooking for some of the local villagers.

As soon as I got back i was visited by the 'sailor' I met at the fairground [Sreeram Kaki, also called Ramu; nik name = jolly boy, pronounced jally bay]. Showed family photos and accepted invitation to dinner for wednesday. Then Surya arrived with yesterdays Sunday times (India). I told

Surya to go and turn on the computer to share my horrible experience with him, and it worked perfectly. It has a hibernation function and if not plugged into mains there is no way of waking it up. When it was turned on with the mains it merely went back to exactly where it had left off. What a relief. They then played games while I went and had excellent lunch - Samanya felt guilty about breakfast I think so had produced about 5 veg dishes all good and a bottle of Thums Up. I then spent a wonderful peaceful afternoon preparing lectures and reading in the sun. Went to Kapiltheertham waterfall temple. Flagged down an auto - 3 wheeler - (you clap your hands and bellow). He already had 3 large male passengers in the back but put me on the seat in front (only designed for one - the driver) much to the annoyance of the other 3 passengers. This is a new policy in the state - you should share facilities. I had to elegantly swing my hips out of the side of the open cab every time he wanted to turn left - to make room for the handlebars. Actually he stopped at the University for me to get my own auto. Spent a peaceful hour or so sitting on the steps listening to the temple singing until S arrived to take me to dinner. There was less swimming in the temple pool this year but there were the usual groups of families with shorn hair (from the temple up in the hills), and teenagers wanting photos. We walked for twenty minutes down to bus station and had nice veg dinner (with paneer butter masala and fried rice with chilies) in the Woodlands hotel restaurant. Came back by auto at about 8.30 and spent the rest of the evening listening to Beethoven String quartets. Remarkably, this is Surya's favourite classical music.

Shall now go bed early. I tried to phone again today to wish you happy birthday Libby but failed to get through to UK. Anyway, its nice to think of you all last thing at night. Hope you are all well. I miss you all (including Karen) which is a good thing I suppose. At least I hope you miss me.

Tues jan 5th.

Hello again. I am writing this at 10.15 at night with my CD playing vintage blues. It is almost appropriate. I don't seem to have any energy for writing this tonight so it will be a factual record. I woke up cold again. Not far from here the coldest night on record was reported (9 degrees); this happened to be the maximum temperature recorded in London yesterday. I know this because my paperboy Surya bought the Times this morning at 8.00. He is so good - this requires a long cycle ride uphill of about 2.5 miles. He acts as my social secretary. I tend to see him when other plans do not materialise which tends to be frequent. Another nice morning with sun and cloud, so not too hot. After the cool night it heats up pretty quickly. Gave my 2 morning lectures and was back by 11.30. My dinner with Venkaiah had been postponed from yesterday to today but he cancelled it again. Did washing etc then strolled into back 'garden' where I experienced an odd Indian ornithological phenomenon a 'wave of birds'. I don't mean a gang of waving girlies. A mixed group of birds slowly moved through the trees while I sat and tried to identify them; here they are: 3 nameless; 1 turtle dove; 1 shrike, 1 Coil; 2 golden orioles; 3 black drongos; 7 seven sisters; 1 white throated kingfisher; 2 types of sunbird (like a humming bird); 3 mynahs and a beautiful chestnut Coucal. All that without my birdbook!

Had excellent lunch again; Sambaiah produces at least 2 new vegetable dishes every day. Raja phoned and arranged to come here at 8.0 this evening so I laid my brilliant plan of having a long stroll down to Surya's new house for dinner at 6 and then coming back here for Raja. This was to fail dismally. I prepared lectures in sun for a couple of hours. My pineal gland (I think) is enjoying the sun and I am filling up with happy endorphins. A boy spent half an hour going back and forth past my chair carrying small cement bags from a nearby shed to some place out on the road. The first time he just stared blankly (actually it was probably in admiration); the next he smiled feebly; the next, he laughed and waved, and the last time he cycled up close to my chair, where I happened to be drinking Mirinda, and pointed to my room and his mouth and indicated desperate thirst. So he came in and drank my last bottle. I think he deserved it from his work.

I had a hot shower, or rather I threw a few buckets of hot water over me and wonderfully refreshed I set off on my planned long walk in the best part of the day to Surya's. I had gone 10

paces and Rajiv Dixit (pronounced unfortunately Dickshit) appeared with 3 other research students. I have known Rajiv for 3 years now - he is the son of the Head of the AuroVedic medical College. He had come to ask my advice. So I gave in graciously and ordered tea for 5. He then lured me into the garden to ask me about his plan to go to Berlin to do a PhD. Apparently they do not charge fees. I did not know what to say. It will be dreadfully cold. They only eat meat (sausages) and cabbage and speak German. I promised to find out the reputation of the place. I then had a similar enquiry from a rather unpleasant student who has plans to go to Hungary for a post doc position. This student complained to Sambaiah the cook that all the 5 teacups were not identical - he assured me that etiquette demanded that they should be. I winked at Sabaiah who did a sort of grovelling Indian servant act and pretended to take the tray away. I persuaded him to leave it.

Eventually I set off for Surya's in the beautiful evening golden sunshine. I realised it was the first time this year that I had walked all the way into town so I called in at the cricket ground for old times sake then on down Ghandi road. A boy (16yrs) on a bike sidled up alongside in the chaotic strolling evening crowd and asked name etc. He is Imran (like the Paki cricketer Sir). He offered to take me as far as the D R Mahal (cinema) near Surya's on his crossbar. I declined but he walked with me anyway. Rather reminiscent of Suresh (Surya's brother) when I first met him. He is son of policeman. Unfortunately I had forgotten to bring my notebook and I made a mistake in my route. The result was that I failed to reach Suryya's. He has no phone so all I could do was to hurriedly promise to call and see Imran's family and get an auto to rush back to the guest house etc. I then remembered that Surya's father works in the station which I was just passing. So I persuaded the auto to wait and went dashing in to find him. I remember the first time that I went in the station I had felt very nervous. It is about the size of Southampton main station but the platforms are twice the length and depth and they are covered with what appear to be destitute refugees. Families camp out and light little fires on the platform for cooking as they may have a day and night to wait for their connections. As usual granny is wrapped in a white shroud. There is hardly any way to walk down the platform. I ran down it, hopping amongst the fires like Harrison Ford in a chase sequence in the Temple of Doom. I found his office and he was delighted to get me in the auto back to the house. As we got in the Auto, Imran rushed up (he had cycled after the auto) and gave me a present of a black biro (only used a few times he said). We reached the house about 6.30; one hour late. As we walked the last 50 yards down the last of the narrow streets/passageways towards his house I was directed by the sound of 'Falling into you' (Cel Dion) coming from 3 floors up in his house at the end of the road. Surya had put it on very loudly in case I was lost so I could home in on it. I then had to bolt my dinner (chilli curry with chillies) to catch an auto back to guest house to meet Raja. He was not there. So I used the waiting time to phone Sreeram to check if I was due to go as planned to his aunt's house for dinner tomorrow night. I left a message for him to ring me. 20 minutes later his brother phoned to tell me not to move because he had pedalled to the exhibition field to get Sreeram who would soon come to the guest house. This he did and we arranged for tomorrow night. He had gone to the fair to meet his girlfriend. She lives next door but he is not allowed to be friends (the usual thing). I then phoned Raja and got his mother who just said Raja not here. 30 minutes later he phoned and immediately cancelled my irritation by explaining that he had had to take his granny to hospital. All this phoning involves dashing about the guest house compound to find the mobile phone and then to find somewhere that it would pick up a signal while shouting WAIT WAIT into the mouthpiece.

