

2000

# India

**4<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> January 2000**

For my family

India 2000; Jan 4<sup>th</sup> - Jan 30<sup>th</sup>.

I am starting to write this during the night of Friday 7<sup>th</sup> Jan in the guest house of Sri Venkateswara University in Tirupati while listening to Haydn's Creation on the CD player of my lap top computer. It does not seem a whole year since I was here, but it does not seem too soon. I am in the same room as last year - the big separate one on the ground floor.

Having started from home, with Libby and Hugh at a little past seven in the morning to avoid the risk of being late - expecting dense traffic- there was not more than usual so we found ourselves parked and eating breakfast in Heathrow within 90 minutes of leaving. I had my usual feeling that I must be mad to leave home. Everything went very smoothly with plenty of time in Heathrow for buying last minute presents (small knife for Imran and a few cheap pens and lots of chocolate). By some odd accident I was the first person on the plane - stowed into a window seat next to an empty seat; the aisle seat was eventually taken by an elderly (70) man who sat doing the financial times crossword. Being English we didn't speak until we had travelled at least 500 miles. He was (is) a sheep farmer from near Manchester, travelling to see relations in Sri Lanka and New Zealand. We talked until we were both dry. I then tried to use my nice new computer to do something to make the time pass more pleasantly but the person in front was lying back and there was insufficient room so I read my book.

The nine hours eventually passed. As my seat was at the rear I was almost last off the plane. I then, of course, found myself in the queue in immigration that had the most problems. This always seems the bleakest time during journeys. The relief and excitement of arrival is almost immediately cancelled by long waits in shuffling queues. I was one of the last 3 to get through. By contrast with every other immigration official anywhere in world (except UK), my one was very chirpy and welcoming so had a little chat with everyone and so his queue took longer than all others [we met again on my return journey]. People meeting planes are not allowed into the terminal but they can see into immigration on closed circuit TV, so Surya knew that I was there, although I had my usual anxiety about whether he had made it safely.. As he did last year, he had hired a car with driver to come and collect me. As always, I was relieved to see my bag crashing into the collection area. So eventually out into the Chennai night (11pm UK, 4am Indian time). The atmosphere identifies the place immediately - a lukewarm soup of damp, dust and diesel. The driver was fast asleep and would not wake. Surya was so considerate, knocking gently on the closed window, that when he did wake he heard Surya and thought it was a lullaby and promptly fell asleep again. After about 5 minutes he started to become fully conscious and off we went. Within 5 minutes he had taken a wrong turning and we went wildly west.

Eventually, after accosting sleepwalking citizens wrapped in shawls who seem to sit on most crossroads and corners, we got back on course (wasting 20 minutes) and arrived at the famous Poonamallee road and the even more famous Murali family Breeze Hotel. It was as good as the very much more expensive 4/5 star hotels. I had booked in advance and saw that I had a mention of Eshwara (?) Brothers on my booking slip; this link with the owners gave me a 15% discount. The only negative feature of the hotel room was the cold stone floor in our room which we covered in towels. We got to sleep about 6am and woke at about 10 to the sound of the hotel being demolished (I assumed that I was waking to an earthquake). There was no sign of any building work when we looked later so I assume this was just a Breeze hotel special wake up call, so they would not have to provide us with a late breakfast. Breakfast was good South Indian stuff (idlis with curry) which Surya ate together with the croissants and jam. The day that welcomed me to India was a depressing dull gray (it failed to depress, in fact). It was so good to see Surya again. It is so relaxing to have someone to care for me (poor old man). We drove first to the famous Higginbotham book shop on Mount road and bought 2 computer books (including good book on Coreldraw8 for £3) and a load of maps. We then made the silly European tourist mistake of trying to achieve two successes in one day. We aimed to visit the park at the Theosophical Society which I had found previously to be the most peaceful place in Chennai. Our driver resented any attempts to slow him down in the confused traffic moving south so we missed the entrance and then got lost, so ended up at Elliott's Beach. I am afraid that your namesake's beach was not up to your standard, Libby. It was mainly occupied by the fisherman's huts and the water's edge was their loo, so not my cup of tea, as it were. So we had a cup of tea instead and watched a threatening storm move towards us from out at sea. It failed to arrive, prolonging the drought - making a serious water shortage in Chennai.

We then drove back on the coast road by the long Marina beach as far as the University guest house where I used to stay. We went to the 'slums' to see my old friend Sivamani. He was not there but his very nice family were, including a lovely sister who had married that year. So we took pictures of them to add to their collection which they showed us from previous year's visits. Sivamani was in Pondicherry but had left a

message that he would be back that night; we rang him later and arranged for him to visit Tirupati later. He was supposed to have come last year but floods in Chennai prevented it. After sentimental goodbye from parents, and promises to remember them we stumbled through the poorly lit tiny street between the houses, avoiding the little cooking fires and saying hello to neighbours who seemed to remember me from over the years, and then the long noisy dusty crawl back along the Poonamallee road to the welcome Breeze Hotel. Of course, I unconsciously hoped Murali would appear at any moment. We had dinner in the Poonamallee restaurant. It was the best vegetarian food I have ever tasted. I feel embarrassed about the veggy messes that I have sometimes produced for Murali. The band was too loud (too much middle and base booming) to talk easily and the man who showed us to our table was a rare example of an unpleasant Indian (I guess I am usually lucky). I asked for a menu but he insisted that we look at the buffet first. I said I would like to see the menu anyway but he insisted that we must see the buffet first. All this with a self-important pompous unsmiling attitude. I do not like to pay to be bullied! I should say that Surya reacted exactly as I did. We never saw the menu and had an excellent though silent dinner (little talk lots of dull heavy music). I ate far too much (result of buffet).

So, goodnight my dear family. Thank you again for tolerating my obsession with this place. It was a good send off from Heathrow etc. Thank you, Libby and Hugh. Of course I'm missing you already. It was a very luxurious feeling to lie on the bed and phone home and know you were all there for me.

Jan 6th. After our typical curry breakfast we drove to Tirupati. We were spared the long slog through Chennai, as the the Poonamallee road soon led out of town to our route. This was soon amongst the paddies and palms and roadside people and animals that make such a welcome back for me. We went by a back road for the last 50 km so missed the rather nasty town of Renigunta. This is probably not very different from Tirupati but it is not home. We also bypassed most of Tirupati, coming out near the town club. They have at last finished the road out towards the guest house (and Bangalore). It is dual carriageway and smooth and has a raised pavement. This, oddly enough, makes it all more peaceful as there is less competition for the good bits of road. Previously drivers would choose the side of the dual carriageway that looked least congested. The journey was only 3.5 hours so we arrived by 12. The big lame steward was there and made it all very easy. He claims he sent me an invitation to his daughter's wedding. I don't see why he should have done as I don't know him well.

We then spent half an hour settling in. The first task was to make the cupboards acceptable; this meant using my wonderful powerful pliers on my Gerber tool (Clive's birthday present) to wrench off bits of metal from the sliding doors, washing the cockroach dirt off and using scrap Hindu Times to line it. Surya sat giggling at this domestic scene. After a short time Naga Raju arrived with his beautiful smile and soulful welcome and a pleading invitation to invite me to his village home near Guntur (300km) for the Pongal holiday time. Like Surya he has been up to the god (Balaji or Sri Venkateswara) to pray for (*buy*) this century's good health and so has very short hair. He is now a senior research scholar in the Biotechnology Department doing research on edible crabs. He was very excited when I accepted his invitation. After another ten minutes Kiran turned up, looking heavier than ever - although he says he has been fasting to ensure that he is not too fat. He was very pleased with his Bible (even more with the cheap box of CDs - Music to relax to). There was a party in the guest house dining room so they brought us a wonderful lunch to my room - for Ragu and me. The guest house has been cleaned, painted, and modified, so instead of the long bare dining room there is an area at one end with comfortable seats and colour TV. There had to be a disadvantage to the new system; some idiot had decided that the door into the kitchen area should be closed off so access was by a big square hole of a serving hatch. As there was often only one person on duty, to avoid walking all round outside of guest house to get into the dining area he sat on the serving hatch base and swung himself through; to get back the other way he clambered up by a small stool and swung back in - transferring dirt from clothes and feet to the hygienically tiled surface.

Balangyay the cook is older and greyer and very helpful. In the afternoon I walked with Ragu through the small paths of the campus to the Department and met his Head of Dept. then went to see the Biochemists. Venkaiah is now Dean of Science and Parthasarathy's old enemy (Thiagaraju) is now Head. We sat around a Table and gossiped and then they tried to organise my lectures. T is always easiest to deal with; he is an impatient man who likes a direct approach. P is his usual bumbling self who is well-meaning but defers all the time to Venkaiah who says he need not be involved but then confuses everything with his suggestions. Soon sorted out; I will do genetic code etc and also some bioenergetics including the structural work on cytochrome bc1 complex. It is slightly confusing as they want me to teach 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> years together. Raju then walked me back to guest house to look at photos and sit smiling at the thought that I was going to visit his village and see his parents and fields. After he had gone a very thin young man came to turn on the lights on my 'veranda' and seemed to be making rather a fuss of it. I went out to see what was happening. He immediately came up and shook hands and explained that he was now working in the guest house and he had been told that there is a very

good man from UK in room 2 and he wanted to see for himself. So we introduced ourselves; "My name is Murali" he said! He asked to come in and I did the usual showing photos of family and friends. I showed him the real Murali. "He is your special friend sir?" Yes. "OK sir, now you have 2 special friends please let me give you my address". He then wrote down the name and address of our guest house (where he worked!). He then ran off smiling and waving into the night. At 6 pm Kiran arrived to take me to his home in Giripuram by the tamarind tree on his motor scooter. There is always a very good welcome at his home. Both brothers (Thomas and Charles) were there and their wives and the 2 year old Steven. His mother will not allow him to be smacked or reprimanded and he was passed between family members in the hope of finding one who could stop him screaming and demanding a ride on Kiran's scooter. All this row went on with a TV dance competition blasting Michael Jackson look & sound alike as background. As usual I ate at a small table on the side from a huge pile of food with Kiran, the rest of the family sitting watching. This year the father was not drunk so was not quite so embarrassing. We came by scooter back to guest house as soon as I could decently do so and then spent a nice quiet evening chatting with Kiran about all his plans. His DVD-player rental scheme for financing the school worked for about 6 months but then they became more generally available, he developed a small fault and he sold it. Overall it was a success and paid for the teacher. He has the money in some other complicated scheme which I slept through.

Jan 7th. Had a rather dramatically disturbed damp night last night. At 4 O'clock I was woken by what I assumed was an explosion and I (being still asleep) assumed it was Tamil separatists from Sri Lanka (there had been a bomb in Colombo the day before). As I realised where I was I fell out of bed and stumbled to the bathroom where there was the sound of a river or waterfall. I found that the hosepipe to the loo cistern had burst under pressure and was producing a huge fountain from almost floor level to the 11 foot high ceiling. I took off my shirt and tried to investigate and of course was immediately soaked in cold water. As it would be impossible to sleep with the terrifying row I had to do my action man stuff (CA the demon plumber). The usual solution applied. I produced a tourniquet from tightly rolled polythene bag and tied it in place with my shoelace which reduced it to a gentle silent stream, sufficiently dammed for it to flow away through the floor drainage hole. Amazingly the next day it was repaired within 2 hours. I gave my first lecture - on genetic code- to the MSc students and hitched a lift back on a tiny motorbike to the guest house with Reddy in time for Imran's arrival. He is the boy I met last year who wanted to know if Father Christmas is real (he assumed he is a Christian saint). His father had phoned from Chittoor the day before to arrange that he would visit. I managed to get an hour of work on my paper, sitting in the sun before he arrived. He is unchanged and I was very pleased to see him. He immediately set out to explore all my possessions and was rather disappointed that my computer has no games on it. (Kiran found Encarta to be better than any games). Being Ramadan he was not eating, so I rushed over to guest house for quick lunch and returned to find him playing with my penknife. I should have hidden it because I had given him a relatively small one (very small but high quality); I thought it is very good with scissors, knife and brilliant light. But I think that he felt that he had been cheated. I asked him if he thought that I should have given him the big one. "No sir, that decision is up to you" he said hopefully with a gentle pleading smile. I explained that mine was a present from my wife so he understood that "that is therefore sacred sir". I hadn't thought of it that way. At about 4.30 he suddenly decided he was hungry and rushed out like Cinderella to get the bus home.

