

India

January 2002

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India Diary 2002; 5th Jan - 3rd Feb.

Photos were taken with my small automatic camera and printed pictures taken from the Boots CD.

Thursday morning (10th Jan). These italic parts are notes when I am actually writing the diary which is sometimes a few days later of course. I have at last started to write my diary. I am not sure if I will continue; if I do so I doubt that it will be in the same detail as previous years. I was woken by the sound of pouring water at about 4.30 this morning. I must have left a tap on yesterday evening when the water supply was off. I guess it is now back on. It is now 7.00 and the room is gently rocking to the sound of one of the long goods trains trundling past, wailing sadly. I am wearing socks and a sweater - a new low in Tirupati weather. There has been no sun since I arrived on Monday evening. But sun is forecast for tomorrow. It is overcast now with dramatic dark gray clouds over the red hills. Everything feels odd this year. I arrived with the tail end of a very heavy cold and yesterday was the first day that I was not blowing my nose every few minutes. That seems to have got much better but I am coughing a lot. I had a brief alarming experience a couple of days ago when I found after blowing my nose that the mucous was bright lemon yellow; it was like this for only an hour - must have been some sniffed curry, which certainly gets everywhere. While in this hyperchondriac mood I may as well mention that my left eye remains poor - everything slightly out of focus or misty. This has made me feel slightly nauseous a lot of the time. So this is the mood I am starting to write this in.

Saturday 5th, Southampton. I woke at 4.30 feeling much less prepared than previously. My cold had diminished my will power over the previous days and also the PQQ conference stuff had, as usual, filled most of the available time. I had managed to get (with Paul Skipp's help) the web site updated and had sent off my email reminder to my list of 200 possible registrants. I had the usual feeling while waiting for the car from English Rose Collection that I must be crazy to leave my comfortable home and especially Libby, Hugh and Clive.

[I have just been interrupted by the new cook's assistant with a tin tumbler of hot chai (sweet milky spicy tea) and an offer to make breakfast of 'bread omelette', a lifeless omelette with no salt pepper anything with bits of damp warm bread (toast sir). Fortunately I have discovered what my favourite breakfast is called so convinced him that I should have puri massala - crisp inflated fried bread things served with sweet, lightly spiced potato & veg stuff. Things are looking up.]

Had an excellent drive to Heathrow, arriving 3.5 hours before flight time. My carry on baggage should have been 6kg including laptop but it was 9kg; as I had been told I can have a bag plus laptop (actually only for World traveller plus - and I am definitely world traveller minus), they allowed this. But my 3kg overweight on main baggage they would not allow. I said that I had travelled this route for years and always they had been generous. They insisted that nothing had changed so I had to pay nearly £60. So much of my good idea of buying chocolate, sweets etc before travelling. Every square of jamaican rum chocolate must have cost 30p, but worth every penny. After going through security I asked about the change in policy at the British Airways desk. They denied any change. Eventually they did concede that the 'change I had observed but which they denied had happened' had been the result of a directive sent out on September 12th. Clearly British Airways knows about the harmful effects of chocolate. After a nice leisurely Garfunkels breakfast drifted off to my flight. I was in a bulkhead seat - reserved for those with long legs or little children. I am sure that the 4 mothers were charming and also their 6 children. The mother next to me had a 2 year old girl (my favourite companion) as well as a broken arm held rigid in a straight line in front of her by her dirty plaster cast. I tactfully suggested to the stewardess that the mothers would be more comfortable without me and so I was laughingly moved to the backseat of the plane next to a silent Indian man. All my little attempts at conversation were met with a nod or pure silence until we were landed at Chennai when I asked if he was from Chennai or did he have much further to go. 'No, I am staying here and I come from Southall'.

I had decided not to use the sleeping pills provided by Leigh and read my Christmas present - five quarters of the orange all the way, and finished the next night. I was almost the last off the plane and last through immigration and customs but had no wait for luggage. As usual I was welcomed by the damp dusty taste of Chennai airport, then by the smiling happy hugs from Surya followed by a fight through throngs of travellers, friends, touts and taxis to our white Ambassador (car) for the hour long drive out to Mahabalipuram, a temple town on the coast, famous for its shore temples, dance festivals and granite carving. We had decided it was more sense to go there than to struggle through dusty hot Chennai to an expensive hotel (although the Breeze hotel of Murali's family was excellent it was really the wrong side of Chennai). My heavy cold prevented much talking and also prevented the usual feeling of affection for the town as we rumbled along at our top speed of about 70km/hr. The later part of the road was very well repaired and had lines and catseyes on it so it was a safe and easy drive. Every year there is more development along my favourite road in India through palm trees and paddies and goats grazing and distant sea etc. They have declared it a coastal scenic route and charge a toll. We were stopped by the tollman who asked where we were going. We were free as we were not going on to Pondicherry. I suppose no driver ever admits going there as he would then have to pay the toll. We stayed at the Tamil Nadu State tourist hotel on the beach for £14 double + luxury tax, payable only by westerners. I guess it is a luxury just to be Western.



Sunday 6th. Woke to the sound of the breaking surf and the sight of a sunny morning and puri masalla for breakfast. The weak sun fighting through thin cloud was ideal as a welcome to India but I still got a red nose - 'no problem sir; it is beautiful like a parrot'. I read on our little plot off grass on the edge of the private beach while Surya slept. Then off down the beach to a beach restaurant (Luna Magica) for kingfisher beer, fish soup and spaghetti marinara. Wonderful. We then wandered around the huge carved rocks (Arjuna's penance) and the small rock carvers in their small shops all around the town. An exhausted Surya then went back in an auto while I continued to wander about the fisherman's boats on the beach. I met a couple of boys I had talked with last year as they were tidying up their nets. These were fine nylon nets and their job was to remove tangles caused by bits of junk and shells caught in the mesh. The older of the boys, called Tamil, who spoke some English and had spent some time with me last year chatting on the beach, asked me to wait for 20 minutes so he could walk back the mile up the beach to the hotel with me. So I strolled slowly up the beach until he caught up with me, and we walked the long way back. He came in to chat with Surya who went off for a walk and to order tea for two to be delivered to the room. Tamil was impressed. He was good company, explaining how he gets up every morning at 6 to go out fishing with his father and brother on the tiny boats made of 4 balsa planks and driven by an outboard motor. When Surya returned he suggested that he should come and visit me in Tirupati and Surya would take him to the hill temple. He agreed enthusiastically [but never did visit]. He eventually left, carrying two bars of chocolate; I gave him one and he then went into begging mode for another one for his mother.



In the evening we went into town for a boring veg dinner. Surya so rarely asks for anything that I could hardly argue when he wanted to choose the restaurant - so I missed my favourite fish curry.

Monday 7th. Was woken again by the gentle surf outside the window to start the cloudy day which was quite good for driving in. Spent the morning sitting on the veranda reading and looking at the sea, then off to Tirupati in the car starting with the lovely coast road to Chennai (the cross country route was blocked by roadworks). Fortunately we skirted round the worst of Chennai and met the Poonamallee road to the west. At about 2.30 we stopped at a Punjabi roadhouse for lunch - rotis and curry - sitting on a string bed with a plank across it for a table, next to some noisy drunk lorry drivers. We arrived at the guest house by 5.00 where we were immediately shown to my nice separate ground floor room with a veranda and, amazingly, hot water. Dr Sai Gopal had been to see the Vice Chancellor that day to get a chitty telling the guest house that they must give me that room (they had previously refused because the reception boys like to keep it for use by themselves). It was fairly clean but I still started by washing out the cupboards before putting my stuff in. I then fell asleep to be woken by the car returning to take me to Surya's house where his brother Suresh is on leave from the airforce, who are clearly not taking the threat of war with Pakistan too seriously. Also his sister Swarna and her new husband were there. He seems nice enough and they all get on well. He was introduced to me by Swarna as 'my life's partner'. He owns and runs a phone and computer shop in the capital Hyderabad. We had the usual rice and stuff followed by photos (Swarna returns to Hyderabad the next day), and a drive by auto with Surya back through Tirupati. It doesn't seem a year since I was last here. Surya is waving Hugh's old phone which made many arrangements much easier this year. My cold is slightly better but I still have to blow my nose every few minutes. Surya then returned immediately as he is working nights (11pm - 8 am) as receptionist etc at a new hotel, The Kalyan Residency, near his home.



Tuesday 8th. Sai Gopal called in to make contact while I was sitting reading on my veranda looking out at the noisy traffic and up to the brick red hills and gray clouds. Lunch was in the dining room which had some politicians and security guards. These were looking after the state Minister who was visiting. I have no real objection to sharing my table with the military but was a bit shocked when a very large tough looking sergeant with an aggressive looking rice gut hanging over his belt slumped down opposite me, clunking his short sten gun on the table between us. It spun round like a roulette wheel until it stopped, pointing at me. I politely leaned across and turned it a further 180 degrees to point at him which he thought was a great joke. We compromised when he pointed out that he needed to be able to grab it easily with his trigger hand, and we compromised by pointing it at the cook. I walked over to the Virology Department in the afternoon to plan my programme and was met there by some of last year's students including Sudarshan who had written a few times during the year. In the evening I had dinner (snack) at Surya's and returned early to be at the guest house for Sudarshan. He had only been here for a few minutes (wiring a table lamp Surya had

given me) when Subhan turned up [ex-research student of Murthi who I have known since he was an MSc student 7 years ago]. He had really come to say goodbye as he was finally leaving Tirupati the next day.



Wednesday 9th. I started my teaching programme this morning mainly to microbiology students with a few virology students- only 1st years. I have to check the register like a primary school which is a good way of discovering that my profound knowledge of pronunciation of Indian names is still pretty amusing to the owners. Low point of the day was lunch. Because the politicians were swarming all over the guest house, using its dining room as a committee room, lunch was brought in from outside. I was handed a plastic bag, two spoons, a ladle and a steel plate. In the bag I found a huge newspaper (Indian Express) bundle, tied with thin cotton, containing enough rice for a week. To go with this there were 3 small plastic bags full of curry, all tied extremely tightly so they were like little triangular shaped balloons. The only way into them was with my swiss army knife scissors. Balloons burst and so did these ones, spraying ghastly khaki gunk all over the table. It was cold and very spicy. I was very hungry so it was still welcome. After the afternoon lecture I was escorted by Sai Gopal's research scholar down to the town club area to a cyber café to read my emails. I left my sandals with the huge array of others at the entrance and walked through the glass door into a cool dark area lined with tiny booths most of which had pairs of boys browsing and surfing (I am assured that there is a difference). After abandoning my first computer as a dud I had 3 hours of reading and answering my 25 emails. It is essential that I do this frequently as so many were absolutely necessary for conference stuff. It was all rather slow and interrupted by a young student who came and sat on the little stool beside me to ask me all the usual quizz questions (job family etc). "I am so excited to meet you sir, please may I sit with you for some time?". OK but I can't use the mouse if you keep holding my hand like that. He is an IT student and coaxed my address from me so we may meet again [I never saw him again]. I phoned Surya on my mobile to come and collect me for dinner at his hotel restaurant. So, off in an auto in the rain to the hotel which is in the centre of town and was built this year. It seems excellent but the chief minister is staying so I kept finding myself chatting to armed guards. The restaurant is wonderful; it contrasts with all the other top hotels in having unaggressive air conditioning (I am usually tempted to wrap the table cloths around me to keep warm) and in being light enough to see the menu and my companions. There was only discreet classical Indian music and the seats were comfortable. The meal (all strict veg and no alcohol) was punctuated by streams of Surya's friends including the manager, with whom I had once spent a miserable minibus journey to some waterfalls about 5 years ago. He was delighted that I remembered his name (Mr Chandrasekhar), whispered to me 30 seconds previously by Surya. Surya's immediate boss - the head of the front desk team - joined us for delicious kulfi, my test of a good restaurant.

Thursday 10th I started the diary this morning (see top of page) feeling cold and hungry. Now it is about 10 pm and I am too full and warm and clean. I discovered that the hot water system is working. This happy fact was hidden behind the need to appreciate that 3 taps had to be turned on or off first and then that the hot water comes out of the blue tap marked cold. It comes as a trickle of superheated steam and water; after 5 minutes a bucket of merely boiling water is available which can be diluted into the other bucket and dispensed over appropriate parts using smaller buckets. Don't get me wrong - this is not a complaint, it is a hymn of joy. The experienced was only marred slightly by the unnoticed drowned bug (about 2 cm long) which caught in my hair during the first dowsing.

My Good Idea about the puri massala for breakfast was a Big Mistake; the cook sent out for it instead of making it fresh so when I arrived for breakfast I had a plate of damp greasy cardboard in cold green potato soup. I did my duty and read my book while trying not to notice what I was eating. The book is an account of the early life and some journalist adventures of John Simpson - one of the best ever BBC reporters who managed to be in all the major news places this half of the century. It is a coincidence (I think) that his contemporary at the BBC has been John Humphrys whose book I read here last year. I am listening to Britten's string quartet that Hugh gave me for Christmas - the same as we heard played by the Allegri quartet in the Turner Sims. By the time for my walk to my morning lecture (9.30) the sun was coming out so had a nice walk spoiled only by the fact that my eye is still bad, so it felt uncomfortable looking for the birds that I could hear (it seems to be rather better now). I started sorting out the final programme for my conference at last. Not an easy job but it must be done soon. One of the emails I had last night was from Dave Dooley (USA) who told me he must speak early in the week as he has other commitments. So that has confused things a bit. Lunch was the usual nice stuff. Afterwards I had a call from Imran to say that he would be arriving to see me from Chittoor at 3.40 UK time system (as opposed to Indian time which is about 60 minutes either way). [Imran Babu; met 3 years ago in Tirupati; son of police chief; Muslim; about 17 yrs; charming but very demanding; moved to Chittoor, 2 hrs away by bus].

So I finished my lecture after only 55 minutes (usually 90 minutes) and was driven back by scooter by Sai Gopal [Lecturer in virology; one of my 2 main hosts]. As we walked out we passed a grinning Nagaraju - just returned from his 'native place', Konanki, where I had gone with him two years ago; enjoyable except for the riverbank toilet system. He was married this year and has the swollen belly to prove it. I promised to come and find

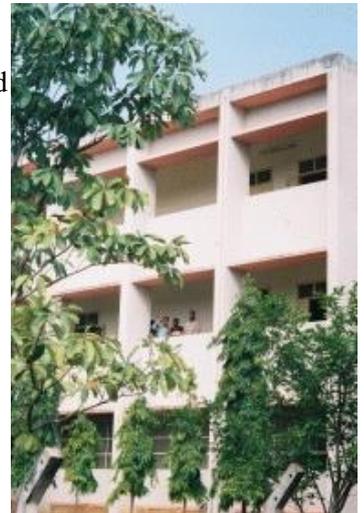
him tomorrow and then dashed off. Imran arrived looking hardly different from last year, just a little taller and better dressed, with brilliant blue checked shirt and white trousers. He had two parcels for me, one of delicious Indian sweets and the other a perfectly fitting long sleeved green shirt. We spent a couple of hours catching up with news while he put some sentimental message on the front page of my computer and then we went into town with the intention of calling to see Surya and to see my email at his house. But we had to stop for a treat from Imran to Chris. This was a 20 minute wait in almost complete darkness (power cut) in sweltering heat for a pizza in The Bakery. The Pizza was OK but not the cream puff pastry thing we had afterwards. I bit into it, expecting it to be some sort of jam thing, spraying flaky pastry everywhere, caused a coughing fit and discovered it was a chillie cauliflower pastry puff. This did not disqualify me from having to eat a lot of rice and khaki stuff at Surya's. This was after a frustratingly slow session with my email linked to his phone. There were 15 new messages since yesterday. Some of these, of course, were departmental meetings announcements - deleted without reading (wonderful) but many were conference enquiries. Yesterday I had an enquiry from someone to whom I had written begging support; he was doubting that there would be much interest in his company. I told him in reply that he could advertise in any way he liked at the conference but that the main reason for supporting us would be so that he could feel good and so that I could sleep better in my hideout in India (better expressed than that). He replied today to say with a witty message, that he found my arguments irresistible and would soon send a cheque. I had a nice little note from Daisuke and a very welcome message from our Hugh. I tried to phone him later but the number was engaged. So home by auto and here I am. The sky is now clear and the air feels warmer so perhaps the forecast of sun is right.

The Britten quartet is finished so I shall stop and walk down to the STD booth for another go at phoning home.

