

Tirupati INDIA January 19th – February 21st 2006

Text in italics is written at the time of typing which may be some days after the date of the events.

Photos of main characters are on back page

18th – 20th January. *I am typing this about 3 hours after arriving at the guest house in Tirupati. Imran has gone so has Prof Sreenivasulu and so has Satheesh. I am waiting for Madhu who is on the bus from rajampet. So this visit seems to be starting as the last finished.*

Wednesday 18th January. Set off at 6.10 am after a fairly relaxed preparation. The last event was to start the new CSO rehearsals – Ist two movements of Tchaikovsky's 6th symphony with John Traill.

I felt I hadn't really said a proper goodbye to Hugh, thinking that he might change his mind and come with us to Heathrow. He had just finished 5th in his international Grand Prix race so was too exhausted I guess. Of course as usual it seemed crazy to leave my nice family and come here. Said farewell at Heathrow after nice terminal breakfast with Libby. The flight was completely full but was ok; I had the usual hysterical one year old nearby but survived, watching two films I have saved up for this purpose it seems: the constant gardener and airport.

I am so hungry I have decided to go to meet Madhu at the Kalyan Residency near the bus station so we can eat immediately.

I think I could tell Chennai airport anywhere with closed eyes from the smell or rather the atmosphere – slightly attractive humid and dusty; I gulped it in, grateful to have arrived. The next part of the arrival process went fairly smoothly, lugging two big hand bags plus my duty free bag with newspapers, water, shortbread and sweater across the brightly lit shiny tiled floor like walking on water. While waiting for baggage I changed my money, receiving a manageable bundle of 500 rupee notes – instead of the previous huge stapled brick of 100 rupee notes. I then managed to make a girl cry. I had noticed her as she boarded the plane, looking nervous and boyish like the girl (name ??) in the film about a girl who wanted to be a boy. As she got her bag out of the overhead locker I saw it slip and the corner hit her in the eye. It must have hurt badly but she just stood there motionless for about ten seconds before carrying on. We then found ourselves struggling together at the baggage carousel to get close enough to it to detect our bags. I asked if her eye was ok and she said she had never felt so alone, with no-one to care that she had been attacked by her baggage, and then she had a little cry but was soon cheered up as her bag appeared. She said she was trying to prove she can be independent. She looked very small sweet and brave as she walked with the start of a black eye manoeuvring her trolley through the heaps of huge bags and bundles of ancient guarding grannies all around the carousel. As appears to be the tradition, mine was one of the last bags off. So into the humid night air of Chennai past the 60 yards of waiting friends and waved messages but with no sign of Imran. I was bravely contemplating aborting the mission and going to the Breeze hotel when I saw him some way back in his red England football shirt "O chris professor you look so distinguished even when you are worried"; that's ok then. Our car was a newish modern style Indian car and the driver was excellent. We soon were calling hello hello at the Golden Sun Resort reception desk to wake up the duty man to let us into our room. "Same as last year sir but new television". We were soon asleep and I woke to the sounds of Indian dawn and the breaking waves with sun coming through the window. Up I got and onto the beach only to realise that I had only been asleep for 2 hours. Very little sign of the Tsunami remains – except new paint and plants everywhere. After a later breakfast of masala dosa and sweet tea we flopped about in the pool, overflowed by kites, surrounded by Bourganvillea bushes, watching two white-fronted kingfishers sitting on a bush contemplating us for lunch. In the morning there was a busload of Koreans who had stayed there on a tour and at lunch time there were 18 Germans. I asked one of them on the beach where were they from and she explained they were all grand or great grand children of some famous German missionary; they were touring all the places he had visited to work. The most senior of them had a rich bass voice like Sarastro in The Magic Flute. I slept in the afternoon while Imran went exploring Mahabalipuram, having a wonderful time visiting the light house and going in a small boat to look at the sunken temples. I didn't know this was possible and was envious. He then slept while I walked up the beach further north where there were large numbers of the usual fishing boats most of which had been wrecked in the tsunami. These all had German words written on them. I later felt guilty about my initial response to this when I found they had been donated by a German charity and formed the basis of a successfully revived village. This was all explained to me by a man on crutches who had a smashed hip, crushed in his boat by the tsunami. His English was good for

a fisherman and he explained how he was doing a course so that he could join the police force which is expanding to provide more security with the big increase in tourists; these were coming out of interest created by the tsunami. Some boys came up and told me I had taken film of them last year and demanded I take more. Of course I did and of course I assured them I remembered them. In the evening we ate at one of the beach restaurants with tables of German, French, Italian, English and us. Imran had mutton byriani and complained it was not as good as Hyderabad biryani which is not surprising as that is where it is famous. I had delicious spicy fried fish and chips. Our bottle of sandpiper beer (one between two of us) was wonderful.

Friday 20th January. We started the day with a swim followed by a cold shower – they still have not fixed the heating system. We drove to Tirupati by the direct route through the outskirts of Chennai through Poonamallee and Tiruttani, the one hour of driving through Chennai being extremely unpleasant, noisy, hot and dusty. After a really good lunch (Imran agreed) at the same small wayside restaurant as our lizard restaurant of last year we arrived by 3.30 in T. I was escorted with great enthusiasm to my usual room which they explained had been beautified. Instead of the dark plastic wooden walls throughout, it now has a shiny polished tile floor, white walls and a decorated ceiling. There are two working strip lights and four corner lights set into the ceiling. The new fan is quiet but they must have wired the control wrongly as it will not run slowly. The new AC unit does not seem to have any power but I do not like these things anyway [later found it works perfectly]. The bathroom has a real loo and a new water geyser which provided wonderful hot water at all times. They have even fitted mosquito netting at the windows. A huge improvement except that while decorating the old room the cupboard and tables and chairs were removed and dispersed. So there were just 2 beds plus one armchair. As soon as I arrived I phoned Prof Srinivasulu who answered my summons instantly on his old vesper. Imran then went off to town in our car to get my local phone set up and to buy a broom, a long power extension cable and coat hangers, rushing off after delivering them to catch a night train to visit his sister in Kurnool. He was delighted with his cheap ~chinese MP3 player. I had called Madhu from Mahabalipuram to say I had arrived and he phoned to tell me he was coming by 8 pm by bus from Rajampet. I went down to town to meet him by communal auto; this is a new development this year. They are a little bigger than the usual ones and have two bench seats facing each other. They have some sort of itinery, usually based on the destination of the first person to get in. I was first but picked up six others on the way to Ghandi road. It was only 10 rupees instead of the usual 20 [I was later told it should really have been only 5].

I stopped at Gugula Lunghis run by Surya's Esperanto friend, to be ushered into his little shop and given tea before going onto Surya's old hotel – the Kalyan residency- to wait for Madhu. I had to leap up every few minutes to shake hands with people I had met when visiting the hotel previously. I then fell asleep while reading Ruth Rendell's 13 Steps (a rather grisly crime novel). I was woken by a smiling Madhu, as positive as ever and even thinner. We had a veggy thali then, overfilled, strolled back down Ghandi Road to buy 3 lunghis and 2 bedsheets (total about £5). We returned to G House by auto, collapsed onto our new beds and chatted ourselves to sleep watched over by two fireflies.

Saturday 21st January. I was woken through the night by the usual sounds of Tirupati – the wailing trains and the screaming Koils at sunrise (black noisy cuckoos) finishing with the old lady cook with morning chai and enquiries about bread omelette for breakfast. Madhu declined but I stoically accepted my fate. Prof S collected me at about 9.0 leaving Madhu to visit friends in town and to do some studying. In S's office I caught up on the news, including the news of Prof Naidu's death, including the gruesome details of finding him by smell after two days. After this I bravely wandered into Biochemistry to have yet more chai with mad wild Parthasarathy, Thyagaraju and the other staff. They have given up trying to get me to give lots of lectures and were very pleased that I suggested that I give one special lecture fairly soon so that I can meet the research students and "interact with them". This is a technical expression which should mean discussing biochemistry but with them it usually means being nagged by the staff. I was soon allowed to drift off to wander gently through the campus in very hot sun. This year they have had a lot of rain - the best for ten years so all the reservoirs are full and everywhere is much greener than previously. Before lunch I inspected the gardens at the back of the guest house, irritated by the number of poly bags scattered everywhere. I was interrupted by Murali who used to be one of the guest house servants but is now the Vice-Chancellor's gardener. I could only just recognise the thin smiling Murali I had known as he is now covered in muscle and fat of which he is most proud. We sat smiling and holding hands struggling to find suitable things to say in simple English. I hit the jackpot when I asked if he was married yet. No, but lots of happy giggles as he showed me a picture of his beautiful girlfriend. After a delicious lunch in the guest house I sorted my room. Prof Sreenivasulu arranged for one of

the research students to come and fix a rod between to concrete bits so I can hang my shirts trousers etc. I then got an ex worker from biochemistry department who now works at the guest house to help me commandeered two benches that had been used by the painters [I think they had taken them from one of the other rooms]. He washed these down and then I covered them in newspaper and lungis which I had brought Friday evening. The boy told me "I was Venkataraman but that is gods name I am now Christian with new name" (which I didn't get). He went into the next room and commandeered a small table and then raided the store to provide me with a set of 4 comfortable plastic chairs. So I now have a nice light airy furnished room. I was free at last by about 5.30 to go for a walk round my usual favourite bits. The golden late evening sun lasts only about 30 minutes and is still hot through most of that time. I saw very few birds except for the usual home-going crows. Dinner was alone in what was the Athidi restaurant now the Arana, having chicken biriani complete with eggs [reminded me of Madhu's answer to my question why do you have eggs with chicken biriani but not with mutton biriani – "O Chris muttons don't lay eggs"]. As I came down the stairs from the restaurant out into the hot happy noisy Balaji Colony I was grabbed by 3 final year students whom I had taught last year. They were then joined by 4 more and after lots of questions and answers, neither being understood by either side I think, I decided to use them to help me get some covers for my CDs. Very successful; I now have a very lightweight green fluorescent case for 24 CDs. I will have to get another one. One of the students, the very thin, shy one with a squint insisted on coming back with me to the guest house so that I would not be tricked into paying more than the proper 15 rupees. He was delighted with the prints of the pictures taken last year. I returned here to be in time for Madhu who should have arrived at about 8.30. Fortunately for my diary-writing resolve he has not yet come and it is 9.45 [that probably is about 8.30; I must adapt more thoroughly].

So, up to date with diary; battery low but spirits good. Hope to speak to you all tomorrow lunchtime. Goodnight my dears.

Sunday 22nd January. Last night Madhu eventually arrived cold and sorry at 11.30. He had gone to Chittoor his old home town to collect some book from a student friend and was trapped into being sociable (and his cell phone had run out of charge). I had just fallen asleep and was woken by a very loud Koil calling which proved to be my new door bell – with a recording of the Koil cuckoo, the loudspeaker appropriately enough looking like a little Swiss cuckoo clock. We woke to a clear bright warm summer morning in high enough spirits to enjoy our bread omelette. Madhu was of course delighted with his Chinese MP3 player and with the songs that Imran had left for him on the computer. The quality of sound is excellent. He played his favourite song to me so I countered by playing a couple of tracks from my Joan Sutherland collection with glorious high Ds and florid decorated runs. It was too hot to walk to the village so we fell back on the obvious plan to go by auto to the Guest line hotel at the foot of the hills for a swim. As before we had the pool to ourselves although there was a party going on under the trees at one end of the pool. I managed to coach Madhu from a crazed drowning dog paddle to a sort of manic crawl. I wish the university pool could magically have a blue sky above and be a decent 30 degrees. Madhu's friend Vijaya turned up later and we had a biriani lunch together in the Guestline restaurant. They had first met when Madhu took a friend to the hospital with a broken arm and Vijaya was in charge of X-raying him. We dropped him off in town and went back to the guest house where Madhu fell asleep blissfully plugged into his MP3 player while I sat outside reading my Ruth Rendell which I finished rather too soon. In the evening we had a wonderful mushroom curry with roti in the Sindhuri Park hotel while Madhu told me his plans for the next year; he finishes his 4 year Btech in engineering soon and hopes to continue studying for a further 2 years which depends on passing an engineering aptitude exam in 2 weeks time. When he gets a job it will probably be in Bangalore where his family has moved. The move means that he is learning (rather improving) yet another language (Kanada) in addition to his Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and English. After dinner I had a rather frustrating call home – the line was very bad and the street noise aggressive. It seems that all is well and I was especially pleased that Libby enjoyed the Guenari concert so much that she bought one of their CDs. Clive's central heating is a success and Hugh had a good party. I then walked all the way home, calling at Sasi's shop to register that I am in town, and then pausing for a rest on the long slog up the 3km slope to the guest house, at the STD booth to call Leigh. Surprisingly he was there so we had a quick download of news. He got his grant application off and received formal confirmation of his other grant which is great news. I am now writing this at 11 O'clock to the sound of the Emerson string Quartet playing a Mendelssohn quartet.

Monday 23rd January. *I am writing this in the evening while listening to Mozart's early opera Escape from the Seraglio with the great Fritz Wunderlich.*

I was woken before dawn by an early train to Bangalore roaring through my room, feeling a bit stiff and my foot hurting from last night's long walk home. I was feeling sorry for myself – a typical early morning blues that I am rarely awake to experience. Pulling myself together I sorted a few things then almost dutifully set off for a walk expecting to see nothing. Everything is so green compared with last year that birds have more places to go but more places to hide. Within 60 metres I stood for 5 minutes watching a single tree with black headed orioles (like golden orioles but with black heads), then in same field of view a tree pie (like a slender friendly magpie with chestnut wings and striped tail) and an amazing paradise flycatcher with long trailing tail [*got to stop now as Chandra Sekhar has just arrived – I am pleased*]. Contd.. So, morale up high I had an excellent stroll back for a bread omelette and 2 cups of sweet tea. Good loyal Satheesh [teaching fellow who has helped me a lot for last few years] turned up at 8.50 “for your teaching assignment sir”. After the usual hair raising drive on his motorbike we arrived at the door of virology to be met by Sreenivasulu who took me to the first (Previous) year to introduce me. I had given him my CV the day before but he still fumbles along explaining to them that I am an important scientist (exaggeration) who has had almost 20 research students (35) and published quite a few papers including one or two in international journals (about 100), and had visited India about ten times previously (18). I had not really prepared my first lecture so spent 50 minutes chatting generally and quizzing them about their ‘Native places’. They seem an alert smiling lot with the usual characteristic of having much more responsive girls than boys but I shall provoke them to be more lively. I enjoyed my traditional tea ceremony following the ritual hand washing with one technician to turn on the tap and one to pass me the towel. Sateesh then drove me back after delivering photos to the happy welcoming final year students [the previous year's Previous students], disrupting their practical class. I immediately settled into my routine of lecture preparation sitting in the hot sun followed by a wonderful shower with hot water [geyser and AC now working]. Lunch of chapatti and runner bean curry followed by rice with dahl and garlic washed away with a great bowl of live curds with sugar. This was gobbled up while listening to Mr Naidu the Steward who wants me to write to the Vice Chancellor to say how much better the Guest house has become. That will be a pleasure. Bloated I staggered across the burning courtyard and collapsed asleep, to be woken by my driver Sreenivasulu for the afternoon lecture on continuous culture to the final year microbiologists (appropriate mistake!). Fortunately the Department is very strict on timing so my lectures can only be about 50 minutes which is much as I feel able to do without a cup of tea. Subra Reddy drove me back to spend an hour sitting in the hot dappled shade refereeing a paper by Mary Lidstrom in which she showed yet again that she does not know any literature before 1990 (or perhaps it is her student who probably only used Google to search the literature). At 4.45 I filled up my excellent new bag with cameras and photos and walked to the village Thummulagunta. The little shrine at the start of the road has developed over the years into a full temple with painted gods around the roof all. The road has yet more houses and has good trees for shade all the way. The dirt tracks into the village are now all paved and even more paddy fields have become building plots. I managed to find my way to Balaji's house but no one was home. Venkataramana suddenly appeared behind me – woken and dragged to me by a tiny boy who recognised the photo man from last year. Balaji was at college so will see him later in the week. I was so glad I had gone to the trouble of printing nice copies of all the village kids and grannies. I felt like santa handing out the photos to squealing kids and embarrassed pleased father. Eventually of course I had to take more pictures both in the house and as V and I tried to escape the village. V is very affectionate and possessive but speaks little English so we were fortunate to have an engineering student from the next house to translate for us. I really enjoy my pied piper moments as I walk out of the village trailed by about 20 small kids all dancing about and waving goodbye in the red setting sun. I eventually persuaded V that he should go home and that I could manage to get home without him. I felt almost disloyal to the sun when I accepted a ride from an auto, calling in at G house for a pee before going to Balaji colony for dinner in Athidi (more chicken biryani and butterscotch ice cream). My resolution to eat less has failed every time so far. A power cut added a dark drama to my hot walk up the road to the student hostels (in the university campus itself), jostled by bikes and motorbikes without lights, meeting one of the final year virology students who kindly took my hand and guided me to C block to find Subramanian who is the affectionate but shy boy with earring who graduated last year and is now teaching in the BSc college while revising for the exams which may earn him a PhD place in Delhi. He has retained his previous smile but decorated it with a wispy beard. He insisted on walking all the way back to the GH where he was delighted with the photos of him plus Vijay Kumar who sadly is now in Hyderabad. I then lay on bed while he sat chatting about how beautiful is his village on the shore up north near Nellore. “I am sad when I think of my native place especially now all my student friends here have dispersed themselves; at new year I feeled all