So, a hectic day. Tomorrow promises to be similar.

Sorry this is a bit dull.

Goodnight to you all; you are just starting to watch Heartbreak high if its still on. Lots of love, Chris and Daddiji.

Wed Jan 6th. 10.30 pm.

Exactly half way through. It seems longer than this because I am so familiar with the place; I think I am tacking old memories onto this year thus extending the total time spent. Today seems much the

same as yesterday but for my sake I shall plod on recording it. Day started with paper boy (good) and breakfast (disgusting). It was dosas - a sort of floppy pancake (bland taste and boring texture and limp and cold) with a very spicy coconut gunge and thin brown curry (also almost cold). I had about 10 bites and gave up. Burnt my tongue on the tea and came back to my room to have a warm Thums Up (like curried coke) with some shortbread biscuit with 4 malaria tablets. No problem. Had very nice walk with Surya in beautiful sunny morning to lecture. This takes about 20 minutes and I usually go through the campus which this morning was full of sunbirds (what is it you are expecting sir, we have sun and we have birds so they meet up occasionally!).

Finished off 2 lectures on lactose and tryptophan operons and had equally nice walk back through campus which was full of people dutifully doing their Social Services - "pursuing the Clean and Green Policy, sir". The idea is that the money saved on cleaning the place up and planting gardens and trees will be spent on welfare and education for the poor. It was this policy that led to the Guest house being properly cleaned up after 17 years.

Suban and another research scholar turned up to discuss their research for an hour. Apparently since Prof Venkaiah returned from USA he has not been very helpful and actually stops some of the students from getting help from other departments with whom he seems to have feuds. I only ever learn this sort of stuff from the research students. I suppose that is where our students learn about our odd problems etc. Just before lunch Raja called in to apologise for not coming last night and enjoyed blasting his Michael Jackson into the peaceful air of Tirupati while I did some washing. Had very good lunch to make up for awful breakfast. Today was almost cloudless but with a slight breeze. I sat in garden for an hour or so checking my knowledge of protein synthesis for tomorrow and was picked up by Kiran (Frances) on a motor scooter to go and inspect his school. On the way we passed the town wash place. This consists of a series of concrete terraces with water flowing through big concrete troughs with flat concrete slabs sloping down into them. The technique is to pick up your dirty sari, soak it in already soapy water and then to beat it on the platform until the dirt hurtles out crying for mercy. Its all very colourful but it looks hard work and smells a bit disgusting as the used water flows down into an open drain.

The Good Shepherd School is in 3 small rented rooms a few houses down the little road from Kiran's house. He has a tiny cupboard of a room looking out onto a corridor - open to the sky with 2 rooms for teaching coming off this. No windows anywhere (to keep it cool). There were 26 kids, all about 3 ft high and aged from 5 - 10, all in red shorts or dresses and white shirts sitting on low benches facing a blackboard with Welcome to CHIS UK. They stood up and saluted very seriously when I came in; I equally seriously returned the salute and sat down at the front. They have one teacher beside Kiran's mother; she was dressed in beautiful white Indian trouser suit and looked very cool and beautiful. Then each child stood, in turn, and with arms crossed and very serious face recited "my name is Chandra Sekar and I am in class 2" etc. They were then picked out one by one and asked to recite to me - English nursery rhymes "London bridge is falling down" etc. After this I distributed a bag of sweets (Kiran's good idea). I then asked them questions about their town and country then took photos of them and the teachers. Kiran's father came in (sober at last) and chose 2 of them to recite the morning prayer (English Prayer book Lord's prayer) and then they prayed for teachers and after a little prompting included me in the list (not my prompting). It is not specifically a Christian School and there is only one child of a Christian family there. Hindus and Muslims send their children because the teaching is in English (a little anyway) and everyone knows they are friendly. They pay 100 Rupees /month (£1.50) this year which is not enough to pay the expenses but next year the fees are doubled. This is just to get it all started. They have a lower rate for really poor children. They attend from 9 to 12.30 then 2 to 4.30. The older ones then stay on for another 2 hours for private tuition. A holiday from this was declared in my honour, so I was eventually released to go and have spicy tea in Kiran's house while he played his guitar. Although I told him I was going out to eat soon his mother insisted on getting me food - a flat dry fried egg with a pile of greasy sweet fried bread. I struggled through a bit of this until I was rescued by Surya - come to take me to the guest house on yet another borrowed motorbike; this one had a damaged

gearbox and sometimes failed to get into neutral. This nearly caused a spectacular bump when we played chicken with an oncoming motorcyclist, both aiming at the same narrow gate to the campus. We won but left the other chap rather upset (literally). When I said that he wasn't as polite as usual Surya told me that "you don't want to know why" but then confessed about the gear box; his impolite courage was merely a failure to get into neutral and stop. Soon after we got back Sreeram and a friend turned up to say that it was not convenient to go to his house for dinner because they had builders in and so his Aunt had prepared special dinner for me and they would go back and get this and bring it to the guest house. Surya assured me there was no way to refuse this so I graciously welcomed the good idea and off they went. Fortunately they were an hour getting back so my egg had had some time to get through the system. Sreeram then unloaded his 6 metal canisters of rice, 2 dishes of rather thin curry stuff, 2 huge dishes of meat, enough rice to feed a family and a tin of yoghurt. I then found I was the only one to eat all this. Sreeram sat and played with the computer (drawing the Taj Mahal with Window paint while his friend went through my photos, all with the William Tell overture in background. The meat was very spicy hot and mainly gristle and sharp bones. It was all rather unpleasant. When I could face no more Sreeram was a bit hurt. I explained that one of us must be hurt; either me by eating too much, or him because I would not eat all his dinner. I claimed that being the guest of India then I should be in a special minority protected category and he eventually agreed whereupon his friend ate the rest, complaining that it was too spicy to eat. I am still feeling a bit sick of it all. They were both good company and on balance I am glad they came but I could do with a rest from the awful ritual of getting up from the table (or bed) and blowing my nose to stop the tears and snot dribbling into the curry, although this might have improved it.