Friday 11th. I got through OK last night so had a nice end to the day with a chat with Libby & Hugh. I am writing this at night while listening to Bach preludes and fugues at the end of a good day. I was woken this morning from a deep sleep by my very loud doorbell - the assistant cook bringing me a tin of tea. He must have wondered what was opening the door to him (not a pretty sight). We had idlis (bland white rice cakes) and curry for breakfast then a nice walk in sunshine (!) to my 9.30 lecture on chemolithotrophic bacteria. The lecture theatre is on the second floor with the doors always left opening onto the outside corridor/balcony with views over the tree-filled campus with pink and cream buildings protruding and the distant hills framing it all. Most students were 10 minutes late, which is ok as I can enjoy the view while chatting to any who were on time; they promised they would be on time in future. I was given a scooter lift back by Murali (the general office helper) after the lecture so that I could spend 2 hours in the sun in the garden trying to sort out the conference programme. I found on the internet that Carrie has pinched 2 of my speakers and also modified the lecture times so that hers do not fit any plan. I will come up with a complete programme next week leaving her one slot to fill as she likes - in a silly way if she wants to.

After my afternoon lecture I called in to see the old Head of Biochemistry (prof Parthasarathy); he wasn't there so had to have tea with the present belligerent Head - Thyagaraju - and Dr Murthi. They explained that Murthi wanted to attend my conference and that they had the fare and that all I had to do was to provide him with registration and local accommodation as the University at Tirupati had done for me. I didn't like to point out that usually this was paid for by The Royal Society and that I had done 30 lectures to pay for it. Instead I said my hands are tied (the usual bureaucrats cop out) and our money was specifically for young speakers. Murthi is not young, he is not even interested in the topic and he is also the person who refused to read his student's draft thesis (my friend Subhan) unless paid 2000 rupees. I predict three weeks of bullying [In fact it wasn't mentioned again]. There is a problem in Biochemistry as I discovered eventually by quizzing my friend Sudarshan, that Thyagaraju is made Head of Department because he is from a scheduled Caste and so has priority.

I escaped and went into the nearby Biotechnology Department to find my old friend Nagaraju. He was about to leave to go to his new Father in law's village where his new wife was staying for the holiday period. We had a very nice walk in the early evening sun to his house in a quiet part of town past the Women's University about 10 minutes walk away. When you ring his doorbell it turns on 10 seconds of religious temple music. He proudly showed me the toilet (instead of his village riverbank); since my visit they have built a special visitors' toilet in Konanki. After half an hour Surya turned up (they have become good friends over the last 3 years) and they had their usual 10 minutes of laughing at me before we all walked to the station in the setting sun through the back roads and alleys of Tirupati to the station, the last part being a few hundred yard up the track. It is a nice tradition here to accompany friends to the station when they are going on a journey. Raju didn't want to get a sleeping berth because he was worried that he would not wake for his stop at 2 in the morning, so we had to hunt up and down the enormously long train to find somewhere to sit him. Not quite true; we merely hunted for somewhere to actually board the train through the packed doorways and corridors. He eventually found a place next to 3 chickens tied by their feet and hanging from a luggage rack (the chickens). We waved goodbye then walked another quarter mile up the track to a cheap dark restaurant for dinner - noodles on banana leaves followed by delicious butterscotch ice cream made with Jersey cream. 'Do you know what is meant by Jersey cream Surya?'; yes sir, it is made with milk from Jersey cows which come from a village near



Konanki (Raju's). Then back by auto to the guest house for a 30 minute wrangle with the electrical system so that I can have the mosquito coil on at the same time as my mobile phone charger. On the walk to the station I had defined better what is wrong with my left eye which is usually slightly out of focus. When I looked at Jupiter I could see 2 distinct planets - so I have double vision (the images being extremely close) in one eye (therefore not neurological). Odd innit. It makes birdwatching rather unpleasant and I often feel slightly nauseous.

I do seem to be writing a diary again. I have done nothing with the stylish diary that Leigh gave me for Christmas - mainly because birds are off at the moment.

Time for bed. goodnight dear readers; missing you all. I keep being reminded that mum won't be reading this (actually perhaps she is now so it is worth writing).

Saturday 12th *[I am writing this on Sunday night having just arrived back from Chittoor, the small town 65km away where Imran lives. He moved last year to Chittoor.]* I have become very self-indulgent - or perhaps experienced is a kinder description. Instead of the business of finding an appropriate bus in the dirty hot noisy bus station in Tirupati, followed by 2 hours of noisy screechy bouncing bus, followed by a 30 minute hunt for Imran's house. I got Surya to rent a car which is about £12 for 2 days.]

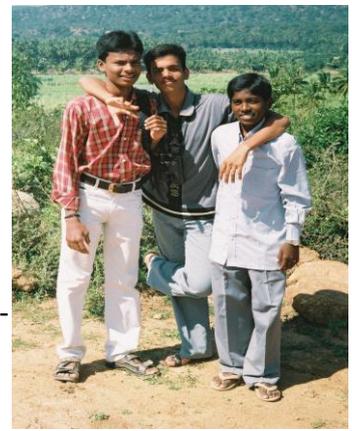
Today didn't start auspiciously; when I leaned through the hole in the dining room wall into the kitchen the young cook - man asked if I wanted chai. Yes please, assuming he meant to go with my breakfast but after the chai he went off and that was that - so had emergency biscuits and the last of Imran's sweets. Things looked up with a nice walk in the sun to my Saturday morning lecture on fermentation to the 1st year microbiology class. This lecture was disturbed by a call on the mobile phone from Imran to check that I was awake. I was whisked back by prof Sreenivasulu on his scooter so that I could get off early at 11.15 - when we had arranged for the car to come. At about 12 O'clock Raja phoned to say that he was at the car place (I cannot think why) and my car was still there because when they phoned the guest house they were told that I was out for the day. Who wins the stupidity prize I am not sure. I had kindly told the staff at reception that I would be away till Sunday night so they wouldn't waste time looking for me at meal times. The car was supposed to come anyway. When that was sorted the car soon arrived and I had a pleasant though very bumpy ride to Chittoor. They are still rebuilding the roads for half of the route so it takes nearly 2 hours to go 65 km. Imran phoned 5 times on the way there - the final call being useful as no one had told me or the driver the name or location of my.

It was the Sree Durga Lodge. Clean and pleasant. I only had 3 mosquitoes which come in through the permanently open window, killed after their tasty last English meal. Imran was waiting for me with his friend Mahdu. We walked through the hot dusty streets to a typical veg restaurant. They always look unwelcoming from outside - very crowded and scruffy but they usually have an AC part which is clean and cool and too dark. We had the usual stuff on banana leaves with Thumbs up. Then for a walk to the cyber café that Imran uses to phone me most days. There was no message from home but plenty of confusing conference ones. It was so slow I had no patience to reply to anything much except for a few urgent ones. *[I had intended to do the rest this evening but am still waiting for Surya. When I phoned, his father said he thought he was coming here. I guess he got it wrong.]* After about an hour we wandered off to visit Mahdu's family - in a nice little palm thatch cottage on the edge of town with a nice village feel to it, parakeets screeching through the palms with palm swifts whirling around and the crows joining us for tea. My formula for rejection of the offered water (I'm still neurotic about this) - to request tea instead, had the usual effect of relaxing his worried mother and we sat outside on the stone slab that is used for Mahdu's bed. One reason (I had been forewarned by Imran) for wanting me to visit was that Mahdu's brother wanted me to get him a job in the UK, having failed his BSc engineering exams. I had been briefed with the advice that the best reply would be - OK that should not be a problem - but I could not bring myself to say this and explained two or three times that we have government policies that control these things. I suggested he wrote to me by email when I return and I will send him some addresses (British Council etc). We had the usual farewell photos before Imran and I walked back to the hotel to watch TV. This was the usual irritating experience of flicking through the channels (at least 50) most of which are Telugu or Tamil films or adverts for other more interesting programmes or just adverts. I suppose our adverts would indicate to the man from Mars that we are pretty stupid gullible people; certainly that is the picture of India and Indians that is provided by their adverts. As we rushed through at about 10 seconds per channel I glimpsed The Simpsons (how I would like to be watching that with Hugh now), the UK football results, The Empire of the Sun, and interesting nature programmes.

We settled on none and instead went out to Imran's house



instead to have a nice chat with his father. He sat chain smoking saying that he would kill Imran if he caught him smoking. Imran obviously believed that he would do so. I asked him what he thought about the situation between India and Pakistan. He said we should let them have a good fight then they would see how stupid it was. They only have these confrontations to distract attention from failed home policies and they always lead to a hike in prices. So what if a few thousand are killed - maybe they will learn their lesson! We then set off to see an art exhibition - on Imran's small borrowed motorbike (50 cc 2-stroke). We stopped on the way for a snack by the side of the road - from a wooden cart - of rice and chillies and onions which I decided would do me for an evening meal, having been forced earlier to eat chocolate cake at Imran's (my Christmas cake for you Chris dear) followed by hard spicy grilled peas; this had augmented the plate of luke-warm hardly cooked small very spicy broad beans I'd had to appear to enjoy at Mahdu's earlier. The art exhibition was in fact a fun fair. I won a balloon by getting 10/10 for a balloon shooting game - with air rifles, surprisingly set up with very accurate sighting systems. Imran got very excited by being able to buy us key



rings with our names stamped on them in silver and gold (30p) but I soon deflated him when I refused to go on the big wheel. The little cages looked like parrot cages and were held on by the flimsiest brackets; at least half of them had seats that had rusted through and fallen off. He eventually went on by himself and waved enthusiastically the first time round but as it got up speed I could see he was gripping the rail too tightly to wave and anyway he couldn't see me through tight shut eyes. He is great company, chatting continuously,



always searching for things to entertain me without realising that just walking about in the warm dark night with his affectionate public pride in being with me is quite enough to keep me happy. We then drove off home over bumpy dusty roads as good as any fairground ride.

Sunday 13th. I had a good night after killing the mosquitoes but was woken at 6.30 by the noisy traffic and crows. I had a nice read then sat on my little balcony watching the world start up on a misty morning with a promising rising sun. We were opposite the 'Chicken and mutton shop' and at about 7.30 a herd of goats came up (to do their shopping?). One was dragged away from the herd protesting very noisily and tied to the lamppost outside the shop by its owner. Can it really have known its fate? Another one was singled out by a man in an auto and yanked off by its back leg and then flung into the auto to go off for Sunday lunch I suppose. At 9.30 Imran appeared, with Mahdu and Gopi, a 15 year old friend and neighbour who wanted to meet this friend who Imran is always talking about. They told me that he is very shy because he is so short. I became his instant friend when I told him that he is taller than my dear son Hugh. He is very dark with a very even quick smile and eyelashes you could hang things on. We then set off in the hot sun in the car to visit Mugalai - a place 20 Km distant in the hills. I think it is a temple but we never reached it. We stopped at an off-road open air café for the best breakfast this year, sitting chatting in the sun in the countryside by a big enclosure with lots of cute rabbits (lunch??) eating Puri massala and sweet tea (us, not the rabbits).



The turn off for our destination soon led to an uphill tractor track to a little village, where we left the car to walk. By now it was 11.30 and very hot. I saw some Indian robins and realised that my left eye is more or less normal again [this turned out to be only for about three hours]. On the way to Chittoor yesterday I had found I could focus better without my glasses (STOP this hyperchondria). Anyway the result was that I had a delightful walk up the hill through the rocky countryside. The boys were again great company searching for birds for me, giving very good views of White fronted Kingfishers; their white fronts are the least interesting thing as they have a rich chestnut back scarlet beak and show a brilliant kingfisher turquoise blue when they fly which they did when Gopi threw stones at them. When we saw the very steep climb to the top I saved everyone's face - except my own- by saying that I must get back by 2.00 to check out of the hotel (true), so we

had a gentle stroll back down, pausing (actually dashing back up the track) to avoid a snake that was looking at us rather evilly from the wall of a well by the path. My usual trick worked - threatened by having its photo taken it slithered backwards into a hole in the wall. After our drive back we arranged to meet up again for leave-taking at Imran's while we went to his house for an unpleasant lunch set out for us on the table. Chapatties and spicy greasy mutton. Perhaps I had become too sentimental about the unwilling goats that morning. We then bumped off over the mainly mud roads on the little motorbike to go for a gentle stroll in the nearby forest with lots of pictures by sentimental Imran. When he went off (for sanitation sir) I lay down on the bare rock and slept for 35 minutes, waking a little stiff but very refreshed and recovered from lunch. As previously in this place, there seemed to be very few birds - except for a beautiful pigeon lit up by the golden setting sun just above our heads. We drifted gently back through the rocks and thorn bushes, Imran having his arm round my waist and singing the Indian national anthem to me - all very subdued and sentimental; 'now please sing your national song Chris, its only fair isn't it Chris and you have a beautiful voice'. Called in to Gopi's to take photo of his house and mum and then home to Imran's to say goodbye to his mother and to use next door's loo as their one was blocked; I felt slightly odd, walking into someone's house, doing solemn Namaste to the elderly smiling lady owner as I walked past to the loo out the back; then the reverse process on the way out, smiling sheepishly. Said goodbye to them all, including a gang of very smartly dressed teenage boys on a corner including Mahdu and little Gopi and then a nice drive home; I had insisted on leaving at 5 o'clock so that I could enjoy the evening drive - which I did - even the very bumpy part nearer Tirupati - often playing chicken as we hurtled into the huge dark dust clouds directly into the lights of oncoming buses and lorries. So home to a hot shower (pail variety) and writing this. It is now 9.00 and Surya has just rung to say that his father had merely guessed that he had come here - typically wanting to tell me something that I would be pleased to hear, whether it is true or not. No problem. I shall walk down the road and test the samosas at the STD phone place, having been told by Surya that they will be very good, especially for a starving man. The mobile phone has certainly been very useful although Imran rather overdoes his calls, usually if he is bored. So good night my dears.

Monday 14th *[I am writing this while listening to Wagner's Tristan and Isolde (the new small earphones recommended by Murali that I bought at Heathrow for Libby are superb) at 6.00 in the morning (Tuesday) having woken and unable to stop coughing until I sat up.]*

I got up today to a cool but clear sunny morning with the hills opposite lit up brick red by the rising sun. Put on a vest to face the morning mist and went for a walk through the nearby dairy farm. Each year more of this, my favourite area, is built up. The Women's University (Padmavarthi University) has continued to expand and they have now erected a wall with barbed wire around their very extensive grounds. A gate was open so I was able to go into one of my favourite areas of rough scrub land that leads to one of the villages in the paddy fields. Had a new experience of seeing two hoopoes together preening on top of some dead bushes which also had a bulbul and 3 Indian Rollers, stumpy beige birds that flare up into glowing turquoise when they fly off. My way was eventually blocked by another wall so I tried to get out by the usual paths but the gates were all locked. Some workmen led by Osama bin Laden told me I must go the very long way round, but I had already seen that gate was closed. I was rescued by a nice man with a bike hidden beneath huge bundles of leaves who thought the situation was very funny - he led me round the corner where the gate I had originally used was still open, so liberating me. Except for the walls etc the morning was like Tirupati 20 years ago as it is the Pongal holiday and there is no road traffic, the main sound being from loudspeakers in distant villages playing temple music.

I returned to special sweet Pongal rice and curried peas for breakfast before finishing washing my clothes and hanging them out on the veranda on a string line. I should then have started a full days work but could not face the conference programme so sat in the sun reading for most of the morning till Surya came by auto to take me to lunch with DrXX. He is the man who teaches Ayurvedic medicine and Esperanto who took me with his family to the bird sanctuary last year. We had a huge lunch with lots of special holiday items including samosas filled with extremely sweet gunk and covered in sweet sticky ghee. One was very nice but I was force fed too many. I had remembered to bring a small present for their 13 year old son. It was a small high tec key ring (from Cotswolds) with red laser light. As seems to be the custom he didn't open it until forced and then ignored it until later when I was told he was very excited by it. We were soon released and went off with them through deserted Tirupati in a noisy jeep (9 of us) to drop us in the guest house -they were going on to Annanpur 300 Km away. Surya had been on night duty last night so within 2 minutes of getting back he was fast asleep, leaving me to read in the garden which was wonderfully peaceful, with the younger monkeys providing entertainment. They also did a good job clearing up some of the filth swept by the cleaner off the paths outside the rooms into the garden - newspaper-wrapped rice and plastic bags of curry. The room owners throw it out of the door and the sweeper does the next bit and the monkeys the last. They still leave a horrible mess which I guess the dogs and rats might do something with.

At about 4.30 I was able to face getting on with the programming of the conference [80 speakers to fit in so that related topics would not overlap and so that people could speak on particular days etc]. Driven in at dusk by the few mosquitoes, I was just getting to grips with the programme problem when two previous students turned up. One was Surya's friend Chandramouli who I had helped (so he said) to get a one year research technician position in Bangalore with my old friend Surolia. Poor Surya was woken and we walked towards town to get dinner. Half way down they went off to get the bus to Chandragiri leaving us to follow our original plan to eat at Surya's where I was able to slowly sort out a few problems on email - mainly caused by Carrie. Very glad we had gone there as it was

Surya's brother Suresh's last evening of leave from the airforce; he is returning on the 3.00 am train to Delhi, a 36 hour ride. [Wagner has just been interrupted by a blast from my doorbell - tea, which I have now just burned my tongue on. This was Act 2 of Tristan (the Carl Bohm recording with Christa Ludvig, Birgit Nillson, Waechter, Talvela and Windgassen, a wonderfully appropriate name for an overblown Wagnerian tenor, although he is more than OK)].