alonly, but now I am happy”. He then told me he had not yet eaten so I fed him on English Cadbury’s milk choc and milk bikkies. “Have some more”; “yes but only for 3 minutes” then after a grabbed shy goodbye hug he skipped out into the night saying he would be back tomorrow. I had earlier had a call from Sasi who said he will come tomorrow, as did Venkataramana and Balaji. There is usually a 30% success rate with social arrangements so probably one of these will happen. I at last managed to achieve my original aim for the evening and write this with Mozart, interrupted by the visit from Chandra Sekhar who had come to explain why he was not in my lecture this afternoon. He has a girlfriend who he wants to marry and her brother had turned up to explain to him that he must get a job first and give up any idea of following his own plan of studying for a PhD; “so you see Chris Professor sir I need your advice”. I declined but cheered him up by saying that I think he will be a success whatever he does (a true opinion as he is very motivated and one of the best students). He eventually left, with a promise to return at the same time tomorrow, leaving me at last able to finish this with Fritz Wunderlich.

Tuesday 23rd January. Not much to write about today. Woke late so missed my walk and had usual bread omelette. Another very hot day spent giving lectures on redox potentials and continuous culture. After morning lecture sat in hot sun preparing tomorrows lectures, followed by a wonderful hot shower. At 5.00 walked into town bumping into Balaji [boy from village who I missed yesterday] on his way to coaching. Then wandered into cricket ground in the golden evening sun and bumped into the other village boy Venkateramana who hurtled up on his bike very excited. As soon as we had parted a rather noisy teenager came running up “do you remember me sir”. I had only a vague memory but greeted him with enthusiasm and we were joined by a mob of friends so eventually had photos of them all and video of them being introduced to me one by one. I had intended to email home but the server was down so failed. I walked on to the Kalyan to see Susai, hoping that he would arrange train for my weekend trip to Kadapa (Imran’s). He has moved to another hotel further away near the bus stand – The Fortune Kences – the most expensive in Tirupati. He is assistant front desk manager. I was introduced to the manager of the hotel who explained that Susai is very good and will be a manager himself some day. While standing in the foyer we met Dr Ranga [Surya’s Esperanto friend]; he was very pleased and we agreed to meet up next week. Susai took me to one of the restaurants where I had a nice Masala Dosa snack so for a change I am not writing this bloated. Sasi said on phone yesterday that he would call this evening at 8.0 but just phoned (10.30) to say he had to go to college. He has always been the least reliable of friends. So I had a peaceful evening putting photos onto computer and writing a thank you letter to the VC – partly at the request of the GH manager who wants the VC to appreciate what a good idea it is to have a high quality guest house. Of course the peaceful evening was interrupted twice by Imran to check that I was well and will be coming at the weekend, and once by Madhu to say “sorry to disturb you chris, have you had a good day, I will come tomorrow at 6 if that is ok; ok chris goodbye”. He is such a good visitor as he is happy to go off and visit other friends if he senses I have other things to do.

Wednesday 24th January. *I am writing this just after a very good guest house lunch – served in my room as they have some function in main hall. Listening to Der Rosenkavalier, some of the most purely beautiful music written, with tears dribbling onto the keys and nose running from the curry.*

The students have had a similar fight to last year and the VC has again closed the hostels, and therefore the university, until next Monday. I went into the Department anyway and was able to see my emails – all running very slowly so I sent off some rather brief emails. I returned to spend most of the day reading Mary Lidstrom’s paper (refereeing for J. Bacteriology). I have her previous 3 papers and a review and keep getting annoyed with her rather casual biochemistry. She seems to think that ideas arising from her genome work are truth as long as they make sense, ignoring the usual requirement for biochemical evidence. In the latest paper she also manages to ignore some of our earlier papers which explain her data perfectly. I think she uses students who just use google for literature searches. At 4 while it was still hot I went for my first long walk around the dairy farm area. I think it was too hot for the birds. The one time when I was about to take a nice picture a farm worker came and sat by me to tell me I had taken his photo in 2001 by the new well. Of course I remembered it very well. The parakeets soon came out to play as the sun went down, screeching overhead between the palms and the tall grasses. I took an auto down the town to Ghandi road and walked my favourite walk to the Fortune Kences to see Susai to arrange my train for Friday to visit Imran in Kadapa. The hotel is immediately next to the bus station so I had arranged for Madhu to meet me in the foyer. Susai provided coffee while I waited and then escorted us to the non-veg restaurant with beer. It is the best restaurant (at least the most expensive) in Tirupati and so dinner was very good. The nice young waiter (Rajesh) bravely explained to me that I could not have

fried fish with naan – both are dry sir so I think you would like rice. Madhu thought this very funny so they had a lot of chat at my expense and the waiter earned a bigger tip as he explained to Madhu that he was worried that he had annoyed me. With beer and fruit salad ice cream (Madhu's addiction) it came to 500 rupees (£6). M then explained that the next day is Republic Day so a holiday and he was going up to have Darshan with Sri Venkateshwara at Tirumula in the hills. He was delighted that I wanted to come (to see the pilgrims not the god) so I arranged to be lazy and got Susai to provide a car for the next morning. After a walk down Ghandi road to settle the biriani and fish we autoed back to guest house where Madhu connected his MP3 player to the computer to play me some of his favourite songs. He saw my CV and so I had the curious experience of lying in state on my bed with wild Telugu film music wailing around me trying to explain what are cytochromes.

Thursday 25th January. We slept early so woke before dawn. I got up and crept quietly around until M called out 'thank god chris I am awake and bored'; so I had the responsibility of shaking off my early morning stiffness to entertain M with a description of Japan. M showered and dressed very carefully for his visit to SV and could not face bread omelette. Our car arrived on time and we had a great ride up to the hills, starting at the foot of the hills with a rather casual search of the car by military security men. They didn't want to look in my big bag with its electronic gadgetry but made sure there was no gun hidden behind the passenger's vanity mirror. The road is one way and well kept and has good safety borders. It was the first day that I have seen clouds and visibility was not so good but we had good views of Tirupati on the 15 km winding mountain road which is mainly through forest and punctuated by pictures of tigers and leopards and instructions to us: wild urinating costs 25rup; spitting 25rup; Nothing electronic, no cameras or noise 25 rup; it is forbidden to eat non veg food (25rup); dress decently for the Lord. I asked M if he thought I could commit all these crimes at the same time; "no chris please don't do that this is a holy mountain". "Relax Madhu I will behave myself for your sake"; "no chris it is for the lord"; ok just testing". We arrived at the top by half eleven to find the carnival in full swing, every square yard was occupied by happy devotees (the notice at the entrance said please remember you are a pilgrim; this is not a picnic palace). After parking and discussing how we would all meet up again M unloaded his MP3 player and cell phone into my bag and we strode off to find the start of his queue. It is necessary to buy a ticket in advance – 50 rupees for standard Darshan (viewing, tribute, worship – add queuing to that) so we followed the signs for 50 rup darshan devotees to the end of the queue and I was given my last minute instructions of where to find a peaceful place etc. The queue follows a path beneath an iron roof. The sides are bars. In many places the queue winds back twice on itself. Every yard is a crush of every version of Hindu Indian, every language and dress, age and sex, rich and poor, healthy and cripples and occasional lepers. The paths wind their way around the whole inner temple complex arriving at last in the sanctuary where you have about 3 minutes in sight of the god [M said he only caught a very brief sight of him as there were little children being held up in front of him]. We had arranged to meet two and a half hours later at 2.00 with the agreement that if he was not there we would drive off to some peaceful place. This we did, returning at 4.00 and then waiting for another 2 hours. So while I had an interesting time but much too long, Madhu stood in line for 6 hours on a very hot day (no breakfast, no lunch). At some places the bars of the caged paths could be seen with brown hands stretched out to buy sticks of ice. Occasionally during the first 3 hours I looked at the cages in case there was any sign of Madhu (he later said he guessed I would do this so had been looking out regularly). For the first 3 hours I wandered about taking photos and looking at the huge numbers of stalls selling coconuts and associated temple stuff including camphor for burning on the stinking little fires by some of the lesser worship places where people smash their coconuts to offer them to the god. The technocrats had won the battle of the windmills so as a backdrop to many scenes of the temple buildings there is a line of modern windmills in the closer hills. I at last found a restaurant that looked vaguely civilised from the outside – distinguished by the line of beggars leading up to it, but inside it was enormous with little light, benches and bare tables crammed with people gobbling up their rice off banana leaves previously cleaned by the waiter dripping water on them and smearing it off with his hands. There was some ticket system for ordering that I could not make sense of so I slunk away. I eventually bought 3 onion bahjis and 3 other battered veggie things from a fast food stall (total 10 rupees)– all recently cooked in a huge vat of rather dirty looking oil but smelling wonderful. I received my little pack on an open square of newspaper and was immediately grabbed by the shirt tail by a little girl with her dirty begging sister on her hip staring at my food like a sad bullied puppy. It was much more satisfying to see her stuff the thing in her grubby little face than to hand over 2 rupee coins. The food also tasted great. At 2.00 I returned to the car and we set off to some local beauty spot for sightseeing that the driver knew. It was at the head of a ravine where in the rainy season there must have been an exciting waterfall. We walked down (and

hot and exhausted up again) to the bottom to see the throngs of pilgrims washing in the small pools and taking photos of the small waterfall with their friends splashing beneath it. I staggered up the steps and went for a walk down the quiet road which was nice but still no birds. When I returned 30 minutes later the driver was sleeping so peacefully in the car I sat on a wall to read. A little kid begging stopped this until I gave her 2 rupees and pointed my camera at her causing her to rush away giggling. She then returned with a small boy and a few others to entertain me and have their photos taken. We eventually returned to our parking place and I wandered into a small park to lie down and rest. It was evenly sprinkled with polythene bags and bits of paper. Mainly dry and not too bad so I lay down, fell instantly asleep and woke with a parrot nose. I then set off on my own penitential trek between the car, the sanctuary outlet, hoping to greet the god-blessed Madhu, and a few other ports of call. During this time the square near the sanctuary exit filled with families sitting down to eat in the setting sun as it became colder and colder (these hills are about 4,500ft). After taking loads of photos with digicam I gave up and returned to the car to get warm and to read. The moment I closed the door Madhu arrived looking fresh and happy, rather like the feeling coming out of an hour long service. We had to rush off before leaving to buy a few things. The first was a sort of black string which is sold by scores of people in the temple grounds and in all the little colourful booths around. This is used to replace the last piece wrapped around the wrist on the last visit. He then bought two utterly horrible little key rings with little model children on them – for his college friend. So at last our crazy whirl down the mountain in the dark with hooting buses lightless motorbikes overburdened jeeps and a few lucky cars. I was so pleased I had insisted on the car so we avoided queuing yet again for a noisy dirty bus ride home; Madhu collapsed into a curled up snoring heap with his head bumping up and down on my lap for most of the journey down to guest house. After dumping us and collecting £13 for the car, driver and driver's meals, we ate 8 squares of chocolate each, chatted more about the importance of the god and prepared M's bag for his trip back to Rajampet, from the bus station which is opposite another old favourite - the Myaura pureveg hotel where we had pure veg as it is Madhu's holy day.

Friday 26th January. *I am writing this in the 2 hours before going to Kadapa to see Imran.* The students are still banned so no teaching today. As I went to sleep before 10.30 last night I woke very early and very stiff only to find that as the light dawned the sun did not; it was a cool grey morning. Rather dispirited I then remembered that there would be no breakfast or lunch provided today. So I lay down again to read only to be woken with lovely hot tea and a request to come to breakfast early. I had obviously misunderstood something. As usual when feeling a bit less than wonderful in Tirupati I washed some clothes and tidied up (I seem to remember Libby has the same approach for which we are grateful). The walk to the Department to do email cheered me up, it was like a typical gentle English summer morning with occasional glimpses of sun. Subramanian soon appeared with a new research scholar who I had got to know in his final year last year. he is so enthusiastic to talk but doesn't seem able to do so. S wandered off to the library and when I finished I walked around to discover it and then found him reading the paper there. As we came out we were interrupted by professor Nagaraju (call me raj) from geology. We had met apparently in 1982 in the same building which he took me to, where he then showed me his reports of a shared project with someone in Aberdeen and then offered to lend me his good loudspeaker system for the duration. I have agreed to visit him next week to talk to his daughter in English.

I must stop this to pack

Now writing 5.0 Monday afternoon.

Prof S kindly drove me to the station to catch the 5.45pm express from Chittoor to Hyderabad. He is always so nervous on my behalf as he peers at the coaches as the 24 coach train slowly pulls in. I was in AC/sleeper/2nd class/3 tier. We found my bed which was not really needed as we should have arrived by 8.30 at Kadapa (189km). We actually arrived late and had a nice dark ride by auto to Imran's house.