I then walked down to the town and to Surya's for dinner. I seem to be almost too familiar with this place. I was deep in thought and not noticing my surroundings and found myself walking down Ghandi road behind the 2 temple elephants and a small band of drums and wailing woodwind. They were escorting one of the lesser gods from the Govindaswara temple on a walkabout. She is carried on a heavy, highly decorated platform held on two long poles by 4 sets of 8 devotees at each corner. They arrange themselves in pairs as for a 3 legged race except that the legs that would be tied together are neatly tucked one behind the other so this forms a very intimate compact unit. Of course they have to all stay in step and the whole lot goes along in a sort of sacred swinging conga dance.

Walked through the pilgrim crowds and confusion by the main train and bus stations and over the rail crossing. The gates were closed so it was packed with the usual mixture of oxcarts, bicycle rickshaws, 3 wheeler yellow autos an occasional Ambassador cars. Pedestrians, free range cows, goats chickens and motor scooters leak through under the poles until the last minute before the train howls its approach warning at us. Went through the little backstreets leading to Surya's feeling very welcome as groups of little local boys called out Surya that way sir. I think he had remembered how I had been so lost last year so had asked them to look out for me. Had a nice reunion with Surya's family. As usual I received no indication that Swarna really wanted the biology book that I bought her. I must get her a more personal present before I leave. The father (Venkataswara

Rao) is looking much better than last year as he has changed jobs at the station and works shorter more sensible hours. We had a very enjoyable walk back through Ghandi road buying bits and pieces. I bought 3 lungis (for just over £2 total) - for bedsheets. They have provided new blankets in the guest house without the special tassels that used to creep into on my nostrils, ears, eyes, etc, but lungis are good. The owner of the lungishop (Vijay Kumar) is a very nice man who is a friend of Surya - they attend the same Esperanto class. He asked if I spoke Esperanto and I said that I did not need to as I speak English. I wasn't allowed to get away with that and we had a long talk about the contribution of Indians to English literature. Other customer joined in especially when Salman Rushdie was mentioned - a Muslim man said he was very wicked but we all agreed that he was really just very stupid. As Vijay said, a writer should only offend on purpose. Incidentally, I am typing this while listening to Mozart's Marriage of Figaro. The CD player on the computer produces very good sound so I do not need any other system. We then bought a broom and washing line in the shop next to the Cyber pub (an alcoholic cyber café I suppose), next door to the Pornbroker shop. Then on home from Town Club by auto (3 wheeler).

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> Jan. Went to my lecture on the X-ray structure of the cytochrome bgl complex. They seemed to understand it and asked a few sensible questions; Prof Venkaiah had asked me especially to cover this topic as the structure has only just been determined. He therefore attended and did his usual thing of asking a question that I had spent 20 minutes explaining (poorly I assume). I gave them the afternoon off so that I could go to Chittoor to visit Imran's family. This seemed slightly daft as he had come from Chittoor the day before but this was the most convenient time for them. Venkaiah drove me back from the lecture on his Vespa.. Surya was there (to identify the bus I had to catch - they only have Telugu labels). Venkaiah then spent ages trying to make some very complicated arrangement about our visit next week. I am going to spend Pongal at Raju's village. This is near Guntur University and near Vijayawada - Surya's home town. Venkaiah wants me to go the the University to talk to the VC there. This is all part of his possible plan to retire there. He is very odd about this because he has not yet discussed it with his family. My job, I think, is to tell the VC what a good chap Venkaiah is. [Surya later hatched a much simpler plan to achieve everything and is buying our tickets tomorrow to make sure that we have the whip hand]. All this made me miss my bus (no problem sir, they come every 5 minutes - actually 30). Got the last seat on the bus next to a fat hairy sniffing man who left me about 30 cm to wriggle down into between himself and the rigid side to the seat. No real problem as it was only a 90 minute drive and we were entertained (if torture can be entertainment) by film songs screeched on damaged loudspeakers sadistically located every metre down length of bus.

It was a beautiful day with some small clouds and a friendly breeze. As it is Ramadan I had lunch before I arrived (4 squares of chocolate and about 20 cashew nuts courtesy of Breeze hotel, bless it). Imran had provided a map showing how easily I could walk to his house from the bus stand. He had the key places OK so I only had to enquire about a dozen times. I was advised to take an auto every time. "No, I prefer walking thanks". this was never understood so I had to revert to Indian style and say that I preferred to go by walk (by bus, by taxi, by walk, OK?). The main landmarks were the Collectors bangalow (left over from the Raj period) then the Chief Inspectors bangalow etc. His father is the boss of the Special Branch for the whole Chittoor District. No one was home when I arrived so the maid maid tea then collected father (Ansari) and then Imran. Had nice long chat with Ansari whose main job is to protect visiting politicians etc from dissident political groups. I had the usual long job of explaining why my salary (revealed under duress) did not make me extremely rich. When I was completely parched I suggested that Imran should take me around Chittoor so I escaped. He sensibly suggested that we walk to the local forest which is a small conservation area. This was a good idea. Our conversation mainly consisted of debates about how many pictures of me posing on rocks and under trees and feeding deer etc was appropriate (I thought one was excessive but he wanted a whole reel). We had a good view of a hawk (Shikra) like our sparrow hawk and then watched kingfishers and egrets and bee eaters and yellow wagtails and paddy birds (my new birdbook is wonderful). By about 5.30 Imran was starving and went all feeble. This meant that not only did he need to hold my hand possessively all the time but whenever we stopped he hung round my neck leaving me slightly embarrassed.

Six O'clock was official sunset so we stopped for a coke and were soon home where I was force fed half a water melon and another bottle of coke. Imran and sister were due to get the night bus to Hyderabad at 7.30 so I assumed we would have something to eat before they went. But they were going to eat on route. So, full of water melon and 2 cokes I was put on the bus home with a policeman friend of the family to keep me company. He sat behind me (bench seats) and tried to chat by hanging forward over my seat but this was not a great success. He spent 5 minutes compiling a question whose answer he couldn't understand. Within 30 minutes of very fast driving on very bumpy roads I was desperate for a pee. When I at last got my policeman to

understand my question about the bus stopping he was delighted to tell me that it stopped for nothing until the guest house. Eventually, with great relief, I was bundled out of the bus at the guest house with much hand shaking with policeman, conductor and driver, stumbling down the steps like some decrepit old fool only to be picked up in the pitch darkness by a surprised Surya who was waiting at the bus stop having been to deliver a message to me. He was even more surprised when instead of the joyful embrace he had been expecting I turned my back to pee into the darkness.

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> Jan. Woke to a beautiful sunny morning and Idlis and curry for early breakfast (a genuine break of fast). I planted my chair behind the guest house - which is now a peaceful garden with my favourite Bourgainvillea instead of previous rubbish tip as a result of the State Green and Clean campaign - and started my work while watching bee eaters. I soon had to go in for sun tan lotion. At ten, Raja Sekhar arrived and we had a nice chat. I then continued with my work while he explored the computer for an hour. After he left I got in another 2 hours before Kiran arrived. I had not arranged for Lunch so he went into town on his Vespa and soon returned with veggie burgers and he was soon launched into Prince of Persia, leaving me to continue work in the sun for another 3 hours. I managed to sort out nearly all of Simon Dales part of the mutagenesis part of the paper I am writing. Now all I have to do is to type that part to feel I am on my way. At 5.30 Venkaiah came with a visiting friend and his son Chendu - just to introduce the friend. Kiran went off and Srivanasulu, head of virology drove me down to the cricket ground where I had a peaceful wander during the sunset, with the occasional interruption by cricketers who found me more entertaining than their matches. Then through temple area and past the crowded train station, fighting over the closed railway crossing to Surya's. He has been abandoned by family for 2 days so he had cooked dinner for me - simple but very good. Then drove on his friend's (Mahdu) scooter to Raja's to give him our excess cooked rice. Once again Surya had a vehicle with a faulty clutch. This meant he was usually unwilling to try to change gear so he careered on at inappropriate speeds through rutted roads and back alleys. He asked why I held on to the back instead of on to him. I explained that one of us had to stay on board to steer when he got thrown off. Watched a program on TV (National Geographic Channel) on monkey-eating eagles. This channel and the Discovery channel seem to be the most popular channels. Then the final lurching slithering ride through the cool Tirupati night to home. Lay on bed listening to Marriage of Figaro while Surya wrote silly messages using the Power point programme. He has now gone, leaving me to write this during the last glorious act. This is the best advert (or advocate) for fidelity and marriage in art. This seems a suitable time to stop and say goodnight dear Libby; I think of you very much while here (good thoughts!). With love, Chris.

Monday Jan 10<sup>th</sup>. Today started with a certain lack of promise; I woke violently at 5.30 with my toe stuck between the 2 beds. I decided I must show a bit of character and having sorted myself out I got up to start a days work. I started by devising a method of getting hot water for hair washing. Turn on the water supply to broken electric water heater; turn on heater until it starts to hiss violently; turn off water supply and catch the leaking boiling water that sprays out over the exposed electrics. This highly moral act (hair washing) inspired 2 hours of typing my paper. Most beautiful day - sun and breeze and sunbirds. Finished my cytochrome lectures and walked back to guest house and another 2 hours sunbathing and working in garden. Good lunch and very hot stroll back to department (about 20 minute walk through tree filled campus). Lectured on genetic code. During my lecture this morning I reminded the students that they should feel free to ask questions if they had 'doubts' - their word, which seems to have some kind of religious context. I promised that I would not tell them that their questions are stupid etc. This afternoon a student stood up and asked a reasonable question and Prof Venkaiah whirled round and almost shouted that "that is not the right question". It was actually a good question so I answered it, then answered Venkaiah's rather silly alternative question. After the lecture he took me to see the Principal who is officially my host. He almost immediately asked me to give a lecture on principles of good English to an evening class for postgraduates who want to improve their English. Crazy idea but I caved in and agreed to give a lecture entitled 'An Englishman's view of the Indian use of English' which will just be a series of anecdotes. By the time this was printed it became 'English Communication in India' (a better title). If their English is bad enough to need an evening class it won't be able to cope with a very sophisticated lecture - or I would have had to refuse. Back at guest house did another hour's typing and at 5 went for a birdwatching walk up toward the Agriculture college. Saw coppersmith bird, brainfever bird, sunbird, weavers, - all bathed in a golden setting sun.

Arrived back to find 3 students sitting on my veranda - one student from last years batch (Artik) plus the morning's questioner. He studied in a 'Telugu medium college' and so can ask questions but his English is too unpracticed to really understand the answers. As usual my photos provide a good way of relaxing; they then want to see the computer. Had good fun playing with my bird CD! they wanted to hear skylarks and owls. They

did not recall ever seeing a hoopoe (a very distinctive crested pink and black striped bird) but when I played its call (sounds like hoopoopoo) they'd heard it all their lives. Surya then turned up to say hello. He joined me for dinner in guest house (fried rice, chillies and cauliflower) then we returned to my room to find 8 students (1<sup>st</sup> years - invited). They introduced themselves (their first visit) as I wrote their names (and their meanings) in my notebook together with their 'native places' - helped by my book of Andhra Pradesh maps. They then gave me a sort of team lecture on the caste system as it still operates. The main effect on them is that they must marry within the same caste (4 main castes).