What shall I do today? I feel bad that I have not yet contacted Kiran or his family. I was rather disappointed last year by all the requests by the drunken father for financial support and by Kiran trying some dodgy deal on Surya. I shall try to spend a lot of time sorting out the conference. It would be a good feeling to get it out of the way. Traffic still sounds negligible so I should be able to have a very peaceful morning so I shall start by going off to breakfast (I hope) with glorious Isolde's love music ringing through my life. I wonder how Hugh's interview went.

Tuesday 15th [*I am writing this while listening to the last act of Tristan on Thursday morning having again burnt myself on early morning tea - this time by just pouring from the tin tumbler into the cup.*] As planned, I managed to finish sorting out the whole of the timetable during the morning so in the hot afternoon sun I set off down town to try to email it to Carrie and Rob. Found a nice short email waiting for me from Hugh saying his interview went well. I hope the result is as good; his courage when disappointed shows great character but I'd rather he had the chance to have a happy result. [*I was just interrupted by a phone call from Imran, in Telugu to start with. His friend Mahdu was supposed to have come yesterday - Imran had phoned to warn me because he was bringing his brother again to persuade me to give him a job. Very glad he didn't come as I was not well.*]

For some reason I was unable to reply to my email messages (including Hugh's) and was not able to compose any so could not send my programme off. [*I still have not sent it as Surya's A drive seems to have a problem*]. I had found this morning that my phone was out of money (it is like Hugh's) so I asked the people in the cyber café where I could get it 'recharged'; typically they were so helpful and took me up the street to a greengrocer's small booth. I showed them the previous card so they knew what I wanted but first they said no, indicated by shrugs and gloomy looks. Eventually the lady showed what they had got - exactly the same card but a bigger denomination, 500 rupees, so I was back in contact with the world. As I was near the Town Club I could remember the way to Kiran's and went to get an auto there. There was a row of empty autos so I shrugged and started to walk up the road, to be stopped by a crazy wild yell as a teenage driver came bounding over the road jumping over the central partition nearly losing his lungis (good expression - a bit like getting your knickers in a twist). [Isolde's great Liebestod - love/death song - has just started so I shall lie back and think of home]. Dried my tears and on we go. After the fifth pronunciation of my destination - Giripuram - we set off, to arrive less than five minutes later at the tamarind tree. It is still charming to have a particular tree as a destination. The young driver demanded 15 rupees but was not experienced enough to hide his amusement at trying to cheat me so I laughed and gave him 10 and walked away. Instead of the usual sulky glare I had a radiant smile so I assumed that the real fare was only 5 rupees, so I gave him another 5 anyway just so that I could see the upper end of the response scale - kissing the 5 rupee note. Later that day I was negotiating an auto and the same driver came running over and caused annoyance by stealing me, grabbing my hand and running across the street. I think that it is very unprofessional to get out of your turn in a line of waiting autos but I suppose he argued that we were friends. I must have used a lot of autos this year as on at least 3 occasions a driver I recognise has driven up asking if I want his auto and then driven off smiling even when I haven't wanted one.

I went down the little side toad (nice typing error, some side dish!) to Kiran's family but there was no response when I banged the door. I looked for the Good Shepherd School but saw no sign of it. I showed the names, written in my little book, of Kiran Frances and Christopher Dass (father) to the usual old crones (sorry, unkind) squatting in the street outside their doors but got no help. Eventually Kiran's mother came rushing out. They had all been asleep, as I should have realised.

[*My breakfast has arrived - sweetish rice and curry - I shall make an attempt at it, I haven't eaten for more than 24 hours. It was delivered by the new helper here; a rather gaunt young chap called Raju with huge light olive, sad eyes which change from nervous to cringingly grateful when I smile - especially if I also say his name*] [*Breakfast now eaten; no problem although as usual I only ate one third of what was provided. It was served better than usual, with no poly bags just plastic bowls and all served on a very ornate white baroque plastic tray with a paisley pattern in purple.*].

At Kiran's all the brothers were there. Father was not drunk and was nice and sleepy so I didn't get my usual reprimands for not writing, or requests for money for the school. The school room has been returned to the owner (for his daughter) and they could not afford a bigger place (last year they wanted me to buy one) so they just have the younger age group in their own home run by the mother and father only. The flute playing brother (Charles, pronounced Charlezz) has the email address flutecharlie. The younger brother Thomas who works as an electrician about 50 Km away was there; he is the only one who has not tried to get anything out of me - perhaps that is why he was the least inhibited and embraced me with a sort of frenchman's kiss on both cheeks, a scratchy hairy business with unshaven face and aggressive spiky moustache. The others appeared rather sheepish (probably my imagination). Flute charlie's music business (performs for weddings etc) is going ok and Kiran helps with the sound systems and sales. They took me down the road to a sort of lock up cupboard containing all their gear - huge loudspeakers, keyboards, mixers, amplifiers etc. This lot is carted, literally, to functions on an oxcart. Kiran then waddled, looking pregnant with his married man's great paunch, up the steps to his house which is two rooms just down the road. His lovely wife, Theresa Jyothi, immediately made me a huge omelette and bread, which was very unwelcome. The

Thumbs up was very very welcome. In my rather groggy state at home when preparing to come I forgot to bring my photos from last year except the ones of their new born daughter which they were very pleased with. But they were disappointed that I did not bring the one with her father in it as he died a few months ago. I must remember to send a good copy of it. The daughter is very lively, already walking, almost running, and the centre of attention from all the children along their balcony; the second floor 'houses', are joined by a shared balcony which is also a general communal area.

I managed to leave eventually after promising to attend the daughters 1st birthday party and walked down to the town to the Sri Govinda Swamy temple. It used to be the peaceful centre of Tirupati where I would go to rest from the noise and confusion of the Ghandi road. It has lost that function with the introduction of loudspeakers playing badly amplified temple music too loudly. I always think of Jesus driving out the moneylenders from the temple when I am here. I was planning to take a photo of the top of the Gopuram, the very high white gate tower covered in carvings of gods, often doing what seem to be rather ungodly acts, surmounted by golden structures (I have to avoid Beckham's balls) lit by the evening golden sun. As I panned down the tower I reached the lower part which has very ancient carvings in the dark granite and then down to a mess of little booths and carts selling junk like a fairground except that it often has some vague religious significance - brightly coloured powders, coconuts, bananas, models and pictures of gods. By the time I had reached this of course I had a leper on one side and an ancient corpse-like lady gently tapping my arm for alms. I would like to have taken a picture of them but I am too sensitive (squeamish) for that. While sitting on a stone wall wondering what to do next my mobile fought its way to my attention. Yet again it was Imran telling me he was bored, 'you haven't phoned to me, I don't think you care about Imran'. 'I care for you Imran, you are very special'. 'You are only saying that to please me'. 'So you agree I care for you enough to want to please you'. 'OK Chris you win isn't it'. 'Then sir?' Surya then phoned to arrange that we would meet at the rail crossing on the way to his house in order to go and eat and then to buy a few things.



In the meantime I found a new peaceful place, the big 'tank' which is a large square pond with many steps leading down to the water and a central island, associated with the temple for ritual washing etc. It is next to the Sundhiri Park hotel. A new 'All pure veg' hotel. The 'park' is 3 trees in the dirt road beside it. I went in for coffee there one evening - mainly to use their loo and to read in peace (in restaurant, not loo) but it was too dark and cold to stay for long. Then along the very noisy dust road parallel with the station to meet Surya. This is the least pleasant area of Tirupati; it is between the rail and the bus stations and is full of travel agent's booths and cheap food and lodging places, peopled with bewildered pilgrims en route for the big temple in the hills at Tirumula. Many families seem to have given up and sit with their bundles and babies in the dust at the side of the road. Others are on the way home, heads shaven at Tirumula and children in balaclavas, usually very cheerful and always arguing and treading on toes. Amongst all this are the equally bewildered better off families trying to look as if they are nothing to do with the crowds and confusion, arguing with the touts and with each other, sometimes in Oxford English, having arrived after long journeys at their destination and probably wondering if it was all worth it; will Sri Venkateshwara do his stuff? He is said to do anything for you if you pay enough. Surya arrived at the railway crossing on time and we met 10 minutes later, having waited on the opposite side of the track from me. The barriers are nearly always down because a train is always about to leave. As the times are very Indian there has to be a big margin of error. This is no problem as almost everyone can dodge beneath the poles and cross. Surya had a friend, Joseph, from his hotel (the Kalyan Residency). I had suddenly acquired an American craving for cold beer but then found I didn't have enough money for the big hotels that serve it. 'No problem, I have a solution sir'. So we fought our way through the evening dust and noise across the huge area of the bus station which smells, even in the middle of the square, of stale urine, to a bar, up some rickety stairs to a room with open windows overlooking the bus station and the urine where we had 2 beers between the 3 of us and some crisps, mainly in the light of the buses outside and a few candles (there was the first powercut of my visit). The power supply has been privatised and so there are fewer power cuts. Surya said I shouldn't pay any tip because the crisps were supplied, rather stale, 10 minutes after the beer. So I ignored the rather unpleasant waiter after he gave me my change and then gave my prepared tip of 10 rupees to the boy responsible for cleaning the table which he had done the instant we had arrived, very well and with the usual big smile, which I received again as I tucked the note into the shirt pocket of his typical dirty khaki uniform of shirt and shorts. We then ate at a nearby non-veg restaurant, paid for (probably not) by Joseph who had worked with someone there previously. On the way home in the auto I had some warning rumblings and threatening stabs of pain in the gut. This woke me in the night with fully fledged Tirupati tummy (a mild version of Delhi belly).

Wednesday 16th. Having woken 6 times in the night I eventually got up at 7.30 feeling tired, aching and empty. I could not face the thought of staying 'ill' in my untidy room so I started the day by washing the floor where the cleaner the day before had tipped tea over it while failing to sweep it clean. I then thoroughly swept it clean and had a hot bucket shower (bliss). I rejected breakfast and lunch and spent most of the day alternating sitting in the shade in the garden sleeping and reading *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood (Booker prize winner). Couldn't face doing work. Surya came in the evening with my requested 'dry dinner' from the bakery - a veggie burger. Unfortunately they have started to copy MacDonaldis and cover everything with gunk - curried onions and creamy

stuff. Four bites was enough so I had a biscuit and bit of chocolate and some bubbly lemon Mirinda.

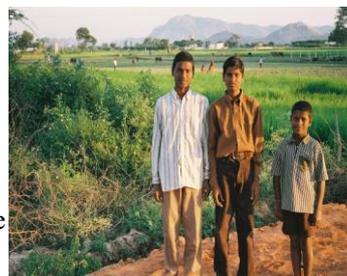
Thursday 17th I have just finished writing the last 2 days journal so time to get up properly and go off to the internet café; I think I am feeling well enough to risk it. Becoming neurotic is as big a risk when feeling unwell here as actually being unwell. I shall have another go at phoning home. I couldn't get a line yesterday. Kiran phoned to ask if he could come and visit. I suggested he should come and collect me from the internet café at the town club area. I walked down to the University entrance where there are the usual autos but they asked for 20 rupees. When I laughed and waved a 10 rupee note at them the younger one laughed at the older cheat and took me. Of course I gave him 12 rupees anyway. As Carrie is at a conference I had fewer emails to deal with. I wrote a long complicated message to Rob John about the conference and was about to hit the send button when we had a powercut. After 20 minutes reading the paper we were powered up again and I at last managed to send off the completed programme. I had a message from Hugh 'have news; please phone'. Sounds good. Also a nice long email from Libby. And a reply to my brief message to Leigh - typical Leigh - business-like with no hint of the nice person writing it. I tried to phone Kiran to request my promised lift but got a neighbour who spoke no English. I got an auto back and started to sort out other work in the garden.

Kiran then arrived and, as I expected, gradually worked his way round to hinting that I should solve his financial problems. He has borrowed too much to pay for his amplification equipment and the interest is terrible. And the Hindu astrologers have declared the last 7 weeks to be very bad for anything like weddings so they have had no functions to perform at and so they have no income and if I paid off 50,000 rupees (>£700) they would have no problem with the interest. He keeps wanting me to go to visit them so that he can 'make a proposal'. I have no intention of giving anything. Imran then turned up looking clean and cool after a 2 hour bus ride from Chittoor, demanding food. I was not eating at all so I got the cook to provide chapattis and potato curry. He insisted I have some - fed to me in little chapatti parcels like a kid. It was excellent, making me feel I was getting better. I got rid of Kiran with a half promise to come and see him sometime. Perhaps it would be kinder to tell him No immediately. Imran was his usual good company telling funny stories and describing his plans for his future. After a couple of hours he had to leave. I had promised to buy him some shoes (Nike copies for about £12) so I sent him off to get these on his way home. Then I slept until Surya came to take me to eat.

I specified it should be near and not wet curry so he suggested a pizza in the little place opposite the icecream shop - Chill Thrill. My gut was still rather threatening so I didn't really enjoy it and was glad to get back home. Very boring I have become. I was very cheered up after walking in the very chilly evening down to the phone booth to phone home to receive the great news about Hugh's job. I realised the lad who runs the place was staring at me through the little window with a look of concern on his face - real tears of joy dribbling down my nose. 'Home problem sir?' 'No, thanks everything is now OK'. 'I am happy sir'. aren't we all. Then back here to early night to be woken by Clive's happy voice 'is it the middle of the night there?' - no only 12.30. Very nice to hear him so happy. It turns out that the odd email I had got from him about painting his skirt red before some party was meant to be reassuring me that he had painted the skirting boards. Some reassurance. I noticed that suddenly it had got warmer and sure enough in the morning I found we are back to more typical hot Tirupati weather.



Friday 18th. Woken at 7.30 by my 'Francis of Assisi' ascetic looking boy with my scalding tea. When I turned up for breakfast he stuck some grim-looking curry in front of me but then found there was no rice so he made an omelette, just broken fried egg with no seasoning- except for old frying fat flavour. It was revolting, partly due to my squeamish condition, so I left it and rushed out, pleading that I was late for a lecture. I was, but not as late as the students. After the 20 minute walk through the very hot morning sun there were only 2 girls there. We chatted for 10 minutes and then two of the boys arrived. One was Sudarshan (the middle one in the picture) who lives in Tirupati, and is very quick witted and appreciative. The other is huge with a baseball cap over his recently shorn head, and rolls of fat on the back of his neck. At ten I gave up and accepted what the students had already told me that they would be most likely at their native places until the weekend. The boys then walked back to the guest house with me where I persuaded the churlish lady cook to make us some tea while I showed family photos etc and, of course, advising on their future life plans. I got one of them to ask the cook for the same lunch as yesterday which was good. I cancelled the afternoon lecture and was glad as Raja managed to get time off work to come and see me but he promptly fell asleep so I got on with the start of my paper with Peter James which I continued sitting in the shade of the garden before going off at 4 for a long walk.



I went along tarmac roads (converted from the previous tracks) towards my favourite little village where I was recognised, and made to photograph the latest baby, sitting in a little booth by the side of the road with a pile of bananas looking as if it was for sale. On the way back from the very hot walk as the sun went down and a cool breeze

appeared a little boy on a bike came up and walked beside me. After asking his unpronounceable name (Venkatakambata - he wrote it for me; middle one in picture) he told me that I was Chris Anthony 'you come to visit us with photos'. So I was enticed into the village (Thummlagunta) where he dumped his bike before calling his friends from their cricket match for photos. He kept pointing out the 'agreeable surroundings' of the village. It's good to know he appreciated it - mixture of mud and emerald paddy with the hills in the distance. I have never seen it so clear, with the distant hills making a nice limit to the horizon. My left eye continues to be nasty to me which spoils birdwatching as they are not so easy to see - OK with binoculars once found. The gradual build up of the extensions to Tirupati are, I guess, driving some birds away. No sign of the chestnut and white brahmī kite for at least two years, or black winged stilt or Egyptian vultures. But still grateful for the bulbuls and large wagtails and bee eaters. As the sun went down, the sky was taken over by crows returning to roost - probably their usual place in the Eucalyptus trees around the engineering hostels. Had a nice phone call from Imran in Chittoor on the way back to tell me about his shoes. I thanked him for calling; 'No need to say thank you - you are in India'. *[Oddly enough, I had just typed this and he called again - it is now Saturday morning. He is just off to do his college work 'then I can be a great man like you, but do not worry always I will be a little lower, I am a small stone on the ground and you are my friendly mountain'. This was little Gopi's idea. What a nice welcome to the day.]*

On the last part back from the 2 hour walk I met Rajiv Dixit on his scooter so had to entertain him for an hour (my cough is still depressing my will power). I harnessed Rajiv to drive me down to the rail crossing to meet Raja and Surya for dinner. By then I was very hungry - accompanied by stomach pains but we walked through the hot crowded back streets for ages to get to the 'garden restaurant'. I was feeling ungratefully sulky, my suggestion of eating at the Kalyan Residency (comfortable, table cloths, light, warm, clean etc had been rejected as it was too expensive - it would have cost about £3 for 3 of us). Eventually I felt any one would have done but after a cool beer and simple fried (appropriate mistake) veggie rice I felt really alive again and had a nice evening lecturing them about the stars we could see - mainly around Orion. The stars appear incredibly bright here and it is warm! I used grains of spilt rice, the little aniseeds and toothpicks to illustrate the relative size of Betelgeuse and the solar system to Raja, looked on by waiters circling the table in the almost complete darkness. Made a decision to solve the disgusting breakfasts and bought a load of bananas and a huge pineapple (8p) on the way home; I had to keep out of sight as the first price for bananas was apparently exorbitant (2 rupees instead of 1). *Now looking forward to a good night's sleep, but first listening to Wagner's Parsifal while writing this. Halfway through the 2nd of the 4 disks I have at last discerned a tune. This might be because by accident I'm listening to this for the second time today. Looking over the last couple of days diary it is very dull so I suppose it reflects how I have been feeling.*

So goodnight all you workers of the world, love from me.