Saturday and Sunday 28, 29th January. I slept well in spite of the almost continuous barking of the local watch dogs, an Alsatian and Doberman. Worried that she would not be a good host to me Imran's mother of course decided to give a me a real breakfast of bread omelette and dosa (big pancake as in Kerala) and a huge bowl of cornflakes with honey. And a big mug of buttermilk and coconut milk. As in my last visit here Imran had to go off to try to book me a seat to return. There was no suitable train till Monday so he got me a seat on the 5.05am which should get me back by 8.30 in time for my 9.0 lecture. While he was away I had a nice stroll by what I had thought was a cool attractive river but which is in fact a sort of long thin stagnant dirty

Lake with rubbish all around it. I had my usual quota of men with daughters and little boys to photograph. I did see some nice kingfishers but most of the pleasure was the warm breeze and friendly people. I seem to have taken rather a lot of pictures of people bashing their washing on rocks. After an accidental snooze we were fed a huge lunch. This was followed by a deliberate sleep and then off we went by borrowed motorbike to the country hotel (=small scruffy hotel on outskirts) with a swimming pool where we did actually have a good swim, entertained by a gang of youngish teenagers who Imran found were skiving off school so were rather worried as they got dressed that they looked too clean for an afternoon working at school so were planning to buy an onion bajhi to wipe some greasy oil on their hands and faces to make them look tired. I do seem to have persuaded Imran that we will have a better time if he drives really slowly so I can enjoy the warm breeze as we drove home clean and tired. He wanted us to repeat my morning walk so we did with the usual never boring (perhaps to you) golden evening light. The highlight of the walk was seeing a little stockade filled with ducklets – guarded by the usual small boy who then demonstrated their skill at running about forming a dense cluster all around him but leaving a perfectly circular space immediately around his feet. Of course the video of this was very popular with his family so then had to take a few more photos to include them all. I have not yet found out how to get the video camera to record what is actually there. It has a little man inside who thinks everything must be lit up as well as possible so my beautiful evening scenes are like mid afternoon. At some time we ate in a newish small restaurant which I thought was rather grubby and might have been proved right as I woke in the night with a gut bug. This kept me confined to the roof within trotting distance to the loo which is a small cupboard outside on the ground floor. I got to know this much too well in the next few hours. I still had a good day, reading in the sun and sleeping. Felt sorry for Imran but he had the sense to go off and do some things he needed to do. Finished the day with his father watching a National Geographic programme on Megacities – Mumbai in this case. 13 million inhabitants all linked by a huge rail system on which 10 people are killed every day (falling off trains being run over etc.) But, amazingly there have been no actual rail accidents in living memory.

Monday 30th January. Woke up feeling a bit better at 4 in morning to be driven on another borrowed motorbike through empty cool streets to catch the 5.00am train to Tirupati. As a senior citizen I get 40% off. Of course it was dark as I crept about in the sleeper coach looking for my bed by the light of my cell phone. After a bit of sleep we trundled gently along through the waking country, frightening a flock (?) of about 100 huge fruit eating bats – about the size of rooks. I had bet Imran that the train would be late but when he phoned at exactly 8.25, its arrival time, we were just drawing into the station. The best thing about going anywhere else is coming back home to Tirupati and the auto drive through early morning busy optimistic streets to the GH just in time to wash, change and hop onto Srinivasulu's scooter for my lecture on chemolithotrophs to Previous year. They had not all returned from their enforced home visits. One girl had the courage and cheek to tell me I had something wrong on the board; she was half right and half wrong. When I told them that she was half wrong and I was half right they told me I am an Indian politician.

I am writing this in a familiar situation. Nagaraju, who I thought was in Taiwan, left a message at the GH to say that he would be coming here between 4 and 5. And Surya's father said he would be coming at 5 or perhaps 7 to collect me for dinner. I think I persuaded him that I would eat nothing (my gut strategy which seems to be working). It is now 6.00 and no sign of either so am writing this to a Bach cantata.

I am now living on shortbread and water. After my rather low key lecture I helped a research student (R Kumar) with some internet stuff, read my nice emails from home [poor Hugh having to rebuild his computer] then came back for a wonderful hot shower followed by a chat on the veranda with Sateesh about his project. He has still not written the brief review that I suggested last year. I have at last persuaded him that I should help him do a gel filtration experiment. They have so little practical work in their degree courses and the staff are rather inexperienced so they all cower back from doing even easy experiments if they have not been done in the department before. I have been rather gobbling up my serious non-novel book. It is a collection of the greatest crusading journalism [collected by John Pilger], So I have gone from outrage about the bombing of Cambodia, to the wreckage of the mining industry, Chechnya, the A bomb etc etc. I worked on the refereeing of Mary Lidstrom's J. Bact paper in the afternoon kept going by little encouraging cracked cups of sweet milky tea.

At about 7.0 I caught an auto down to the train station and walked over rail bridge to the big open square by the choudharies - huge free hostels for pilgrims. I had taken my smaller camera especially to take clever photos of the derelict people 'living' on the bridge and if I had the nerve I would have a great picture of a very damaged and fierce looking black bearded man sitting with his friends plus 3 small monkeys tied to him with

string. They (the men) seemed to be smoking something and passing it around while the monkey man tried to get the monkeys to smoke it; I found I didn't have the nerve to be a great investigative journalist. *Now writing this Tuesday night to first Act of marriage of Figaro.* The large square is lined with pilgrims' coaches put to bed for the night and little groups of people sitting around on the ground wrapped in shawls and many with balaclavas looking like a load of conspiring terrorists. The background is necessarily temple music. As I entered the little alley leading to Surya's house Naveen Kumar, their little neighbour, appeared out of the darkness taking my hand and grinning. He is about a foot higher than last year and was clutching his college work – notes on the classification of invertebrates. He is studying to get into medical school. As we passed the alley leading to their house his older brother Vinodh Kumar emerged and they led me in triumph up the outside stairs to Surya's mum who was all smiles and jabbering questions in Telugu. The boys helped translate. It seems S never tells them his plans so I was able to cheer them up with news of his hotel work and paying off all his debts. Father is on duty, presumably arranged after he arranged to pick me up. I successfully fended off food, compromising with a cut-up apple and cup of coffee. One of the little boys I photographed last year appeared with his mother so shed a little more happiness into their lives with all the photos – and of course those of Surya in London. Vinodh then led me out through the maze of alleyways to an auto back to GH where I finished my dinner of chocolate and biscuits. Had a nice phone home where tea was ready – it sounded so nice – to slump in front of tele with a glass of wine. Fell asleep while reading on the bed to be woken by Leigh phoning; he sounds so nice and relaxed.

Tuesday 31st January. I was woken violently by my electric cuckoo and cook with tea (6.40) and invitation to breakfast. She has been away a few days and seemed very pleased to see me, standing smiling at my shorts and wild hair. I set out almost dutifully for my morning walk to be rewarded by the usual wonderful morning light on the hills opposite and the feeling of an English summer, almost too cool. The tree pie (bird not bakery) appeared on cue but still no photo. It is very odd that there are no bulbuls this year as they filled the area last year. I was pleased to find that I was looking forward to my bread omelette but restricted myself to 2 small squares of bread. Enjoyed an energetic lecture on electron transport to Previous year and then another struggle to download a paper I have promised to referee; after 20 minutes downloading 22/26 pages it crashed (3 times). Then sat in the sun preparing last of the continuous culture lectures for the afternoon final year which went very well; I guided them through a quite complex numerical example which they had understood. When confident they sit behind me as I write on the board whispering the answers all together and muddled up. Lunch was very appetising but I forced myself to have only one chapatti and a spoonful of rice but rather too big a heap of curried potatoes. After my afternoon lecture I finished Mary's paper and fell asleep. I decided I would not have any dinner as am still feeling a bit fragile. So I walked down to hostels and went to look for Subramanian who had not turned up as planned last week. As usual I was captured by a friendly student who tracked down the room (121 in B black); he is S. Siva Prasad [C black 52] who is studying to be a biology teacher. Having found the room he was automatically ushered in with me to chat with Subramanian, Naresh Kumar and their friends. Their sharing of everything (not that it is much) is very attractive. If they do not have a cell phone (like Subramanian) their friends and relations all have their other friends' numbers so the phones are always being passed round – it is your cousin, mother, etc. Naresh and Subra insisted that I must go and eat with them. I said that I would not eat but would go with them. They cleverly achieved their aim by stopping at a bakery and bought 2 small pies and rather garish green iced cake for me. This was ideal and we washed it down with a coconut [milk drunk from a straw] from a cart on the way back to the guest house. They insisted on photos with me then a look at some of home photos and off they went so I could relax with this diary and Mozart.

Wednesday 1st February. *I am writing this on Thursday evening while listening to Maria Callas.* I am having a problem to work out what I did this day. After my morning lecture the professor of geology phoned to ask if he could call to take me down town to buy loudspeakers from his friend's shop. So he soon turned up wearing a baseball cap and dark glasses. Subramanian was supposed to be coming so I explained I would have no time to stop off to have coffee. He is rather a bully but was doing me a big favour. He has a new small motor scooter with a top speed of about 20 mph. Perhaps it is a new thing but he is the most nervous driver I have been with. At the slightest sign of danger he jams on the hooter. When there was any real need to do anything like slow down as we approached a parked car he just froze and stopped in middle of the road, allowing roaring buses to pass on the outside and jeeps on the inside. He then set off again without a backward glance. Straight into the traffic. Fortunately the small clean computer shop was near the Balaji colony. He had earlier negotiated a good price of 950 rupees instead of 1400 rupees for a good pair of small speakers with a 9 inch base speaker with

amplifier. Got back safely and set up the system so can now fill the room with wonderful sounds to counter the Hindu songs that sometimes blast from the new temple at the junction of the road to Thummulagunta.

I walked up to inspect it this evening. It is still covered in wooden scaffolding poles but is surrounded by low marquees set out for some kind of ceremony. In one of these there is a gang of young priests in white lunghis preparing garlands of marigolds and little offerings of coconut and banana leaves. As I took a step nearer to take a picture there was a shrill "sir sir" from a little boy who pointed at my feet so I dropped my sandals in the gutter and moved again to be greeted by grins and clapping from the boy. They have rigged up tannoy loudspeakers to nearby lampposts and it must be these they use to blast me at sunrise and sunset. I continued walking up this road which is the main road to Bangalore and has been developed hugely with the side roads lined with large houses and many new shops and small eating places on the main road. The small one I had previously discovered with Surya about 5 years ago is now quite smart and has a nice notice outside advertising Best Chinese Food. I later cut across towards the hills on what used to be a small footpath but is now a road lined with houses belonging to Dr Balaji, Dr balasubramanian, Dr S. N. Naidu etc. Seems to be the academic elite quarter. The development stopped at the railway but on my bird watching patch on the other side the local Cadets Corps (pronounced next morning by my students as Cadet Corpse) were casually drilling new recruits. Not in uniform and not in step. Further along was the same thing happening but with more disciplined girls marching slowly and ceremoniously out of step with their multicoloured saris and long hair braids wildly waving in the wind. When I got to my favourite wild place by the small river I found it bulldozed and just red earth. All rather sad. I then had to hurry back to get into town to meet Madhu or Nagaraju. Nagaraju was supposed to have come (from near Hyderabad) at about 4.30 but had phoned to say his train was too slow so he had left it near Guntur and caught a bus so would be at bus station at 6.45, the time I had arranged to meet Madhu in the Kalyan foyer. So I told N to come to the same place. Because I know a lot of the staff at Kalyan (Surya's old workmates) I am fussed over and bought coffee as I sit and wait. Madhu arrived about 7.15 and Nagaraju 5 minutes later after a 13 hour journey. He is the friend whose village I visited so memorably some years ago. He is the biotechnology MSc student who had first greeted me with a beautiful smile and a rose many years ago. His village English (taught in Telugu medium School) is still difficult to follow. After his PhD here on the hormones produced in the eyestalk of prawns he went for a post doc in Taiwan where they were very impressed with his English. He is back home now looking for a job. He later explained that he had amicably divorced his wife after she dropped out of her MSc course; the marriage was arranged on the understanding that she had an MSc. When it turned out that she did not, he kept to the arranged marriage on condition of doing it. She lost interest in the works of Byron in her English course and lost interest in Nagaraju. He has now re-married and is due to be a father in 4 months time. I learned all this on the next day. Of course he is quite a tubby man but has retained his great sense of humour and he and Madhu had a good time laughing about me over dinner at Kalyan. We dropped him off at his friends in the Balaji colony and came home to show Madhu my new music system. I will be leaving it with him as it can be used to amplify his MP3 player which of course he did immediately filling the room with the heavy but snappy base sounds of his fast Telugu movie songs. *Writing this early Friday morning reminded me to turn it on so I now have rather unsuitable Maria Callas singing in Rossini's Turco in Italia.*

Thursday 2nd February. I was woken by Madhu's songs gently replacing the temple music while he sat in his blue lunghi at the table tidying up all the wires and stuff. Our tea was bought by the little man in his filthy vest and shorts and brown balaclava [*callas may be unsuitable but she is good enough to change my mood from dutiful diary writing to high spirits – controlled of course*]. I don't mind his dirty vest except that I have seen him wipe my dinner plate on it as he put it on the table. Of course I did not accept such filthy behaviour – I re-wiped it on the tail of my dirty shirt. Too much detail. While I had my bread omelette Madhu showered and dolled himself up to go and visit the friends he was here for. After my enjoyable lecture on Mitchell's chemiosmotic stuff I came back to wait for a clean, alert and recovered Nagaraju who kept me entertained with all his news. As there was some function in the dining hall we were brought our lunch in the room by the younger lady assistant cook. She had a long chat with N which he explained was her telling him to tell me that when I gave money to the old cook to share with them all last year she had not done so. In fact I gave a lot to the cook (whose son had just died and who had had an expensive operation) and had inadvertently forgotten the assistant. So I gave her 100 rupees for last time and resolved to be more careful this year. N was shocked by how little I had for lunch and I was shocked by how much he ate, splashing about with his samba and rice which I had to wash off the floor later. He told me he would call for me for dinner at the Fortune Kences at 8.30

that evening. I persuaded him to make it earlier and off I went to my afternoon lecture on citric acid production to final year students who had spent the previous afternoon doing a practical on it. [*I nearly dropped the computer off my lap as the bird call doorbell blasted at me; it was the little hobbit man in his balaclava signalling that it was time for my omelette*].

As it was sunny but fairly cool I had a gentle stroll back home and spent an hour or so in the garden at the back reading a paper I am refereeing on polyvinyl alcohol oxidation – another good paper on PQQ enzymes by Japanese.

At about 5.30 two Previous year students arrived “so we can interact with you sir”. It was the usual combination of one fat, one thin, one Hindu, one Muslim. Venkata Naidu, dull nervous but keen to please and Nissar, tall thin with a huge mouth of teeth and probably the most competent of the students; he lives in Tirupati itself. [*I am writing this Friday evening while playing the magnificent Tacaks quartet playing Beethoven late quartet 132.*]. After some time learning about them they told me they had come to hear about me so on with the computer for a sort of tour of family and friends. As I was drying up, my pet cuckoo heralded the appearance of Thahir Basha from last year’s final year. He also lives in Tirupati; he is the very skinny Muslim boy whose family gave me and Madhu a nice dinner on my last evening last year. I enjoy the way they introduce each other and seem to be genuinely interested. Of course I then had to bring Basha up to date on family and PQQ etc. He then left to be replaced in a few moments by Nagaraju coming earlier than threatened. So had the usual introductions and chat again before going out to meet Nagaraju’s friends from the Zoology Department (Post grads). N wanted to change our original plan to go to the Fortune Kences hotel and to take me out to an open field beer place with very good pork snacks. I told him he could take his friends there but I am going to Fortune; “ok sir just testing”. They flagged down an empty ‘service auto’ and negotiated with the driver to not pick up more passengers. These are slightly lengthened autos with 2 bench seats facing each other. The first person to flag one down more or less determines the route and others join in if it is going where they want. It is only 5-10 rupees instead of the 20 rupees for an auto. The drivers are more aggressive and they are a nasty addition to Tirupati roads (nasty for me; of course they are good for student travel). We had a most unpleasant bumpy journey with constant hooting right across town to the Fortune hotel opposite the bus station. When we got out the older rather unlikeable zoologist (staff perhaps) set off to the side of the hotel. No, this is the way I insisted going toward main entrance. No sir this is the way to the bar before dinner. I was very hungry and anyway I wanted to go to the nice restaurant of the previous visit. While they argued I irritably walked away into the hotel to have a nice chat with Maria Susai. The others joined me and off we went to My restaurant where the young waiter Naresh was delighted that I remembered his name and negotiated that he would serve our table. He had been really nice with Madhu last week explaining all the menu and recommending things. In the end we had an enjoyable evening with beer and a constant stream of small snacks (chilli chicken and mutton kebabs – on sticks- followed by mutton biryani. Nagaraju is great fun, mainly mocking me, to the horror of the others, and somehow involving Naresh in all our decisions. As is usual with the posher restaurants they produce a little card or booklet to give my opinion on food and service and any other comments. So we filled this in with advice from Susai who dropped by, that we should say something nice about Naresh as he came from his home village. So we said that he was probably the best waiter / adviser in any hotel restaurant we had experienced in Tirupati (true by anyone’s standards) Anything naming an individual is immediately sent to the manager apparently. Of course I always think of Surya doing this sort of job.