I am going to bed, still feeling a bit unwell but nothing a good stiff upper lip and a thought of home will not overcome.

Goodnight all; hope you are feeling better than I am.

Thurs 7th. I am actually writing this at 10.00 on Friday. I shall have trouble thinking of what happened yesterday. I remember we spent some time after my lectures discussing when I should finish. The holiday officially starts on Saturday but Venkaiah has told them they must attend on the Saturday. One girl (the best) must leave Friday morning for her home place Nellore. Another girl must leave soon to get married. But most of them want me to continue as long as possible especially to learn genetic engineering and recombinant DNA technology. I have never taught this before so I spent 4 hours (some sitting in sunshine) preparing a few lectures on this. This was very good for me because I learned a few more basic facts. In the middle of the afternoon Rajiv Dixit turned up with a load of papers to sign - over the top of stamps in triplicate to claim my expenses (£6 per day for 9 days). He then was desperate for me to advise him if he should go to Germany to do a PhD. I found that his father had enough money saved to pay about half the amount he would need; the rest he would have to work for in a country that does not want immigrant workers and where they don't know English and he does not know German. When I found that it would use up most of his father's savings I suggested it would go much further in India and that he could spend it more effectively in getting training in one of the really good Indian Institutes. He seemed so relieved to get this advice I think he really did not want to go. Of course I cannot be certain I am right but at least he will have a happy father (always a good aim in life). He had trouble then tearing himself away to take back the forms to Venkaiah. "I don't know whether you are a father or a friend, I am so confused" he said, hugging me rather feebly, while peering tearfully at me through big old fashioned glasses. At 4.30 Venkaiah came to drive me to his house for a cup of tea and snacks to meet his wife and new daughter in law. His car makes our Lada into a Porsche. He has no real idea of how to drive. It has a rather stiff gear lever on the steering column. Inconveniently, it is necessary to let go of the wheel with the left hand to change gear and he keeps pulling the wheel with his right hand. So all gear changes are accompanied by a violent veering to the right. On the main road into town there is a central divider so we soon come up to within a few inches of this when he realises that we must be

careful. The result is that we swing between the middle of the road and the central divide with all other traffic, most of which is faster, overtaking on the inside with wild screams and hoots. We were even overtaken by an oxcart. He mutters instructions to himself before each operation - change gear up - No down - Ok that's good; turn here - is there something behind us - God, what is that - are only autorickshaw - you see these fellows think they are so clever but they don't know I'm a professor of Biochemistry". It was good to arrive. I then had to slog through 2 huge padded books of wedding photos. The whole business takes 2 days so there is time for 3 inches of photograph books. The saris are very colourful so the pictures look nice but knowing few of the people makes it all a bit dull. With the mother in law and bride sitting watching I had to continue for about 30 minutes with a constant muttering of appreciation. Chendu (the groom - Venkaiah's son) looked so serious through it all. I asked his wife if he had become a serious fellow and she said No, he was serious for only the first day of our married life; now he is a wonderful jolly man. She is very nice and witty. Chendu himself eventually arrived just as I was leaving so back inside for more photos. We had to hurry back because I was 40 minutes late for meeting Surya at the guest house (we had agreed 'Indian time' so no real problem). It later turned out that he was in the house behind Venkaiah's and he had a problem getting away and we almost drove up the long road together.

Drove on a small Motorbike (Hero Honda) out to Guestline hotel for dinner (not specially good except for wonderful pistachio Kulfi). This was 8Km away through very narrow dirt lanes lined by open sewers into which Surya tried to direct us. I tried to give him a driving lesson all the way and he did start to improve. He had never learned how to get into a lower gear before an obstacle. So each obstacle we met (children, old women, buffalo, scooters on wrong side of alley way, holes in road, sleeping policemen -real and stone) we tended to stall as we pulled away. I didn't enjoy it at all and was glad to be home, although suffering from stiff legs and arms and tensed stomach from the stress of holding on and getting ready for the crash which never came.

Friday 8th. Woke at 4 am from a grim dream in which I was hung for some crime. This took place in a small sports stadium with a few well wishers in the stand. A priest said ...have mercy on your soul and I had a sinking feeling and a sharp pain in my neck; I thought I am dying so goodbye but then I found that I was still walking about but I went up to Jeff Knight (why him I wonder) in the stand and asked if he had seen me recently. Of course, he said, but not anymore of course. I woke up wondering if I had been reincarnated. Had difficulty getting back to sleep after that nasty experience.

This morning gave 2 long enthusiastic lectures on gene cloning etc and came back to an early lunch. Sambaiah was very pleased with himself as he had a big function to cook for and it had all gone well - I had a sample and told him it was excellent (it was). Ram Prasad came after lunch to deliver an invitation for Saturday to go to dinner with his family (I went to his sisters wedding last year). It seems I can't refuse as its his friends car that we use in Madras. I then sat reading paper and doing a little more preparation for last lectures - in the strong sun with 3 different sorts of ant crawling over me. Two of the more enthusiastic, but rather tedious, students turned up to discuss "our doubts sir". The main question was what exactly is the genetic code? This was the subject of 8 lectures so I am feeling a bit of a failure. I think it was just an excuse to come and visit. While they looked at my pictures and played a CD I fell fast asleep on the bed for 40 minutes. After they left I set out at 4.30 in the golden afternoon sun to walk down town. I have spent too much time travelling on bikes and wanted to wander around the temple area. I had just passed the police quarters when an excited Imran rushed up to tell me his mother had seen me walking down Prakasam road. This is the young Muslim boy who had helped me look for Surya's house the other day. He had earlier phoned to ask if he could visit me tomorrow in the afternoon ("please stay there; do not go wandering off"). He was pleasant company as he was happy to wander casually about. We went into the temple area which he had never visited before (in 15 years in Tirupati). As Surya's old house is near the temple I wandered up the little alley that led there for old time's sake only to find Surya there, visiting Veena (his lady friend with the drunk husband). So we all went into Veena's