Saturday 19th. Halfway. I have tried to imagine how I would feel if I was about to go home now. Of course it would be so nice to be home but much of the point of these trips would be lost. It is a little like a 'retreat'. Everything of lesser value diminishes, leaving me certain of what is most important.

[At this important point a boy has turned up asking to clean my room so I have moved to the veranda. He has already reached me so I think he must have realised that I had already swept the room this morning or he does the usual thing and ignores beneath the chairs and bed etc; the thought was there].

It is another very hot start to the day so I must plan while I still have the willpower. I shall walk to my morning lecture, expecting it to be cancelled and then go on to the internet pub. I must buy more breakfast biscuits and a new comb; mine is rather dusty looking. People here always seem happy to borrow others' combs even mine - perhaps they hope some of my glamour will brush off. When Imran asked to borrow mine the other day he then asked 'you are not suffering from any medical condition or hygiene problem?'. I told him that I am but that it is too disgusting to talk about even in private - 'no problem then'. Gut good, eye bad, cough still there, spirits very high.

I dutifully went to my lecture at 9.30 to find a few students half-heartedly taking part in the 'Green and Clean' programme - doing what would should be done anyway, cleaning the place up and making the gardens nice. The same 4 students turned up as on Friday, including Sudarshan, plus one other so again we sat and chatted before walking down to the internet place, by way of the student hostels, dropping them off. The students always seem to understand the situation better than the staff. They warned me that no one would obey the professor and come back two days early just for a few lectures even from me. I arranged that Sudarshan and a couple of other friends would come with me to dinner this evening, Sudarshan to pick me up at 6.15 UK time. After a few false starts with incompetent computers I managed to do more than 2 hours of internet work, starting with reading Libby's nice newsy letter (the news not always so happy though). I then bought some milk bikkis and a comb before negotiating the proper price for an auto back to the guest house for a simple lunch of potatoes (spicy of course) and chappatis. I spent the afternoon solidly working in the garden and on the veranda, writing the first few pages of Zannoni's respiration book. I turned my back once, leaving the door open to air the room and found 2 monkeys wondering whether to risk a dive for the bikkis; my shout strengthened their resolve and one darted in and grabbed the open pack, fortunately spilling half of them over my chair before diving outside and up into the nearest tree where he sat enjoying them. *[Cook has just brought me my Sunday afternoon chai/tea].* Exactly 6.15 Sudarshan arrived to go to dinner. We talked a bit first then off in auto to the Kalyan Residency. I had invited Surya but he was uncertain and only turned up afterwards. The other 3 friends of Sudarshan also turned up on time. It is a nice place but they are uncertain how to serve some types of food. The boys all chose Chinese (Manchurian

cauliflower etc which was served together with corn soup and followed by very good butter naans - but nothing to eat with them by then. They made up for it with Kulfi and butterscotch icecream. Came out into the warm Tirupati evening to find Surya grinning outside, so made introductions which were followed by a short walk to Ghandi road to buy me a lungi or two at Gungulas where the Esperanto-speaking friend of Surya is manager. They are so friendly and good fun. I wanted a Paisley pattern one for Murali (his latest interest) but the only one they had was very dull; but I got it anyway, plus one for Hugh's table and a big one for me for the van. Surya went off to prepare for his night's work while three of the students cycled away leaving Sudarshan to (unnecessarily) escort me home where he spent half an hour telling about some of the absurdities of being a student in SV University. He pays 50,000 rupees per year and yet the class are being made to pay 700 rupees for a broken pipette. The lecturers often lecture for two hours at a time, reading almost direct from textbooks. It is not surprising that I am considered a brilliant lecturer even when they don't understand me.

Sunday 20th Jan. [I am writing this at the end of the afternoon 6.15 pm while waiting for Imran's friend Mahdu who is visiting Tirupati from Chittoor with his family. Three times Imran has phoned to warn me that his brother will be there trying to get a job from me].

I started the day at 6.00 with the crowd in the next room hawking and spitting themselves awake, so I joined in with a much more English coughing fit. A cloudy day so I resolved to get a lot of work done after my floor-sweep and breakfast of bananas and biscuits and chai. Kiran soon phoned with his usual rather aggressive 'when are you coming today?' I am not; 'tomorrow then'. Eventually we negotiated that he would come here later in the morning. Fortunately I got a lot of typing completed before he arrived with a gift of cakes and hot Danish pastry which was very nice but it spoilt my lunch - something did - as I could only eat 2 chapattis.

It was not very long before Kiran worked his way round to what I was expecting - his Plan. He has to pay 4000 rupees a month on his loans taken out to pay for audio equipment which he uses with his brother (flutecharlie) in an orchestra that plays mainly at wedding functions and similar. If I paid off about £700 off his debts then he would pay half as much interest and the rest he would pay into Surya's bank account for transfer to me monthly. I started by telling him that he should have no hope; I have already decided not to support this plan. Of course we carried on discussing his plans in general which was dangerous as I have more sympathy for them now. But it will not hurt for him to struggle more. He said he is desperately driving around to arrange more functions for the orchestra - arranged by getting names and addresses, from marriage hall managers, of potential customers. When I asked what he would do if not doing this I got the impression he would sit at home getting fatter. Having more engagements would solve everything and is obviously the best thing to do so he won't starve. It hadn't occurred to him that if I lent him money I would lose my interest on it. That seemed to help him to accept the decision (he should have argued that he would pay me back for 21 months instead of 20 but if he is not quick witted enough for that then he doesn't deserve help). [Mahdu has just arrived - without his brother so he is forgiven for being late].

After my very small lunch I continued with some more of Peter's paper on glucose dehydrogenase, in the garden, in the shade of the palm tree, although not much sun anyway. Everywhere is wonderfully quiet, just me in my chair and someone's driver lying asleep beside me on the concrete veranda, on a couple of newspapers, carefully dusted down before sleep. The noisiest thing is a monkey trying to open a discarded poly bag tightly full of curry; he is actually trying to undo the knot! I saw him later bite into it, getting a burst bag sprayed all over his face, but apparently happy with it. [a huge black beetle has just peered around my computer screen, nodded and jumped to the floor]. As arranged, the microbiology student, Sudarshan, turned up at exactly 3.00 on a scooter to take me to the Zoo park. The scooter was borrowed, he explained as we went the back ways through the University, necessary as he had no licence (or driving tuition). On the way back around the big roundabouts amongst the lorries and buses near the temple Kapilatheertam as a heavy lorry roared up threateningly behind us, he suddenly shouted 'signal right for god's sake'; then later 'Do it again'. Not really dangerous, honest. The zoo is laid out amongst the scrubby thorny forest at the base of the hills. It is almost exclusively native species - except for the tawny lions. The animals were in open pens except the huge tigers which were more enclosed but still outside and in very large cages/enclosures. It was cloudy, very humid and hot but as we moved higher there was a nice breeze to go with the views of the plain between Tirupati and Chittoor dotted with palms and paddy fields and framed by the rounded rocky hills with a backdrop of dramatic dark gray rain clouds. We had a safe ride back after I suggested that we should go slower when there was traffic; Sudarshan usually speeded up as we approached congestion - rather like the faster kayak paddling as you approach a river rapid, partly for giving greater control but mainly to keep your courage up. Had a nice gentle chat on return; Sudarshan's ready smile in lectures hides a rather worried boy; should he spend so much of his parents money and 2 years of his time being taught by people he doesn't really respect? He told me I was a very kind and helpful friend but all I did was lie there on my bed like a psychiatrist's patient while he sat in the chair holding my hand and telling me his problems. Took photos of us both with the camera autotimer, then at 5.30 he left to return the scooter to his cousin, telling me not to worry, he will keep smiling.



Half an hour later Mahdu arrived; he is Imran's friend from Chittoor who spent most of the time with us during my visits to Chittoor previously. I was very glad to see him, especially as he did not have his brother and father in tow. He was late because he had been one hour trying to find how to get here from his sister's house on the other side of town. Like Imran, he is easy company as he chatters happily and I am not his visiting professor. He is about 18 and doing maths physics and chemistry in order to do engineering. Like most boys here his main aim is to find a way out of India. This seems unlikely but enough have succeeded to make it a genuine hope. It is sad to think his attractive enthusiasm will probably be worn down by the usual problems. He says his brother is a good example to him; when I seemed surprised he explained that he would avoid being lazy and failing etc. His family have just moved house from their nice rural location on the edge of Chittoor to a main road next to the house that Imran is soon going to move to. The reason for the move is that the palm thatch of the previous house was breaking and leaking badly. I had noticed when there that you could see the sky in a quite a few places.

Madhu could not get over the size of my hands (especially finger nails, which do seem to be about twice the size of those of most orientals) and my beautiful fine hair. No wonder I like this place! He was keen to show off his collection of tattoos on chest and arms - actual just coloured transfers from sweet packets. He is rather vain and also enthusiastic that I am his friend. 'Am I number 2 after Imran in Chittoor?' 'Of course you are Mahdu'. 'Do you think I am more handsome than Imran?' 'You are certainly a nice dark brown' (Imran is noticeably light skinned). After the usual looking at photos on computer and taking a couple of photos, we set off by auto to town to do some shopping. I suddenly had some threatening gut pain and changed plans to have some dinner first in the Sundhori Park hotel (it has a marble and gold loo). No problem; false alarm. The restaurant is typical of the good hotels (except Surya's Kalyan Residency) in having very cold air conditioning and being dark. We had nice simple veg biryani and 'seven jewwells rice'; this is veg fried rice without most spices but with little coloured bits - chilli, pomegranate, corn etc - rather bland and laughed at by Mahdu. The waiters (and manager) were, as usual, curious about me (I am still the only non-Indian I have seen here this year). So I hear the Telugu explanation, with Biochemistry, Very important Professor, My Friend, UK etc spattered throughout. I was even brought a baby to bless (darshan sir - just hold it for a minute). We finished the meal with wonderful butterscotch ice cream, then up the elegant marble stairs into the welcoming dusty warm air of central Tirupati. Unfortunately by then the shops were almost all closed but we found one that Mahdu liked- a fashionable clothes shop (little booth on Ghandi road) where he inspected every item in the shop staffed by a very good looking young teenage boy who was the owner's son; the boy was presumably an advert for the fashionable clothes, wearing a rather gaudy shirt of yellow, orange, ochre, and related unknown colours, with very uncomfortable-looking tight khaki corduroy trousers. I was perched on a little stool in a corner to watch with the owner while the two of them ransacked the shop before he found tight black jeans and a highly decorated shirt with zips and complicated pockets and patterns all in various shades of grey, 'to go with the black jeans', the young helper seriously explained. This was all my treat - total a little under £7. We then stood in the middle of the Ghandi road cross roads in a very subdued warm dark empty Tirupati all looking very neat with the shop fronts all locked up and everywhere swept clean. Just us and a few cows and home-returning rickshaws. Mahdu then tried to fix a time to visit again next week and we parted with much sentimental hugging, all a bit like the farewell scene in the empty dark Catfish Row in Porgy and Bess. He went off down a side road to his sisters and I had a nice stroll, hoping for an auto to get me home. After two rejections (no petrol, home sir) I found an auto who agreed to take me to the guest house for 20 rupees (30p) but he only made it to the town club where he sold me to another auto for the last part home. I jumped ship at the STD booth and phoned home to have a nice chat with Hughie before returning for an early night.

Monday 21st. A good job I slept early as I was woken by fierce arguments (a debate really with at least 4 participants but all in loud theatrical voices) in the next room which is often used as a stopover place just to wait in. This was at 4.15 am. At about 4.45 I went next door and mimed them to be quiet and to let me sleep. There were 4 debaters, each sitting cross-legged at the corners of the square made up of two adjacent beds and there were two sleepers, cocooned in thin covers on the floor. They were very apologetic and turned the volume down slightly. Fortunately they left anyway fairly soon and I probably slept a little before getting up at 6.30 to write this while listening (on considerate earphones) to Der Rosenkavalier. This has just finished so shall I. It looks like another grey day so I shall get a lot of typing done after my 9.30 lecture.



[I am writing this on Thursday evening but I cannot remember anything about Monday except that the weather started to be hot.] So this day and the next few days were all rather similar. I have given up breakfast and have banana, biscuits and pineapple. I then walk through the very hot campus for my 9.30 lecture which they now attend on time. I have to read the register which has been a good way to get some of their names. After lecturing for about an hour and 20 minutes I usually feel dried up and incapable. The lectures are in the second floor theatre which has wide open windows looking out to the red hills and the door is always wide open, leading to the balcony/corridor so that I can wander out there and think of the next thing to do in the lecture. I sometimes find myself aimlessly looking out over the hill trying to decide if I can see vultures or are they just black kites. My left eye only works for distance without glasses and my left needs the glasses. The students then leap to their feet as I leave the room then dash out to the water urn, boys

first then the girls. I then go downstairs to Prof Sreenivasulu's room where one 'boy' leaps up and turns on the tap for me and the other stands by with a towel - for washing off the chalk dust. While drying the 1st boy then pours my tea out of a thermos into a little 'thermos' cup which ensures that I burn my tongue. The sun has become so hot now that walking back the 20 minute walk to the guest house is not so attractive, so Murali takes me on his scooter - or he takes me down to the Town club to use the internet. I usually sit in the sun for half an hour reading work stuff or preparing lectures. Lunch is now always a few chapattis and a dryish veg dish with chai. I am collected by Murali for the 2.30 lecture and then brought back at about 4.30. Actually today I fought his kindness and wandered over to Biotechnology hoping to see my old friend Nagaraju [visited his village, Konanki previously], and found him in a huddle of research scholars around the hunched up figure of his supervisor Dr reddy while he explained something rather laboriously on the computer. Raju saw me and sneaked out with a his big sheepish grin. He said they all knew the programme being explained but it would not be respectful to explain to the supervisor. I wonder if they do that to me? [I am writing this at 7.00 am while having my early morning tea and bikkis on morning of the 25th - Raff's birthday I have just realised]. We drifted out quietly to chat by the pond outside and arranged for me to go to dinner with him and his new wife (Lalitha) (my holy life's partner sir) 'tell Surya he must also come if possible'.

Surya turned up at at about 6 pm and then we listened to some unaccompanied Bach violin, expecting Nagaraju to turn up to collect us for dinner. As he didn't come we walked in the nice almost cool evening air past the police headquarters, over the rail track past the women's (Padmavarthy) University to his road. We had both been there before but both had made the mistake of memorising the house by the position of a moveable advertising board which had since been moved. Fortunately I am always fairly visible and a friend saw us and directed us. His wife is very nice - looks nice, smiles happily at his jokes (he later explained - 'her duty sir'; is it a holy duty? 'of course sir'). In fact she does seem to share his sense of humour so we had a great time. She explained that she is studying MA English at the women's university (so she can be near her holy kitchen sir). This course involves a lot of English language so that they can understand the books but it only covers 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, whose English is not modern, so as Raju explained this will not really help her everyday English but it will 'give her a beautiful mind'. We were given too much to eat, starting with dosas (flat boring pancakes served with coconut and peppery plant stuff that, because of a tummy experience in Sri Lanka I still find distasteful; this was followed by lemon rice and hacked-up chicken which has bits of sharp bone and gristle as the main components. The taste was delicious. Surya had eaten before coming (not knowing that he was to be fed at Raju's) so he had to do most of the fighting off of 'more sir - you don't like my new wife's lovely cooking?'