We then went same route (by Auto) back to Guest House in a very different mood in which I could think of no more wonderful place to be, with so much life and enthusiasm and activity.

Friday 4th February. I woke at 6.30 with a back ache and associated headache to a grey dawn. I was contemplating just lying to fester when my hobbit brought me comforting tea so I got up and wrote the diary. He later called to tell me it was breakfast time. He seemed to have made the omelette the night before, it was cold and rather revolting. Fortunately I read my book while eating it, as I later missed lunch. Also the book was about the awful experience of Iraq during the pre war period when UN sanctions led to (their estimate) half a million children dying of malnutrition. I felt a bit pathetic being irritable about a bit of cold egg. The sun gradually appeared behind the clouds and it now gets hotter every day. I was hoping to use the internet but the university has closed it for a few days while a new virus protection is installed. When Srinivasulu took me back to the GH there were about 20 cars there and 60 men standing and sitting around on my veranda – shared of course with next room which held the chief minister or his brother or cousin – involved in some political meeting. So could not have my sit in the sun or even sit on my veranda. So I set out to try to sort out the CSO

programme. I have been sent the costing for music hire which is depressing and we have to re-think some of the programmes. I was disturbed all the time in this by the politicians in the next room shouting at the tops of their voices like a lot of manic machine guns. So I put on a CD of Sibelius and blasted them with that. When I looked out of my room to see if they were still occupying my space one of them just pushed passed me into my room, better to hear his cell phone. My impressively controlled but fierce Get out of My room sent him scuttling and some important looking man came over to apologise. After they left I went over to get lunch only to find another big group of important people were taking over the dining room – including the VC who came over to say hello and welcome. Reddy, the manager said he would send food over to my room so I went back lay down to wait and fell asleep. I was woken by Sai Gopal, 20 minutes early “come sir it is time for your lecture”. “Please sir you should comb your hair, it is better not to lie on your bed”. “Have you done the piece on Prof NV Naidu yet?” Naidu is the botany prof who first invited me, retired some years ago, and died last month. “Sorry I have not yet done it, I will do it before Monday”. “I told you to write it last week”. A silly man. So off to a very hot empty lecture room with no food and a headache. Cheered up by Nissar’s smile as he came in. I gave a great lecture on lysine biosynthesis (always my favourite topic as it requires some pure science).

[Now writing this at 10.30 Sunday night while playing Strauss Ariadne auf Naxos]

After my lecture I returned and wrote the Naidu piece while sitting in the garden. Prof. Srinivasulu turned up promptly at 7.0 to take me to dinner at Sindhuri Park pure veg restaurant. “Please some items you would like from this menu then we will tell them and he will arrange it”. I see. We had the usual with him – South Indian Thali – a mix of most veg things. Very good, followed by both of our ice creams. The drive on his scooter to the restaurant and home reminded me, as if I needed it, why I love this place so much; the incredibly crowded streets with nice little cows and groups of happy people.

Saturday 5th February. Madhu woke me by phone at 6.20 to tell me he was on the way to collect me to go to Chittoor. Originally we were going to Bangalore where his family have moved but he decided it would be better if we met up with them in nearby Chittoor in the house where his father lives during the week. Their friend had kindly let them use his little car; the same friend and car as drove us back last year. This time Madhu’s oafish brother drove with much tuition from the owner. They arrived at about 7.40 and we set off immediately for a lovely drive through rural India with paddy fields and ploughing oxen, flocks of goats, coconut palms, bananas and barren rocky hills in the distance. After dropping the car on the outskirts we went by bike to his father’s house. He works for the bus company and moved the family to a nice house in Bangalore when M’s brother got a job there. He himself rents his room for 700 rupees a month (£10). The room is on the roof and has a kitchen, loo and bedroom and the roof itself. Madhu’s friend Madhu then turned up with his best friend Suresh. Madhu was other bike driver last year when the four of us went up the hills. Madhu is the only safe driver in India I think, anticipating everything, slowing down instead of hooting, braking before the slippery corners instead of on them etc etc. We drove through dirt tracks and little alley ways all round the edge of Chittoor to Gopi’s small house. His mother was the only one home. Poor Gopi had exams on Saturday and Sunday. They then decided we would try to go swimming at an extensive new leisure complex out in the country. When complete it will have conference centre, hotel, boat lake, bowling alley, table tennis, amusement arcade, snooker, swimming pool with waves and an ordinary swimming pool. When we drove up we were told that it had not yet opened – due for opening in 2 weeks time. So nothing was open including the pool. Madhu then talked his way past the security people at the gate and found the most official looking person amongst the many milling around a big table with a serious man signing papers. He then came and told us we must come in and meet this man which we did. Madhu then murmured that he had told them that I was a very important man from UK and interested in the resort and the swimming pool. After lots more debate the man who had been striding up and down the courtyard shouting into his cell phone came over and apologised for ignoring me and quizzed me about my visits to India. He was very impressed by me giving lectures at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. He was the chief executive and manager of the resort and was worried that it would not be finished on time. He was very charming and good to chat with while the boys were standing nervously by. He then stood up and passed me to a lower man with the instruction to show me around and then to let me and the boys have the first swim in the pool. Having endured his boring sales stuff, with me responding with enthusiasm of course, we reached the so inviting pool only to be told by a Mr Prabakhar that we must have swimming trunks and that the usual Indian habit of swimming in underpants was forbidden. So we failed at the last minute - but the other boys were very impressed with Madhu and his important friend. So in the midday heat we drove off over more bumpy dusty

roads up to the new dam where I saw some Spotted ducks. Suresh and Madhu got their swim eventually in the water below the dam which was used mainly as a place for washing clothes. The other Madhu couldn't swim so we sat chatting and taking his photo. He was charmingly vain so I had to delete most pictures until I got one that satisfied him. Sitting in the sun produced my parrot nose and we drove back to Madhu's for lunch which was far too much, with me eating first by myself – fish, chilli chicken, mangled mutton biriani, pakora, chapattis, rice – altogether much too much. I ate inside on the bed with a chair as my table, the others eating on the floor of the roof. My lunch was accompanied by yet another National Geographic channel disaster programme on earthquakes. I then fell fast asleep for an hour before we drove off to find an internet place for me to send my prepared documents on orchestra programme committee to John. The internet place was greasy and hot, with flies stuck over the screen. My excessive lunch had made my gut rather threatening; all this led me to an embarrassing mistake when replying to Sarah (orchestra chairman) who had sent the next committee agenda on which there was a Programming committee update to be given by Barbara Howells. I didn't notice that she had sent it as a Group email so they all got my reply which was slightly aggressive about a couple of daft items they had added to my guidelines when I was last unable to attend a committee meeting. Fortunately I had said sorry my email seemed a bit tetchy - explaining the circumstances. Hope they see the funny side of it. We then returned to the roof for tea and chat after which we drove back here through the greatest time of day 5 – 7. Madhu had planned to go back immediately with the other two but changed his mind as he was so tired, which was nice as we could chat by ourselves without interruptions from the rather silly friend who I had to humour for loan of the car.

[The Strauss has just finished so I will].

Sunday 6th February. Last night at about 8 30 Madhu put on his lunghi, washed and flung himself on his back diagonally across the beds with his arm looped across his face to shield his eyes from the light and fell fast asleep. I shoved him around enough to make room for me then read *The colour of a dog running away by Richard Shaw*. I was very thirsty after my day in the sun and I had a headache but we had little water so at 11 o'clock I walked down to the tea place to buy some. It was rather cool and a crystal clear night with the stars of Orion, lying on his side, piercing through the branches of the trees. It is more obvious at night that the trees lining the road nearly meet in the middle, forming a shady tunnel. There was no traffic at all until a bell alerted me to a magnificent site of three elephants rapidly lumbering up the road coming home from temple duties. The two very large ones came side by side bumping against each other so that their drivers could chatter. After they passed I saw that one of them had dumped a row of a dozen cannonballs perfectly spherical and perfectly evenly spaced every two metres along the dashed white line in the middle of the road. They made a message in Morse code but it was rude so I won't repeat it here. The tea house was shut so I trudged the km back to have some aspirin in an inch of water. When I woke at 6.20 for my tea lady, Madhu had not moved and at 7.30 he staggered awake "what is the time is it chris late I think so". He could not face bread omelette so off he went to catch his bus back to Chittoor, after listening to a few more chirpy Telugu film songs through my booming loudspeakers. After bread omelette I went for a bird walk in my usual place until about 10 as it became very hot. I got no good photos except perhaps for a paddy bird that I usually find under the trees next to the drain taking pig washings from the pig farm. I did see some very welcome sight: a hoopoe doing its long looping black and white striped flight from a high tree down to the ground in the distance, reminding me of the nesting hoopoe in France this year. A very odd medley of sound resolved itself into two golden orioles chasing a black drongo though the high trees. There are plenty of birds but they are difficult to see in the leafy tree tops. At last I have seen some bulbuls which have been mysteriously absent this year, having filled my morning walk with beautiful songs last year. When I returned it was very hot so I got some washing done and set off to Thummulagunta with the photo of the last year's small boy with the bike who had so carefully written out his address for me. I went to the nearer part of the village (Venkataramana and Balaji live further away over the fields). Two people failed to recognise the address and then a boy who was having a great cool time cleaning the big metal pots at the water pump called me over to ask what I was doing. Between him and two girls on the roofs of adjacent buildings – like renaissance angels on the ceiling they worked out who he was and I was led to his house where his mother received the photos with astonishment and kisses (on photos). The neighbours were called in (rather out, as we were standing about outside the house) to look at them, and dribble toothpaste on them; the Sunday morning always has wandering tooth cleaners sleepily drifting about looking for entertainment. Unfortunately the boy Sridhar was not there; unusually he was at a local boarding school (that is he lived in the school hostel). He is 10th Class which is 15-16 which is why he seemed exceptionally intelligent and educated for the nine

year old he appeared last year. I then drifted on to Balaji's house but he was at tuition and Venkataraman was at work in the local supermarket. His brother showed me pictures I had taken over the last few years all nicely laid out in an album. I walked back the long way, forgetting that it took me on a treeless road for about a mile. At the end I found a newly opened little cake shop / café opposite the Padmavarthy Women's University so I bought some water, a thumbs up and caught an auto home. After a hot shower had lunch and a happily solitary afternoon during which I read quite a lot of my methylotroph book – partly to prepare some lectures on methanogens and partly to check a few things for Mary's paper. Gosh isn't it impressive – even the jokes seem to have lasted ok. At ten past five the mosquitoes start to hover and once seen cannot be ignored and I was driven in to start serious refereeing of the PVA dehydrogenase paper which is good but has a few glaring errors. Imran phoned earlier with sad news. He had been unable to go to Mysore with his friends because his father was unwell. Now the doctors say he is in a serious condition and he must be taken from Kadapa to the VIMS hospital in Tirupati for kidney dialysis and they have advised his other son to come also. Later a very upset Imran phoned to say that all the family were now staying in a room at the hospital. They had decided his very high blood pressure precluded dialysis and he should go back to Kadapa which they will do next morning. "Chris I don't know why god does these things but I suppose he has to find something to do". In the evening I walked down to the auto parking place where there is always a small bearded man who leaps out of his auto when he sees me, pushes all the others aside, shakes hands and helps me like an old lady into his auto. He took me down to Ghandi Road so that I could slowly stroll through the peaceful Sunday evening crowds, through the temple and over the rail bridge to Surya's family for dinner. This had been difficult to arrange because his father was called away *to duty sir* at short notice previously. As always Vinod mysteriously appeared out of the dark shadows in the little lanes and took me to meet two of his friends, one of whom I remembered, and his memorable name (Ramabalasubramanian) meant that I earned a hug for remembering it. We had trouble negotiating the bottom of the stairs up to the flat as it was filled with ladies sitting in the near darkness on mats having a women's social evening. The rather grim stares turned to delighted smiles when I hung over the stairs (and stares) to take a photo. I then spent one and a half hours inventing stories about Surya to prove how happy and wise he is etc. They phoned Swarna and I had yet another conversation where all she says is *how are your family members sir we are all well then sir?* We had a really nice small dinner, with Vinod included – he acts as a relaxing factor being able to divert attention from me, chatting in Telugu. He then drove me back to the student hostels where I eventually located B block. One person I asked kept telling me there is no B block, only A, B C and D blocks sir. A student Srinivasulu later explained they thought I asked for P block; however hard I tried I could not distinguish between my or their B and P blocks. At last the microbiologists' rooms were found and the door was opened by a delighted Srinivasulu who kept taking off his glasses to clean them in surprise at what he was seeing through them. Their room, designed for three takes seven or eight students all on metal platform beds shoved up together. Gradually the room filled with 9 students all keen for me to tell them what I think about India and what about your family members sir and what did you do for your PhD and what about us sir and what can we do with virology and please sir you must have this cake as Rajesh has just bought it for you. It was a sort of small hot Cornish pasty filled with candied peel and other sweet stuff and about the only thing I could tolerate eating after my full dinner. Then of course photos and then autographs. Please write me a message sir and that is too small. This solved a lot as I then filled an ~A4 page with a signature and they all wanted one. Eventually I escaped, followed, through the dark crow-loud grounds to the road, by all of the students plus their friends who they wanted to introduce me to, me striding to get away and them all hurrying behind like Ghandi's march to the sea. A passing auto saved me from the 2 km walk up the road with my followers and I jumped in followed by my new disciple Srinivasulu, and then by 3 others on a motorbike. We got to the GH just in time for the two of us to go in before the others arrived and so had time for peaceful chat. I had mentioned that I liked classical music and S was very excited as he is keen on classical Indian songs and he found a CD on the table by Balasubramanian his favourite singer. S is very thin and gentle, with small scholarly glasses, a delicate moustache, pale skin and he speaks comprehensible English. Many of his year were taught in Telugu medium until degree level and their pronunciation is impossible to follow – as is mine they tell me. We could hear the other students murmuring outside wondering if they should ring the bell so S swore eternal friendship writing his name in my notebook and receiving one of my few visiting cards with a kiss (the card). So off they went, leaving me to play the second act of Ariadne auf Naxos (see above). *[I woke at 5.15 and couldn't sleep so I have written this and still have time to prepare my lectures]. I forgot to say that I had a nice*

phone chat with Hugh, very enthusiastic about his concert, and with Libby who has been reading last years diary and told me that Gopi came that day last year. Well he should be coming this morning.