Family photos followed. One of the students (Chandra Mouli) had been at college with Surya. They left at 11, leaving me completely parched. As usual there was one student who formed a focus of attention - as the student who had wanted to come to visit. He is rather good-looking and vain and called, like half the people in Tirupati, Reddy.

So time to sleep; there is no point in aiming to do so until 12.00 when the Chennai-Bangalore express storms past with its massive roar and continuous whistle from Tirupati main station all the way past me to the level crossing up the road from here. The shaking has just stopped. I have just finished my first book - started on the plane; a thriller based on India/Kashmir/Pak border, dealing with India/Pak conflict and Yetis.

So, good night dear readers.

Jan 11 Tuesday. Hello again! I am writing this as the day is happening - 9 in the evening while listening to Tallis's Spem in Allium; there is something out of context here - 500 year old English Cathedral music in Sri Venkateswara's guest house. Not much happened today. Woke too early again at 5.20 so got in 2 hours typing before breakfast - rice cakes (idlis) covered in rather aggressive khaki gravy. As usual now I am provided with two cups of tea (in two cups); this is ever since last year I asked for some more tea. Surya turned up at 6 with the Hindu newspaper - full of discussion about the Pakistan government's collusion with the high jackers. It is a very long cycle ride from Surya's house uphill to here so I was glad to hear that he really comes in order to attend an early morning yoga session in the library. Another hot breezy day. Lecture started this morning at 9 instead of 9.30 so the students could attend some function at 10.00. The very idealistic State governor invented another scheme this year. Last year's was the 'Green and Clean' scheme where all University Staff and other State employees and students had to spend half of their time cleaning the place up. This year they had to be bussed out to villages and do a sort of census of requirements and grievances of village people. This will all be collated and lots of money thrown at the problem. The Biochemistry staff have a special dispensation to avoid it because they have this very eminent visitor from UK (no, there is not another visitor). Today was the last day and so everyone had to meet outside the Principal's office building and form a human chain which stretched out of the University up past the guest house (a 20 minute walk). It was suggested reasonably enough in the paper today that the census job could be given to the thousands of unemployed social science students. Venkaiah showed me a copy of a letter sent by the Principal to the State Governor and the Prime Minister as a result of a conversation we had yesterday. He sent a message to say that I had inspired him (he pointed out that this means the spirit of god had filled him up). The letter demanded that money should be provided to the Indian Universities so that they could come up to the standard of Harvard and Cambridge. Men of international stature should be invited to spend a year inspiring the departments etc.

This place seems full of idealistic well meaning twits. Yesterday my lunch was accompanied by a long lecture from a Botany lecturer on the book he is writing on 'The relationship between molecular biology, the life of the spirit and planet earth with special emphasis on supernatural influences on scientific achievement'. He then went on to tell me about his son who has also written a book. I asked if this was on a similar topic and he said "no it is a deeply spiritual work and is better than anything I could write". He seemed rather young to have such a wise son. "No sir he is only ten years old. After having his bath last week he stayed in his room for two hours and wrote this book on his computer". I don't know whether this should be a warning against baths or computers. I have just been interrupted by a phone call from Raja; it's wonderful now - they come running across the 'square' waving the phone (cordless) shouting 'phone phone'. So half a dozen inmates open their doors to see if it is for them and then stay on to listen to my conversation. Murali (MarkII) came to see me today to ask if I like chocolate. When I said that I did he asked where is it then, so I parted with a small bar of Bourneville. He has a degree in politics and economics and is employed as a sort of odd job boy. He is about the same height as Murali MarkI but half the cross sectional area. When he is wanted by other staff you hear a sort of prolonged wail ending with a rising question - "Muraleeeeyea..." So many people here make me think of Murali of course; a pity he isn't here. After my lecture I went with an old friend Suban (research student) to the dreadful canteen for tea. The little boy who brought our tea to us was proud of the fact that could carry 5 cups at once - as most people might carry empty cups with fingers dipping in the tea. He dropped them down in front of

me on someone else's spilt rice and then stood licking his fingers. I suppose they had been sterilised by immersion in previous customer's hot tea. By 10.30 I was back in my beautiful garden, sitting in the sun writing. I am producing a paper on site-directed mutagenesis of my enzyme from the theses of Simon Dales, Karen Amaratunga and Tosin Majekodunmi. Simon's is of course very good, Karen's is excellent and Tosin's is pretty awful but I think I have sorted it all out. I gave my last lecture (protein synthesis) before the holiday this afternoon and then walked back in the heat to type up what I had sorted this morning. Amazingly I had had enough sun so sat on my 'veranda' and typed. This new computer can be used perfectly well outside. Venkaiah had been spending a lot of time talking about me visiting his university near Vijayawada and we (Surya & me) had come up with a fool-proof plan, but as I half expected, he has not been able to make arrangements at his end. No problem - it means that we will be able to spend some time looking round Vijayawada. We go tomorrow night. At 5.30 went for short walk out to dairy farm. As with many other places round here it has been improved a lot - with many cool gardens etc. In many ways I preferred the old scruffy Tirupati. When Surya arrived at 7.15 it was too late to eat at guest house so we walked half a mile up the road to another novelty - FASTFOODS. It is built from two downstairs rooms in a house whose outer walls have been knocked out so that some tables can be inside and some outside. The food is cooked outside in woks on a gas fire and there is a Tandoori oven. All quite exciting as the oil catches fire frequently. The owner was very excited to have his first foreign customer. Had usual veggie (mainly chilli) rice and paneer. Very good. Had very good plastic cup of coffee afterwards - mainly to please the boy who was serving us; he told me later that he had just started working there and the coffee was his main responsibility (I think that is what our conversation concluded but it was all done with a mixture of sign language, Telugu and English). The menu concluded with a nice message - 'ThanX 4 you vist' - No problem.

15<sup>th</sup> jan I am writing this four days later while sitting in the morning outside Raju's house in the village of Konanki. As always I have people all around - it is a very friendly place. I wrote the last sentence as I realised that the person looking over my shoulder could read English.

The day we went to Vijayawada in the evening was a perfect working day. There were no lectures so I was able to start work sitting outside early on and got a lot done on my paper. I did more than expected because Raja failed to turn up as planned at 11. I sit in the sun with the computer, a pile of papers and binoculars. Looking back, I should have stayed there. At lunchtime Kiran took me to his home for a huge lunch. We sit at a small table end everyone else scattered about on the bed or floor. Thomas the flute player took me upstairs to his room to show me his Roland piano/synthesizer. He also has a computer attachment for composing. He played me a few tunes -hymn tunes etc all with a hefty automatic background beat; rather horrid. Everything changed when I asked him for some classical flute music. He chose a large base flute and then did the usual thing of setting up the 'key' of the piece on the keyboard. It then produced the background drone while he gently developed the key and then the tune etc. Very lovely. He has a wooden chest with 40 flutes of all sizes - for different types of music and different keys. We went up to the roof for the mandatory photos and then back to guest house. Surya arrived at 5.30 with some food - rice and gravy before our journey. Rather sadly they were in sort of coloured tupperware plastic boxes instead of the tin carriers. He then walked out into the road and shouted at the first scooter to come along. He paid the same as a bus fare and was taken down to the town club area to get an auto to get us to the station. He knows me well enough to know that I like to be in plenty of time so we arrived unnecessarily nearly an hour before the departure time. Raju's grandfather has just hobbled in and is looking over the top of the computer screen. I wish I could talk with him but Raju is almost the only one in the village who knows much English. Our train did not look very inviting for our 8 hour trip to Vijayawada and my heart sank when I saw our coach S6. It was the usual dirty oily red-brown with barred open windows. The names of all those with reservations was pasted to the coach by the door. It was quite comforting to see mine with Surya's nestling in the middle of the long list of complex South Indian names. Everything improved when I realised that the rather simple slightly hard seats converted into bunks. The compartments of 6 bunks were separated by the open corridor from more bunks parallel with the side of the train. The air was vigorously stirred by huge arrays of industrial strength fans. Next to me on one of these was a tiny, thin couple who sat on one bunk, cross-legged facing each other. At exactly 8.00 they unpacked their dinner. This would have been the ideal time to use the tin food carriers but they opted for banana leaves and newspaper covered with rice and lots of messy brown runny things tipped incompetently onto their rice and the floor out of small polythene bags. I tried to avoid watching this mess but couldn't avoid the aggressive smell. The man opposite me got rather irritated with them and insisted that they go and get some more newspaper from someone and clear their mess up off the floor. They did this, flinging soggy newspaper and remnants of banana leaves and polythene bags out the window. If anyone was looking out of the door downstream they would have received a very unpleasant

faceful. We then lowered the middle and upper bunks by their huge anchor chains and I (coward) opted for the middle one as I couldn't work out how to reach the top. I also thought the fans - only about three foot from the bed looked too threatening.

If Surya had thought to mention that we would have sleepers then I would have packed my (new wonderful perfect) bag so that I had a softer pillow. It wasn't too bad and I actually slept for a few hours. At 3.00 am we arrived and were soon at a hotel (name -) which was perfectly good for a night (total cost for 2 was £12 including breakfast. Unfortunately I was woken earlier than I wanted (at 8.0) by the sound of a waterfall. I assumed that I was dreaming but I wasn't. Water was pouring in through the ceiling at the corner and flooded the floor, washing gently under the beds and out the door. Fortunately the floors were the usual cold stone (now I know a good reason for not having carpets). The flood soon stopped and Surya summoned help on the phone; it came in the shape of 3 grinning teenagers - and off they scampered to get help. We went for breakfast and it was all cleared up by the time we returned. We decided that we would go direct to the village (Kodanki) that evening so we did all our visits in that day. This was Surya's home town so we started by visiting his best friend. He lived on the top 4<sup>th</sup> floor of a block of flats with the door entering from the roof on which they had about 50 tubs of flowering plants. He opened the door, hopping on one leg, having his other foot in plaster. A really nice person who has promised to come to Tirupati to visit before I leave. He showed me his photo album and as often seems to happen with Surya's friends they have photos of me with Surya. This was followed by a lovely time chatting, refusing to eat vast amounts of biscuits but doing my duty and having three cups of tea, followed by lots of photos amongst the flowers on the roof with me helping X to hop about between the pots and hanging washing. Rather sorry to leave but we were due to visit Surya's old family home. We had a nice walk through the hot holiday streets until we realised that we were an hour late so grabbed an auto for the last mile. He had told me previously that his grandfather plus 3 sons and wives plus their children including Suresh Swarna and Surya had lived in the same house. From the high position on the road he asked me which I thought it was house. So I guessed it must be the large obvious one. No, he said it is the first one in the road. This was a single storey assembly of shacks covered in corrugated iron. I laughed, assuming this was a joke - I thought it was a shed. It wasn't. It contained a warren of tiny rooms where I had to do my usual thing of entertaining everyone. All ages were there including Surya's cousins. One of them, a very soulful 16 year old limped up to me and with a sweet smile said "would you like some water- I am sorry I am slow but I have typhoid fever". I nervously accepted the water but somehow forgot to drink it. They only seemed to have one chair - father and uncle sat on small wooden stools and the rest sat on the floor (mothers and sisters did their stuff hidden in the kitchen).