house and had horlicks and biscuits. This tastes very odd on a hot sticky Indian afternoon. I then set off alone to do a little more exploring before successfully finding my way to Surya's new house. He still didn't trust that I would make it because there was Swarna his sister standing on the outside corridor 2 floors up looking out for me. I dislike walking along that thing. It is very high and the wall only just comes up to my knees. The grandfather was there huddled up on the bed. He is almost blind and does nothing but sit on the bed all day. He was a very strict Brahmin and still considers some castes untouchable. This includes non-Hindus so apparently he would be appalled to know that I was wandering about his family house. Until he was 9 years old Surya had no friends at all. He was taken to and from school in a rickshaw and was never allowed outside. When they left Vijayawada to come to Tirupati this changed (Grandfather remained behind). They lived for the first 3 years in a small house in the same alley in which they now live so there are many old friends there.

Saturday 9th.

Strictly speaking today is the first day of the Pongal holiday. Venkaiah is away so I agreed with the students that I would start at 9.30 and give only 90 minutes of lecture. This was on the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and on some applications of genetic engineering. Had lots of appreciative comments from the students when I finished. Afterwards Parthasarathy (previous Head of Dept) turned up laughing nervously as usual. He walked the length of the corridor towards us laughing and flinging his arm high in the air like some tennis players do to let a bit of air in their shirts I suppose. When he does it his huge gold wristwatch (3cm diameter) falls down his skinny arm to his elbow. He has a variation this year. Every second arm fling he uses both arms together. He did 5 or 6 of these movements as he approached us rather like a gibbon just fallen out of the trees and trying to find a low branch. He is always so nervous so I made some excuse about getting back to meet someone; I collected 2 of the research students and went to get some tea in the noisy canteen and saw the other staff to say goodbye. Instead of my usual direct route back through the campus I went birdwatching further out towards the hills towards the NCC area. Cloudless and very hot but plenty of shady places to stop and watch the bee eaters, bulbuls etc. Very enjoyable. On last part of walk a small 10 year old girl cycled up and started chatting like the boys usually do. She is from Punjab, her army father having been posted here. She misses all her friends and she can't speak Telugu. "That's why I am talking to you sir because you can speak English." She was very sweet but my photo won't do her justice as she insisted on putting on a serious blank face instead of her usual animated smile.

After lunch I went out to have my usual time sitting in the sun reading the paper like a good mad dog but Imran turned up as planned so I did my usual illustrated lecture with family pictures. Then he did the usual thing and explored my room demanding the cost of deodorant, films, pants etc. I then was allowed a rest while he played with the binoculars. "Do you have a second pair at home? No, why. You would not miss these if you wanted to give them to me". So I explained that they are a scientific instrument and so expensive; "what to do, what to do?"

Frances Kiran Kumar then appeared and played music for an hour or so. I had to tell Imran to go and let me talk to my friend. Ok sir but surely I am also your friend? OK OK. Had to make a deal and agree to visit his home to meet his father tomorrow morning. Frances then explained what seems a crazy scheme. He needs to make some income to keep them going while the school becomes fully established. He plans to save up to buy a VCD player (Video CD - a new alternative to ordinary videos). He will then hire this out to shops that hire out the CDS (films). He expects to get an average of 100 rupees a night. It should pay for itself within 3 months and then bring in a good income. It will cost about £120. As it is to establish The Good Shepherd School I think I shall buy the VCD and have an honorable Christian investment. [Surya made enquiries the next day and confirmed through Mahdu, friend with many small business connections, that this is a well established practice]. I went to one of the hiring places. I am surprised I know nothing about these things. There are a lot of these little booths renting out film CDS - including the most recent; Saving

Private Ryan, Titanic etc. The shop man told me that I would have to pay 10 rupees (15p) to hire for 24 hours but he had a problem at the moment because he did not have a video recorder to hire - they were already out. I would have to pay 200 rupees to borrow one when they are available. So it all seems a good idea.

Ram Prasad arrived to take me by motorbike to dinner with himself, Surya and another friend. His sister, whose idea it was (she is on holiday from the US) had had to go to Madras I was relieved to hear; she is a bit of a show off, expecting me to agree with her that India is very backward etc. I really dislike conversations that start by being apologetic for India. Had nice dinner in a typical very dark small restaurant with more helpers than tables; each has a different status, from washing tables to leaning on the wall watching everything. Had vegetarian fried rice generously laced with cut chillies, with paratha and 'gravy'. I then decided to walk home - partly to avoid the tension of bike rides. I always forget what a long walk it is from the town entrance to the guest house.

Had no will power to write this when I arrived back so am writing it Sunday night. My torch bulb has blown so I usually sleep with the light on to avoid waking up after reading in order to turn off the light. I have acquired too many mosquito bites and these woke me a few times so had a damaged night's sleep.

Sunday 10th 10.30pm.

I am too tired to write this but I know I will regret it if I do not do so. Actually I must write last night's page first.