Monday 7th February. *[Writing this Wednesday morning now everyone has gone and I can have some peace at last].* As planned, Gopi arrived at 12.10, looking darker and a bit hairier with his smile which is sometimes the only thing visible in photos indoors without flash. He was so surprised by his gift of an MP3 player and we had a great struggle to find how it works. The Chinese instruction book was funny but not useful. Eventually we succeeded in copying some music left on the laptop by Imran at my request. The player can connect direct to my loudspeakers so I have been rather crushed by 'Happy, Happy, Happy' and 'you are my Barbie doll' and Celine Dion Titanic. The earphones were missing from the box. Either I left them at home or Imran or Madhu took them by accident – they say they didn't. When I phoned Imran he was still very worried but his father seemed better and insisted on chatting with me – not even mentioning that he was ill. In the late afternoon Balaji from Thummulagunta called in on his cycle ride home from college and asked Gopi and me to go next day to the village to take photos. As soon as he had left Subramanian appeared. After dinner at old Athidi restaurant we went looking for the shop where I got my loudspeakers to get some earphones. When we could not find the shop between the restaurant and traffic lights S said, in his very high, highly inflected, voice "sir you said before the traffic lights; it is not here sir; Gopi said you are a genius sir but sir the shop is not here". I have so much to live up to. Honour was retained when we found the shop just past the traffic lights. The person who sold my speakers to me said they only had good quality headphones – like Hugh's with microphone. The quality was good and they were only 90 rupees (£1.20) so we bought them (he gave me a discount as a friend of Prof Nagaraju so only 80 rupees), and got some small travelling earphones next day. I love this part of town with groups of students and families, pushing aside a buffalo so I could get into the auto. Back at GH S and G had great fun playing with the headphones singing along with the microphone. Then S joined me collapsed on the bed while Gopi selected Telugu songs. I walked a short way down the road with Subramanian so that I could pay him some attention but he sent me home soon "Sir why do you risk your health in the cold air for me sir?" "I will have to come back with you now sir". We arranged that he would come next evening at 7 and we would go to eat together.

[I am writing to the rather incongruous sound of Shostakovich's 8th string quartet on Wednesday night.

I soon fell asleep but Gopi kept waking me with some simple question about my family. I think he spent a lot of time working out how to ask the questions.

Tuesday 8th February. While I went off to my lecture Gopi went to buy me a top up card for my phone and for another search for earphones. I got back to find I was locked out as he had not got back, so had a nice gentle stroll up through the university campus in very hot sun and of course not having my camera I had a great view of the bird most wanted - a golden backed woodpecker. While I prepared lectures Gopi went off to find his friend at the hostels. I was bullied into going for early lunch but the cook was very good when Gopi came late to have lunch. His earlier investment had paid off; when one of the men bought us tea in the mid morning he asked where the man was from, explaining to me later that it was a way of showing appreciation. His nice friend then joined us and I went off to give my last lecture to the final year students. At 5.30 Balaji arrived to take us to his village. We quickly captured an auto and raced Balaji on his bike to the village. He had obviously prepared his father and brothers and so a lot of photos got took. I remembered they had a small rooftop and so we all went up there, Gopi taking carefully arranged groups of squabbling kids while I used the camcorder to record the process.

Gopi reminded me that we must soon leave in order to meet with S at the guest house. Leaving took another 15 minutes in 3 other houses for one more photo. By then I was using the small camera which is much better for quick flash shots. We escaped to a long walk home in the dark where we arrived at 7.15 and 2 minutes before S arrived "I am sorry sir for being so Indian". We ate in the Ardithi again, vegetarian this time Gobi fried rice and mushroom masala followed by butterscotch ice cream. In fact it was pistachio (sort of). They always say they have butterscotch but bring whatever they feel like. As soon as we got back Gopi packed up his bits and pieces and walked out into the night to catch the bus for the 90m minute drive home to Chittoor. I continue to be very impressed by him. He finished his BSc engineering course and immediately started an Mtec in computer engineering. After half an hour being entertained by Subramanian he walked off into the darkness leaving me in peace for the first time for a few days.

Wednesday 9th February. After S had left last night I decided to catch up with my diary so turned on the computer but realised it was a good time to call Clive as he had texted me to say I could call any time after 4.00.

I lay down on the bed phone and woke 4 hours later at 2.30 with the phone caught in the top of my shirt and the computer sulking on the table. So I called Clive and had a nice chat during which he explained he had got 92% in his kinky sex exam or something even less attractive. I then had to read for half an hour to get to sleep again. I woke to a cloudy morning and decided to try to finish the review of the paper on PVA dehydrogenases. I eventually did so but only after working on it all afternoon. I decided to walk into town to send it by email and of course an auto appeared immediately and I was unable to resist. Fifteen rupees he said; I was sure it should only be ten but didn't argue much. We soon flagged down by two portly police who just wanted to hitch a ride. At Balaji colony they let me out and I was about to insist on ten rupees when the driver quickly interrupted me with "no sir it is only 5 rupees". So now I know how to find the proper price – ask a policeman. As I passed the cricket ground one of the gang of boys leaving in the gathering gloom called me over to say hello to the group of friends I had previously entertained. As I left them one of the final year students (the tall pale one and the short dark nice one) stopped me for a chat. I was very tempted to get them to join me for dinner but thought I should send the report. My usual internet was not working but I was taken by the young manager to one nearby where there was one of the past virology students; she asked did I remember her and I gambled and said of course you were on the MSc course the year before last. Yes sir would you like to know what I am doing. She took me to a better café explaining that she is doing a PhD in SIMVS - the hospital where Imran's father went, on Legionella. That reminds me that when I phoned Imran his father was very much better. They are staying with his father's brother who lives next door to a very good friend and doctor. "Chris the doctors think it is a miracle his urea has dropped and now his creatine has gone from 14% to 4%". It is all very technical but it does seem very impressive. The new café was very fast and I eventually got my 4 page report sent off to J. Bacteriol. I had a nice email from Sarah, not taking offence at my email. Also a very nice email from Raff and also from Stuart. I had another read of Libby's email and even downloaded the huge picture of her and her hobbit friends on some quest somewhere. As I had arranged that young Srinivasulu (student not professor) would come at 8.0 I had no time for dinner so stopped in a bakery to buy two big samaras for 10 rupees, bumping into tall thin first year Muslim student called Nissar who gave me a lift on his motorbike back to GH where I entertained him with family photos etc. Half an hour later Srinivasulu arrived on his cycle, wearing a sweater with sleeves (unique) because it has become so cold. He really was very cold and hugged me shyly to prove it before climbing onto the bed beside me and heaving all my sloppy discarded bedding over us, snuggling up to me with a sweet little boys smile, happy to be comfortable. We listened to a bit of Saint Saens Organ symphony then some Telugu pop songs, after which he emerged warm enough to sing me a quiet meandering wobbly Sanskrit song about the place of man in the universe. When I showed him a picture of our orchestra he told me he knew what a cello is because the school he was at insisted all students play an instrument and no one seemed to know what this instrument was so he volunteered to find out. I think he just played traditional Telugu songs on it. After the obligatory photo he prepared to leave for a cold journey home. As he was about to leave he told me he thought I was very nice person and darted forward to give me a quick nervous kiss and was rather relieved when I gave him one back. He was a rare subject as he agreed that he looked better smiling and kept his glasses on so I have at least one student photo with the happy smile that makes them such an attractive gang. He seemed to have some difficulty leaving as he put on his sandals then talked a bit then took them off and came back in the room then on with them again and eventually away after I promised he could call after the morning lecture tomorrow. Ten minutes later there was a scraping at the door. It was Srinivasulu who had cycled home and then back here because he had forgotten that he had bought me some cake. Thinking about it this is very improbable; the timing suggests he had decided to call in at the tea place to get some and brought it back. Very welcome as my only dinner had been the 2 samosas from the bakery. Surya has just called for a nice chat. I miss him being here.

Thursday 10th February. My plan to go for a nice bird walk early this morning cancelled itself when I stepped outside at 6.30 to find it was a very cool grey cloudy morning. So I changed plans and, fortified by a delicious dirty little cup of sweet tea planned the rest of my lectures. I have also just started a new book. The last one – The colour of a dog running away was excellent – set in Barcelona and the nearby Pyrenees involving lots of stuff about the Cathar heresy in 12th century in the towns around the southern Pyrenees in France. The new one – The Dangerous Tide by A. Roy is set in the Sundabarns, huge area of mangrove forests, islands and rivers in the delta of the Ganges south and east of Calcutta. Today is a national holiday, actually a Muslim Holy day, but my poor Previous year students had to come in to attend my lecture. I enjoyed it and they did or pretended to do so. Afterwards Srinivas was supposed to have come to the Guest house but he was not at the lecture. When I got

back I phoned him and he said he was about to come. He turned up half an hour later with 2 biochemistry students and his younger brother (Mahesh), an engineering student, all coming for 'darshan' of Srinivas's new friend. Instead of the nice quiet chat I would have liked I then had to repeat stories told to Srinivas last night and show pictures and play music. The biochemists wanted to know about my work so I gave them my PowerPoint presentation from Mitsubishi. They then slowly went off, after photos and a promise to give a lecture in Biochemistry Department. Mahesh, who is very different from his brother, being a tall athletic grinning extrovert with very little hair (I gave it to god sir) and a baseball cap then came back into the room and asked if he could come back in the afternoon "so we can be friends without those fellows". No problem, so off he went grinning, after giving me a little hug. Had a great spicy lunch of chapattis, ladies fingers and dahl, followed by a short read and one hour sleep. Mahesh then appeared, immediately asking for some Telugu songs (no problem) so that he could see me dance (more of a problem) – "you are so glamorous sir". There really does seem to be a huge cultural difference here somehow. "Please sit here sir and teach me English". He was quite tiring but good fun and didn't stay too long, although he was very insistent that he will come again soon. I am sure he will.

As soon as he was gone I got down to preparing the programme for the March concert but had to stop to get ready to go to Sai Gopal's for dinner and "to see your friend Sumanth" (his young nephew). The sun had at last come out and I sat very irritated when he did not come as promised at 5.00 as I wanted to be at his house in time to take photos from his roof. He was only 10 minutes late and we had a nice long ride on his scooter out to his house towards the hills near Kapilatheertham temple. Sumanth was there waiting and was much more confident in chatting compared with last year and soon took me to the roof. I showed him how to use the good camera and he had a great time clambering up on the highest part of the roof taking clever shots (most seem to be out of focus or otherwise faulty). It was a lovely place to be as the sun went down and the crows came home to roost in the Flame of the forest trees. Looking down on the flat roofs, spying on the lives for many streets around would make a good stimulus for plotting a new novel. Everywhere there was activity, or rather often sedentary activity with little groups or individuals tucked into every corner studying. Sai Gopal and an elderly relative stayed on the roof for some time discussing family business; SG has a lot of extra responsibilities since his father died 10 days ago. They then went down with instructions to "enjoy your interacting" (a popular activity here). Sumanth is most impressive; he is about 15 but has a huge amount of general knowledge, his latest enthusiasm being the Hound of the Baskervilles. To get him talking I asked him about this book and he became very lively, explaining the story to me about a place called Dartmoor, pronounced as in Chittoor. When SG went off Sumanth relaxed and showed me how he gets strong for cricket (how ignorant I am, I didn't know strength is important). He did this by using his "special Indian Gym sir based on the water supply": pull-ups on a drainpipe and situps hooked into the water supply pipe then press-ups. Panting after one round of this he gasped "Sir Uncle please take photos and films" and round he went again with the crows swooping low and the scarlet sky inspiring another go at photography. As it became really dark we came down to find only Sai Gopal's elderly mother there. SG had had to unexpectedly take his uncle to the doctors. It later turned out that they then had to wait for a particular doctor to arrive and he had a puncture on his scooter etc etc. I became concerned as Madhu was coming by bus from Rajampet to arrive at about 9.30. We spent some time trying to find out when Sumanth would be free to come and collect his photos at the guest house and to see my family etc. After lots of negotiation there was no problem as he had the next day off so could come after my morning lecture. He then went off to tuition, after first showing me his history text book, showing off his knowledge of European and Indian history and then his atlas and then his incredibly advanced geometry and algebra books integrating cosines etc. As he left one of the final year students came in (Bateek) who had met SG in the street and been instructed to come and keep me company. This mainly consisted of being the old lady's interpreter as she sat swinging in the wicker basket suspended from the ceiling, asking about my family etc. All this time there was no hint of food being prepared and I was torn between disappointment at being hungry and pleased that Madhu would not arrive at a dark guest house. Eventually an embarrassed SG arrived, explained his delay and rushing me off to a local excellent restaurant called Andhra Spice. I kept to my resolution to keep to safer veg food and had mushroom masala and the ubiquitous Gobi. *[Speaking of which I am writing this 11.30 Saturday morning waiting for Gopi from Chittoor and listening to Britten's Death in Venice]*

Typically, silly SG complained on my behalf that the food was too spicy; what did he expect in Andhra Spice? Had a nice ride back through a part of Tirupati I had not seen before, arriving about 10 minutes before Madhu. Seeing a dark room and no Madhu, SG said that we had hurried unnecessarily (patience Christopher). M walked in, kicked off his smelly trainers, grabbed a lunghi, rushed to the bathroom splashed water all over

the place for five minutes and emerged shiny wet in the lunghi; “sorry chris, bad journey, hello chris”. He put some Telugu film music on with his MP3 player, dived onto the bed and said “OK chris, tell”. This is the usual way of saying he wants me to entertain him by chatting so I did and we had a nice sleepy chat before I realised he was fast asleep so I could turn off the music and read for a bit before sleeping.

Friday 11th February. I was woken with tea and the Bangalore express at 6.35 so got up and prepared my morning fermentation lecture. M eventually woke and was much more alive than last night, being very apologetic for being asleep when he arrived. As soon as I had my bread omelette (spurned by Madhu) he left to do his business in Tirupati and was collected for my nice sunny morning lecture. Sumanth had come with SG and was working on the office computer. After my ceremonial hand washing and tea we had a race between us on SG’s scooter and Sumanth on his modern but gearless bike back to the GH where I had copied my 3 CD version of Encyclopaedia Britannica for him and we explored that for some time [his main interest was Einstein’s discovery of the photoelectric effect for which he won the Nobel prize] before going through the pictures he had taken the previous night and copying them. He then asked for the camera and we went outside and onto the roof to take yet more pictures. He went off for more study while I crept guiltily late over to the dining hall. I was welcomed noisily by the big manager (Reddy) who had been looking after some function which was just finishing. So they removed the clean table cloth so I could have my usual slightly greasy table place and some of the left over food which was delicious. Half way through an elderly man came over and gave me an ice cream “to say thank you for allowing us to disturb you sir”. The oldest of the GH helpers then brought me another one and a nice Indian milk sweet. After this wonderful lunch I sat in the sun reading *The Hungry Tide*, then slept for an hour then prepared a little of the next CSO programme book before going for a late afternoon walk up near the Cadet Corps Nagar where I was glad to welcome back some more bulbuls and enjoyed the evening welcome home cawing of the crows. *[Gopi has just phoned to say he will be another half hour and will bring two friends with him so I suppose I am going to have to earn my living entertaining them and finding some way of getting lunch; there is none available at the GH today for some reason.]* At 6.20 Satheesh arrived to go to dinner; I tend to take him for granted – he is the very kind friendly teaching fellow who collects me most days and with whom I make all the teaching arrangements. We first drove down to Balaji Colony to buy top up cards for my phone and also for Madhu (he had phoned earlier in a panic that his phone is out of time and he had no money - no problem I just bought a pounds worth and phoned him the code). We then went right through town out to the Fortune Kences top hotel to make final arrangements with Susai. It appears the Golden Sun resort is fully booked. Susai plus Surya are trying somehow get us in but I left instructions of what to do if he cannot. My nice waiter friend Rajesh then came by and asked if we were going to his restaurant so we did, having Kingfisher beer with Gobi Manchurian and rice and dahl. We drove back through the never-disappointing evening Tirupati streets to the student hostels where I eventually found Subramanian’s room. He was out but I was welcomed by his room mate and we were soon joined by random students who had seen me arrive. They included a student in a bright blue Lunghi who told me he is doing education after a first degree including microbiology. He took me over and eventually walked me back half home, taking a long time to explain his name – Ucheer, made up of ‘U’ which in historical European languages means true, and Cheer which means goodwill and hope for mankind. I told him I hoped he would live up to his name which earned a howl of laughter and violent hand shaking before I wandered up the long trek home.