Surya left early to go and prepare for his night work while I continued with the tiring business of talking with Raju. He soon becomes 'Indian philosophical', always wanting to prove the superiority of Indian ways - 'you people think quickly for a few seconds and you think you have solved the problems of the world' - probably true but better perhaps than just thinking and never getting up to do anything. When it was time to leave Raju came out into the street with me and shouted and two friends appeared from nowhere on a small 50cc bike that was then used to drive me back to the guest house (I would have preferred to walk). My friends are all especially concerned about me during this election period as gangs of people accumulate and always seem threatening. This is merely because of the numbers and not their intentions; I have always had nice chats with people as I have edged around them when they block the pavement.

Tuesday 22nd. Evening Prof. Sreenivasulu's for dinner. He collected me at 6.30 on his scooter for a nice ride through the still very warm evening air over to Barraigi Patteda. For some reason Imran had been phoning but we had been cut off because my card had run out. So on the way we stopped near town club for me to buy another one. Sreenivasulu was so worried because I was not sure which shop was the correct one and seemed surprised that I was able to walk along a row of shop fronts (open booths) waving a little yellow card until one acknowledged that they sold them. When we arrived at his home I had to 'register' the card but the instructions were rather confused and his daughter failed to sort it out. I had promised to phone Surya that evening but the phone failure meant I had failed, so I got Sree to drive me to the DR Mahal (cinema) which is the landmark for me to find Surya's house. He was again so worried that I might get lost. It is a nice busy area with lots of little streets with small open-fronted local shops half lit, providing ironing service, sewing, greengrocer, phone booth, general - matches, bananas, candles, biscuits, combs, with shoppers wandering around chatting and kids playing and birds coming home to roost in the nearby grove of trees - crows and huge flock of noisy paddy birds - small egrets. I should have said the dinner at Sreenivasulu's home was very good but as usual far too much. Surya was not in but would be in by 10. I hadn't realised that he was not on night shift that night so did not need to return. So I sat very hot (too cold for fan!) pretending the mosquitoes were absent, watching apparently highly overacted Telugu films or soap operas. I got my phone working just in time for Imran to phone me. My phone had run out as I was talking to him on a very busy street and he had heard me shout and heard a bang just before being cut off so he had worried (or so he said) all evening that I had been run over. He is slightly cloying as most too sweet things can be but it is something I can tolerate! At about 10. 20 a neighbour's boy (Vinod Kumar) came in and introduced himself and sat beside me to do his maths homework. He is only 14 but the standard of the algebra seemed like A level. He was very thin and had huge sad eyes like a character from a Christian aid advert. He comes every time his sisters make too much noise when he wants to work and apparently sleeps there. It is very attractive, the sharing of houses and facilities. I gave up at 11.0 and walked down to the rail crossing past the sleeping rickshaw boys and

the little samosa and tea carts, to get an auto back to the guest house through a deserted Tirupati. I negotiated the correct fare of 25 rupees but gave in on arrival when he asked for more - by miming a sleeping man to tell me it was very late so he got another 10 rupee note which from the way he kissed it suggested I'd gone a bit too far.

Wednesday 23rd. Surya turned up with a paper this morning - on his way home from work (so he said, but it is 3km from the town centre to here). My morning had started at about 6.20 after the early morning screaming train out of Tirupati junction followed by the flood of hooting buses, released after it has gone past the closed level crossing. I checked that the sun was rising its usual glorious red over the opposite cliffs and hills with the promise of a hot day and then swept the floor with my 'grass' broom before preparing lectures. After my lecture I went to the Internet but found it dead so auto'ed back in the sun to a relaxing, gentle clothes wash and read in the sunny garden followed by nice lunch. I had previously hinted that I would like to visit Sudarshan's family and this morning he came running out of the lecture after me to ask if I could come that evening. I explained that I had to attend Kiran's daughter's first birthday function so would not need feeding. He found this worrying because the first time a guest comes he should be looked after in a lavish way. So I told him the nicest thing I could imagine in Tirupati would be to go to a friends house and not be forced to eat too much but just to have coffee and cake.

In the evening I went to Kiran's function at the time commanded which was 6.00, only to find that besides some 7/8 year old kids I was the only one there. 'There' was the roof of his house (part of a warren of attached 'houses; it was set up with his mikes and loudspeakers and mixers etc. His orchestra was due to give a celebration performance. I had previously told him that I was due back at the guest house at 8 to meet Sudarsan. So I was fed by Theresa his wife in their little house. Quite nice mangled spicy chicken and rice with 3 plastic wineglasses containing Pepsi, Thums up and Mirinda, all for me only, the whole lot including rice and chapattis being arranged for me on the only table which was a singer sewing machine. I then went back to the roof but it was clear the orchestra wouldn't do anything until about 9.00 so I took a couple of pictures of baby (Talita I think) and then by auto back to the guest house where Sudarshan turned up at exactly 8.00 as arranged. When I opened the door to him I realised that he looks a little like my Malaysian friend Ariff, the way he parts his hair, his glasses and his bright teeth (Ariff thinks his are too big and Sudarshan too many, but both very attractive and welcoming). We walked down most of the road to town, as there were no autos, usually in the gutter. There are very high pavements all the way but the trees and their protecting concrete surrounds and wires holding them up make it rather more perilous than the road. Sudarshan was typically considerate for my safety as if my extra 40 years of walking has made me too careless about the risks involved. As he insisted on holding my hand or steering me with an arm around me I often found myself yanked out of the way of an oncoming cowpat or a placid rolling bullock cart. The affectionate hand holding is very nice but in the very hot evening air I would like to disengage and wave my arms about a bit but I didn't want to give the wrong message.



We came eventually to the end of the Ghandi road and on to PK street where he lives in a maze of small roads with high houses all joined together in the usual way with outside balcony/corridors etc. He was very nervous that his family would not understand me but there was no difficulty. We climbed up the usual steep unlit concrete steps to his father, standing to welcome me, in white shirt and long lunghi with shaven head with the god's mark in ash on his forehead, and simple Ghandi spectacles. I sat with him while his wife peered round the kitchen door and Sudarshan and his older brother and younger sister sat on the floor at my feet. It was a very enjoyable evening. The father is a clerk in the local hospital and a religious man. After a while I was brought a plate with some biscuits and very nice sponge and cream cake and a very welcome cup of coffee. We had the usual debate about how (im)possible it would be for his brother to get a scholarship to a British University; their prospectuses all suggest that this is easy, which I know to be almost purposely deceptive. This moved on to the other standard topic of corruption in society. Everyone denounces it but it is difficult to achieve anything without taking part in some way. Surya's father, for example, is strongly (and sincerely) against corruption but he had had to pay in order to get his move in the Railway system from a town 8 hours journey from home to a place that is less than two hours which is better for him and much better for the whole family. At about 10 I realised that I was being inconsiderate, as guests determine the time of departure so up I leaped to go. Father also leaped up but motioned me down again saying it is not necessary to leave but I detected the slight irritation with his father in the older son's face and got ready to go anyway. Sudarshan explained later that his father always feels compelled to be too hospitable then complains afterwards that guests don't leave. My timing was probably OK. Of course, Sudarshan walked back with me through the quiet streets to Ghandi road for an auto which he joined me in to collect his bike from the student hostels.

Thursday 24th. I am starting to type again, feeling very nervous. While typing stuff for Peter's paper yesterday afternoon (chapter 3 from thesis) every time I reached a particular sentence Wordperfect shut down 'Error insufficient memory' HELP. I tried copying that part into a new file and using it but got the same error message. So last night I defragmented the hard disk. Then I removed many old unnecessary programmes but it was no good. Clearly there is plenty of space on the hard disk (25% of total). System is configured with 64% of the 125 Mb RAM available (tells me it is optimally configured). But I still had the problem. I moved the file to a floppy and ran it from there - same problem. So I am typing this, dreading a similar message - OK so far.

Each day is now noticeably hotter and the 20 minute walk into the Department is almost too much. I am in the odd situation of having done almost no birdwatching because of my eyes. It is rather like a nightmare I used to have before going to Canford music school; that I had reached Thursday but no-one had yet asked me to play. My right eye is ok but needs my glasses to see well (near and distant). My right eye still needs glasses close up for focussing, but with my left everything is a little blurred (double vision when tested on a star) but is much better without glasses for more distant objects. Altogether a little frustrating but I am being brave. Everyone was present this morning at class except Sudarshan (they explained that he was late last night - so it is my fault then?). He told me later that he had arrived at 9.45 - a time that other students are happy to come in. My topic was bacterial growth leading on to continuous culture which I then continued appropriately into the afternoon. Yesterday Imran had been phoning from Chittoor to say that he was coming with little Gopi to visit - on a friend's motorbike. Fortunately he could not borrow the bike - it would be very dangerous on the unmade parts of the road where all the drivers get very frustrated and competitive. He arrived while I was typing a reference for Murthy, a biochemistry department lecturer. He had had a very bad journey; his bus had two punctures and it had taken nearly four hours. I filled him with luke-warm Pepsi. I sent him in to have a shower and he was soon back to his happy self. I don't know what Mahdu has said to him (Mahdu is his friend who came last week and returned with some new clothes), but he is angry with him. I think they are competing childishly for me. I had to nurse him out of this. We presented ourselves to the lady cook at lunch time and she was remarkably friendly and provided a full lunch which was excellent, and Imran was able to tell her from me how much I liked her cooking - we nearly got a smile from her. They still have the disgraceful arrangement where the only entrance to the kitchen from the dining hall is through a large hatch way a metre above floor so she has to heave her bulk up on to a stool to sit on the counter and swing herself in. There was a gang of guest house workers and hangers on watching the one day cricket match with India in Chennai, and I had to guiltily confess that I was ignorant about cricket except that our captain is called Hussain who is Indian.

I left Imran to play with the computer while I was scooted off into the afternoon heat by Murali for my afternoon lecture on the theory of continuous culture which was enjoyable, for them also I think, although Sudashan said afterwards that I had washed their brains. I have now managed to get them to reply to questions and to ask questions, not something usually encouraged, I feel. I have to be very careful to treat the boys and girls equally (that is the ladies and gents) and also to avoid asking Sudarshan for the answer. He probably doesn't know more but is very concerned that I enjoy my lectures so he wants me to get answers. Murali got me back in the blazing sun to find the door open, the airconditioning blasting away and Imran asleep with his head sandwiched hotly between two pillows. He had engineered another front page on my computer - a picture from previously of us together outside the guesthouse and he had put sentimental comments about friendship coming out of our mouths in coloured bubbles. Unfortunately he had done this using some link programme he had written in DOS so my computer starts up with many error messages. No problem; Surya helped me get rid of it all later but I still have my opening picture and bubbles. [Imran has just phoned to say he will try to be good to Mahdu 'I will try to grow up Chris, just for your sake'. 'I am so glad, you are becoming more impressive everyday'; you are just saying that to please me Chris isn't it']. At about 4.30 we started to walk down town to get Imran's bus home. I could think of few things nicer to do here than to drift town-wards in the golden evening sun (actually in the shade, looking out at the sunny surroundings), past the cricket ground etc, with sentimental Imran pointing out where we had previously visited. We stopped for tea, a gratefully accepted suggestion, imagining a quiet sit by the side of the fields etc etc but of course it was in a tea 'shop' - in a hot open booth - two chais for 1 rupee, which was of course excellent in its own way (aren't we all?). Just as I was thinking what a long way it was, having just reached two thirds of the way in Ghandi road, Imran commented on how fast the journey was when there are two good friends to share it - making me feel a little guilty. As we went down the small road near

Sudarshan's house a beautiful girl with a baby called out from a balcony above - Mahdu's sister, so up we went for coffee. Poor Imran was wearing the trainers (Indian copies of Nike for £6) that I had previously bought him; these always look uncomfortably hot for me in the UK and here they seem almost criminal. Every stop he had to unlace them before going in which was why he had been slow to accept the call up for coffee - I had got halfway up the stairs with enthusiasm before he even saw her calling.



So then on to the unpleasant bus station area with a happy feeling that I would not have to go on the bus. It was due to go in 30 minutes so we drifted around, Imran feeling 'dull at our partings Chris'. I sent him off and wandered in the dusk over the crowded rail crossing to Surya's area (Venkatarreddy colony). There was actually a train going - with 35 coaches, the one we had used to go to Vijayawada the previous year. [I am writing this on Friday morning and I must get up and go to a lecture; it is already too hot]. I had yet another go at Surya's house to get on the internet but the connection was too slow for the webmail address. Had chapattis and curry, followed by a sort of white slimy rice noodly thing with almonds and cardamom; it was very good but Surya's father kept complaining that it was too sweet (Surya had added extra sugar behind his mother's back for my sake). Of course, we ate to the accompaniment of a Telugu film, the background tragic music being like a cheap version of the doomed bits of Puccini's Tosca, which is dramatic the first time but it goes on every few minutes with yet another tragedy unfolding. Surya had only slept for about one hour in the last

two days and was like a large morose caricature of an Indian civil servant in a Telugu film. We soon returned by auto to the guest house, stopping on the way to confirm that the internet was too slow at my Town club internet place. Surya then slept for one hour while I read and listened to Bach piano music. He was very difficult to rouse - I had to push him on to the floor and even then he just grunted and rolled over.

Friday 25th. After this morning's lecture (more on continuous culture) I saw Santheesh from last year's group. I have seen very little of them as their lecture timetable is out of sync with mine and the virologists are not always coming in anyway as they have an exam on 28th. I got him to organise his friends, to come to dinner tonight at the Bliss hotel (probably the best hotel - they chose it). I phoned the internet place and they said it was going ok so Murali drove me down but it was too slow to use. I found a small pharmacy shop nearby and bought some Amoxillin (a very good antibiotic, requested by Leigh), £2 for 24. I couldn't believe it when they said yes they had it. All these little shops have their counters separating the owners from the street and the customers, often rather like punch and judy shows as they are so small and the workers in them often seem to be having arguments. The boy in the pharmacy hunted around to find them and handed them to me with a sweet triumphant smile with a hint of sympathy (I wonder what they are prescribed for - perhaps it is for tummy bugs). Today there was some cloud so for the rest of the morning I enjoyed sitting in the garden doing some more typing - the problem seems to have gone from my computer. Just before lunch I walked the 10 minute walk down to the telephone place to phone Libby who I remembered was going away for the weekend; I couldn't remember where but fortunately she was up and could tell me that it was to some Friary to pray for me. I look forward (or dread) the results. I then tried to get Raff - it is his birthday but had to blurt some dull message into his answering machine.

After my afternoon lecture, at 4.30 I set out to walk towards the agriculture college set in a large wooded area between the guest house and the opposite foothills. My plan was almost thwarted by a boy on a small motorbike who stopped to offer me a lift to the college; I couldn't refuse of course. He comes 6km everyday to deliver his older brother and to collect him. This extended my walk range and I continued walking along the rail track towards Bangalore. I was rewarded by seeing a brilliant golden yellow Golden oriole flying past and then sitting only a few yards away in the top of a tree on the same branch as a coppersmith bird. Usually orioles are very secretive and hide amongst the top leafy branches of trees. This is a reward for discovering that my old glasses are better for most purposes including distant vision with my left eye. I found myself 30 minutes walk later, following a Coucal (the beautiful black and chestnut crow pheasant) round the back of a high student hostel surrounded by eucalyptus trees and mounds of rubbish beneath the windows. 'Where are you from sir' came down from the branches, half hiding a student 4 floors up on the balcony/corridor. We then had the usual FAQ session with me struggling to be enthusiastic, shouting at someone almost hidden who I would never see again in my life. As I turned away to go there was another shout 'please tell your good name sir'; Chris 'Thank you thank you'. It is good to spread a little happiness. As I moved off to find the way home I disturbed the early roost of a flock of crows who launched off together and wheeled around, filling the sky like a scene from Hitchcock's The birds.

I returned by 6.15, nearly 2 hours continuous walking. I immediately fell asleep and was woken by Sateesh, Subash and Sudarshan no 1 (last year's virology model), come to take me to dinner. This started with the usual hand-linked stroll down the half mile to where there is a chance of getting an auto. Subash was very keen to talk, which was unusual as last year he was very shy; it turns out that he knows Nagaraju (village friend) who had persuaded him that he should practice talking English more so that he could talk with me this time. He is the very nice gentle student who usually managed to stand next to me in all the photos but hardly said anything; he comes from a small town on the way to Chittoor who is very enthusiastic to do a PhD in Bangalore. There is an open exam for admittance - as into all the best institutes - Sudarshan (1 and 2) is intending the same for AIIMS in Delhi. We arrived at the Bliss hotel in style - 4 of us climbing stiffly out of the single auto into the arms of welcoming doormen dressed hotly in pseudo military uniforms, in the hotel garden lit by thousands of coloured lights strung amongst the trees and bushes. As arranged, Surya materialised out of all this to chat briefly and tell me he had some other business (he had said he would see who I had with me and if they were good people he would join us; he left, so I will find out today what was wrong with them; in fact he was really just checking that I would not be bored or to need his help).