Had nice simple lunch with very small portions - Surya had briefed them on my odd ways. We then set off in very hot early afternoon sun up a road loud and dusty with convoys of huge grinding lorries, for a walk with the healthy cousin, up to the great river Krishna. It has been dammed about half a mile up from the town centre and so there is some water in the river bed but most of it is a half mile wide stretch of sand. We walked down to it and I took some pictures of them paddling, admired the structure of the dam and bridges built by the British and tried to find a way into the peaceful gardens by the river. We nearly failed as they were all chained closed but Surya shouted to a man he saw in a building in the garden (run by the dam authorities) and told him there is an important Englishman to see the dam. This was the right thing because in the garden are some new statues to the two English who had built the bridges. The man was very proud of these and of his knowledge of the engineering involved so we got in at the price of a lot of lecturing by him in Telugu. But in the middle of noisy hot dusty Vijayawada even this was peaceful. We then returned for photos before leaving. The rooms were so low in the house that the fan missed my head by about 6 inches. We went back to the hotel, checked out and negotiated an Ambassador car to take us to Konanki (£7 for a 4 hour journey). The first part was during the last hour of daylight through paddy fields in the sunset etc so was very enjoyable. It got less so as we continued - on the main Chennai Calcutta trunk road in lines of heavy lorries etc. As we approached the expected location of the village we had to stop frequently to ask the way. Eventually we found the turn off and trundled down a road like Oaklands way asking regularly for Naga Raju. At the end they knew his name and we had arrived. The house seems to have 3 'rooms'; a veranda, a main room with a double bed occupying most of it with shelves all round walls where most things are kept and a kitchen - reached by walking through the 'bedroom'. Surya decided he wanted to catch the night bus back to Tirupati so we walked up to the main road and waved him off. He told me later that he had caught the local bus towards Tirupati in order to get to a place where the express buses would stop. When he arrived after an hours journey he was told that it did not stop so he came all the way back past us to Chilingriapet where he could get the express and then back past us again towards Tirupati.

As soon as we got back to the house I asked where the toilet is and was told no one has one - you walk

to the river bank ...etc. So I was taken outside to collect a little pot of water which we filled at the well and then Raju told everyone where we were going to much amusement - early morning is the correct time for this operation. So he collected a huge torch and off we went. I then had to persuade him that the moonlight was sufficient - I did not want him to floodlight my embarrassed bum. Then back where I was commanded to ritually wash my feet at the well while everyone laughed at me. This, and the complete lack of any privacy is the only problem here. Not true - I don't like any of the food they have. Parents sleep on veranda and we sleep on the 2 big beds - wrapped in sheets over our heads and the light on and the fan at full blast. This was after Raju chased a brown rat out from under the bed by banging tin pots. Got some sleep and woke at about 3, so wrapped my lungi round me and went for a walk, wonderfully alone, in the empty paths under a full moon - really to reconnoitre to find alternatives to the public river bank. The village is a lot of mudpacked roads and paths joining the houses which are mainly like Raju's - brick built with open verandas. In the early morning Raju made me go with him to the river bank; through the early morning mist we wandered - with everyone else with their little pots of water - to squat by the river. I declined the opportunity and drifted back, watched by curious squatters all the way. Everyone seems to be closely related and they drift in and out of the houses. There are almost as many water buffalo as people, all standing about between the houses or in their own open sheds. Water is drawn from wells. I'm assured its OK. Raju tends to be a bit of a bully and tells me what to do all the time. Yesterday morning I was ordered to come and wash. This meant going to grandfather's house opposite into a little sunny ivy covered courtyard where water came from a hose into a stone trough. He then spent 5 minutes filling up buckets then ordered me to bath while he sat outside guarding the entrance. So I obeyed and had a cold bucket shower in the sun - very refreshing and the only private place in India. Spent rest of day sleeping or sitting in the bedroom sorting out what I had done so far on the first part of the genetic engineering paper. I more or less finished it by bedtime. Slept well and felt better next morning (this morning).

Today was the first day of the holiday so I was again ordered to go and "bath and wash your hair for the god please". I did so but for me. I then set off sorting out Remi's thesis material for the paper in the sun on the veranda until I had to go to see the gods. They live in a small cubic building on a raised stone platform. The door is only about 3 feet high and a small boy crawled in to light little camphor fires and wave flames over the gods. I was told their relationships but cannot remember. Rama and wife Sita but others are not familiar. I had to do a Namaskar ("just say good morning to them all") and then the boy put a bit of ash on my head. There is no point in asking the significance of anything because the answers are all full of technical words which I cannot catch. Raju's accent is very difficult to follow even when I know the words. Not long after this I fell asleep on the bed on the veranda only to be woken to go and see a bigger god being brought along on an ox cart with lots of noise. He was covered in flowers so I couldn't see him but he was protected from the sun by 2 small boys holding a battered old black umbrella over him. The oxen were decorated with flowers and with 10 rupee notes fixed with safety pins to the hair on their heads. The cart was pulled to each cross roads and villagers (mainly women and girls in their best saris) came up with offerings of bananas and coconuts. These are then smashed on stones and eaten. When I was handed one earlier to smash I got a great cheer because, in my fear of being too feeble to break the thing, I dashed it so violently that it smashed and distributed the shrapnel for a record distance. It was one of the few pleasant things I have been offered to eat here. Behind the oxcart was another, covered in little boys, with two large car batteries joined to a tape player and amplifier feeding huge cone speakers blasting the whole village. In front there was a band of 2 clarinets and 4-5 drums. These all looked the same - single skins on a frame like a tambourine but bigger - hit with sticks in a violent frenzy. When they saw my camera they lined up and went into a manic dance at the same time as playing. It was really very exciting and rhythmically too complex to follow. They obviously enjoyed it immensely. I hope my pictures come out they will be the most remarkable from any of my trips here. Unfortunately there was a man with a video camera - from some film company who was filming everything and he wanted me in a picture with the oxcart plus god. This brought out the film director in about a dozen men and boys who shouted (apparently angrily) at me with contradicting directions, pushing me about while I kept my upper lip stiff in a fixed smile. Some positions were unacceptable to the irritated priests who finally pushed me violently into their preferred position. This was between the oxen heads. All of this was enjoyed by the crowds of villagers and I was told that I would be the best thing in the film. I am sure that's true. I eventually crept back to a public sleep on the veranda. I forgot to mention that last night in an attempt to earn my keep I showed some of the boys my computer with Encarta - the only disk I brought here. They were very excited with the pictures of Everest and the sounds of south Indian music - and of course- the cello. I played the examples of choral music to show them what western religious music is like - snippets of Handel's Messiah and Bach's Matthew Passion. Eventually of course we finished playing Prince of Persia - we being a gang of young teenagers who drifted into the house. One of them had

never seen a computer before but he picked it up extremely quickly, becoming the general tutor as they each took turns.

After a tiny lunch (I am succeeding in getting my way a bit) I did a little more writing on the porch and then agreed to go by tractor to see Raju's fields. He drove out onto the road but we met by an old lady who jumped in front of us and after a serious chat we returned. One of the oldest workers in the village had died and he had been a tractor driver so there was a self-imposed hour of respect when no tractors would be used. So we set off later for the 2 km ride - with 6 other adults plus driver plus 4 children. I had the safest seat next to the driver - on the mudguard - but still felt very precarious. The gear change on tractors is not very smooth - nor are the tracks and roads. I soon got into the habit of avoiding cramp by tensing all the muscles in my body only during the most life-threatening situations. Once on the main road we even got hardened lorry drivers slowing down to stare. We stopped at another little temple where we sat on the cool stone floor in the shade before paying our respects to the god inside (literally - 2 rupees down a little shute into a safe). Then to the hut next door to sit on a string bed and drink tea. Of course, Naga Raju's fields were indistinguishable from any others - rice paddies, chillies and palms trees. We went for a walk around the perimeter of his fields balancing single file on the raised mud between the paddies. We stopped at a few trees at the corners where he put flowers - these were apparently shrines to his ancestors who had these fields for at least 6 generations. Then back on the tractor for another thrilling ride home. Later in the afternoon we went to look at the east fields by walk. This was really beautiful - through emerald green paddy fields with paddy birds kingfishers, egrets, herons, red-wattled lapwings, Wood sandpipers and even a huge stork flying overhead. His fields are mainly paddy and chillies. At the corner of one field he harvested some lemons for us which tasted just like you would expect except perhaps a little more acid. Surprisingly welcome and refreshing. Am now sitting by the bed typing while father grandfather uncle cousins etc argue and laugh and occasionally interrogate me. They have enjoyed my birdbook - arguing about the names of the birds and often finding it all very funny but I have never found out why. I have had to pretend to be slightly ill to excuse myself from eating too much but from the sounds beside me I think more food is about to appear [I do feel slightly ill partly because of the imodium I take in order to have some control over my life. I shall now stop. Good night my dears.

Sunday Jan 16<sup>th</sup>. I have just returned from a disappointing failure to telephone home. Calculated to find everyone in on a Sunday afternoon. Contrary to Raju's assurance, the telephone booth at the end of the village on the main trunk road did not do direct dialling overseas and the operator lady could not work out how to do it manually. After my usual slightly disturbed sleep with noisy fast ceiling fan to keep out mosquitoes and the fluorescent light (purpose?), enshrouded in a sheet over my head, woke to a cool misty morning. My cough seems to have left. When the sun came out I had a nice wander round the village where all the houses were having coloured patterns of chalk 'painted' on the earth roads outside the entrance. These are often very complex and require great skill to ensure that they retain their symmetry. The young girls sometimes have battered exercise pattern books to follow. I took some photos with the usual problem that the subject saw me and stood up to spoil the picture. I spent the rest of the morning trying to sort out Remi's part of the paper. I found that I seem to have no copies of his thesis on the computer and the printed out part he gave me was an earlier draft. As it happens this didn't matter as it was so bad it needed complete re-writing. So I sat out in the weak sun with the bored water buffalo looking over my shoulder like an intrepid war correspondent getting back my story to the comfortable readers at home (I hope you are sitting comfortably). I am writing this at the end of the day between power cuts. These plunge the whole village into darkness of course, the only source of light in the village being my computer screen, which then attracts the insects. Today was the last day of the holiday - celebrated by eating chicken. So last night saw villagers wandering about carrying live chickens and this morning saw others with dead ones. When called into lunch the door was furtively closed behind me and I found Raju and his 2 uncles sitting on the floor to eat - I had the bed. The secrecy was because they had a beer for me and a small bottle of whisky for them - half a tumbler each topped up with coke. The rice was fried and good (I will go mad if I have to eat much more of the bland cold boiled rice with its side bits of frightfully spicy scraps of mashed vegetables). We also had the chicken which was very good. So, the best meal since we arrived in the village.

After lunch they all collapsed tangled up together drunkenly asleep and snoring asleep on my bed leaving no room for me so I went for a very enjoyable 2 h walk in the sun, instructing the locals on use of binoculars. Saw some spectacular blue tailed bee eaters and another stork - as well as usual birds. The country is very beautiful - like the very best of Tirupati - mainly paddy fields and palms and interesting small hills in the distance. On return there was space on the bed for me to collapse to read. Later in the evening I went to grandfather's house opposite to finish celebrating. His house is around a courtyard with all the 3 rooms opening onto it - the wall is missing so it is very open plan. Bits of cloth hang up in places to make a bit of privacy. The

main room is about 3 metres high - more like a barn with all sorts of agricultural stuff hanging from the rafters. Cooking is done on an open wood fire within a circle of stones so the whole place has a camping feel to it. I sat for dinner on a string bed (charpoy) - shared with two little sleeping girls. the food (special sir) was the same as lunch but cold. I had to pretend to be angry to avoid being forced to eat more than my share of the cold greasy chicken (I really wanted none at all). I asked "who is the professor here and who is the student?" This was effective and provoked Raju to kneel down and pretend (I hope) to kiss my feet, all of which was great entertainment for his father and uncle (Venkat) and grandfather. They then decided to come back to my place and watch TV while I went to sleep. They sit slightly to the left of my feet and the TV is on the opposite corner to the right of my head, so I am nearer than they are. The usual shrieking dancing Telugu film loudly distorted through their TV. Amazingly I seem to cope with this OK ("this is an adverb sir so you should say OKly"). I was woken next morning at 5.30 by Raju who'd got up and, like Hugh, immediately turned on the Tele. I just went back to sleep. Did Lawrence of Arabia have these problems? Am I a spoilt brat? I am reading the second of my 2 novels by Sebastian Faulkes. the first, set in the 1914-18 war was great but rather depressing. I have just started the 2<sup>nd</sup> - Charlotte Gray - set in the 1939-45 war. I must be careful not to read too fast as I only have 2 other books left. I am longing to leave this place. The only loos are the river bank (Although I have found a more private place ten minutes walk away). The food is awful and I want my mum.