Saturday 12th February. I started with an unproductive bird expedition, but still enjoyable, slowly drifting in the rising heat of the early morning amongst the pig farms and empty vet places. I saw some nice birds, especially the dramatic paradise flycatcher, with chestnut back and very long wispy tail. I had left the camera wrongly set so missed great picture. Gopi was due about 10.30 but didn’t come until 1.00 and then with a friend (Ramesh). There was no lunch at the guest house so we found an auto to go to Kannas (old Athidi) for quick lunch then had long debate in the very hot sun with the auto driver who wanted 60 rupees to go out to the Guestline swimming pool. We accepted after I explained to Gopi that I would pay the 10 rupees excess just to get out of the sun. Unexpectedly the Guestline was crowded so we had to wait some time to get the desk manager to deal with us – this meant calling the main manager to vet us and to ensure that we had swimming costumes. We did, although Gopi seemed to have missed the point by putting his on over his underpants. Every person at the reception desk seemed to be making a complaint – wrong room, no shower, beds too hard, lunch not included in price as promised in brochure. They are all the usual weekend traffic on its way to Tirumula to see the god. We had a nice swim where I did my usual thing of being an expert coach; these things are all relative I suppose. I had both cameras so we spent a lot of time taking photos; Gopi is safe to leave with the

most expensive one. The other (thank you Hugh) has proved a great success. The other usual thing at this place is the impossibility of getting an auto home. Gopi was so subtle in his approach that I almost missed the suggestion that we go to the nearby outdoor zoo. We got an auto eventually who moaned and argued all the way and added 10 rupees every step of the way, for staying too long at the zoo, for it being sunset on the way home etc. eventually we were arguing back at the guest house where he added another 10 rupees. We both won, as I gave him all the change I had left in my pocket (it was probably 8 rupees). Gopi was very apologetic so I had to explain that the £3 for 2 hours and about 20 miles is quite good for UK. As soon as we got into my room I was completely ignored as the two of them leapt onto the computer to play songs and to look at photos. Eventually Ramesh went off to get the bus back to Chittoor, leaving us to go back for dinner to the Kannas, before coming back to more film music and photo games while I read. We fell asleep in the middle of me explaining to G that *I went* is ok but *did you went* is not, *I am going to T* is ok but *did you going* is not etc. G got up at about 2.45 fooled by the outside security light that seems like morning. He went back to sleep with a happy smile on his face that he was getting more sleep, leaving me aggrieved that I couldn't get back to sleep again.

Sunday 13th February. I was woken again at 7.00 by a text message from Madhu who was in Tirupati to take an exam that day; he wanted to come at 8.00 to bathe, which he did. Gopi had managed to spend at least 20 minutes splashing about in the Great Indian Bathroom and came out just as Madhu arrived in a rush, throwing of clothes (remaining decent) as he went to dive into the bathroom. I hope I got a good picture of the two of them madly drying their hair on my one shared towel. "Chris please can I have the comb (note The comb not my comb), and a pencil chris and a pen chris. Ok ok, no need as I offered him 5 pens; just one for luck. Our small modern car arrived early at 9.30 and we packed up to go Chittoor to visit G's family. I did not really like the idea of spending my last Sunday meeting relatives in dark little rooms but ended up with one of the nicest days in India this year. I was told we were going a slightly different way in order to meet Gopi's father (the one with the magnificent handlebar moustache) who spent most of his working time cooking in a boys' hostel, part of a state school for 9-14 year olds; we would then go on to see some of their land. This always seems amazing but of course in a small village someone often has a small house plus a few fields. The slightly different route meant setting out in completely the opposite direction – to get around one end of a hill outcrop that I can see from Thummulagunta. In the end we did exactly what I have wanted to do – to go for a nice morning drive in the country and then a walk in the village. The small road, often single track, followed the field outlines so we were constantly swinging round 90 degree corners, first one way, then the other, all a bit like the small Somerset roads except for the emerald paddy fields and the ploughing oxen, the tractor trailers piled high with sugarcane and the lines of coconut palms shading little mud walled houses with banana leaf thatch. We collected G's father from the small village school, starting with the slightly embarrassing ritual of him bending down to touch my feet and me patting his head in blessing. He seems a great man, very relaxed and open. He gives no feeling of thinking he needs to make an impression or of being fussily grateful etc. We just stood holding hands grinning at each other. He had been very pleased with the big prints I had made of him and his family so of course wanted more. We then drove another 4-5 miles on red Andhra Pradesh dirt tracks over rocky outcrops, around coconut groves and paddy fields until the track was too rough when we abandoned the car under a tiny amount of shade for the driver while we walked on the last 200m to the family houses. They were tiny single story sheds of earth brick, some covered in smooth white plaster, banana thatched roofs and outside veranda (more equivalent to the van small awning, made of sticks and leaves. After meeting brothers and their wives and children (all girls) we were taken to show off the preparation of the new paddy fields and the chilli field and groundnuts. All three cameras were constantly on the go with little groups of little girls plus the odd reluctant non-smiling mother who then broke into happy attractive grins the moment the camera was put away. We had to eventually drag ourselves off to deliver Gopi's dad back to work which involved him dishing out dinner of rice plus curry to about 16 little kids all clutching their own steel plates to sit down in their classroom on the floor against the wall to grub around on their plates. I then went down the line asking their names while filming them. This was followed by the final photos before we drove off to Chittoor for our lunch, arriving about an hour late. Being the guest I had to sit at the small wooden bench table and eat my rice and spicy mutton or chicken (or both) with aggressive lime pickle while the others watched over me. Amazed at how little I ate I was let off with only one banana told by Gopi to "lie down chris take rest". No need, I said and promptly fell asleep. When I asked for the toilet I was told by apologetic Gopi, "sorry chris it is outside, over the railway. This runs at the back of the house. Ok, no need I said. Gopi then suggested we went with two friends come to

see me called Dillip and Rajesh (?) to the nearby park which amazingly was just the other side of the track and is the same place that Imran took me two years ago – with huge rocky outcrops and a deer park (he never thought to mention that Gopi lived nearby). So eventually I was able to drift away for a private pee. I was persuaded against my better judgement (correct) to clamber up the rocks to get a good view. They got too adventurous and I had a horrible time trying nonchalantly to build up courage to leap across gigantic gaps (probably only a metre) between 10m high boulders. “Don’t worry chris we will carry the cameras” – that helped a lot. As sun was beginning to think about setting we drifted gently home to Gopi. I was about to leave his house where his family (mother, 3 brothers, sister in law) and 3 or 4 friends were milling about the veranda part and the edge of the little road and I was collecting my bag and book and water and biscuits from inside when up the road came Madhu with 3 friends, one of whom I had met – at the pool- and two new ones come see this strange thing in Madhu’s life. They looked a bit thuggish but his friends tend to do so. Gopi explained later that this was because they do not know English and so are very nervous or blunt. Whatever the reason, Gopi’s friends all seem relatively gentle. Madhu had had his exam this morning and had been calling most of the afternoon saying first he was coming then he was not able to make it etc. It was nice to see him even if only for a few minutes. Gopi then suddenly decided that I should not have to travel alone so he jumped in the car to return to Tirupati with me. So off we went with the road blocked by my supporters club (Gopi’s expression). We had yet another good drive back in the evening light about 75 minutes to Tirupati where the driver went off very happy with his 50 rupees tip and Gopi’s explanation to him that I thought he was the best driver I had had (true; he had not complained when we went over the tiny bumpy tracks to Gopipalle, or the fact that he had not slept for 24 hours; and he did not hoot unnecessarily; and he observed dangers before almost hitting them). He obviously took pride in these things as he told he agreed with Gopi after each comment that Gopi translated. I hope we get him to go to Mahabalipuram. As soon as we got to the Guest House G explained he could not stay long but would see me on Friday night; I am already in count down mode; he will come Friday night and Madhu on Saturday morning. Before he went he dived into the bathroom and “had a good bathe in the best bathroom in India”. We sat around a short time feeling a bit sad that I would be going soon and then off he went to get the bus back to Chittoor. He had been great company in the car as he was looking at everything all the time and explaining stuff. He also explained that the postgraduate engineering course he is doing is very good but expensive for his father who now has 7 dependants. This is why G has no cell phone and why he is always dressed so nicely in real trousers, not jeans, and real shirt etc. I then felt guilty that I had not forced him in the past to accept his bus fare. I later did get him to accept 500 rupees which would have covered most of his expenses since I arrived.

I have checked that he has a bank account (I had previously suggested he set one up in case he needed it) so I will give him some pocket money for the next year (this will take some skill or it will be rejected with “no need chris, no need” – the reason of course why I want to do it).

I have failed to make contact with Subramanian so I walked down to the student hostels to find him in C block. On the way through the dark I met some of the 1st year students who wanted me to visit them but kindly took me to Subramanian’s room; he was out so I was carried off in triumph to their room where they all sat on Srinivasulu’s bed, the only one with a thin mattress over the steel sheet. He arrived a little later with his gangly young brother in his baseball cap. This group do not seem to have a confident English speaker so they are rather hard work but very appreciative. We had a nice debate about the difference between custom and tradition and long explanations why arranged marriages are the best. When I entered the room and was given the only chair there were only 5 students; when I left there were 11 – called from around the hostel to come and see what they had found. There was the usual furtive muttering in a corner as they debated about whether they should get me something to eat or drink, this resulting in a very welcome plastic cup of Thums Up. I was driven back to GH in the very cold night air on a quiet motorbike with the others all waving in the half dark at the entrance to the hostel. It is quite tiring doing these rituals but they do seem to be genuinely appreciative. I then had an enjoyable brief chat with Libby and Hugh and decided I must eat something and ate the whole of the laddoo (food of god) brought to me earlier by Madhu. Although it was still early I then fell asleep only to be woken by the phone of the brother of Srinivas (Mahesh) whose hostel (junior engineering) is very close to here. “Can I come and see photos please?” He was persuasive, so I said ok, only for the bell to chime within 10 seconds – he had been just outside the door.

My wonderful day then hit its end. The computer would not turn on; no hint of any life at all. So, very alarmed and unable to care about Mahesh, I sent him on his way. I had left the computer charging while I was

away for the day and I assumed there must have been some gigantic power surge (I have surge-proof plugs here to avoid that). I got more and more distressed as I thought of all the implications. I had intended lots of photo stuff in my last week. I have every afternoon off. My music depends on the computer. My special lecture is on it. The work for orchestra including all the programme I had intended to build needed it; what would Madhu do in Mahabalipuram when I wanted to laze about if he did not have it to play on. I phoned Leigh who provided comfort of a sort, reminding me of a few checks but I had done these already. I then phoned Murali to ask advice about Imran's father and about the computer. He concluded it was unlikely to be damaged by a power surge and recommend that we both sleep on it (he giggled happily that it would probably be more comfortable than an Indian bed).

Monday 14th February. I tried not to look at the computer when I got up for tea at 6.30 but eventually could resist it no longer. I plugged in the power supply and pressed the on button but still no response. I went and shaved and found when I returned that its little charging light was going and it turned on. It seems that I had mistakenly left it turned on when we left on Sunday morning and the power supply did not return that day; it had therefore switched itself off in a specially thorough way. What a relief, but rather odd that I could share it with no one as I was the only person awake.

[I am writing this Tuesday night listening to the end of Strauss Die Frau ohne Schatten and struggling to remember anything about Monday].

I started after my relief at having my computer back alive to prepare my last few lectures on photosynthesis. In the afternoon a worried Imran phoned again to say that they are now back in Tirupati at the hospital. It seems they must make a choice. His father is urgently in need of kidney dialysis but his blood pressure has been very high. That has been brought down but dialysis is now more risky [I think I have that right]. I phoned Murali last night to ask a few things and he went into his competent teacher mode, the end result of his lesson being that people with seriously damaged liver (from drinking) also get damaged kidneys and this often lead to these dilemmas. Outlook does not look good. The doctors were amazed that his family had not heard about the fact that he had kidney problems for 3 years or that he had had a mild heart condition etc etc. He did not tell them. Now they have problems of making decisions. In the early afternoon Imran called – they have decided to go to Vellore to the CMC (Christian Medical College) at Vellore – where Murali spent some time working; it is very good apparently. They wanted to come and see me on the way. Poor Imran. They arrived about 3.30. His father does look so ill, very thin and yellow etc, although he insisted on getting out of the car to say goodbye. I cannot believe that I am likely to see him again [*he died two weeks later*]. Imran's mother just sat in the back chewing her handkerchief. They drove off with father trying to lean out of the window to wave goodbye. I guess I won't be seeing Imran again this visit. As I was wondering what to do that evening Madhu phoned to say he would like to stay the night on the way back from Chittoor to college in Rajampet, so we arranged to meet as usual near the bus stand at the Kalyan, at 7.30.. [*Am writing this while listening to Beethoven late quartet Op127 slow movement, one of my greatest pieces since I first bought it in 1958.*]. I decided I would walk into town with the camcorder to record a typical walk into Tirupati. All went well until the battery finished; I have got so used to it going on for ever I took it for granted. I enjoyed the walk anyway. At the noisiest part of town, at the traffic light at the town club Madhu phoned to say that he would not make it until 8.30. Then Subramanian phoned to arrange to see me tomorrow but he is difficult to understand even in a silent room and we resorted to me shouting Tuesday at 7 and him shouting it back. I managed to buy some new batteries for the little camera and some empty CD disks (6 for £1) before trying to find an internet place that was working "sorry sir no bytes tonight". The one that was working was still unable to connect me to email so I have been out of touch for 5 days now. As I came out I bumped into the student whose birthday it was on Sunday. This morning he was waiting in the open balcony/corridor outside the lecture theatre with a box of Indian milk sweets and fed me one of them like a little boy being fed by his mum to the applause of the class. He told me there was little chance of finding a connection so I wandered down the Ghandi road and into the dark little road that specialises in rope and in flower garland making and selling. I was observed as I furtively tried to photograph an old man making a garland of roses outside one of the little open shops. The boy who saw me called me over and offered me a rose which I declined but took a nice photo of him surrounded by his flowers. In the temple there was some ceremony going on in the courtyard which I had just enough battery left to film before wandering beneath the towering gopuram with its surrounding little stalls selling temple stuff with the hundreds of different versions of Sri Venkateshwara. I saw the same charming little boy as last year in his same stall flicking dust off the statues and lighting incense sticks to put before one of the statues; as soon as

it was lit he waved it all around filling the whole stall and the air in front with its sweet smell and then turned to pray to the god for a minute before turning back for his picture to be taken. I still had a lot of time before Madhu was due so went to escape the noise of the streets to the Sindhuri Park hotel for coffee and ice cream and a read of the papers (first for nearly two weeks). On the way down one of the scruffier little streets that is lined with sleeping or begging beggars there was a group of about 20 young men all jostling about in a menacing way in the dark street. When I cautiously got nearer I saw they were merely pushing each other about to get a better view of the cricket [India beating Pakistan] showing on a TV in a showroom. I got to the Kalyan foyer armchairs in plenty of time and then had to wait another 45 minutes for Madhu. Towards the end of the wait I got the feeling that I was destined to wait until I had finished the last chapter of *The Hungry tide* and so it was. I closed the book as Madhu came in affectionately apologetic as he pulled me to my feet to go and have a nice Thali dinner in the restaurant. When we left at 9.30 I clapped an auto but it was waved away by Madhu who said we wanted to walk a bit. Well he did – down the back route from the Kalyan past the bus stands near the Sindhuri Park, all very quiet now, to the short road at the end of Ghandi road where the clothes shops are. As Sasi had not kept his only appointment I boycotted his uncles shop and went two shops down where I had photographed the staff a few weeks ago. By the time he had chosen his jeans and shirt (£3.50) there were 28 items unpacked on the counter. This is the usual thing it seems and all done in a happy spirit. So at last home through the incredibly wide empty streets to collapse on the bed while Madhu paraded in his new clothes. He was wearing the trainers we had bought last year and they were suffering from trainer rot so badly I threw them outside for the night and made M wash his feet again; the first wash had not eradicated their pungency [*this is all rather incongruous with the Beethoven*].