Woke early and went for a long walk past the dairy farm out to my favourite small village in the morning sun. The paddy fields look wonderful today. Every 3rd small field is fed by a water pipe which is also used for washing clothes so there are little splashes (literally) of colour amongst the green paddy. There is always a relaxed feel about Sunday mornings. When I went to my old friend's house he was not there but his sister recognised me and alerted half the village. So I sat on the long stone bench outside the house on a mat and had tea while all the urchins had turns with the binoculars. The oldest boy found the moon and got very excited. He then failed to find it for the smaller boys some of whom pretended they could see it while pointing randomly at the sky. Then walked on to watch the ploughing - with 3 ploughs, 6 oxen and 6 old men helping encourage the oxen. Hugh would love it - nearly knee deep in perfect fluid squelchy mud. Returned for breakfast at 9.20. Surya had called earlier with the Sunday Times India. Had no time to read it as I had to walk down to Imran's father. Having walked for 2 hours already this seemed a long trudge in the heat. He lives just inside the town entrance past the cricket ground. A very nice man who is a police inspector who now lectures on law to the new recruits. Had the usual problem of responding to requests for advice on a son's career. His son wants to work in computers and the father mentioned the advantages of being an engineer so my advice of doing computer engineering was felt to be very wise. Imran is only 16 but seems to be doing very difficult trigonometry and calculus. I didn't mention previously that the first time I met him Imran asked what soap I used; "old fashioned Pears see-through soap; Why do I smell of it?" "No, but it makes you so white". After nice tea and very nice chat set out to walk back. We called in at the cricket ground on the way. It is a huge place, with a little grass but mainly hard packed sandy soil, completely covered with boys playing cricket in overlapping informal pitches. The fielders from one game overlap those from the adjacent game etc. I am sure that Lowry would have painted it if he had seen it. As we walked by the side of the pitches I nearly trod on Raja who was killing time before coming up to see me. So I introduced them as both being the sons of senior policemen. I couldn't face the long walk back so we came by auto (15rup). Raja likes the copy of my copy of the Erika Badu disk so was delighted to leave with that together with some of the old Sunday times collection of Rock music etc. After lunch I slept in the sun then set out for the temple to meet the elephants. Mahdu's father is in charge of one of them and the idea was that I would ride on it. I thought this was to be at the dairy farm but it was in the temple forecourt so I declined the offer. I collected Imran on the way; he had dressed in his best shirt and

deerskin shoes. Before continuing on our way I had to show him how to tie a big symmetrical knot in his school tie (a samosa knot). We met Surya and Mahdu at the elephants so had photo taken with the elephant's trunk resting on my head (blessing of god). The elephants then set off to another temple about half a mile distant. They move very fast and are given right of way by frightened cyclists who apparently irritate them so get swipes from their trunks as they pass. We strolled to the second temple and said hello again before going to have a party. Imran's idea of a party was to go and stand in the shade of a huge tamarind tree drinking cold lassi milk curds with sugar and a dash of lime. It was one of the best parties I have been to, on a hot dusty Sunday afternoon. We eventually meandered through the little backstreets to the gardens of the Tirumula Tirupati Desvenathams (temple administrators). Enjoyed the day cooling into sunset with the crows coming home to roost enjoying a good chat. This was probably about the dead rat I saw one of them eviscerating earlier. Imran asked me if I had any Muslim friends in UK. Yes, his name is Raff Azali bin Salleh. Surya asked what the 'bin' bit means (son of). I asked Imran if he knew Arabic; he frowned and said "I don't think so, I only know anaerobic". We had a couple of samosas from a small boy then set off for the exhibition (the funfair) where we were to meet Surya's mother, Swarna, Veena and her little daughter (Priya). There were far more people there this time and there was a very relaxed holiday atmosphere. I again contented myself with being the photographer. Paid 50p for a polaroid picture of me and Imran. This trip was partly a celebration for Swarna who had just brought home her first month's salary. She teaches 9-15 year olds - mainly biology, augmenting her day job with coaching in the evenings. We bought her some new sandals from a stall and then went to another dark banana leaf restaurant near the main bus stand - to eat dosas filled with veg curry. Then home by auto to listen with S to the haydn cello concertos before writing this. Sorry if its a bit factual but I am very sleepy. In fact I shall stop now. Goodnight my dears. It was so good to hear you all on the phone today. Goodnight.

Monday 11th Jan. My last full day in Tirupati. It started with a startling ring of the door bell at 7.00. I assumed it would be an enquiry about breakfast but it was my old friend NagaRaju standing there looking nervous and rather battered. He is the Biotechnology student whose company was so enjoyable in the last 2 years. He had come from his native place - a farming village near Vijayawada. Surya had told his friend Giri 2 months earlier that I was coming in the new year so he had travelled all night to come and see me. He had a bad headache so I dosed him up with soluble aspirins in fizzy orange chemical drink (Fanta).

As usual he wanted my advice. He had seemed one of the most promising students and told me he finished the course with a first class degree. I was impressed but was told later that 85% of the students get a first class. He finished his degree 6 months ago but has done nothing since except eat and sleep at his fathers home, spending the rest of the day as a street rowdy (he said). He could do a PhD in Biochemistry but their projects are pretty dead, the supervision is poor and it would probably not lead anywhere. He claims that he could not get into virology (a much better Department started by my first Professor here, N.V. Naidu, and now run by Srinivasulu). I later was given a lift back to guest house by a lecturer I also met on my first visit - Sai Gopal - who told me that he would give Raju a place if he spent 4 weeks working for a simple virology exam before he started. I eventually left Raju with a promise that he would investigate this possibility.

At breakfast time there was another ring at the bell and there was a welcome surprise; a smiling Surya with a steel can containing my breakfast (pakoras - spicy doughnuts) in thick veg curry. He had breakfast and there was enough for me and Raju who has become quite a friend of Surya in the last 2 years. Very enjoyable breakfast during which S reminded me for the tenth time that I was due to visit his home for the last time that evening.

We arranged that I would arrive about 6 at his house and would bring Raju and Kiran if available. Prof Venkaiah had been away for two days and I needed to see him to get my allowance money. It

is the usual crazy system which only gives me the rupees to spend at the end of the visit, when I have no time or need to spend them. No real problem as I intended to leave most of it behind anyway. I walked with Raju to the Department at about 9.30 only to find Subhan and other research students droopily mooching about under the nearby trees because the secretary had not turned up to open the Department. No sign of Venkaiah so we went to the canteen for tiffin (tea and snacks). After an hour of drifting about I set off to walk home and was picked up by Sai Gopal on his scooter. When we reached the guest house I put 2 chairs on the veranda to avoid spending time on my last day in my room in the dark. A good move as Sambaiah saw me and brought us tea. He had come in earlier to tell me he was going soon on holiday and that no more food would be available in the guest house; I gave him 200 rupees (£3) for all his trouble; actually he is only doing his job, looking after me but he does it well and he makes me feel as if I own the place. Had a nice time reminiscing about the old botany department and all the University politics that I have gradually understood over the last 16 years. Last night Imran told me that his father wanted me to go to their house after the fair to have dinner. I had explained that this was impossible as I was to be the host of Swarna at the restaurant; he had then said that he would bring me lunch. Not long after Sai Gopal left Kiran appeared as arranged and sorted out which CDS he would have; he will tape any that Surya wants or just swap with him occasionally. Imran then appeared with a great stack of steel cans containing enough lunch for 3 so Kiran stayed to share it. It was the usual non-veg stuff. Dried bits of beaten up chicken and hunks of gristly goat - all lubricated with very spicy veg curry. I would have had a horrible time trying to eat my share if Kiran had not been there to Hoover it all up. Kiran then left me to clear up - helped by a street dog who found our plates discarded on the veranda and had a wonderful time - at last a decent meal for a carnivore after the usual guest house vegetarian scraps. Imran then took over, playing music and asking questions about everything including religion politics etc. He maintains that he has seen me in some English medium film.