So sorry Libby & Hugh that I didn't get to speak to you today. I hope your terms have started well. Mine starts tomorrow without me. So goodnight my loved ones.

Tues 18<sup>th</sup> evening back in guest house, listening to unaccompanied Bach Cello. Yesterday was my last day in Konanki. I was glad to leave. I feel very wimpish to confess it but I am not cut out for the village life. The lack of privacy doesn't suit me; and the lavatorial aspects wouldn't suit anyone I know. Lavatory humour is a well established genre; how about lavatorial tragedy? The result was that I ate little, drank less and got into a nervous furtive state of mind, noting locations suitable as private dumping grounds. It would otherwise have been an idyllic place in every way (provided I had a tiny house of my own preferably with a cook) out the back to avoid the cold dull rice with cold aggressively spiced veg mixes which appeared to be mixed with cockroach shells. My last day started off with a walk up the road to the main road and over onto the small road that leads to the next village in my usual quest for privacy. The mist gradually cleared revealing a glorious sunny day with gentle breeze and lines of young boys and girls in their little green shorts wandering off to school. My binocular lessons were much more attractive than school it seemed. Occasionally boys from our bit of the village came along and were in great demand for information about this strange man. Saw a number of new birds including my favourite black winged kite which I haven't seen since my first trip to Tirupati. Had a wonderful cold shower in Grandfather's shower place and sat in the sun having tiffin - Raju has learned to give me half the amount of dosa that he thinks I would like, so there is only twice as much as I want. Dosas are dull brown rice pancakes filled with chopped raw onion served, of course, with a splodge of (for me) too spicy stuff. The little cups of sweet milky tea are wonderful. I found out how to make Tables easily with the new version of Wordperfect then wrote out most of Remi's Tables. In the afternoon, feeling slightly guilty for not being a more lively visitor, went for walk in the noonday sun through the beautiful cool river, with a couple of mad dogs to watch the chillie harvest. Chilly it wasn't. It was all like a mediaeval Brueghel painting.

The fields belong to Raju so it was all his family doing the picking, bringing in the chillies in baskets on their heads and dumping them on hessian sacks where his parents sorted out the red (more ripe) chillies from the majority greens. They harvest them from the same plants every two weeks; the plants being harvested today had flowers on them which would mature in about 5 weeks. Took some nice pictures (I hope). Fortunately Raju's father was wearing his dark glasses; he had an accident with concentrated pesticide 20 years ago which disfigured his eyes and face badly. We then drifted back to get ready to go. Raju then announced that he was staying; if I had known this I would have left early on some pretext. He wanted me to leave at 8 in the evening but I insisted on going earlier in the hope of getting back in time to get some sleep before my 9.30 lecture. He had told Surya that he would reserve seats on the high tech bus (much better standard than the super luxury Express). I was therefore slightly nervous as he was being very casual about getting ready. The usual problem of me not knowing what is going on (is this my control freakishness coming out?). The fast buses do not stop at Konanki so we had to go back 20 miles to Chilkurapet (?) = place of the parrots. As I had suggested, being the end of the holiday, the local bus for this journey was full. We had to let 2 go by. 45 anxious minutes later we were crammed onto a local bus. It was full to overflowing before we extra 6 plus luggage fought our way on board. Of course, I was nervous of the computer being banged or dropped. Most of the way I stood on one leg as there was no place to put the other down. I had a little boy standing on my other foot. I kept on reminding myself that by the time I came to write this in my diary I would be finding it funny. Not yet it isn't. Except for

computer worry it would have just been another adventure. When we arrived Raju wandered about aimlessly in the mess of lorries and buses lined up 2 or 3 abreast along the dusty dark crowded road. It turned out he was looking for friends who said they would meet us to say goodbye. Found them and off we wandered to the bus station. He then told me that he had not reserved a seat and it was too late to do so. "No problem sir, if the 1<sup>st</sup> is full we will find you a seat on the next". This wasn't too comforting as each bus that drew up was less appropriate for a 9 hour drive than the previous. Every time a bus came crashing its gears into the station Raju would rush over to check if it was going to Tirupati; if it was then he fought his way on to it to try to find a free seat. Having arrived at about 7.00 we eventually found a seat at 8.30 (5<sup>th</sup> attempt). At last some good fortune - it happened to be on a high tech bus so had good fully reclining seats and reasonable suspension. It also stopped every 2 hours for a short break. Too short for my travelling companion who left his suitcase on the seat next to mine as he went off to get a snack; we drove off without him. I feel a little guilty (or rather think that perhaps I ought to feel it) for only casually mentioning the fact that he was being left behind to the conductor and I didn't rant and plead on his behalf. He was going to the end of line - Tirupati - so would collect it from the lost luggage there after catching the next bus. I actually slept for a few of the earlier hours and then sat happily awake, watching the stars as we roared headlong into Tirupati. The buses are so big and heavy that they I get this great feeling of invincible aggressive momentum and power as we hurtle roaring through the night. Stepped out of the bus into the waiting arms of an auto driver who actually quoted me the correct fare (30 rupees - 50p) for the very long drive back to the guest house through the dim wide streets of the ghost town of Tirupati. It turned out that he didn't really know where the guest house was and got a little distressed as I kept tapping him on the shoulder "further on, further on". So I gave him 50 rupees on arrival which generosity he acknowledged by kissing the notes and waving them at me. I staggered gratefully into my room, ate a bar of chocolate, drank a pint of water, waved at the loyally waiting loo and collapsed onto the bed (5.00 am).

While away my old friend from 8 years ago - Puzarendhi from Pondicherry had visited - I had told him in a Christmas card when I would be here- and left gifts of joss sticks and a Lungi. Awakened from very deep sleep at 6.30 by door bell - I staggered wild eyed, hair on end to the door to find Murali grinning and grabbing my hand to hold it to welcome me back - "I want to welcome you back with early morning tea sir". "No thanks, why don't you have it". "No sir it won't be ready until 8.00". Bring it then please. But he didn't - he goes off duty at 7.30. Walked through glorious sunny morning to my lecture on lactose operon. This is such a beautiful place, I began to feel a little guilty at not having a happier time at Konanki (of course much of it was happy - I have tended to mention the less appetizing parts). Only half the students are back but they are enthusiastic so I also managed to be. Surya was waiting - with Mahdu and his scooter outside when I eventually escaped gossiping with Venkaiah. It was very good to see him. He drove me back then went off for Mahdu and returned with him plus Thums up and Miranda and a pineapple cake which came with a free biro - just tucked inside the plastic cake wrapping so it had to be decrumbed before use. Afternoon lecture followed by an hour's preparation for tomorrow. Disturbed by a previous year student and his visiting brother who had come for 'Darshan' - sight of the god (I think). As they left, Surya and Mahdu arrived and took me off to a nice simple fried rice and 'gravy' in a Veg restaurant in town, followed by 'yor hearts delite' icecream. Home in auto. Glad to be back. this is where I feel best in India - in my own castle.

So, once again, goodnight. I had intended to go out at 11 to phone home but it is now 10.00 and I keep falling asleep so will have another attempt tomorrow.

Thurs 20<sup>th</sup> jan. It is evening and I am waiting for a research scholar (Sudhir) to arrive so that we can all (other scholars) go out to dinner. He is now an hour late. During this hour I have had a traumatic experience. I wrote about 2 pages of diary. I then received a screen message saying the programme had an error so please quit etc. It then failed to respond and I could not turn off the computer (I have since realised that I could have removed the battery). Eventually I succeeded (after 20 minutes of panic). When it started again I found the whole of the 2 pages missing so I am starting again while hungrily waiting. So here is the new version: I woke yesterday at 5 am - the dawn chorus of lorries and trains reminded me I was back here. Showing all my great British character, I leaped out of bed and went to look fondly at the loo then typed paper (no not loo paper) for 3 hours. Even breakfast (hot dosas) was good. It was a glorious sunny breezy day so got a lot of typing done in the sun in the garden - and gave my lectures. In the evening went for a walk to NCC- Nagar opposite the guest house - an undeveloped area of mixed tress and scrub and thorn bushes. At last I have seen the beautiful golden backed woodpecker - amazingly in the same field of view as a tree pie (a bird, silly). Came back to find Surya waiting in case I needed anything so we went to our new fast food place for fried rice and gravy with chapatis all for about £1 including drinks and coffee. After an evening of Prince and music and reading my history book - Stalingrad - I walked down to queue for 30 minutes to phone home (at about 11.30). At last I succeeded in

finding a phone that worked at a suitable time etc. It was so good to hear your voice, Hugh Anthony Speaking, and to hear that you are well. I always feel a little bereaved after these brief phone calls but it is wonderful to hear you and imagine you at home. I am rather stupid (OK so you know this) but I forgot to get Clive's phone number so I missed talking with him.

I am still waiting for the research scholars and have the usual problem of knowing what to do. They were all so enthusiastic about coming out so it would be mean of me to just go off in case they do come later and have some valid reason for messing me about.

This morning after a good night's sleep I again woke very early so did another load of writing. This leaves me more free to do other things during the day if they crop up. Fortunately nothing did today so I have had a very successful day until now (I am starving). I am now lecturing on my research, which I enjoy and so do they - they do not have to struggle to take notes. I cadged a lift from one of the students on his scooter (Rao) which he offered to lend me. It sounds a good idea but it would be too big a risk I think. After a glorious morning's work, reviewing all that I have written, while birdwatching in the garden, Kiran arrived to play games while I had my lunch - brought to me in the room as they have a lot of outside visitors. Back to afternoon lecture then back for more of same and here I am. Sudhir is now 90 minutes late. I shall walk down to their hostel then into town to see if email is working yet. Having decided to look up my messages last evening I found the server in Chennai is down so no luck at the cyber pub.

I walked to the Department - as the research scholars often wander in during the evenings but had to walk even further to the hostel to see what had happened. Subhan only was there and he said that they had argued and decided that 5.30 was the agreed time, so had arrived at 6.10; the locked door showed that I must have gone out. They didn't get as far as seeing that I had left a note to tell them I would be there at 6.30 (as arranged). I wandered off and saw Sudhir - the one who had arranged it all - entering the biochemistry building. When I asked what is going on he said "I am just entering this building sir". So I walked on down the town, failed to get Surya on phone (to make alternative arrangement to eat - ie to beg supper). So tried cyber pub again. Connections were there but hotmail is so slow that I never did get connected - so walked home, calling in at A black to chat to MSc students. Only one was there -Reddy who is the moustache-less, vain one. He was in his Lungi and was so delighted to see me that he had difficulty talking through his permanent grin; his room is shared with 8 others in his year (designed for 3 students) and is mainly their sheet steel beds (no mattresses) with strings crossing the room where they hang all their clothes. Then set off home, picking up my dinner of biscuits and bananas at the little shop. I wanted to phone home but there were 6 people waiting (40 minutes worth) so gave up, returned to guest house, poured a Thums up, put on a Bach prelude & fugue and read Stalingrad. I think that it was during today's very long walks that I might have damaged my foot (see later).