Tuesday 14th February. Woke as usual to a cold sunny morning by my rather aggressive hobbit with a tray with 2 teas, both of which I drank as M seemed so tied up in blankets that even if he was awake he would not be able to get out to drink. I have now started my penultimate book *The Time Traveller's Wife*. After insisting on photographs of his new clothes M set off for Rajampet while I set off for my bread omelette which was unusually good this morning. By about 8.30 the atmosphere is like an English summer morning, just about warm enough to have breakfast in the garden so I sat and prepared my lecture on my outer veranda before being taken off by Sathesh to work. His unfailing happy smile as he gets off his motorbike and asks “have you finished your breakfast sir?” is always a positive start to the day. The internet was not working again so I returned immediately with Sai Gopal to sit in the sun for 20 minutes, now extremely hot, before unloading my latest batches of photos and copying everything onto CDs and DVDs, including sets for Sumanth and Gopi. As it became cool enough to sit outside I did so with laptop preparing my ‘special’ PowerPoint lecture which will be based on my Mitsubishi lecture with added family photos. About 6.15 Prof S arrived direct from his week's conference, to check that everything had gone well for me in his absence. At 7.0 exactly on time Subramanian appeared as dapper as ever but looking rather subdued. The reason took about 20 minutes to explain and this continued as we went by auto to Kannas for ultra spicy chicken dinner extinguished by pistachio ice cream before coming back for more chat. His family are very poor farmers for coastal Andhra Pradesh and are Scheduled Caste but he has converted to Christianity so “you see why even with all my problems I am able to be happy, but it is still very difficult”. After he left, agreeing to come to dinner with me and Gopi on Friday night, I started writing my diary but was soon interrupted at about 9.50 by a single loud bang on the door. Irritated thinking it was Mahesh who had phoned twice today to ask to come, I flung the door open and there was Sasi in his black rousers and scarlet shirt looking almost unchanged since last year. I had been disappointed then that I had only seen him a couple of times and so this year when he had not turned up to our one arrangement in my first week here I decided that he probably was not interested in coming so had not called him again. He then explained that he had called twice but has a very full timetable. He was on the way to a course starting at midnight – on setting up and maintaining computer networks. So we had a nice long chat while he explained all his complicated plans – one of which is to go to Singapore as a computer engineer. He left at ten to midnight to go to his course, promising to come again before I leave. I doubt if he will but it was very nice to see him.

Wednesday 15th February. [*I am writing this in the evening while listening to La Boheme; I wonder if Libby remembers when I played this to her and she nearly destroyed our relationship by giggling at the tragic end*]. I woke very sensitive to the fact that I will have few opportunities to have my sunny morning walk so went to have breakfast at 7.15 opening the door exactly as my hobbit rang the bell; we both jumped and he tipped even more tea than usual into the saucer and tray. The birds were very generous this morning and I got some nice

pictures of a purple rumped sunbird and saw two new ones. One had blue eyes – the only blue-eyed bird in my big Helms field guide, the Blue-faced malkoha, a sort of cuckoo. It is not in my smaller guide and I couldn't find it initially in the big guide. I was rather pleased with my self as I estimated its length (by comparison with known birds) as being a little under 40cm. It was 39 cm. I failed to get a photo of the other new bird. It looked like a wagtail but with markings like a ringed plover and two white wing bars. I was pleased that I noted all this down as, again this bird is not in the Collins guide and its territory does not include this area; it is marked here by a little cross to indicate some sightings. It is a Forest wagtail. It was cool when I set out at about 8.00 but by 9.00 it was almost unbearably hot, especially as I stood amongst the flies by the pig buildings trying to get a picture of the Forest wagtail. I finished my photosynthesis lectures today. Internet still down. I met Srinivas on the stairs and arranged that he would come to dinner this evening at 6.0. I sat in the sun after my lecture for 15 minutes then came in and washed clothes hanging them like some patriotic message on the railing surrounding my veranda. *[the great jussi Bjorling is now singing his heart out]*. Lunch was very good but super spicy, leaving me with tears running down my face and nose dribbling into my sugar and curds. I went to lie down for a sleep after lunch but was overwhelmed by the remains of the decaying smell from Madhu's trainers – or rather what was left by his feet on his bed sheet. So I had another washing session, hanging it to dry over two chairs out in the sun. I spent the rest of the afternoon preparing my PowerPoint lecture for tomorrow, simplifying a lot of the slides and inserting a few family ones.

At about 4.30 I went to the dairy farm to say goodbye to the huge oxen and the elephants, before walking around the fields in the still hot afternoon. I was about to get a nice picture of a kingfisher when I had a call on my mobile; after much effort I worked out that it was the younger of Gopi's older brothers who is in Tirupati for some work and wanted to come and say goodbye. He arrived about 6.00 when Srinivas should have arrived. I had just flopped onto the bed with one of my odd migraines; no pain - just odd lights etc. I forced myself to be friendly and showed him the pictures of the family village and of our trip to the zoo. He looks like a heavyweight Gopi, with some of his nice expressions but without the smile; He then got up to go, put on his sandals and we said goodbye. A minute later he knocked on the door to say he wanted my blessing, taking off his sandals (he was after all on holy ground) then knelt touched my sandy feet with his hands then kissed them while I, embarrassed, ruffled his hair. Off he went for his bus while I slumped again onto the bed to wait for Srinivas. I gave up at 7.00, grabbed my book and small camera to go down town. As I walked out, Srinivas came up, very apologetic that some medic student friends had arrived in the hostel and he had to look after them. My plan had been to have a quiet Kalyan dinner with him and nice long chat about music etc. Some hopes. He had something wrong with a tooth and so we had to go to the doctor, after depositing me in the room of his brother (cousin) while they both went off to the doctor who was busy and could not see him until 9.30. So I was taken by the two of them to a simple restaurant where I had Gobi fried rice with ground nuts. Very good. He insisted on paying then had to borrow 200 rupees at the end of the evening. I was looking forward to going back to the GH alone or together but they took me instead out to the boating lake place which was almost closed because there was a wedding reception in the grounds. The ride was about 15 minutes but seemed to be lasting for ever through very heavy noisy traffic over severely damaged roads. So we waited 20 minutes for an auto and had another horrible ride back. Srinivas made his friend wait outside "so we could talk as proper friends sir". I was almost too exhausted to talk as anything but S is quite gentle and so it was a quiet end to the evening. *[I am getting all twitchy so will stop this now]*.

Thursday 16th February. Not a very good day. I was woken at 5am by a bang on the door; I staggered irritably to the door thinking tea was a bit early only to find an old man with a white lungi and whiter beard chattering in Telugu and gesticulating madly toward the interior of the room. Having no idea what it was about I waved goodbye and closed the door. At 6 I was woken again by the same man, plus another man and an elderly woman who brushed me aside and stood in the middle of the room giggling and apparently admiring it. I shooed her away and failed to get back to sleep, just lying with a headache and a threatening sore throat, thinking it is about time to go home. My lecture was on TCA cycle and I nearly panicked when I couldn't remember one of the intermediates. I then obeyed what I tell the students and found I could work it out; I did this while taking a short break through the ever open theatre door onto the second floor corridor/balcony looking out over the campus and the distant heated hills. I returned with Sai Gopal at 10.40 to discover that three men were waiting to get into my room to fit the cupboard wardrobe that was lying on the veranda. It was explained that I must remain in my room while they were doing this for security reasons. So, with headache and sore throat I sat around until 3.50 with a short break for lunch while they cut bits off the cupboard and then fixed it together

again and jammed it into place then drilled holes in the wall and hammered like mad for minutes at a time or sawed up wood with an electric saw. The team of three included two competent workers and one unsmiling paunched man who just shouted continuously, even when all three were working in my room with me lying on the bed trying to read. They left just before I went off to give my special lecture, leaving me just about enough time to sweep up their mess. I had asked that the special projector for linking to my computer could be there early in the afternoon so I could check everything; “no need, no need, I am experienced at that”, from Sai Gopal. So I arrived 10 minutes before my lecture was due to start only to find that we could not connect my computer as their cable did not fit. We moved an office computer in and tried that but this failed. There were usually 4 persons at any one time trying to get the system to work. There is only one such projector and it has to be borrowed from the Principals office. A stream of clerks and technicians went back and forth to try to solve the problem. All the time about half the 1st years sat in complete silence looking on at the muddle. I had just decided that we would use 3 computers simultaneously so that everyone could see when a visiting salesman who knew about computers (and happened to be a biochemist and so was attending my lecture, more or less solved everything although the projector had a colour missing so everything came out with a strong green bias. I had included personal and family things and cellos and bird pictures in the first half of the lecture. As soon as it was obvious that we could have the lecture (now one hour late) the other students were rounded up and shepherded into the lecture theatre. This took another 15 minutes, to get more chairs and rearrange the room. So I started one hour and 40 minutes late. I kept it brief and so still managed to finish by 6.00. I then had to negotiate with Srinivas and Nissar who were coming to dinner with me but as always the students are very nosy and try to join in everything. All the final years students came up trying to persuade me that they should come to the guest house for the evening but I already have plans. I eventually came to some deal with them but cannot remember now what it was. I wanted Sateesh to drive me back to have a quiet chat at the end of the day but Prof Srinivasulu insisted that he drive me. Srinivas and Nissar then turned up only 30 minutes late by which time I was hungry and irritable from all the bullying I had been getting, so I completely rejected their insistence that we go to a cheap restaurant all three on the back of Nissar’s motorbike. The only way of getting them to realise that I meant what I said was when I walked off, telling them that I was eating at the Bhimas de Luxe next to the station and they could come. They caught up with me at the gate as I grabbed an auto; Srinivas jumped in and Nissar drove along beside while he was told where the hotel was. We then went down the small (pedestrian) road leading to the temple with its lining of stalls, looking for the boy whose photo I took last year (to give the photos to him). Srinivas had the sense to show the picture to the keeper of the stall who looked most like the one I remembered him tending and sure enough it was his father who said he would be there the next day. I then tried to buy batteries for the small camera, as the last ones only lasted a few shots. In the shop I was amazed to see an American girl (so I thought but she was Israeli) trying to buy small loudspeakers for her MP3 player. She was delighted to be directed to Nethaji road nearby. We then went down into the dark too cool empty Bhimas de Luxe restaurant, the first restaurant I went to with Naidu 24 years ago. The waiter explained that it was empty because 8.0 was a bit early and there was a cricket match not yet finished between India and Pakistan. We had very nice veg dinner, with me ordering because they don’t know about Indian restaurant dishes. Their English is not good but they were so enthusiastic to talk that it didn’t seem to matter. One gem from Nissar is “in Israel what is the chief caste sir; do they have Brahmins or who are the Brahmins in Israel – are they Christians”? His father is in education administration, and Srinivas’s father is a bus conductor. After dinner Nissar went off to help his father go to the doctors and S came back for half an hour to the Guest house where we swore undying friendship before he left sadly into the cool night with about a dozen stops to look back and wave. He had tried to pay me back the 200 rupees borrowed last night but I suggested he bought a shirt with it [his father buys all his shirts and he likes the idea of choosing for himself].

When I called Imran today his father was continuing to improve and was having blood transfusions. Imran is proud that he has a rather uncommon blood group so has given his phone number to the hospital in case they need him. There were only 3 packs of blood suitable for his father and so Imran’s contribution was essential. ”How is your father Imran”; “Chris my dear, he of course is much better his body is now full of the blood of Imran”. His spirits are coming back. “I had to fill in a form with a nice pretty nurse about my blood – there were 3 questions: Are you on any medication? Have you ever had jaundice? And, Chris, they asked me if I had had sex - so of course I thought this was so they could give me a reward for giving my precious blood; you have a church song about that I think Chris, but no, it was no free offer, I only got apple juice”.

[Yet again I am sitting waiting for Subramanian; he was supposed to come to eat with me and Gopi on my last evening tomorrow, but he cannot make it so asked to come tonight at 9.30-10.0. It is now 10.15].

Friday 17th February. *[I am writing this in the departure lounge in Chennai at 1.55am waiting for BA036.]*. Subramanian did not turn up last night. I gave my final lecture in the morning to the Previous year on the Krebs cycle etc. Gopi dutifully arrived exactly on time just before lunch. He gave me a beautifully wrapped box containing a wooden model car 8 inches long. Lunch was excellent. I managed this year to remember to give rupees to all the cooks. One of Gopi's friends soon turned up and they spent a lot of time doing computer stuff, copying songs and making CD copies of all Gopi's family pictures. At 3.30 Sai Gopal and Satheesh both turned up to collect me for my farewell function. This accident was fortunate as SG found he was out of fuel as we were about to leave so S had to drive off with one of my water bottles to buy a litre of petrol. The Dean was the guest of honour at my function so we had a nice little chat in Srinivasulu's office before parading up the stairs to the usual lecture theatre which was packed with all the students and staff. We sat down in seats in the front row and were called up one at a time to take our proper places at the nicely decorated table in the front. There were garlands everywhere and a nice coloured drawing on the blackboard. I had the usual heavy garland of flowers strung around my neck while they all cheered. The two staff and Dean were then called up and each were about to be garlanded but grabbed them before they were bestowed and stuffed them on the table. I don't know if the students are offended by this but when I commented on it they all cheered. One of the girls started the whole event with a long sung prayer. The dean acted as MC calling on students staff etc to say a few words. As usual the girls were most forthcoming, describing in accurate glowing terms "great scientist who spares his valuable time to come all this way from his loving family to inspire us. He has inspired our undying love, he is our great guru". One of the boys (the one who fed me his birthday sweets before the lecture) then said the same sort of thing ending with "we do not know what we will do without him, he is so dear to us". As he walked back to his seat silly Sai Gopal leaned over and laughing said "did you see, he is weeping". [I don't know what is so funny - it is just what I expect from loyal students]. Satheesh then stood up and gave a neat little sensible speech as he has done for the last 4 years at least. Sai Gopal did his usual stuff saying that I was writing a book about Indian birds, that I am a Fellow of the Royal Society and we expect him some time this year to win the Nobel Prize for his work on PQQ, this bringing a great chorus of cheers and clapping from the students. Shame they don't get to vote. Srinivasulu gave his usual intelligent honest courteous speech which I was very pleased to see was applauded very loudly and sincerely by the students. The Dean did his stuff with a little inspiring bit about how I only come to India to see them and to teach and inspire them; they are the important people in this and they must live up to it. I then had to give my usual party piece which I enjoyed so I guess they did. I was then presented with a gift from 1st year students of two CDs, chosen by Srinivas, one of classical Carnatic music played on saxophone, and then with a shawl and another flowery garland, being made to sit down like one of the gods covered in precious shawls and garlands, or rather more like a little old man in my shawl, bewildered by all the attention. We then all sat in rather formal way eating samosas and cake with Thums Up. Eventually the platform party trooped out, I said formal thanks to the Dean for coming to my party and then went back for photos and autographs, one student complaining that I had written only Best wishes to him but Very Best wishes to his friend. We eventually got downstairs into the last golden evening sun for group photos. I was glad I had avoided last years problem of trying to arrange dinner with a few selected students on my last evening, trying to have private conversations is often impossible. Srinivas wanted lots of separate pictures of him and me but I was rescued by the Previous year girls who fussed around for a group photo on the steps. Sateesh then wanted to drive me back and say goodbye but Srinivas insisted he was going that way so I had to accept and arranged for S to come next morning. Not long after I got back to a hungry Gopi there was a knock on the door and there was Subramanian looking very contrite. He later explained that it was because he wanted to ask me for 500 rupees to photocopy some essential book as he has no money at all. He was so ashamed he could not come. It is not only this. He did come to eat with me and Gopi this evening and asked if we could go outside and discuss a private matter. He is from a very poor farming family in north coastal Andhra Pradesh so could not possibly afford to do his masters degree (he finished it last year). Because he is from one of the lowest castes he was allowed to do the course for only 900 rupees. After he had finished they retrospectively changed the rules. Now he owes the full fees of 68,000 rupees. As there is no way to pay, the University will not give him his formal papers for his degree. So he has successfully got 3 jobs but each time they insist on seeing his proper degree papers. In his chirpy way he refers this to this as his General Problem Syndrome [my GPS]. He