He eventually left at about 3 O'clock, giving me an hour to enjoy reading in the sun for last time. I put the chair out in its usual place in the garden, settled down in my shorts to read 'A fine balance' by Rohan Mistry. This is one of the best books set in India that I have ever read. Mainly about the problems of 2 or 3 generations of low caste Indians between partition in 1947 and the present including the 1975 Indira Gandhi Emergency period. After reading one page, gentle Rajiv Dixit and aggressive Reddy (research students) turned up to say goodbye. I suppressed my sigh, took up my chair and retired to the veranda where Sambaiah brought more tea. One of my rather pompous research student visitors had once tried to impress (I suppose) by complaining to him in Telugu; when I asked what it was about he told me he had asked him to go and change the teacups because they were not identical matching ones. I signalled to Sambaiah to forget this and go away, which he did with a black scowl on his face. The student then said I should not be afraid of the houseboys, sounding like some old colonel from the Raj. When they left, the sun was fast going down so I stayed on the veranda and had a peaceful read in the blessed evening light. Eventually an exhausted Raju appeared, having walked all round the campus discussing his future with everyone up to the Vice chancellor. I had wanted to walk to Surya's but he was too feeble and we picked up the first available auto, so I missed my final stroll through Gandhi road. The route goes passed the railway station and then crosses over the railway by a level crossing. Because there are so many trains in the early evening they leave the barriers down, leading to a regular traffic blockage - usually only autos and carts as it is not on a bus or truck route. All bikes, motorbikes, scooters, pedestrians and animals duck under the barriers and cross anyway until the 20 second blast on the majestic horn of the Chennai express clears the track for a minute or two. Found Surya's house with no problem, helped by seeing Swarna waiting for us on their outside corridor leading to their floor (3rd). This is only a narrow ledge with a very low wall preventing a drop of 40 feet. I was immediately taken into the back bedroom where Swarna bashed a body lying curled on the bed wrapped in a dhoti. It was her older brother Suresh who was my first friend in the family. He is based in Assam in the far north east in the air force (signalling) and had just been ordered to attend a course in the South so had negotiated a trip home - a 4 day train journey. A very nice surprise.

Last time I had seen him was in Delhi 4 years previous when he was unbelievably thin. He is now solid with thick moustache but with the same pale green/brown eyes and gentle voice. So we (including Raju) sat on the bed chatting and swatting mosquitoes with Raju slightly agitated because of his hope of seeing more of Swarna who he thinks would make him a good wife. In Assam it is usually snowing and very cold or raining and very hot and humid with the threat of terrorists and Chinese and the certainty of boredom. Suresh has another 2 years before being transferred to Bombay. Surya had decided to go and collect me from the guest house so we had crossed at some time. He arrived half an hour later preceded by a worried Kiran who came 20 minutes after the agreed time having been caught up in the dense mesh of ox carts and autos at the rail level crossing. I gave Swarna her delayed birthday present (I had attended her December birthday for the last 3 years) of Yardley's lace cologne and talcum powder, chosen by Surya. As is usual it was taken with a sweet gentle smile and immediately put on one side and ignored. If she had got closer to me she would have been able to detect it on me as Raju had earlier sprayed me with it. We then sat on camping chairs in the sitting room around a low table and ate a very good veg stew with puris and lime juice. Surya did the serving while the ladies - Swarna, mother and grandmother - potted about in the small kitchen peering round the door occasionally to have the satisfaction of seeing us well fed (its good that they know their place). It is frustrating not to be able to have more time with Swarna. I had cheated earlier and gatecrashed her evening tuition class on the floor of Surya's room under the pretext of helping by asking her five 14 year olds questions about their knowledge of England. One answer was that they have a dirty president; no son that's USA, we have a superclean prime minister. During dinner grandfather sat on his bed in the same room all folded up hunting for his vegetables with a puri on his steel plate with Surya occasionally helping him, whispering directions in his huge old hairy ear. It is odd how happy these occasions are when they are so quiet and disjointed with people moving about from one room to another sitting on different beds watching TV or just holding hands and talking in low gentle voices. All meals seem to be like this. I felt rather emotional seeing all my old friends together like this, with Kiran explaining his Good Shepherd School to Raju and Suresh and Kiran whispering about electronics, all with background TV Telugu song/dance film in background and toothy smiles from the ladies peering round the door frames. After the usual few photos we fumbled about in the dark finding our sandals before filing along the ledge and down the stairs into the warm night. Surya drove Raju home after we had said a final goodbye with promises to never forget him and to write often and to visit his village at his native place next time. Kiran drove me out to Giripuram to say goodbye to his father and the rest of the family; they are so nice, sentimentally holding my hands (father and the boys) or standing in a colourful line of saris quietly smiling (mother, wives, neighbours, daughter). All the time me grinning with a lump in my throat, swirling the two babies around, suspended from the ceiling in their mother's saris. We then slowly left on the scooter with me twisting round to wave goodbye as they all stood in the light from doorways in the street, waving slowly as if to show that they did not want to appear to be encouraging me to leave. We drove down the long wide but bumpy road leading downhill to the town club corner with the engine off to save fuel, all very peaceful. Arrived at the guest house by 9.0 so plenty of time to say proper goodbye to Kiran. He told me that he had informed the family that he would be late so we can have a last listen to music together. This we did before sorting out which CDS he would take. He will tape some for Surya and borrow Surya's to tape for himself. He left about 2 hours later with promises to come in the morning to help me pack.