20<sup>th</sup> Cannot remember much of this day but realise it must be the day when I went to Kiran's school. I had the usual welcome with the children standing and saluting and giving their names. They then performed dances and songs for me - all the ones they had learned as part of their Christmas celebrations. Father then told me I must make a speech to them giving advice etc. As they understand almost no English other than specific phrases learned by heart ("my name is ...") I thought it pointless so I changed the format and got them to stand up and answer questions. Some of them seemed to love this opportunity to show off so the time passed in a special sort of way. There was a 2 year old who sat on the long bench at the front dozing off and waking abruptly every time she started to fall off the bench. I was told to leave her she is safe. They use her to explain that the Lord Jesus looks after even the little birds so they do not hurt themselves. There was then to be a 2 hour gap to fill before dinner so to avoid having to listen to Father asking my advice on how to find enough money to buy a school building (find a rich Englishman), I asked Kiran to take me to the waterfall temple. Before this we went to the chicken shop to get dinner. The chickens live in a long low room looking out on the place where they are killed and carved up for sale. It looked almost hygienic except for the live chicken being sprayed with bits of their friends while they were being hacked up for my dinner. We went by scooter to my favourite temple at the foot of the hills where a waterfall usually crashes into the large pool but it was disappointing. There were very few people there; the water was very low and there were none of the usual crowds of swimmers etc. Kiran then wanted to drive me to where we could go swimming - this turned out to be the pool of the Guestline hotel which is out of town at the foot of the hills. Before arriving I saw an inviting lake so we stopped to explore. My foot has got much worse and so I limped along the shore watching dabchick and paddy birds in the golden dying light. All around the emerald paddy fields and the violet hills make it the obvious place to stay if I can arrange for Libby to come here sometime (I hope we can achieve this). Eventually had to hobble back to the scooter and return for nice (but too big) dinner at Kiran's and then home.

21<sup>st</sup> Jan. In the afternoon I had been persuaded to give a lecture in Biotechnology Dept. on use of bugs

in biotechnology - a summary of 6 lectures I give to our final year students at home. This was to a large class of B.Sc level teachers (bit above A level) on some special upgrade course. It was very hot (34 °C). As I finished my 20 minute walk in the sun, there was Naga Raju back from his village standing smiling at the door just as when I first met him 3 years ago. I think he was a little concerned that I would not be pleased to see him after the chaos of our parting - fighting for the only seat on the hightech bus on the way back from Konanki. I was delighted. He is less possessive (or protective) when we are here. He had already phoned Surya to try to get "some idea of my health". The lecture was upstairs where I remember giving my exciting lectures during the great cyclone of 3 years ago - with wide open windows through which we saw each wave of the storms approaching and through which I could enjoy great and glorious blasts of warm rain as I paddled about the flooded room. I sound almost nostalgic. I was introduced in the usual flowery way "he has published more than 100 research papers in good and great international journals and is in great demand through all the world (don't forget it)". Within the first 10 minutes 3 older men at the back were nodding off gently and I would have loved to have joined them but I had to do my duty and shout above the noise of the 9 ceiling fans. As usual the lady teachers appeared more alert and interested. Told lots of biotech stories etc. We were then told that there was 20 minutes for questions (after a full 60 minute shouted lecture). There was complete silence except for the wild fans and one ancient snoring teacher (highly revered) whose head had lolled to one side so much that all I could see was one ancient ear pointing at the sky with a shrub of grey hair fighting its way out and blowing in the wind (we should learn to treasure these precious moments). As they asked no questions I asked them a few and that livened them up a bit (this was necessary because the head of biotech who had organised it looked worried that they were not interested). There was then a flood of questions including the possibility of there being a microbes rights action group. One zoology teacher asked "I have a question that has worried me for some years; sometimes we read about the Krebs' cycle and other times about the same thing but called the citric acid cycle and then the tricarboxylic acid cycle - please explain sir?" So I drew the structure of citric acid - a tricarboxylic acid .. She then asked what is a carboxylic acid. Afterwards, her colleague explained to me that "she thought it was TRYcarboxylic acid and thought that perhaps it was failing in its duty sir". They teach in an extremely compartmentalised way and if the BSc students do not do biochemistry as such then they do not come across most of the most important developments in some of their subjects.

22nd Sat. Gave my morning lecture and then secretly told them that they could attend at 2.0 in afternoon but that I would not be there. Came back and did more genetics for the paper - a huge table of bugs, plasmids and phage used in the work. Sivamani is now here. He is the boy I met many years ago on the beach in Madras and we have kept in touch ever since. He is now 21 yrs and tall and very athletic. He represents the state of Tamil Nadu in handball and his house is full of cups and medals. He arrived just after lunch and will leave at about 4.30. tomorrow. After an hour or so chatting (chit chatting as Venkaiah calls it), I sat outside working while he played on the computer - mainly exploring my CDs. His favourite turned out to be my French Celine Dion CD; I promised to send a copy to him. One of my favourites on it is now a very popular shrieked Tamil film song - stolen I suppose. We went for a walk around NCC Nagar in the golden late afternoon with binoculars but saw only about 4 birds and got lost as darkness crept up on us in large area of thornbush. We were directed out of it by 3 students shouting instructions from the top of the 3-story Engineering students hostel, almost lost in the sound of the huge flocks of house crows and jungle crows coming home to roost in the tall Eucalyptus trees. In the evening we went to dinner at a new hotel about 5 miles out on the Renigunta road west of the town. Naga Raju is back from his village and so he came as well - with Surya and Raja. We were the only ones in the restaurant. Raju kept them in fits of laughter describing my time in the village. As predicted it is now a funny memory but I remember the negative bits well enough to avoid ever repeating the experience. They are planning to put up a village 'Chris Anthony memorial guest house' furnished with running water and loo.

We had the usual apparently aimless standing around in the dark road afterwards, working out a way to get home. Surya and Raja went on his scooter and we remaining three caught a small minibus. I hadn't noticed before that 'catching a bus' here is no different from catching any other disease (nervous first symptoms, a period of pain and smells frustration and fear, followed by the relief and gratitude at the end). Raju ran out and waved it down and we crashed into it, sitting on aggressive metal seats and bumped our way back into town. The old man sitting opposite me kept spitting red betel juice onto the floor like a decaying TB patient coughing up his lungs; when directed by the manic conductor to spit out the window he did so, leaving a long stain down the rear windows. We tumbled out of the bus at the train station into the usual aimless bewildered crowds of pilgrims. They come here from all over India to visit the god (Venkateswara) up in the hills at Tirumula. The areas between the train station and bus station is devoted to them. They litter the floor of the vast station, with families heaped asleep like bundles of dirty clothes. Those arriving look apprehensive or, if from richer

backgrounds, slightly disdainful at their surroundings while those leaving usually have at least one of each family with recently shorn head - often covered in makeshift hats of old towels or revolting baseball hats or balaclavas. We did the usual negotiations for an auto, then sentimentally down dirty Nethaji road (where Surya used to live) and dropped off a very tired Raju at his hostel. Of course I then had to do a bit of sorting out to find a bed for Sivamani - I use the spare bed as the base of my filing system (like at home). Had a remarkably good night with one reading break at about 2.30. Sivamani woke, stared in alarm at me with my torch pointing at maps of the battle of Stalingrad, muttered "always reading reading reading" and went to sleep again.

23 Jan Sunday afternoon. I am writing a couple of days later on my veranda at 2.40. Temperature is 35 °C. Unfortunately, I continue to have some problem with my foot; a toe (they call them fingers here) has swollen, making it difficult to walk without pain. So I haven't done much with him. I am not sure where we would go if I was more mobile as he has seen most things I find interesting here. He is quite articulate and so we have had very lengthy conversations - the last being about the bad Christians who go about converting Hindus. They are almost always poor (the converts) and respond rather well to offers of Christian brotherhood (Indian equivalent of the Chinese rice Christians). Christians got off lightly compared with the Muslims - mainly because of the Pak/India conflict and the terrorist organisations. While I was doing some more work, Sivamani sat beside me trying to produce some animated cartoon of me flying to UK - using the power point programme. He had not finished when Surya arrived to take him to the station. We parted with promises of eternal devotion and a few brave tears from Sivamani. In the evening we went along to our Fast food place. Chose to have chicken Biryani which was not good and I may be suffering from it still. Before eating we called Imran who has just returned to Chittoor from Hyderabad. He is always a pleasure to talk to - easy to understand, not demanding and very pleased that he will be welcome to visit here again. I doubt if he will make it but it would be nice to see him again [he didn't manage to come]. I then called Puzharendhi from Pondicherry; I had been putting this off because I really do not want him around during my last few days here. We were told that he had gone to Chennai and would be coming to Tirupati afterwards. He phoned next day to arrange a time and I managed to put him off the idea with lots of false sorry and true thanks for his nice present he had left when he came last week while I was away. Surya then wrapped my foot up in tight plaster - he said this would not harm anything and might help (like most medicine I suppose). It had no effect but brought sympathy and offers of lifts on backs of pedal bikes which I had to reject, explaining that I enjoyed hobbling.

Tues 25<sup>th</sup>. Writing this while listening to a Bach Cantata. Had bad night, waking with stomach ache and bit of temperature about 3 times during the night. Missed breakfast and bravely limped the 20 minutes to my lecture. Most of the students are back now so had a bigger audience for my lecture on PCR. I was scheduled to give my lecture on "English communication in India" at 5.00 so I cancelled my 2.00 lecture as I was feeling unwell (feeble weed). On return I found that the sight of my computer made me feel ill - that is the thought of trying to do any work so I went to bed again - that is I lay down. Had no lunch .... At 4.30 Venkaiah was going to collect me to give my lecture but he phoned to say that He had been to the lecture theatre earlier to check it was OK and had spoken to a few people and found that the audience was likely to be negligible. The Principal has the reputation for shooting off memos saying that everyone must attend some lecture or other and so everyone is immune. So, Venkaiah cancelled it, to my relief. Surya turned up later and went out to buy some cake and bananas. I ate one and promptly fell asleep. I woke at about 3.30 am with all the lights on feeling much better so got up and had a drink and a read then asleep again until 7.30.

Wed. 26<sup>th</sup>. Today is Republic Day, celebrating the publication of the Indian constitution in 1950. I had a casual invitation to attend a flag raising ceremony from Venkaiah a few days ago and subsequently this escalated to me having a special invitation from the Vice Chancellor so I had to go. Venkaiah collected me at 8.0 and drove me to the sports ground. We then stood or sat around for an hour while things were prepared and the day hotted up - and waiting for the VC. The National Cadet Corps (men, boys and girls) were marching about to line up opposite the flagpole. The ceremonial type of marching by real soldiers involves very energetic arm swinging. This was imitated enthusiastically by the amateurs but the marching in step was rather ignored so the effect was a lot rag dolls waving in the wind. They formed part of a square - the two sides were made up of a lot of women and children on one side and men and boys on the other. We dignitaries were stuck under an awning. Fortunately we stayed under it when the VC eventually arrived and marched with escort out into the sun to raise the flag. The military people stood at attention and saluted as did most of the children. The crowds of elderly academics felt they ought to do something appropriate but didn't know what. Some saluted like soldiers, a few did Hitler salutes, others did a sort of Black Panther clenched fist thing while Venkaiah sheepishly waved his arm in the air; I just stood there with a sort of jilted imperial brave face. The VC then barked a speech for 20 minutes in Telugu which Venkaiah later told me was trash. I was still feeling a bit grim especially stuck in the

heat trying to look appropriately serious. At the end of it some students from the music academy shyly sang a couple of quiet songs with Tabla accompaniment (their shyness was overcome by the poor amplifier which sent their message of peace squawking across the parade ground) and this was followed by the distribution of sweets. There was a sort of master of ceremonies who obviously felt he was a great film director - wandering about waving his arms through the whole proceedings. He waved four men into action, each carrying a shallow tray piled with toffees. They set off in an official looking determined way, marred only by the fact that their trays were all rather makeshift - filing trays or filing cabinet drawers. They sort of edged up to the VC - behind his back and on a command from the director (in big beard, belly and sun glasses) they shyly drifted in front of him as the music died. He then pompously strode off to the side and distributed the toffees to the women and children. The principal and deans did the same on the other side. Eventually I got my toffee just as most of the senior staff of the University descended on my bit of space and I had to be introduced to them all - all of us sucking toffees.