We ate in the general restaurant, having confirmed that they served genuine vegetarian food for Santeesh and Subash. The others were keen to get their teeth into animals and it was assumed I would do the same. I was unable to resist and had excellent mutton (goat) biryani etc followed by butterscotch ice cream. Oddly, the boys all ignored the range of icecreams and had 'cooldrinks only' - Mirinda and Pepsi. The bill (paid by credit card) was £11 for all seven of us. I would have preferred to return alone to the guest house or just with one or two of them but they all came back, except for Sudarshan who had to go and revise. So I had to show my pictures again - on computer, the ones they had already seen the year before. Subash had not seen them before and was very pleased to have my almost undivided attention. He had actually looked at my pqq website (given him by Sudarshan) and followed up the links to see what Southampton is like. After they left, slowly and sentimentally, I collapsed on the bed to be roused instantly by one of them returning; he had not spoken all evening but returned to ask me an important question. 'Are you loving Jesus sir?' Of course. Then please come tomorrow and address our function - 'it is operational all day but you will be speaking at lunchtime only'. So very very sorry, but I am going to lunch with prof Sreenivasulu (phew!).

No bed clothes required now, but not hot enough to face the noise of the air conditioning, although this

might have been useful to drown out the row (drunken I think) from the room next door which went on until midnight. It started again with gruesome morning coughing etc at about 6.00 which is one reason that I am up to date with this diary. Last night Mahdu from Chittoor phoned to say he is coming to see me. When? 'That is for you to say'. The afternoon was the only time so I then had to phone Sudarshan (no 2) to tell him not to come as arranged. When asked, the students always give a phone number but as usual this was deceptive. 'Who is it that you are wanting?' 'Sudarshaan; Suuudarshan; sudaarshan'. Eventually I hit on the correct pronunciation and the neighbour whose phone number I had been given says 'Is it Sudarshan you are wanting? can I ask your good name?; how is it you know Sudarshan? Eventually it occurred to him to get Sudarshan for me. 'No problem sir, sorry, Chris sir, sorry, Chris only'. 'When shall I come then?' So he will come Sunday morning.

Can all this be interesting to anyone else? It is good for me (I think).

Saturday 26th Jan. This is Republic day, celebrating the foundation of the Constitution by Ambedkar, a remarkable, 'untouchable' lawyer. In the Constitution was a clause that provided reserved places for the backward castes (untouchables), tribes etc for education jobs etc, all in a noble attempt get over past injustices. It was supposed to have lasted for 10 years. It has now lasted for 50 years and has extended to a much wider range of the population and provides a higher percentage. It is the easiest votecatcher, to promise more reserved places etc. It is wrecking so much of Indian culture now, with the best person not being appointed (not on reserved list) and very good people remaining unemployed.

I had rejected half-hearted invitations to attend various flag raising ceremonies so instead had a quiet morning at home in the garden. Until of course someone turned up. In this case it was Sudarshan, clean shaven and haircutted, who had asked to come previously and was enjoyable gentle company. He realised that at 12.30 he was due at that time to meet a friend at the hostels down the road. He is always punctual with me and then proved it was a general characteristic by actually running off down the road. It was fortunate that he left because Prof Sreenivasulu turned up early to collect me for lunch, and S prefers never to be noticed by staff; 'I don't even laugh if they say something funny'. Sreenivasulu wanted me to decide the lunch place so we went to Surya's hotel Kalyan Residency which is nice for me (light and airy), with a welcome from his friends on the staff. Sreenivasulu was incapable of ordering anything special so we had Thaliss, the traditional mixture. It was excellent and I even got 10% off. I am writing this on Monday morning at 7.30 and Surya has just arrived with my breakfast in a set of tiffin tins. I must stop in order to eat it and to turn off his air conditioning which is about to make me cough; he will just have to sit and sweat, and giggle. Venni Vastulu (see you later).

Sunday 27th. I am writing this in the evening after an exhausting social day. Have just returned from a walk to the STD telephone hut. It is next to the (now closed) little banana leaf thatched hut that used to advertise Spencer's Kikappoo Joy Juice. There is a small tea shop next to it now; that is, a small hut that sells tea, samosas, cool drinks and bottled water. The telephone place has 5-6 phones and stone benches for waiting your turn and we shuffle around until it is our turn when the young operator hands over a phone or sometimes directs me into a closed cupboard with just enough room to sit in unbearable heat. It was packed tonight at 9.00 and after queuing for 10 minutes Hugh was engaged and then so was Raff. So I am back here in the comfortable new armchair having had the luxury of a hot feet wash and a 5 minute blast from the air conditioning, listening to Beethoven's 3rd opus 18 quartet which I hardly know at all.

Today started at 7.00 with a 'morning sir this is your wake up call, would you like me to bring you breakfast' from Surya'. He has a couple of days off so wants to use it well. So I staggered, stiff from my plank bed [the 10pm train to Bangalore has just taken over my room], swept the floor and had a warm (wonderful) bucket bath. The day looks disappointingly cloudy. At 7.40 Surya appeared with The Hindu special Sunday edition and a tiffin tin with my tiffin in. It was pakoras (bread doughnuts) in thick curry. I generously allowed him 2/3 of it - he had got up at 6.30 especially to make it. My morning tea had just arrived so I felt well looked after. I suddenly realised that I had not coughed so far; usually I start the day with a irritating bout of coughing. It seems to have gone. As usual Surya seems to have become my social secretary. His Ayurvedic doctor friend wants to come and chat he warned me, and he also suggested that I fix a time to visit Rajasekhar's house, avoiding the possibility of arranging to visit and then cancelling after his mother has prepared something special for me. Imran had told me on the phone last night that he intended to come today from Chittoor with young Gopi to say goodbye. I tried to persuade him to only come by bus but he seemed adamant that they would come by motorbike, as the bus was boring. The doctor soon phoned to say that he was coming that morning, so we fixed 10 O'clock as suitable. Surya left on his rickety old lady's bike at 9 and 2 minutes later Raja turned up to fix that I visit his new house on the outskirts of Tirupati this evening, then sat on the bed and discussed yet again whether or not it would be a good idea to get his cousin to 'fix' a visa for him for UK, so that he could get some job like petrol pump attendant etc to make enough money to live in London. I tried to describe what it would be like and I think I have convinced him that he would do better to get more professional experience here first and then to travel, getting a better job. As the 'doctor' friend was coming at 10, Raja left but the man did not come (I was pleased but baffled). This gave me a nice chance to sit in the occasional sun in the garden reading the Sunday newspaper. One section is 'Classifieds'. It includes 3 full sides off adverts for grooms and brides:

'Alliance invited for slim beautiful girl, law graduate with good family background, from decently employed graduate, goodlooking bachelor boy, caste no bar'.

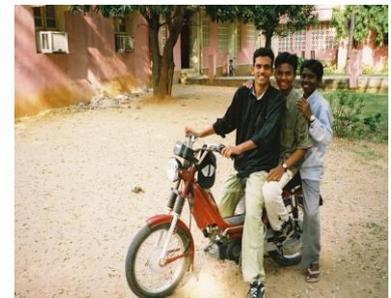
Vanniyalulakshatriya parents from educated decent family seek alliance from decent well educated cultured professionals for their daughter doing MS. Computer literate talented with various interests capable and dynamic other castes also considered; reply horoscope, biodata.

Alliance sought for pretty smart girl employed, 46 looks younger. Grooms family must have decent habits.

At about 11.15 Imran phoned to say that he was very sorry but they had not got sufficient petrol to come here and so had turned back after a few miles. 'Don't worry dear Chris, I will definitely get there to have some more beautiful time with you before your tragic departure'. Disappointing - as I had no other plans. Ten minutes later up came a motorbike driven by Imran, wearing a baseball cap and carrying Mahdu (just picked up in Tirupati) and an excited Gopi. They were all immaculately dressed and had survived the journey very well. I never did quite grasp why he had phoned to say he was not coming. After about an hour Mahdu and Imran drove off to see a friend for 10 minutes leaving me to talk with Gopi who was very shy but wanted to talk to me. He had earlier told Imran that they were all like little stones at the foot of the mountain (me). He obviously deserved some effort on my part so I did the usual family photos etc and he gradually got brave enough to talk. He is only 15 (and quite young for his age) but is in the same college class as Imran and Mahdu. He agreed shyly that he must be quite clever. The ten minute trip by Imran and Mahdu took 90 minutes so we ran out of things to talk about and I fell asleep.



After their return we walked down to the auto place and caught one into town by the station to go to the Bhimas hotel as they wanted non-veg lunch. It was crowded and I was told we must wait five minutes. 'Is that Indian or UK time?' 'sorry sir it is Indian time it will take 15 minutes'. We then found that it was a veg restaurant anyway so decided not to wait and walked to the 'Pure veg' Kalyan residency yet again and had a nice lunch, although they said the portions were too small, but they were perfect for me. The staff are always very welcoming so I feel very much at home there, and I was impressed how the boys soon relaxed into the place as if they owned it. The taps in the handwash sinks at the end of the restaurant near us were activated automatically which led to fits of giggles from Gopi and started the whole lunch time on a very happy note. They were great company, unaccustomed to western forks etc and getting the most out of every little oddity. It was 3.30 by the time we were autoed back to the guest house, with Imran getting very sentimental on the way, competing with the other two over who will miss me more (very difficult to deal with in a quantitative manner). 'What are quantitative manners sir?'. I was desperate to just collapse and read or sleep after the boys left, so was sorry to see 2 people waiting on the steps of my veranda as we drove up in the auto, but it was Sudarshan who I am always happy to see, with an old college friend come to meet me. I put them outside with the Imran, Mahdu and Gopi, calling them in one by one for gentle sentimental goodbyes. Then of course the anaesthetic of farewell photos, all together taken by Sudarshan, although I found later that he cannot have pressed the shutter, and then the three on the bike.

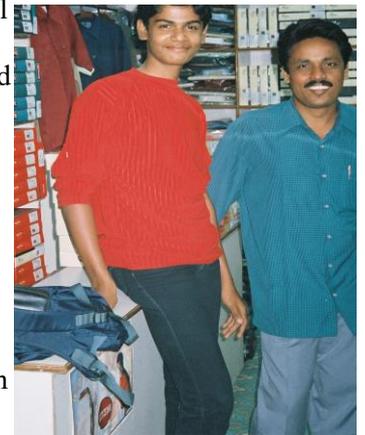


After the boys had gone off on the bike the younger cook lady turned up with three little plastic glasses of tea plus a tin of extra tea for me. The heat was stifling as the breeze had dropped so we sat outside and I had to be entertaining for Sudarshan's friend, Shastri Prasad. Always considerate, Sudarshan whispered to Shastri one of the Telugu phrases that I recognise: I think perhaps we should go now. So they did, leaving me an hour to sit and read as the evening started to cool down. By the time Raja came to collect me to go to his mother's for dinner I was fast asleep over my book. 'Trumpet' by Jackie Kay (wonderful, so I am having to ration myself). We drove through the happy Sunday evening around the edge of Tirupati on Raja's brother's motorbike, Raja being unusually skilful in avoiding road holes, dogs, cows, autos, rocks, etc etc. His house has been 'built' by his father during his first year of retirement, on the edge of Tirupati, but that won't last long at the rate that new buildings are going up. Had very spicy mutton with chapattis (only one and a half, 'I hope they are OK'). Fortunately Raja has learned that when I say Charlu I mean charlu (enough) and he doesn't bully or embarrass me into eating too much. We spent most of the evening watching the first half of the football, Southampton playing Spurs (0 - 0 at half time). I was sorry they lived so far out so I could not do as requested by Raja's very beautiful mother and come to visit at any time. This was after Raja had worked hard to lure her out of the kitchen for me to say thank you and goodbye. Raja drove me safely home and returned immediately as he is worried that his mother is not very sensible and would open the door to any thief, apparently a real threat if you live in an isolated house on the very edge of town. So this gave me an chance to sit and listen to Bach violin music while writing this. Imran has just phoned to say that they got back safely "so now you will remember me and be thankful that I am still alive isn't it", so now Time for bed so good night.

Monday 28th. I seem to have missed this day out so am struggling to remember it. I am writing on Wednesday in the shade in the garden after my morning lecture while waiting for Imran to come from Chittoor. I do remember that in the evening I had an enjoyable stroll down the town to meet C. Sudarshan ('Previous year' ie First year student) to go to Surya's house for eating (not dinner). I had arranged to meet him in the ticket hall of the

railway station, a bit like a refugee staging post with bundles of grannies sleeping in rags, old Sadhus - wandering holy men, with lots of orange and yellow and tins for people to put money and food in, bald children and their frightened parents. On the way I bumped into Shastrikumar [I later learned his name] from Surya Fashions, who told me he is in second year intermediate (so aged about 17) studying physics and maths which was difficult as he had studied in a Telugu medium school. 'Please teach me English sir'; OK if you teach me Telugu but you have only 2 days. 'OK sir I will come to guest house on Wednesday at 5.30'. His idea of fashion this evening looked very uncomfortable in the heat and humidity, a thick scarlet T shirt and very tight black jeans so that he looked like a misplaced matador. He reminded me a little of Imran when I first met him, slightly agitated that here is an opportunity not to be missed of being friends with a foreigner, and becoming instantly possessive and responsible for my wellbeing. Three times in our short conversation he unnecessarily pulled me out of the way of slowly approaching ox carts or cycle rickshaws, then holding me protectively. As a result of this encounter I was 5 minutes late for Sudarshan who looked so relieved as he dodged between the corpses on the floor of the station ticket hall while staving off two begging leper victims. "I was so scared you had some problem sir, sorry, Chris sir, and could not come". Surya had prepared dinner of veg fried rice and some special veg dish which was too mild even for me and a very salty dahl. He and Sudarshan had a typical very quiet conversation in Telugu which later led Surya to say he thought that Sudarshan was a very good person, without telling me the actual criteria, and Sudarshan to say later that Surya is a very calm person which in his eyes is extremely good. So that's good then. Sudarshan lives in TK road off the Ghandi road but insisted on coming back in the auto to the guest house which waited for our 10 minutes chat before driving him off home again.

Tuesday 29th. I woke at 4 this morning and couldn't sleep again until about 6.30, then was woken by Surya calling at about 7 from the hotel to say hello - he was just off home to bed. My chai appeared at 7.15 so had breakfast of shortbread biscuits and sweet tea. For the first time for some days it was clearly going to be a sunny day so I had a rare walk, helped by me remembering that we had arranged for my morning lecture to be at ten instead of 9.30. I explored further along the route found at the end of my trip last year. This was amongst the paths around the Veterinary college buildings. These cover a large area of open woodland with a large variety of large trees. I had noticed on a short walk two days earlier that the buildings seemed unoccupied and it was rather like an abandoned hospital: Short treatment rooms; Clinicall (!) medicine; Radiology; Bacteriology; Ruminant operating theatre; All India Pig project. It was a glorious morning and the birds actually came out of hiding for a change: Little green bee eater; White fronted (turquoise jewelled back) kingfisher; small owls; Drongos; kites; jungle crows; house crows; mynahs; palm swift; swallows; sunbirds; and best of all a beautiful scarlet and black little minivet. My walk was about 2 hours and I had just enough time to recover before going off for my lecture - on my research work. I finished on time and was scooted off in the very hot sun down to the internet café where, as Surya so eloquently put it, the bytes are coming better today sir. I had 87 new messages so I decided to stay until I had deleted or read or replied to as many as possible but there was a power cut at 1.00 so I was forced to give up after 2 hours. I caught an auto up to the telephone place and brought 8 little samosas for lunch. This turned out to be unnecessary as the lady cook was there offering me chapattis plus veg (potato and onions and green chillis) which was really good. [I have just eaten the samosas as I somehow forgot to eat any dinner this evening]. After a brief read in the garden shade (Armistead Maupin's *The Night Listener*), Murali came to take me off for the afternoon lecture and scooted me promptly back to the garden where I fell asleep to be woken by the Professor of biochemistry, Parthasarathy and Sai Gopal (Virology lecturer).