Tuesday: Woke at 6.30 by the usual Bangalore express passing through my room. This always wakes the geckos who rush up and down the washroom walls screeching. I very dozily started to wander about the room in an attempt to start packing. I realised I was inhibited by the grimy floor so I created a broom out of the Hindu (newspaper) then felt more comfortable. I eventually woke myself up by drinking the last of the Fanta orange drink. I had forgotten it tastes like chemical effluent and the shock livened me up a bit. It was all made easier when I remembered that we have such an easy way of leaving. Decisions as to where things go can be made later. Last year I attended

the wedding reception of the sister of Ram Prasad, Surya's friend. He has another friend who runs a car hire firm in Chittoor about 20 miles from Tirupati. they are giving us a car plus driver for the next two days. Total cost including driver and diesel will be about £17 (special friend's rate).

The first person to turn up was Kiran who sat buddha-like in the arm chair directing me. We finalised our business deal. His friend is renting a 'shop'. This will be the usual 2.4m frontage with a counter down one side and the VCDs all round the walls. The friend is supplying these and Kiran (and me) will supply the player. Next to arrive were Ram Prasad with the car owner and the driver with the car. They went off to find some tiffen. Next came NagaRaju looking so sad and sorry for himself because he had failed to sort out his future plans. He can't make up his mind whether to do a PhD in Biochemistry Department. I think I persuaded him to go and see Sai Gopal in Virology. This would be nearer his interests and much more use. Imran then phoned and asked me to call in on the way into Tirupati. Fortunately that's no problem. Sampaiiah the cook turned up, without asking, with tea for everyone; I don't know if it is because he likes me or just that he likes the generous tip I usually give him but he has been very good this year. His cooking is better and he accepts extras appearing for meals with me quite cheerfully. Surya was due at 8.50 and he arrived at 8.51 on the old town bus. Then had a few more photos and off we went, escorted by Kiran on his scooter and Raju on giri's scooter. I still feel very sad as we go through Tirupati for the last time. We stopped at the Police quarters to say goodbye to Imran. He saw us arrive and came rushing out with a goodbye present (a notepad wrapped in loving messages). He asked me not to mention to his father that he had phoned to ask me to call in to say goodbye - he wanted it to be obvious to his father that he was important enough for me to want to see him last before leaving. Tirupati is so different in the hot light of day as it is merely very crowded and dusty. Our plans for the next two days had been left vague. It is difficult because I leave at 4 in the morning on Thursday. We stopped soon for breakfast (dosas - pancake things with very hot curry sauce) and made some plans. As the weather was so good we decided to stay the night in a cheap hotel in Mahabalipuram (now called Mallalapuram) after going to the bird sanctuary at Vedantagel - a detour of about 30 miles. We went the back roads to start with instead of the noisy main road through Renigunta and this made a wonderful start. Altogether we spent about 4 hours driving through rural Tamil Nadu on relatively empty roads. Paddy fields and palms, and herds of goats, water buffalo, cows and great flocks of ducks. I suggested we stop for a simple lunch somewhere, imagining some cute little roadside restaurant but there were none. We stopped at a busy intersection in a small town and sat in the Udipi Home restaurant at stone tables with a demented screeching film singer competing with the crackling loudspeakers and the horns of the trucks and buses about 4 feet away outside my window (hole in the wall). We were next to the cooking area (kerosene stoves) which seemed to be almost in darkness with flare ups of burning oil occasionally and clouds of steam and smoke. All slightly hellish. I was beside the sink where the rice was washed off hands at the end of meals (on banana leaves). When I got up to wash my hands a boy in filthy clothes with a filthier cloth pounced on the table to sweep off mess, most of which landed on me. I turned on the tap and it half fell off at which point I shrugged and gave up, leaving a foot high fountain. They all thought it very funny. It was wonderful to be back on the road again.

Fortunately our driver was good and was willing to turn off his rowdy music when asked. We arrived rather early at the bird sanctuary - about 3.30. The sanctuary is merely a large lake amongst paddy fields with many islands which support bushes and trees which are covered in nests of cormorants, Snake birds, Herons, night herons, open billed storks, egrets, paddy birds and ibises. As the sun goes down the sky becomes full of birds coming home to roost. I was glad I had also taken the small binoculars so Surya and the driver could go off and leave me to my own devices. As I had forgotten my birdbook, I reverted to teenage habits and wrote little descriptions for later identification. The usual small boys came up to have lessons in using binoculars. Their usual opening approach was to beg "One pen please sir". One older boy (Raman) wanted to practice his English with a list of questions about age, marital status, children, occupation etc. He lives in the village and persuaded me to take a photo and he provided address to send it. He decided to take charge and took

me to see his well that he was in charge of - supplying the paddy fields.

As it got later the flocks of birds came in all directions. The most impressive were the ibises; very large white birds with long curved bills like giant white curlews. About 25 in a flock, although high up they make a very loud swishing and whirring sound with their wings and seem to play games, the higher ones folding their wings closed and falling through the others. All this against a wonderful golden evening sky.

After a little cup of sweet tea with cardamom we had another peaceful green and golden evening drive past paddy fields and winnowing grain. They leave the stalks of rice in heaps in the road so that cars will drive over it flinging it into the air. We arrived in Mahabalipuram as sun set, at the Tamil Nadu beach resort (a state run operation) about 1.5km north on the Chennai road. Our beach house cost £14 a night including bad TV, excellent shower and veranda overlooking the beach. We walked into the small town which is rather touristy - that is, there are genuine restaurants. Unfortunately they have genuine Dutch and American tourists in them. We found an inconspicuous one which had a few tables outside to keep the tourists away from us inside. I had spicy fish with vegetarian rice. We were the only ones inside until a rather sunburnt young Dutch man came in and demanded that **our** overhead fan should be switched off as he sat with his back to us at the next table. The nice waiter did as asked looking worriedly at me so I so I just grinned and tapped my head and pointed at the Dutchman. The waiter giggled and turned on the next fan along and indicated we could move to the next table. We didn't but for the next ten minutes the Dutch kept whirling round in his seat to see if we were making any more jokes at his expense. We had a bottle each of Kingfisher beer. Very good after our long hot walk into town. we took a luxurious auto for 15 rupees, 20p) back to the cottage.

We slept to the sound of the waves crashing in from the Bay of Bengal. It was actually too hot in the night so for the first time in 2 weeks I needed the overhead fan. It squeaked badly so I poured a bucket of cold water over me and shivered myself to sleep. Surya wrapped himself in two blankets to get warm enough. The driver had acquired a fever so I had given him 4 soluble aspirins in mango juice. He slept the night as usual in the car and was still asleep at 9 in the morning; he woke fully recovered. Surya explained his duties for the next 18 hours so he promptly got back in the car and went to sleep again for the rest of the morning (as he had to get us back to Chennai, then to the airport at midnight and then a 5 hour drive back to Chittoor). Surya was then to get the bus home 40 km to Tirupati.