We then sat on a sort of veranda with lots of children milling about chasing more toffees while tinny music blared at us. I got less and less able to smile and chatter - I could only lip read through the noise and the toffees distorted the shapes. Eventually the special invitees (!) were ushered upstairs for breakfast. I got to the top of the outdoor staircase and decided I'd had enough as they were elbowing their way through the hot bodies into a small crowded room to get their curried breakfast. I pleaded a slight fever and looked pathetic so Venkaiah agreed to drive me back to the guest house. I collapsed asleep on the bed and then spent the day a little better than the previous reading Stalingrad. I tried to get some work done but failed. Of course it is a beautiful place to just drift gently through the day. The view from the veranda includes a bit of road backed by the wedges of the distant red hills, the home of the god. My monkey family paid a couple of visits and I lured the squirrels (like striped chipmunks) with some grapes onto the veranda beside me. I strolled in the garden amongst the bougainvillea and Eucalyptus with the bee eaters, butterflies the size of birds and birds the size of butterflies (small sunbirds with iridescent purple plumage). In the afternoon two students arrived to deliver my official invitation to be chief guest at their party tomorrow - Kartik and the small crazy 'village boy'. I told them to go to the student hostels to tell them my lecture in the morning is cancelled. As I was feeling a bit better at 5.0 I went for a nice walk in the evening sun but my foot got worse so I limped painfully home I kept thinking during my walk how good it will be to visit here with Libby. Taken to Kiran's home for farewell dinner. I had actually started to feel hungry so was able to eat a little of the special dishes. I had told him earlier that I would not be eating but this was an unacceptable message. They were very sympathetic and told me they were sorry that I was so dull. What they meant was not my usual lively self - not that I was dead boring although I was. Felt better after eating, so livened up to earn my supper by chatting with father while watching Discovery programme. This is on 24hrs a day and is very good although boring slow American commentator always seems to be addressing an audience of 6 year olds. Took the photos of family and said goodbye - warding off invitations for "tomorrow when we can cook you fish". Kiran came in after scootering me back and we listened to my Erica Badu CD (Maybe next lifetime etc). Its now 11 and I shall go to bed to dream of home.

Thurs 27<sup>th</sup>. Last day in Tirupati. Forgive me, but this is a diary so I cannot hide the truth. I woke at 4 am with runny gut; not a good omen for my last day when I need to sparkle and let everyone know how well I am and how happy and how healthy etc (and also enjoy myself). Fortunately yesterday I had already cancelled this morning's lecture. It seemed daft after a break of 2 days to give just one extra random lecture. I rejected breakfast and sat by the open door trying to edit and sort out a last bit of the molecular biology part of my paper. I was feeling perfectly well and enjoyed it except for having to leap up twice an hour. Surya had come earlier and I'd sent him off to track down some Imodium which he did successfully. I avoided using it in fact (I had used up my supply in Konanki - preventative rather than cure). Another example of how much has changed here over the years. I had a typically humiliating experience yesterday. Venkaiah had realised that in his office loo there was no paper (of course I carry my own anyway). He had therefore considerably bought the nearest approximation - paper napkins - with happy new year printed in red in the corners. Instead of leaving them where needed, he showed them to me and carefully placed them on the end of his table under a paperweight and then proceeded to explain to the student who had called in to see him what the purpose was "you see these people (me) have different habits from us" - spoken with his usual expression of slight distaste which in this context seemed to have overtones of disgust and religious fervour mixed in (perhaps I'm being sensitive).

Murali came to see me and stood there looking a bit tearful because I was sounding as if I wanted to leave. I explained that I didn't want to leave but I had family etc to return to. He promised to come to say goodbye tomorrow. The shortsighted secretary (Barsha) who has more common sense than the rest of the staff together, turned up with a cheque for me to sign - for my payment of expenses etc. I asked him to arrange for

someone to collect me for the student afternoon function as I couldn't face the 20 minute walk in the hottest part of the day. Avoided lunch and started to feel better by 1.15 and decided that I had beaten the bugs. Reddy came to take me at about 2.00 but before I could go I had to deal with a student from two years previously who had heard I was in Tirupati and had come from Chittoor for advice. He had application forms for PhD places in various Universities in UK. Most of them had assurances that it was possible to get scholarships to help pay fees etc. They are like those at Southampton - almost zero chance, and I would guess no chance at all for a typical Indian MS student. He had been encouraged by one University to apply for the standard Wellcome studentship. This is immoral as the chances of our very best undergraduates getting one of these is very slight and he would have no chance at all. I persuaded him that he should accept the honourable advice of Bath University and visit the British Council office in Chennai to discuss it all. I arrived by scooter 15 minutes early for my function and was waved away by the preparing students. I wandered over to Biotechnology through a herd of placid buffaloes to see if there was any sign of Nagaraju. He saw me coming and came out to greet me just as 3 years ago when I first met him. It was very good to see him; he had been away to collect prawns for his research. I have to reassure him whenever I see him that my visit to his village was the most memorable part of my visit. He smiles sweetly, strokes my arm and says don't worry sir I will build a proper guest house for you for next year. I returned to Biochemistry and was ushered hurriedly to Thyagaraju's office where the other staff were assembled (they were merely special guests).

There was a problem - the chief guest had arrived (me) but the other guests -the first year students - had not arrived although it was their welcoming function). Eventually they came and we were summoned to walk down the outside corridor past the beautiful flower patterns painted in coloured salt on the floor to be presented with our roses as we went into the lecture room. It was decorated quite beautifully with delicate christmassy streamers and at the open windows very fine silk shawls, pinned so that they caught the breeze and billowed into the room as if we were looking out from inside a flower. The whole place had been cleaned and even the blackboard washed (I would have liked that for my lectures). We sat in a row facing the front until I was called with Thiagaraju to sit at the facing table in the front where we were welcomed and presented with bouquets of flowers. There was a printed menu of speeches to be presented. The final year students gave very short English speeches welcoming their juniors (the 'Previous year'). The last of these was in Telugu by my village boy who had tight jeans and huge inflatable trainers. he seemed to be giving a sermon or political lecture. He was very serious and waved his arms at them - I presume it was funny from the audience reaction and I think I should be grateful from the fits of giggles that I did not understand his bits that kept having SriChrisAnthonygaru shouted as a sort of refrain. He earned great applause and we then sank down into a very boring set of small speeches by the academic staff in turn, finishing with a sensible short speech by Thiagaraju in which he did the very Indian thing of mentioning my finances and his 'slight problem with his stomach'.

Then of course came the climax of the function - my speech. I can't remember what I said but they laughed happily through most of it. I was then presented with yet another representation of Sri Venkateswara, small wooden and tasteful with, according to Surya, an exceptionally high standard of enamelling (laqueur). I was then ushered to the front- facing row and we sat there silent and patient while some of the girls organised refreshments. It seemed a perfect time for the staff to be a little less formal but they all sat there facing the front with their backs to the students. I arranged a halfway position so I could talk a little with the girls behind me. It was all rather like sitting in church waiting for the bride and groom to come out - half celebration and half subdued by the surroundings. The food was one samosa and one pink fluffy cream cake followed by icecream and pineapple juice. I wolfed mine down and had a second cake thrust upon me by a very excited student - she had prepared it all. In her eagerness she had managed to acquire a row of blobs of creams - coffee, pink, green, blue - evenly distributed down the waving bit of her sari. She then sucked them off one by one. The best food I'd had for three days. After this the staff called to me and out they walked with not a backward glance at their hosts who had prepared everything to give them a good time. I had to follow them but managed to call out 'I'll be Back' which brought a cheer (for Arnie, not for me). I then was taken with all staff to the office to get my cash. This was seventy 100 rupee notes tied with string. Thanks very much and into my bag in their envelope. They all leaped up together - no sir you must count it. Barsha said he had counted it but that I must count it again. This was all too embarrassing - sitting there counting my money like a bank robber with them all looking on so I passed them over to Murthy the fat lecturer who I have never liked and told him to count them if he wanted them counted. A good solution, and they all sat there counting with him. Murthy is Suban's PhD supervisor and is demanding that he pays him £100 before he will read his thesis. Suban is refusing but would not tell me his problem. Nagaraju explained it all later. I then stood up and thanked them all formally and said goodbye - I'm going back into the student party. Why, they wanted to know. "So that I can tell them what good

students they are and goodbye because I missed my last lecture to say goodbye". So I did, and so enjoyed what most previous years the staff have caused me to miss.

The Final year students provided the formal part and the previous (1<sup>st</sup>) years provided the entertainment. This was very slow starting as they were all very shy. Village boy stood up and did a comic speech to get them going and one of the girls sang a shy song very quietly with her own words describing the seniors in turn - presumably accurately as they were screaming at the end. Then a tape of film dance music was put on - very very loud and horrible and one of the boys did a very energetic clever dance to it - he does classical dance and he had adapted it for the occasion. This was the nice vain boy who always came up after lectures to say thank you, hold my hand and waggle his head in friendly way; he was very shy and conversations rapidly failed through language problems. I then left to say goodbye to the research scholars next door - especially the nice quiet Sudhir who always wanted me to talk with him but never had anything to say, or rather never managed to get it into English. He stood there with tears in his eyes muttering good journey sir good journey sir, stroking me gently while the others looked on sympathetically. I suppose I arouse this devotion in my students in England but they are too English to express it (?). I gulped a few times and cadged a scooter lift back to guest house in the golden evening sun.

Nagaraju soon turned up and we had the usual chat about his plans - marriage and farm or PhD. Surya then arrived to take me for our last trip to his home. He suggested that we all three went on the scooter but fortunately even he realised that we would not be comfortable so we just went as far as the University and Nagaraju and I caught an auto. I had reminded Surya earlier that I would be eating almost nothing so he had prepared just rice and one dish of curried veggies. This was almost the worst food I'd had since Konanki village - just that I didn't like the taste of that sort of vegetable (green slimy with no name). Had very good tea to wash it down. Swarna gave me presents for me and Libby and said that she wanted very much to invite aunty to come next time. She also thanked you Libby for the wonderful biology book - she uses it all the time as it is so clear. Before she came in I took out 2 bars of chocolate I had kept for her but Surya said she doesn't like chocolate but he tried to grab them for himself. I grabbed back as I told him he had eaten enough of it. His mother then appeared smiling at the entrance to the kitchen 'Give it to her he said'; wonderful idea. I did so and got her very happy toothy smile as she took it; Surya roared 'she actually hates chocolate sir' So he succeeded in getting the last of it. Nagaraju sat sadly staring at me so I cheered him up by getting him to tell the others about my visit to Konanki. He is a very good storyteller (mainly in Telugu) describing what I had experienced from the village point of view. Apparently they never come to watch TV in Nagaraju's - they were visiting just to look at the stranger; I suppose that was obvious. He wanted me to go a to a Telugu film but I boringly chose to scooter home. So another sad farewell with promises to visit his guesthouse and then back to my wreckage of a room at my guesthouse. Surya stayed to listen to Schubert's Death and the Maiden string quartet (he liked the slow movement) then off he went to do a few errands before leaving tomorrow.