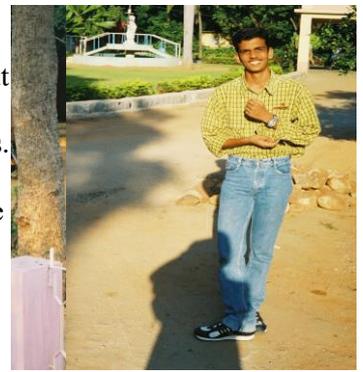
This was for the arranged trip to P's newly built house. So we had a sort of scooter race, P against us. He has all sorts of odd mannerisms including flinging his arms in the air to loosen his shirt I suppose but it does look rather like some sort of rare Gibbon behaviour. On a 200 m stretch of flat road he changed gear more than 30 time so leaping forward ahead of us then zooming back behind. We then admired the house, which was fairly typical and was attractive, with small trees planted in pots all the way round the house including pomegranates and limes. It was apparently built at great cost of granite with marble floors and some walls. The main room was plastered but had soon developed a big crack and the plasterer could not repair it (Like Clive's wall -clearly an International plastering problem). The house was nicely built and then decorated childishly. It had an elegant cut glass chandelier with very dusty unattractive doll and stuffed parrot hanging from it - tied with green string. There was the usual arrangement at one end of a set of indented shelving in the wall for ornaments etc, which were very crude dolls and model gods and plaster monkeys, all covered in thick dust. The television had a large magnifying glass in front of it which meant that only one person could really see it and then horribly distorted; Benny Hill looks distorted enough without that. We then sat inside with Sai Gopal and myself and the silent son on chairs and P sitting in a basketwork 'chair' slung by a heavy chain from a hook in the ceiling. He swung about in this so much that poor Sai Gopal who did



most of the talking was constantly swinging round first left then right in order to keep in contact. P has the mannerism of saying No, no no as his first response to everything (as in Vicar of Dibley). 'Next year sir you must come to biochemistry, not virology'; OK I'll think about it and discuss with you nearer the time (I will certainly not do so; virology/microbiology is so much more efficient and useful). As his response was a nervous loud laugh followed by No no no, I can claim that the threat is over. We ate some sort of sweet closed tart (like Indian Bakewell tart) which was very nice, served with English style tea 'He prefers this sort of tea' ('he' does not). As we got back to the guest house by 6.00 I got Sai Gopal to drive me down to the internet place again. I had made no eating arrangements so decided to plod on and finish. I did not do so as the system became so slow it seized up too often. So at 8 ish I wandered further down Ghandi road among the happy evening shoppers. I had the nice experience of meeting friends like student Subash, some 1st year (previous year!) biochemists and the ayurvedic medicine doctor chatting in Esperanto with the manager outside the Lungi shop; I joined them when they agreed to use English. Just before seeing them I found myself opposite the Surya Fashion shop where I had bought Mahdu's shirt. The young helper [Sashikumar] saw me and came and pulled me in to introduce me to his brother in law. I had my camera so they were snapped in 'work context please'. Sashi reminded me that we had arranged yesterday for him to visit the guest house. I had assumed this was not a real arrangement (I would have been there in case) but he was very definite and got me to draw a map with his friends help and accepted my suggestion that he should come by auto. I dropped in, for the first time to E block in the student hostels, set in the dark, amongst Eucalyptus trees, their courtyards, filled with a few big trees being echo chambers for flocks of roosting mynahs, related to starlings and making a similar deafening noise. I had collected a library studies student at the gate to direct me to E-block and he delivered me to Subarsh's door. He was very interested to know that my son is the librarian at Southampton University Hospital (some very slight misunderstanding). He was thanked by the microbiology students (2nd year) who had wanted to spend more time with me as I am not lecturing them. Oddly enough Sudarshan (No 1) phoned within a couple of minutes from outside the hostel to ask me if he could come and visit. It was an exhausting 2 hours of entertainment but they are very appreciative. In the middle Imran phoned from Chittoor impersonating young Gopi: 'hello sir this is your new friend Gopi, can I come to visit to morrow?'; 'of course you can Gopi'; 'there is a problem sir because Imran is coming and he may not want me also'; 'why don't you ask him' (this is a very abbreviated version & by this point I had guessed this was Imran playing some game or testing me); 'I am sure that Imran wants to be there with you only'; 'OK Gopi, I would like to see you but if Imran wants to come alone then he must do that because that is what I would like'; 'Oh Oh thank god cris, thank god, .You know this is Imran speaking, I thought you may prefer Gobi'. I feel this is all a bit like my sister's school girl comics. I am writing this while waiting for Imran; Mahdu just phoned to say he is visiting his sister in Tirupati tomorrow so can he please come and see me!

Wednesday 30th. I woke again too early with a painful right hip, followed by hip replacement nightmares, age creeping up, double vision worries but still I must have dozed off as I was woken by the lady cook with tea and an invitation to breakfast at 7.30. When I mimed 'is it puris and are you the cook?' I got very big smiles and so had an excellent breakfast, after burning my fingers on the hot fat of the inflated puris. I then set out for a sunny walk to the same place in the Vet college grounds as previous but after 5 minutes was stopped by a little (10-13 yrs) boy with a petition asking for financial support, saying he is deaf and dumb and that his mother was ill having given birth to a deformed child (2 heads!) etc. I only had 12 rupees change which I gave him. The petition had columns for recording names and amounts given, usually 10-20 rupees. I felt a bit mean and after a few minutes followed him towards the guest house to give him a little more. Thoughtlessly I called out quietly to him to come back and from 20 yards away he heard this and turned round. I then indicated that his ears were working so he stuck out his tongue and pointed to the word mute (odd as he was also described as illiterate but was carrying a school textbook). When I indicated that he should come into the guest house grounds so that I could get some money he looked terrified and went belting up the road to some other older boys. I assume it was all some con trick, as the students later suggested. Within 5 minutes wandering beneath the trees I saw a tree-pie, for the first time this year; a beautiful magpie sized bird with very elegant gray and chestnut colouring. Then in the same tree a golden oriole which my book says is really a northern bird but may winter in the south so I guess it must be winter here. Remarkably, within a few yards the flickering flames high up in the tree turned into the same minivets as I saw yesterday, the most beautiful Indian bird. I have struggled to come up with some suitable joke about the mini-Vets in the Vet college grounds but as you see I have failed. Good start to the day, a good breakfast and minivets. Imran had phoned to say that he was coming on a borrowed friends bike at about 11.30. He didn't come until much later so I had a nice relaxed sorting out of work on the computer sitting in the garden with warm wind wafting (etc) until he phoned at lunch time to say he had just left Chittoor by bus. I had fortunately cancelled my afternoon lecture as I had finished all my scheduled stuff and wanted to have the informal chat on my final morning. I had a good lunch and continued in the garden until woken from sleep at 3 o'clock by a gentle Imran, relieved that I was still there. 'So Chris, what are you giving your devoted friend and weary traveller for his lunch'. I didn't want to spend too much time going into town hunting for food so persuaded him that we should walk the 1km to the phone booth/tea stand for samosas which was successful. I had only eaten their samosas after they had cooled all day and half the night when they were ok as emergency rations; when fresh they were excellent. As soon as we returned Imran wanted to edit the front page on my computer and the screen saver. As he was being a bit sorry about me leaving I made the mistake of allowing this. Screen saver became a flying banner that said 'Remember to email Imran at

imranbabu_2002@hotmail.com. Something he did confused my system as I found out in Mahabalipuram. All icons needed about 4 clicks to open and the Accessories icons would not respond at all. This included the 'System' icon so I could not correct errors. Surya eventually half succeeded. [I have just realised while writing this at 5.30 in the morning the day after I returned] that this was perhaps why Imran was so keen for me to tell him on the phone (he phoned the hotel in M) whether I was annoyed with him about the computer - I was not as I had not seen the problem then. I have a cutting from The Hindu to send him, about clamping down on Cybercrime.



We then spent the rest of the afternoon swearing eternal friendship etc - the usual sad/sweet stuff with him feeling that a friend is leaving him and me with the background comfort of knowing I would soon be back in my nice home. He kept reminding me 'you see chris I am going back to my house where my father lectures me and my work is dull but you are returning to your family, isn't it chris, and all those friends who will be better than Imran'. 'Imran, they will not make me forget you'; 'don't say that chris, you must not even think of forgetting me'. Etc Etc. I certainly won't forget him as I expect he will email me everyday to complain that I am not writing to him. I can't help feeling a bit sad as I expect that all his warmth, enthusiasm, good intentions and quick wit will be worn down by the usual difficulty of getting jobs etc. At the end of the afternoon he went very serious and asked if he could ask a favour; 'please do not be angry and you can always say no, isn't it chris, but I think you will say yes because you like me when I am happy, I think'. 'Ok, Imran, you can ask anything and I can refuse anything'. 'Please chris give me credit of 1000 rupees (£14) for this year'. 'I prefer to give money to friends and not be a bank'. 'No chris, dear, you must forget this immediately, I will go to my father or to my uncle'. Of course, I lent him this. He then regretted it because it made him the same as others who want to be friends just for me to help them (Mahdu's brother). I told him that by him coming three times to visit me he had saved me three lots of 1000 rupees needed for the car plus hotel. So he was comforted until he remembered that he had to leave in 20 minutes. I stood firm as an English rock while he hung on tearfully 'I want you to see me happy, isn't it chris, not stupid like this'. When I said that I was grateful that he cared so much he rushed off wiping his eyes into the 'bathroom'. The doorbell then rang an end to everything as Sashikumar from Surya Fashions (photop) appeared with his friend to visit. I sat them down on the veranda and went in for final farewell to dear Imran. To hide his damp face he rushed out past the boys on the veranda to the guest house grounds and round the corner to go home, still looking very upset. I waited a few minutes then ran off after him to wave wildly and jump up and down to be rewarded by similar waves and his happy distant smile. He phoned half an hour later from the bus stand to tell me that he had been standing round the corner 'praying to god that you will come and wave goodbye - so you see chris there is a God isn't it'; 'yes my dear Imran there is and I am sure he will look after us both'. Then his 'don't forget your loving Imran' etc were drowned by blaring buses as he rang off to get the bus for the two and a half hour noisy dirty bumpy trip back to Chittoor. [If you read this then I must have decided to leave this in, even though really written for my private memories of 'my most special friend in India 2002' - 'thank god, thank god and of course thank you too my dear chris isn't it'.]

I then was protected from a surfeit of sadness by having to do my picture show of family and friends to Seshikumar and his friend, neither of whom spoke much joined up English. As they went off Seshi came back in, furtively closing the door and coming up to give me a big hug, asking if he could come the next day for five minutes only to give me a small present; 'of course come at about the same time but give me a call first so you don't waste your time'; 'don't worry, I would come, I would come'.

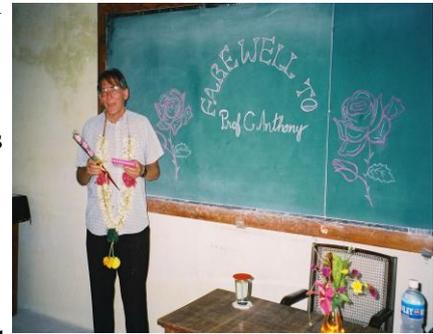
Then to Surya's to dinner (uninvited drop in) where Sudarshan (Previous but newest) also dropped in (I assume I must have suggested this). I think he had eaten but the 'rules' meant that he had to have something with us. He and Surya get on well together, gently murmuring in Telugu in the background while I watch BBC World news. Sudarshan wanted to know why the English taught everyone to play games but always lost them; I must remember to gloat over our win at cricket against India at Mumbai the next day. He is apparently very good at cricket. When Vinod's young brother drifted in, just to see me I think, I said how attractive it is that people share their houses like this in India. Apparently not the case in Sudarshan's family. They (the father really) are strict Brahmins and keep themselves to themselves. I asked Surya how they (also Brahmins) are different but he just giggled and said they are a bit advanced and 'dummy' Brahmins. I left with Sudarshan at about 9.30; he had his bike so that he could hurry home. When I invited him at Surya's suggestion to join us the next night for farewell dinner he said he couldn't because was expected to be home before 9.0. He was out this evening late because he had told his father he had some special errand (ordering my garlands for the next day). I have come across this before that the sons of strict families, while showing their fathers great respect and always behaving properly, are almost forced to tell lies regularly to avoid hurting them. So we arranged that Sudarshan would return to the Guest house the next day after the farewell function to say a personal goodbye. He then went hurtling off down the road on his bike toward the station, weaving about amongst the late night bewildered pilgrims and oxcarts and homegoing rickshaws, leaving me to negotiate my 25 rupee trip back to the guest house.

Thursday 31st Jan. [I am writing this at 7.20 in the morning in the Golden Sun Beach Resort in Mahabalipuram (new name Mammalapuram) south of Chennai in an uncomfortable wicker chair on a gray morning with the sound of crows and the surf. My first task was to try to change the computer settings left by Imran - the general background of a picture of him is OK but he has fixed it so that the screen saver cuts in after 30

seconds with a message to remember to email Imran. He seems to have disabled the Display settings window so I cannot change it].

This is my last full day, so of course it started rather cloudy, but having woken early I rejected breakfast, replacing it with a shortbread biscuit and tea and went for another walk in the Veterinary college grounds and beyond. There was a comforting warm wind and I realised that perhaps I really am going native and think that a good day is when the sun is not so hot. I had another good view of a Golden Oriole and as I walked down the railtrack saw a bird I have not seen for a few years, a pied crested cuckoo which is a black and white cuckoo with a crest but more exciting than that. Flitting about in the bottom of some thorn bushes I saw a small flock of very small brown birds which I failed to locate after first sight; I thought that the most remarkable thing about them was the fact that they formed a group, which is rare in that sort of bird, but I doubted if it would be mentioned in the bird books. The Collins Birds of India (my small bird book) identified them immediately as Quaker Babbler, *Alcippe poioicephala*, 'usually found in small groups' so there we are. Later I looked in the definitive guide (the pocket field version and find there the same bird is called the Brown cheeked Fulvetta, resident in Hills of India and Bangladesh. Odd that, as it has no brown cheeks. The map section in the same book showed it to occur throughout India but not in the Northern hilly parts or Bangladesh; so I will have to wait till I get home to resolve this with the large full version. There you are, dear readers, I thought you would like me to share all that with you. [Cardomom tea has just arrived so will pause].

This morning's lecture was replaced by a chat session, similar to one that I did last year. A lot of the time I spent discussing the ideal characteristics of their future wives/husbands. When I asked the ladies (not girls sir) if any of the gents (not boys) were handsome enough they said 'none of them sir'; the equivalent question to the boys was answered more graciously 'all of them sir'. The girls gradually became more animated and it reminded me of last year when I resolved to get to know them better earlier on. My resolve was squashed early this year by their almost complete silence when I tried to talk with them. In the afternoon they claimed that this was a trick so that I would return next year to teach them as senior students and be especially friendly with them. As I entered the building in the morning one of them (Preena Prabahakar) came running up with a large autograph book, which was in fact a set of questionnaires: who do you have a crush on at the moment? who is your favourite boy? (Sudarshan); who is your favourite girl (yourself of course); your ambition (too late). Two pages of this which I promised to complete by the afternoon. I did so but omitting some questions. Murali scooted me back to the guest house where Mahdu from Chittoor was sitting outside waiting, wearing his nice new grey shirt and black jeans, brought together in Surya Fashions near Ghandi Road last week. He had phoned to say that he might come but I was uncertain. It was a short visit, starting with excellent lunch by the cook (I had given her her tip earlier) and a long slightly sorrowful chat with his slightly husky 'thank you sir' and 'no need sir' which he seems to say when at a loss for any other response. He is usually very playful, teasing my funny way of saying things and responding to any suggestions with 'your wish is my command'. He had come for this one last visit so that 'I would know that he would be missing me'. His excuse to his father (to miss classes or tuition) was that he was visiting his sister in Tirupati so off he went off by bus, after the usual quick embrace and a last quick stroke of 'my beautiful hair', and I was collected by Murali for my afternoon farewell function.



Poor nervous and sad Sudarshan had made me promise that I would not single him out in any way, requesting farewell speeches or songs etc, but his friends had insisted that he act as the MC or, as they called it, the anchorman. I was ushered into the lecture theatre to find a highly decorated blackboard with Farewell to Professor Chris Anthony. [Surya has just waddled in, in his towel having had a massage and sauna]. Prof Sreenivasulu did his usual controlling stuff and interrupted immediately so that Sudarshan's programme plan was spoilt. He wanted a few prayer songs first before the 'Special Guest our dear beloved professor Chris Anthony garu' was invited to the seat at the front but Srinivasulu made me go there first. So we had only one sweet little murmuring prayer song from two of the girls, sounding like robins gently singing from deep in an autumn bush. Then speeches, including a short personal impromptu one by Sudarshan who promptly sat down at the end wiping his glasses, while I sat there gulping and hiding behind his bulky garland of jasmine and red flowers and associated insects. One of the seniors, a friend called Sateesh, then made the same speech as last year and a few of the girls added theirs. It was all referring to the great scientist Guru Chris Anthony, who continued to hide amongst his flowers. Sreenivasulu made a short speech of thanks, telling them how well I knew Tirupati and its people and restaurants and hotels and asking me to take the best wishes of staff and students to my lucky students in Southampton. [Daft as that might seem, I was able to do that to the first year class in my lecture the first week back]. One of the girls then presented me with a small nicely wrapped parcel "we are sorry it is so small"; I unwrapped it and, surprise, it was two CDs of classical Indian music, chosen by Sudarshan. A recital of an instrument like a hungarian cembalon and a recital by the male singer Balamuralikrishna. Then I had to do my 'final words of wit and wisdom, giving us guidance'. I explained this was rather a tall order as I was not familiar with their traditions etc but managed to blather on a bit about not changing to become like the corrupt or lazy people they despised etc. Sudarshan sat there pointing his encouraging smile at me while Subash sat behind him

wiping his eyes occasionally. When I paused briefly and looked out of the wide open window towards the red hills, one of the girls leaned forward and whispered 'please go on sir, we are hanging on your words'. How could I avoid accepting their final formal request that I return next year?