We had breakfast in the bleak circular restaurant with dirty windows all round looking out at the crows, looking in waiting for our scraps. We had been disappointed that the low cloud near the horizon hid the sunrise and I was childishly worried that my last day would be sunless; it wasn't. I had woken thinking that I would soon be home and able to eat a proper breakfast. This was actually on the menu; so I had scrambled eggs on toast followed by toast and marmalade, while Surya had 2 breakfasts - dosa and samba, and puris and bahji. He had the better deal; the egg was really a dried omelette chopped up and stuck onto limp luke warm sweet bead, and the marmalade was unbearable sweet red jam spread by the waiter with a knife wiped on the back of his hand onto similar 'toast'. We then walked all the way on the wide empty beach to the beach temple. Hot, windy, with wonderful warm water soothing 2 new mosquito bites on my ankles. We watched a fishing boat skilfully negotiating the surf back to its beach home; the boats are made from 4 long curved logs like lightweight balsa wood and most of them have a teak block of wood bolted by 4 huge rusty bolts onto the stern for holding an outboard motor which has a 2 metre propeller shaft which is slung into the air at the last moment before hitting the beach. Saw a small dead silver fish lying on the sand; Surya asked "what is that called, sir"? "We call that as a fish" (I seem to have inadvertently picked up the extra "as" in my answer. "We have a more specific name sir". "I don't know, and I'll be very surprised if you know". "No problem, sir; we call that as a dead fish sir". After this brilliant wit Surya ran into the water and flung himself into the broken waves, rolling around like a giggling log. He has not realised that boxer shorts (stolen from me for beach wear) are not designed for formal outdoor wear so he looked rather bizarre struggling back through the undertow in his underwear.

Wandering about near the temple we seemed to be accompanied by ghosts of ourselves from 2 previous visits. Surya is so much more self-confident this year that I don't have the same feeling of worry about him that I remember feeling when here previously (also on our last day, with thoughts of the future hanging over us).

When we returned I paid the bill (1000 rupees, £14) with my access card and negotiated use of the room until 3.30 when we packed up and set off on the last leg home. I really enjoy packing my nice new green bag (Libby's Christmas present), looking forward to unpacking it at home. The first part of the journey was through very flat slightly barren orange sandy landscape dotted with palm trees and sprinkled with goats and grinning goatboys. The car was an excellent white Ambassador with perfect blue upholstery and with all parts fully operational (our previous car had a door that was inclined to open spontaneously). Surya had assumed that Chennai was 100km but it was only 50 km so we had too much time before us (my flight was due to leave 12 hours later). So we paid a visit yet again to the Golden Beach Resort. This is a mixture of old film sets, funfair, horse rides on the beach, cheap restaurants and stages for aspiring youth to do their imitations of Indian film song/dance routines to screeching music blasted by very loudspeakers ("corrupt like everything in India"). I remembered how John Prabakhar on my first visit there had engineered me as an extra onto a film that was being shot when we arrived - of course the director was an old *friend*. *We wandered aimlessly until I remembered that on my first visit with Surya he had confessed later that he would have liked a ride on the big wheel.* So I suggested this. It wasn't operating but a huge swingboat like the one in Tirupati was calling us by its screaming passengers. We bumped into the driver at this point (I'd paid for his entrance 40 rupees and given him enough money to feed himself sick and to go on all the rides (30 rupees - 40p). So they went together while I watched in relief that I wasn't on it. It swings eventually to a vertical position and just as the top occupants are about to drop out it swings down again. This one was so vigorous that its supports set in concrete were being pulled out of the ground on each swing. They then found other rides, all as rusty, noisy and hair-raising. We finally left at 6.30 to face the noisy crazy ride back into central Chennai. The driver was reminded that we were in no hurry and this calmed him down a bit. I really do know parts of Chennai very well now and looked affectionately from our dusty hot dirty noisy smelly traffic jam out onto the "Traffic Jam Hotel" where we once had eaten very good fried rice. We arrived at about 8.30 at the 5 star Connemara Hotel which is now fully renovated and extremely luxurious. We were helped out of the car in our dusty old clothes by a white-uniformed man in a turban and a very sincere welcoming smile beneath his hugh ex-army turned up moustache. We strolled as if we were the owners through the huge lobby beneath the chandelier to the Gentlemen's room where we almost stripped and had a thorough wash and clean up. I guess it is the European half of our pair that prevents any questions about us using their facilities. We sat by the pool in the darkness beneath the stars in their lopsided constellations reminiscing about the previous visits when, thanks to The Royal Society, we were genuine guests there, and then went into the outdoor Raintree restaurant for a wonderful slow vegetarian dinner with Kinfisher beer and a concert of India Classical flute music with Tabla and dancer. We finally left about 11 for the final horrible drive through Chennai to the airport. There is never anything suitable to say so I sit staring out at the crowds (even so late) of cows goats autos lorries bicycles and people people lining the streets, pleased as always that I still love the place as much. The airport car park seemed to be full and the whole area outside the Departure lounge was packed with shouting porters, drivers, worried parents, waiting families, panicking travellers and eventually us. The security arrangements are more strict (after one year of leniency when friends could enter the departure hall). So we had to sadly hug amongst the crush of India before I was sucked into the channel leading to the entrance. With my bags hanging off both shoulders I was washed along like a rotating leaf in a stream waving to Surya as he became part of the vast jostling crowd, and finally a feeble single waving hand, flickering like a dying candle as I hit the cool damp smelly conditioned air of the terminal. I felt rather terminal myself as I was crushed amongst a sobbing family of Dubai returnees to the security checks.

Once again this visit has been so much more than a working holiday. India, especially Tirupati, has become a very important part of my life and my feelings about it do not diminish with familiarity. I have to thank you Libby so much for tolerating my absence for these visits; I think I know the things you have kindly left unsaid.

Thank you, dear Libby and family, so much for reading this and sharing it all with me. All the time, when travelling, and wandering around Tirupati I feel you with me and I have the opportunity, always there but rarely taken, of appreciating what a wonderful family I have. As this started as a letter then I should finish by saying how much I love you all, and how much I am looking forward to being properly home again.