Sat 29<sup>th</sup>. Had good night and woke feeling better than I had for some time. Sprang out of bed at the 6.00 express, feeling very positive and landed on my bad foot. I recovered by putting on CD of Mozart (Cosi) then the awful job of packing. At 7 Murali arrived on his little red motorbike. He came in and stood shivering violently (from driving through the early morning mist), looking very mournful and holding out a beautiful small rose. I promised to write and to send him photos. A little later Kiran arrived and took a photo of Murali and me. Then Raja and then the driver. I sent him away to take breakfast. Sambanye came with my 2 cups of tea and an offer of breakfast which I rejected to avoid spoiling my last morning. I had been collecting 50 rupee notes for a few days so could go round the servants saying thank you. Of course I couldn't give Murali anything as we have become friends. Fortunately I had a bar of chocolate left so could see his happy smile through his tears before he went off sadly home. At exactly ten o'clock, as arranged, the car arrived with Surya so the boys packed it and I said goodbye to my camp. Venkaiah had not arrived so I phoned him to say goodbye. He was just about to come - he said- but I stopped him and said that I was about to go. He gratefully accepted. So off we went again. We stopped near the town club at the bakery to get veggy burgers for lunch on the way to Mahabalipuram. I had the usual problem of having an inconvenient flight at five in morning for a seven o'clock flight. It is important for Surya to have a bit of time at the end after his loyal unselfish work he does to help me - and of course it is relaxing for me at the end. So off we went by the back way avoiding nasty Renigunta to Mahabalipuram - 90 minutes south of Chennai.

The journey was about 5 hours through beautiful rural scenery of palms and paddy fields. We didn't stop to eat but had our very good lunch while on the road with Surya sitting like a Buddha cross legged on the generous Ambassador back seat. We had same driver as when we came - on the whole very good; he sees hazards before they are life-threatening. [In fact on the way home he hit a girl on a bike - he just managed to

keep the car under control but she broke an ankle - I learned this later from Surya by email; he says he visited her 3 times and she is now OK]. We tried to go to the same hotel as last year - the one with cottages on the beach but they were full so we went up the coast another mile to The Golden sands which was same price (£12) but even better. We stepped out of the room through an archway flowing over with *bourgainvillea* to a small clean blue pool and then to the sea. The restaurant on the beach was good and I celebrated our arrival with Golden Eagle beer (my first since arriving). The waiter (Kannan), a boy from near Madurai, was charming (*I was charmed*), saying Goldeneagle as if it was the name of some rare precious stone. He held the bottle out to me to inspect like a wine waiter wanting approval and admiration. I provided this for the reward of his relieved smile. We then drove into M to go shopping and have dinner. I had forgotten the negative side of slightly touristy places - we have to share them with German tourists - my first European faces for 4 weeks. We passed the Kashmiri shops and of course were lured into one of them. The owner spoke good English but with a German accent - he had learned all his English in Mahabalipuram. I showed interest in the Rajasthan wall hangings (very ornate with little mirrors), intending to get one for Jos. They did the usual thing of noting anything that caught my eye and yanking it off the wall and throwing it on the floor so I was eventually surrounded by a huge pile of these things. I had my usual experience of seeing a very attractive one earlier on which was also the best and highest price. Even that one was incredibly dirty underneath; 'it's the camels sir'. It looked as if the camels had been spitting on them or worse. I gave up the idea eventually. The next day I had a similar experience on the beach where the fact that I smiled at a boy carrying a huge cloth pile on his head led to him ripping the pile open and covering the sand with coloured cotton bedsheets. So I bought 2 of these. Surya was walking further down the beach with the driver and he was very impressed that I had knocked the price down from 800 to 500 rupees. The old man with the boy kept saying no profit no profit.

We had the problem of finding a restaurant that served the very good fishy things and one that served S. Indian vegetarian. The one we chose was probably not especially good for either as it had no customers. It advertised classical Indian music while you eat but had a country and western CD on. Surya got them to change it to classical which was very good (flute & Tabla). He ate the usual stuff and I had 'chinese prawns' and chips with pineapple juice followed by milkshakes (total bill, £1.80). Not specially good and the whispered row between a dowdy exhausted American girl and her embarrassed Indian boyfriend competed with a mosquito which seemed to have been attracted by the burning mosquito coil beneath my chair. We wandered back to the car and to the hotel. Had a very restless night. It was hot and humid, so I lay on one bed with only boxer shorts, spreadeagled beneath the fan while Surya remained on the other, fully clothed with two blankets pulled up over his head. Woken by the sound of the sea, so gently got up and hobbled past the pool to the beach restaurant for breakfast. Up came smiling Kannan to offer bread omellette which sounded good but was as boring as it always is. The coffee was good and the sound and smell of the sea mixed with coffee was perfect. The sun was soon hot so I sat outside reading for a while (*The Seesaw*) while Surya taught himself Coreldraw. The pool was eventually irresistible. I even got my hair wet. The previous night our outer door was suddenly flung wide open and a little boy from next door came hurtling in, wrestling with his towel. He suddenly realised he was in the wrong place, screamed and went whirling out. This same boy saw me in the pool and came up and sat on the side to interrogate me. He was from Bangalore with his family for a holiday with his cousin from Chennai. We had a wonderful lunch; Surya had some special sweet veg curry and I had tandoori fish coated in green stuff with garlic naan with about 2 large chopped cloves of garlic in it. With, of course, Goldeneagle beer. Annan said this as if it was the name of a god, with great emphasis on the two Gs. We then loafed about in the shade of the palm leaf shady thing on the beach, reading *Stalingrad* (the great year long battle in which the Germans were first defeated by the Russians), which seemed to be rather provocative with German tourists staring at me.

Then went for final gentle stroll on beach to hear the last sound of the sea then back to pack up. I had a wonderful hot shower - my first for 4 weeks. We checked out and retired to the beach again for tea before setting back for Chennai. I off-loaded all my very dirty and damaged 5 and 10 rupee notes onto a surprised and grateful Annan; he first refused them - instinctively refusing money from friends - before Surya persuaded him to accept. Then another goodbye. The first half of the journey, in the late afternoon sun was golden and glorious - even the road has been rebuilt and is now smooth - through paddy fields and palms beside wide lagoons and distant glimpses of the sea shimmering in the heat; we even saw a hoopoe as we drove out of the hotel grounds. It is all far more developed than last year but they are doing it to attract overseas tourists to some extent and so a lot of it is attractive and well-planned. Even the last part of the journey through the outskirts of Chennai was almost tolerable; it was about 5.30 before the massive 6.30 rush hour, finishing with the long run up by Marina beach packed with Saturday evening visitors (it is so vast that it is still not really packed - just happily busy). And so down the rather unattractive (noisy busy dusty) Poonnamallee road to the cool Breeze hotel. We had

not booked a room but there was no problem. They even agreed our 15% discount as we had it last time. I asked if the person arranging it was one of the names Murali had given me but they said 'no sir, these are very big names'; when they saw Murali's uncles name on my little list they just said no problem sir we will give you discount. They might have done so anyway as we were only staying till 4.30 in the morning.

Our room looked exactly the same as our previous room there but it had a newly laid carpet instead of the freezing stone floor (perhaps my phone call to Murali last time produced some Indian magic). I then emptied all my stuff out of bags and carefully repacked. Kiran had presented me with a parting gift of a huge picture/3D model of gaudy unpleasant flowers mounted on wood with a heavy glass cover and huge frame. None of the dimensions would fit into a bag (including weight) I am glad to say so I took a photo of it and asked Surya to keep it hidden somewhere. A pity in one way as he must have spent ages making it (he should know better, really). We had an excellent dinner down in the Poonamallee restaurant where the welcoming boss obviously recognised me and refrained from his bullying insistence on trying the buffet. We did try the buffet and I had non veg this time. It was good but not so marvellous as the veg that I had last time. The ice cream was wonderful and I felt I was gradually coming back to normality. I then phoned to Chittoor to say goodbye to Imran Babu who was sorry he had not come to say goodbye (a 2 hour bus ride). My happy visit to him seems such a long time ago. Then phoned home for a nice chat with Libby and Hugh who also talked briefly with Surya and impressed him enormously with his wonderful rich English voice - 'he could be a film star'; so nice to think I will soon be home. Thinking that provoked me to have a long phone call to mum which was nice. Her hearing was excellent and she sounded in very good form; I must get up there soon.

Sat 30<sup>th</sup> Jan. We had a good last night and were asleep before 10.30. The alarm at 4.00 was very shocking and I really didn't want to get up. Did last bits of packing, called the man to check the minibar (bitter lemon and cashew nuts) and staggered downstairs. The reception staff at the Breeze were always very friendly and give a great welcoming atmosphere. Paid bill (half was the phone bill) while Surya went to wake driver - his name is also Nagaraju so it is easy for me to please him by remembering his name. He was already up and ready & said he had a good night - his second night in a row sleeping in the car. So to the last sad drive through the wide empty streets of Chennai. It only takes half an hour at that time of morning. We sit mournfully in the back with nothing much to say then a hurried exchange of messages as we pile out into the chaos of the entrance to the Departure lounge (no visitors). I persuaded Surya to just say goodbye and leave immediately so he did and I joined the first of the many security checks. Of course I had to be the only suspicious one required to unpack my main case. I think the cardboard box with electronic bits in it had confused everything. Fortunately I had had to pack very carefully to get everything in so it was not a problem. I had to empty the batteries out of my CD player and my alarm clock then off I went. After checking in I was also called aside to open my hand luggage and turn on the coputer to prove it was not a bomb but they were really more concerned to identify my small Tyrrell and Green umbrella that constituted the threat. I then found myself at the back of a long slow queue at passport control - operated by the same slow man who had delayed me on the way in. He happened to look up, recognised me, and sent a boy to call me to the front of the queue where he explained that he was pleased to meet me again and hoped I had had a good time.

I was well towards the end of my book Seesaw and the time passed very quickly. I arranged to be almost last on the plane, ousted the lady from my seat (she read her number wrongly) and here I am. The middle seat of our row is empty and I am sitting here typing with my neighbour doing the same. We have just had to stop for turbulence. He is a physiotherapist from Holland very pleased with his first short visit to Bangalore. We have just watched match of the day together. He is a Southampton supporter - mainly because of Le Tissier. Very odd to be in India one minute and the next to be debating whether or not Sheringham was offside in his great goal against Arsenal. The journey to London is 11 hours. I have now been typing for two hours but there is still another 6 hours to go.

Once again I leave India with a few more illusions gone (eg the peace of village life) but still loving it. Its been a successful visit in most ways. I suspect the next one will be with Libby; we (Surya and me) spent some time yesterday planning an appropriately comfortable and relaxed first visit for Libby, involving starting at the nice hotel in Mahabalipuram, visits from there to bird sanctuaries and other peaceful places, followed by gentle drive to Tirupati to stay at big guestline hotel - in countryside between hills and Tirupati - perhaps staying in the guest house for a short time - or even at Swarna and Surya's.

My battery (computer) should be finishing soon so I shall stop and finish this off tomorrow some time. Bye. My

bag was first onto the baggage reclaim carousel so I did not keep Jos and Clive waiting for too long. It was so good to see them. The last time I was met here by Clive it was in a surprising new car (his 205) and the same this year, having downgraded to a 306 diesel. Had the usual shock of driving fast and safely with Clive and Jos through the empty English countryside and home to Libby and Hugh.

Thank you, Libby, again for your willingness to let me go to India without making me feel too guilty about it. It continues to be very important to me and I feel I would have had a poorer life without the experience. Perhaps we will be able to share it next time.