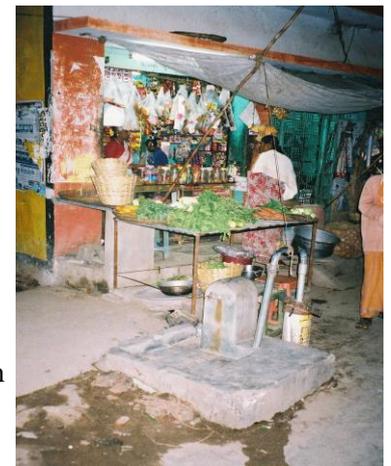


When the speeches were done the boys served dry biscuits and then little plastic glasses of sweet tea, which I have only just learned from Surya is called complete tea (made with spices and sugar and cardamom boiled in the milk). They all sat at their desks rather formally drinking this so as soon as Sreenivasulu and Sai Gopal had finished I suggested they go to do their work and I would call in on them later, so that I could be more informal with the students and I could take photos and dispose of my garland. Having failed to put it over the head of my favourite of the girls, they all took turns to put it back on me, until they accepted the idea of hanging it up in their hostel to remind them of me, 'but this is not necessary sir we always think of you'. The girls looked so nice so I shepherded them outside to take more photos, some including me with the little tea boy who looked frightened of everyone, including the nicest of the students who seemed to treat him without any kindness. I asked his name, Mahdu, and then his father's name and that made me an ally, ensuring that I received 'more chai' every few minutes. The students then treated him much more kindly and included him in one of the photos. I then wanted to drift away with a final walk through the University grounds back to the guest house but this was thwarted by Sreenivasulu, uncharacteristically insisting that Murali would drive me. So I said my last farewells and agreed that all the girls must come next morning to say goodbye at least 45 minutes before leaving so that I could spend more time with them. All this negotiation went on, as usual in the outside corridor on the second floor with its wonderful view of the hills and the rest of the university. Sudarshan then came up to apologise that he would not be there to say goodbye in the morning, the reason being 'personal', and he would come 'with me only' at 5 o'clock today. As we stood looking out at the hills an Indian roller flew off its nearby perch, turning from a dull dumpy brown bird into a glorious blue winged wonder. He did turn up at about 5 pm, and explained that he didn't want the professor spoiling his goodbye which would happen if he came in the morning. So we had a final sad chat, with my new recording of the Indian singer in the background, before he walked across the road to catch the high rusty roaring town bus back home.

As soon as he had gone there was a ring at the door and SashiKumar of Surya Fashions appeared wearing new boots like climbing boots which took 3 minutes to get off before he could come in. He had come to bring me a farewell gift but had forgotten it (I think it was always a virtual gift). His English is poor but it was enough to follow my comments on all my photos of family, friends, holidays etc on my computer. He is rather vain and kept inviting me to admire his hair, arm muscle and jeans which I did of course. He made me promise to write to him by email then held me tearfully, jumping away like a young stag when the doorbell blasted, wiping his eyes. It was his friend from the previous day, arriving with a gift of the usual calender of Sri Venkateshwara. I got him to stay outside on the veranda while Sashi said yet another sad goodbye, a little exaggerated in his drama as we had only met a few times. He helped himself to a cheap pen, that another student had left by accident, as a gift from me. I offered him a much nicer one that I had bought at Heathrow for just such an eventuality but he rejected it as 'it will be stolen'. He then gave me a terrifying bike ride on his new Yamaha 'a present from his father when he died last year'. He was probably a good driver but he enjoyed the acceleration and good braking too much as we hurtled down little streets crowded with autos, rickshaws, babies, goats, oxcarts etc. It was such a relief to stop at the station, where I jumped off, only to have him, still mounted on the bike, giving me a rather dangerous hug with his left arm clinging tightly, his face buried in my shoulder and his right hand revving up furiously.

[I must stop this now and start my final packing]. [Starting again at two in the morning in Chennai airport].

After parting from the still waving Sheshi, I walked with my usual sadness through the crowds, in the dark and dirt past the station to the train crossing leading to Surya's house. There was a train parked right across it causing great confusion of people with bundles, bikes or scooters. Some did the obvious thing and climbed up into the train, all the doors being permanently open, and out the other side. When it started to move off there was one rather overweight



lady who had been sitting on the step ready to make the frightening leap to the ground now stranded waving feebly to the old man she was with who had made it to the ground first. It stopped after about a minute so I assume she got off OK. Of course when the last carriage cleared the crossing area the crush from one side met the crush from the other, all this in darkness except for signal lights and small lamps on the fruit vendors stalls that are piled up where people have to wait for the chance to dive under the bar. The ground is uneven with rocks, holes, discarded railway debris, animal crap and the air is full of dust, sweat and worse. As I crept under the bar and stood up in this mobile chaos and looked down the line into Tirupati station I felt so sad to be leaving and so much love and pity for all the struggling lives. Of course this noble sentiment didn't last long as I was rudely bumped into by a young buffalo and nearly dropped my camera. As I walked up the road past the rickshaws, tea stalls, groups of evening chatters, limping beggars, cows, pigs and aggressive crows someone grabbed my arm and pointed back the way I had come, shouting in loud Telugu at me. He seemed very concerned and pulled me back down the road where I found the steward of the University guest house, Naidu, a big man with a bad hip who only ever acknowledges me when there are important people around (that is politicians), when he makes a great fuss of me. Anyway, he wanted to show me the liquor shop and the lodging house above it that he owns. He started to invite me in so that 'I can offer you a drink' I imagined it was going to be some nice wine but it was coffee so I declined and continued to Surya's, taking a picture on the way of a gang of little boys crouching on the pavement next to a typical rusty tea urn. Raja soon turned up to say goodbye and we all had a nice dinner of rice and veggies followed by spicy tea. On the way down the little alley to the house I had met a gang of boys including Krishna (?) the younger brother of Vinod who I had met a few days previously; he immediately grabbed my hand to take me into his house but I was sorry to have to continue as planned to Surya's. The two boys came round a little later to say goodbye and have their photos taken, before I said goodbye to Surya's mum who had practised 'please come again next year with your family' which was delivered in a hurry before she collapsed into giggles. Surya was very sleepy and had to be woken every few minutes. Off I went in the auto to home waving goodbye to Raja. I was looking forward to collapsing exhausted back at the guest house but as I was paying the driver the mobile phone went; it was Sudarshan (from last year) who wanted to come to say goodbye which he did, although our conversation was interrupted by the third call that evening from Imran "I have full phoning rights for the last days of my friend, isn't it Chris dear". Sudarshan is in the middle of his important Virology exams and by next year he will be gone to Bangalore or AIIMS in New Delhi. Don't worry, I will email and then I will visit when you come next. He then promised without prompting to look after 'this year's Sudarshan' as 'your friend is my friend sir'.

Friday 1st Feb. I woke too early at six o'clock at the hooting crescendo of my last early morning train. I went out in my boxer shorts to greet the early gray morning, stretching and waving on my veranda to the distant hills where the god lives, to be embarrassed by a fat man in a short towel doing the same thing but in a more devotional spirit on the adjacent veranda. We both swung round into an impromptu Namaste, before retreating indoors to sweep the room and shave to the sound of him continuing his devotions with a lot of coughing, hawking and spitting. I had more or less packed by 8.00 so went across to have a nice sweet rice and curry breakfast. A few minutes later all the girls (ladies sir) appeared, waving and saris blowing in the wind across the forecourt area. I dashed inside, they thinking I was trying to escape, to get my camera for a nice picture. I then did the family picture routine, feeling very sorry not to have got to know them better. We were there for 45 minutes before Prof Srinivassulu scooted up, throwing the girls into a twittering panic. He considerately sat himself down outside to leave them to carry on with me but they couldn't cope with that and tried to get him to come in and join us. This failed so they said their formal goodbyes, sealed with more photos, and drifted in the wind across the forecourt waving and calling please come back please come back.. Sai Gopal, the lecturer, then arrived with a brand new leather bound visitors book for me to sign as the first visitor. At ten exactly my big white Ambassador lumbered up with Surya and Raja. They had met up at about 9.30 but had rejected the idea of coming immediately as they didn't want me to put them on one side while I said goodbye to others. I sent the Virology staff away on their scooters and off we went.

As we drove out I realised that I had not said goodbye to Nagaraju or Kiran. Nagaraju was always very busy and Kiran was not so welcome as previously as there was always his irritating hope lurking in the background of me handing over £800 to solve his financial problems. As I expected, none of the boys turned up (the rank and file never come) and Sudarshan could not face it, having said our private goodbyes the day before.

It was an excellent day for travelling with grey skies and a breeze. We lumbered, hooting, around the outskirts of Tirupati, dropping Raja off near his home outside Bairaggi Patteda. Then on the country road to avoid Renigunta for our 5 hour journey to Mahabalipuram. The first half is the best of rural India with villages, palm trees, paddy fields and rice being winnowed on the road, using us to crush the straw, and the wind to do its willowing. The windows of the car could all be wide open so we soaked up the country smells, saw the birds, waved to the children and hoped that Libby could see it all next time. Surya had been on night duty so was soon heavily asleep, the weight being mainly on me. We had left early enough to avoid having an unpleasant lunch stop and arrived in Mahabalipuram on the coast at the Golden Sun Beach Resort at about three in the afternoon. We had almost the same room as last year, looking out through the pink and purple Bourgainvillea over the pool to the crashing sea, under heavy gray skies full of windswept complaining crows. I must have reached some sort of maturity as I had very little disappointment over the weather. We went to the restaurant, opening at the side and front onto a small garden and the beach and had excellent lunch of prawn curry and veg fried rice with beer ('one

bottle, two glasses'). We then sat under a sort of banana leaf thatch shelter on the beach and read. I have saved Malcolm Bradbury's last novel, 'To the Hermitage' for this time; it is superb. Surya decided to read my book of reporter's accounts by John Simpson of the BBC (he has often seen a programme by Simpson on BBC world Service). We had a very enjoyable 2 hours with reading being punctuated by long discussions of the meaning of words and phrases. It took at least 20 minutes to persuade him of the meaning of 'Since 1966 John has worked at the BBC'. I have found a reason for the rather odd English usage in some journalists writing in India. Apparently they all use Microsoft Word. After a debate about the meaning of 'several' (= more than a few but not very many), which Surya thought could mean a large number he quoted the 'dictionary in Word'. I then found it is a thesaurus and not a dictionary so its 'meanings' are similar relevant expressions and not definitions.

We dutifully staggered up the beach into the wind towards Chennai but soon returned, beaten by the wind into submission. In the evening we drove in the 3km to Mahabalipuram where I had the usual nasty shock of ceasing to be the only non-Indian, the other of 'you people' (as Imran calls us) being backpackers earnestly chatting with the staff outside the many shops of Afghan art, sculpture, Kashmiri clothes etc. I wanted a nice open air restaurant that sold fish but this proved difficult. We eventually went to one that we had previously used, The Tina Blue Moon, up some rickety stairs to a bamboo sided area open to the wind and nice and relaxed atmosphere. Half way up the steps we were called back by someone in the courtyard and directed up some other steps opposite to a similar place which certainly seemed more open. Having ordered beer and food, nothing happened for 20 minutes so Surya stood up and talked with the only staff person there, then led me out, down the stairs and up the others into an empty restaurant at the top. They seemed to be sharing staff and some facilities. Surya thought that they were not really expecting customers (business has been bad this year) so didn't know what to do with us. They immediately brought the very welcome beer and soon I had a very good fried fish while Surya had his usual veg fried rice and paneer. The bill was a little under £2. They didn't have a menu or anything else so we drifted through the town to the most expensive outdoor veg restaurant to have huge icecreams called passionate surprise and from Russia with love, while the waiters put the restaurant to bed, whirling tables on outstretched arms over our heads to pack them away.

When we returned we found we had missed a telephone call from Imran. He has emailed since to tell me that he was so sad to miss me but was then pleased because if I sounded happy he would think I did not care that I was leaving India (him I guess he really meant) but if I was sad then he would also be sad so he stopped trying.

Saturday 2nd Feb. My flight is at 4.40 am on Sunday. Previously we have packed, checked out at 2.00 pm and then loitered about the hotel and returned to an expensive hotel to eat in Chennai before the sad drive to the airport. This year I decided an important luxury would be to pay for 2 nights in Mahabalipuram (an extra £14) and go straight to the airport. This made the whole of the last day very relaxed and much better. We awoke to a windy stormy day with fast black clouds and gusts of light rain. Not as bad as it sounds as it was all warm. Our excellent breakfast was in the open sided restaurant, Puri massala and coffee. I tried to write my diary later only to find that Imran had done some silly thing to the computer which took Surya about 90 minutes to half resolve. We were hoping he would try to phone again but he never did try again [he later told me that he had had a terrible time trying to get through but the receptionist/operator only spoke tamil. We were put off our usual long walk along the beach to the beach restaurant by the stormy sea whose spray almost hid distant Mahabalipuram from view and the strong winds so decided to have fish in our own hotel restaurant. Fish was off as there had been no fishing the previous day or night. So my young fisherman friend Tamil had been spared the danger of the rough sea so I couldn't complain and had rather dull chicken curry. The restaurant is made more lively by the grey headed house crows which swoop in from the beach onto the tables as soon as the waiters turn their backs; we had another scene from Hitchcock's The Birds, with 12 crows perched menacingly on and under adjacent tables beadily eyeing our debris.

We shared the restaurant with a group of youngish Indians who we guessed were down for the day from Chennai. I later confirmed this when Surya wandered off for a massage and sauna (!) and one of the boys (Danny Abraham) came and sat by me as I was reading in the beach shelter. He went through the usual questions and explained that he hoped to come to the UK soon to visit relatives. His friends then came up and argued with him in Tamil; he explained that they wanted to go back but he wanted to stay and talk with his new friend with the beautiful hair (so there). We spent the afternoon sorting out finances, sleeping, transferring unneeded heavy items from my baggage to Surya, including batteries, sun tan lotion, moisturising cream, shampoo, John Simpson's book, Guide to South India, etc. This stressful activity was made so much nicer by being able to do it at leisure with the open door and wide open windows allowing in the surf and wind and crows. At eight we trundled into town to phone home and to eat at our usual beach restaurant, having calculated how to reach it down one of the little residential side roads. I was half hoping to meet Tamil there as he had told me he lived near the restaurant but no luck. What was a very attractive open sided restaurant, The Luna Magica, luring us up from the beach during sunny lunch times was rather different on a dark stormy night as we lurched up the beach looking for a port in a storm. The bare white painted wood tables and hard chairs and sand floor were not so attractive somehow but the staff were as good and so was the cooking. No fresh fish so I had fish curry. This was slightly spoilt by arriving as a bowl full of attractive looking slabs of fish in mud brown curry, in which the biggest piece rolled over and seemed to try to heave itself over the side showing a large dull white eye and huge leering mouth. I opted for the tail end which tasted good after I sank the head out of sight to stop its reproving frown. The Kingfisher beer was wonderful.

Then back to a last chat, lying on the beds under the fan until 11.20 when my personal assistant checked us

out and off we went to the airport on the south west of Chennai. The journey was an easy one and a quarter hours drive, delivering me 4 hours before take off time. As we arrived a friend of Surya's joined us - to get a lift back from Chennai to Tirupati. No visitors are allowed inside the airport terminus so we said goodbye and Surya was submerged beneath the crowds packed against the crush barriers waving their last goodbyes. The worst part of the journey home then started: baggage security check; check in (24kg instead of 23kg but no problem, not even glancing at my hand luggage); long wait, writing diary for an hour; immigration queue for nearly an hour; customs queue; security check - open computer please, empty battery from camera, ok put back, looked at my two spare duracell batteries, not allowed so thrown behind onto the floor; ok ok; walked off with his pen, borrowed to prise open the camera battery hatch door; agitated security man shouting across the hall, colleagues grasping their slung guns more aggressively, all rather relieved when all he wanted was his pen back. Another long wait, then boarding. Sat on an aisle seat next to Santosh, going to UK for the first time to study for a year MA in business studies at the 2nd University in Aberdeen. He was nervous and later told me that he was very comforted by the people from the UK he had met who had all been so friendly; I hope it continues. We did the usual email address swap so that he can come and visit some time, an unlikely possibility that he will drop in to Southampton from Aberdeen. I slept for 4 hours at the start, so the journey was not as long as usual. I had a very smooth exit through Heathrow to be met by the chatty Welshman from the car company and a wet and windy drive home to arrive at lunchtime to my lovely family.

So, home again, from my wonderful Tirupati with all its different culture and dear friends to the most important people in my life, my family.