said that he did not want to come with me and Gopi to the expensive Fortune Kences hotel because the bill would be about 500 rupees and he would rather I gave it to him for the book. So I gave him the rupees and insisted he come with us. We had a really enjoyable last evening, stopping off first at the temple to deliver photos to the uncle of the small boy in the stall. Just as we finished that transaction there was a lot of drumming and wailing from the beginning of the little road leading to the Gopuram and there was a temple elephant slowly swaying his way down the road blessing people with his trunk. He was followed by the temple band and a dozen sweating struggling men carrying the god on his throne mounted on long heavy poles. They stopped opposite me as I was filming and offered me the honour (I later gathered) of helping carry the god. I courteously declined. We then had a last noisy walk past the Bhimas hotel, the Sindhuri park, the Kalyan to the Fortune Kences where we had a relative muted dinner, Subramanian being subdued because of his GPS. Rajesh, the nice waiter was his usual helpful smiling self, taking off his waiter's apron for a gentle goodbye hug. We dropped Subramanian off at the hostels and Gopi and I carried on up the long cool drive for the last time to the Guest house. The day time temperatures are about 33 and night it goes down to 17 which is rather cool in an open auto or on bike. The moon was more or less full as it had been when I arrived. After a nice long chat during which I fell asleep a few times Gopi went to sleep leaving me awake as I started into packing and leaving mode.

Saturday 18th February. Departure day. Started with my last bread omelette and then final packing which was easy with helpful but sad Gopi. Of course we were interrupted every few minutes by visitors come to say goodbye, including Subramanian, Srinivas, his brother Mahesh, Satheesh, then Sai Gopal and finally Prof Srinivasulu, just as we had finished loading the car. Madhu had arrived exactly as planned at 9.30. The car and driver were the same as when I went with Gopi to Chittoor; both excellent. I had to guide Prof S out the door so I could have a private last goodbye to Gopi, then we were off. First of all we had to go to the Kalyan to pay for the car and to wait for Susai to come and give us the name of our alternative hotel – The Blue Lagoon [the usual Golden Sun Resort was full]. I had woken with a slight dry throat and a developing cough so did not enjoy the rural ride to Chennai as much as usual although M was very good company. We stopped for lunch at the start of the big Poonamallee road in an AC non-veg restaurant and had mutton biriani again. The 90 minute drive through the traffic jams of Chennai was grim and hot but at last we were on the East Coast Road on the way to Mahabalipuram. Just after a sign saying it was 39 km M saw a big sign about The Blue Lagoon but we assumed it was an early advert for it. We stopped at the Golden sun to ask where the Blue Lagoon was but the gate man did not know so we went on into M itself. At the entrance a toll is charged and we asked about the BL but they said it was in Chennai so we got them to direct us to an alternative hotel, which soon led us to the long driveway up to the Temple Sands Resort, the most luxurious in M. They had only one room available and that was 10,000 rupees. We drove off and tried many other places but all were full. The last of these was helpful and Mina at reception phoned round other hotels to confirm all were full but she finished back at the Temple resort where her friend told her a 5000 rupee room had just become available so we booked it for one night and back we went to be shown to a most wonderful luxurious room with balcony overlooking the green lawns, palm trees and swimming pool. It was near the town so we immediately went onto the beach to explore. It is much improved near the town with many fishing boats donated by other countries and the beach restaurants all tarted up far better than pre-tsunami. Many of these advertised rooms to rent and M asked at five of them but they confirmed that all rooms in Mahabalipuram were taken. We clambered over the rocks to walk around the fenced temple area to the busy sunset beach on the far side, lined with excited family groups urging each other to get into the water in trousers or saris etc. The same boys with lean horses were still there giving jolting rides to showing off men. Madhu is touchingly nervous about adventurous things so declined my suggestion that he had a ride. It is the first time he has been to the seaside and kept muttering “Chris, chris it is so beautiful and its wave noise keeps going on”. We walked up the line of makeshift stalls selling fast food and trinkets on way into town where M bought some rather super sweet little models of fair haired girls as presents for ?? We then strolled through the town with its heavy sprinkling of western tourists, many scruffy hippy style but others looking cool if a little self conscious in their Indian clothes. I asked M if I should wear more Indian clothes; “no chris you are so beautiful”; so, no need for change there then. Fortunately M always seems to have a few coins for beggars which he quietly hands over. We walked right through town and out onto the Chennai road for a km to the long palm-lined drive up to our hotel. I can see how people can become hooked on comfort hotels here, it is wonderful wandering around the clean mosquito free grounds and then up to our room to watch TV before going out eat at the Luna Magica, one of our favourites (me and Surya). The very makeshift place with its

bamboo and banana leaf roof is all a bit tidy now but the food has not changed - or the service. The menus are all now on laminated sheets and seem similar throughout the area. This means that many of the items are not really on offer. I was unable to resist grilled fish and chips with Kingfisher beer, while M had prawn biryani, all of which was good. None of the exotic ice creams was available. There was a strange middle-aged English couple at the only other table; he was like a younger Alan Bennet. They seem to be work colleagues. She was keen to be nice to the elderly grubby waiter and was asking questions all the time and not really listening to the answers. This led her to an assumption that he was the owner of the place and so she did not give a tip. The waiter pointed out that it was usual to give 100-150 rupee tip and she was all flustered and explained to him that she had assumed he was the owner and handed over 150 rupees. Madhu was horrified as the most that would be usual was 20 rupees. In the hearing of the waiter Madhu told me not to give a tip as she had given enough for ten customers. I said he had been nice to us and had to walk up three flights of stairs to get food etc so we gave him 15 rupees, which he rather sheepishly accepted. Madhu's family were originally from Tamil Nadu so he enjoyed speaking in Tamil to the waiters etc. *[I am editing this back home while listening in bed to Mozart, drinking coffee and looking out on gently falling snow]*. We had a short panic when we realised that we had not called the Blue Lagoon to say we would not be there that night and more important would be there the next two. So we called 'Mr James' and he was very happy to hear from us and said he looked forward to meeting us later. We then had a nice stroll by the sea then back past the security man through the gardens into the hotel lobby with M nervously clutching my hand but still looking so dignified and as if he was accustomed to such luxurious surroundings. I was so glad to have exercised no restraint when I casually accepted the last room in the hotel. M has enjoyed it so much (as did I of course). I suddenly felt extremely tired (and I still had the irritating cough) so went to bed early, drifting in and out of sleep to the sound of a Tamil film and Madhu's gentle chat.

Sunday 19th February I woke early and went and sat in a rocking chair on our balcony to watch the early morning fishermen moving out to sea. We went to the restaurant to find breakfast which was mainly a huge intercontinental buffet which Madhu was frightened of so we found a table and ordered what we wanted. I had croissants, Danish pastries and coffee and M of course had masala dosa. The other eaters were 80% western, the rest being very rich looking Indian families. We had to check out at 12 which left us 2 hours to swim. Madhu was shy of this to start, but gave in with "Chris, your wish is also mine". The blue pool was shallow and subdivided by small islands with palm trees, and looked out over the blue Bay of Bengal. On the seaward side there was a large flat area covered with a few inches of water which then tipped over the edge. After swimming around a bit we then lay in this, chatting and looking out to sea, and at the chipmunks (squirrels), crows, Mynas and White-fronted kingfishers. All rather different from early days when I would be rather lonely on Marina Beach, staying with the cockroaches and mosquitoes in the Guest house of the university of Madras. I had the usual series of photos of Madhu looking so elegant in my multicoloured Speedos. His 'teenage' vanity is nice as he doesn't mind this. I still find that I am shy of demanding things from the various servants in hotels but he is more used to the idea of asking for help for the usual excess of helpers in hotels and restaurants; so when we didn't have two chairs (Germans had taken the others) he just called over to a pool attendant asking for another which was quickly found, for which he was given 5 rupees. Our idyll was soon over and up we went to pack up to check out, M going off to find our driver who had slept the night in the car in the car park. He turned up as cheerful as ever and off we went on the very attractive coast road back to Chennai, me apprehensive and slightly irritable at the spoiled plan but M and the driver happily enjoying the trip. 39 km later there was the very tatty side of a building with Blue Lagoon in peeling paint advertised. We pulled off the busy dusty road and my spirits rose as we drove about half km away from the road towards the sea to find the Resort and Mr James, a young man called James. Being a Sunday there was some function going on with the usual blasting film music. We drove to look at the two types of room in the more or less empty resort. The beach facing room actually faced the wall separating us from the beach and was relatively primitive so we chose the Garden facing room which was much better. The garden was bare earth with trees. And crows and more crows and more crows. Our room marked the point reached by the tsunami. The water supply was not working so Madhu phoned reception and two people came to sort it out. We later found that they had failed to provide us with hot water so the hot shower I looked forward to became a technical business of buckets of cold water. I have been spoiled by the plentiful hot water in what Gopi described as the best bathroom in India [he was biased by his home where the bathroom was a tap and bucket outside and a walk over the railway track to find a suitable squatting place]. We then went to find the restaurant for lunch, which was for some reason in the huge function hall where the

waiters in their usual white shirts and black trousers had to run across the hall to the scattered tables each of which had an attendant fan blasting hot air. After a long wait and ordering from the standard laminated menus we eventually found something that they could provide; this would take 15 minutes whereas what we wanted would take 40 minutes. Anyway it took 30 minutes (chicken and mutton biryani). There was an irritable apparently incompetent boss plus 6 young helpful but frightened teenage waiters, being shouted at by the few other customers for not providing their needs. My final butterscotch ice cream this time was chocolate but good. The swimming pool did not look attractive, having little shade and being rather makeshift and concrete; it was also full of fat middle aged noisy men in their underpants showing off to their ladies on the sides in their elegant saris. So we sorted out a few photos on computer read for a bit and then drove off to visit Golden Beach about 5 km away. This is the amusement park I have often visited before with fairground stuff, casual outdoor restaurants, Michael Jackson dance competitions etc. Unfortunately we had left it a bit late so it was empty and often not working and altogether a let down. By contrast with Imran (and me I suppose) Madhu never sulks and makes the best of things so it was not too bad. Imran called, upset that I had not called him the whole day; “sorry Chris but you see I am roaming so cannot call you easily and this poor Indian boy is wandering alone around the streets of Malleable where he knows no one and thinking of his dear friend Chris who thinks Imran has reached his sell by date”. ”Imran how did you know I was thinking exactly that?” “You may be the genius sir but I know you very well; never mind Chris how are you my dear – please be very happy and take no notice of this silly fellow and phone me at your convenience”. The restaurants were all closing so we walked up the road to a completely empty ‘multicuisine garden restaurant’ where we were shown to a table under a thatched roof by a grim faced waiter who kept muttering no mosquitoes sir which convinced me we should get up and leave. We then drove on to another classier restaurant offering kebabs and other North Indian specialities. Again here the chief waiter was apparently incompetent and bullied the nervous young waiters all of whom visited our table to pointlessly shuffle the glasses etc. Our order came after 20 minutes but was completely wrong but we were hungry and had it anyway. Rather disappointing end to the day, but cheered up on short drive back with Madhu listing what he thought was wrong with the restaurant, which fitted what I felt. He made the point that probably no one goes there more than once so they do not care enough. I enjoyed not giving a tip. The Service charge always levied is not for the waiters I had earlier found from Rajesh at the Fortune Kences, so a tip should be given. We went to bed with the late night crow arrivals and the sound of gentle surf that so thrilled Madhu.

Monday 20th February. My final day was one of the best I have had, partly in contrast to what I had expected. Always on the last day there is the dread of the final dinner, packing, unpacking, worrying etc. I imagined having nothing to do and Madhu being bored and it being unbearably hot. I woke feeling stiff and headachy and my horrible cough. The seven O’clock crow chorus was the start of a crow loud day (as Dylan Thomas would put it). I thought of having a nice cool early morning stroll towards the fishing boats just North of us. The beach has a lot of the usual broadleaved ground plant that captures flying rubbish, including the crows. The beach itself looked wonderful except for the line of squatters on the tide line which decided me finally against swimming in the sea. We went to the small restaurant for breakfast where we again had the chief grumpy man and 3 waiters to ourselves. I had been looking forward to my last Indian breakfast of puris or dosas but we had to make do with chicken sandwiches. This took 20 minutes and the lime juice and coffee came another 20 minutes later.

At about eleven O’clock Madhu called reception to ask about the pool to find that it was open and we needed to take our towels from the room. We wandered over to find the elderly attendant unwilling to let us in until we had a signed chit to say we were guests – although he saw us come out of our room. I purposely absent-mindedly sat down on the attendants chair under a tree and read my book while Madhu trotted about from one person to another. It then took him 20 minutes to get our chitty before we were let in. Once in the warm clean water it all became much more attractive with kingfishers in the surrounding trees, kites overhead and of course the last sun for me for some time. Madhu enjoyed the novelty of ordering lunch by room service which was much more attractive as it meant that we could do what we wanted while waiting. After lunch I slept and M went with the driver to buy batteries for his MP3 player for the long drive home. At 4.30 we set out on a long walk on the beach as far as one of the fishing villages, the coloured boats all being post tsunami donations. The small boys had untied the sections of one of the small open ‘boats’ made up of 4 balsa logs, and were using the logs for surfing. Eventually they mobbed us for photos and especially to look through the binoculars which have become Madhu’s pet toy. We returned for the last horrible packing but this was easy as M is so positive and

helpful. I managed to pack everything well enough that it was almost insufficiently full. I left M with deodorant which he thought was wonderful. We went to the small restaurant for final dinner which was fairly competently served. Madhu's resistance broke down and he decided he must try the Chinese ginger chicken which was rather Indian in the amount of chilli which seems to have found its way into the menu. Anyway it was all good. We had to pack the car up and check out officially before 9.0 as they were digging a trench across the path and the car had to get out first [and also that all staff would then go home]. I am a bit confused about sequence of events but I had a nice phone call to Libby and had a nice text message from Leigh who had checked me into my flight. I gave the phone to Madhu to say something to Libby who chatted to him while he had a delighted smile on his face. After we finished the call he said "chris chris I am so happy, your lady is so sweet, I could understand everything she said please let me have her ID (email address)". He kept on this vein for some time; it cheered him up about me leaving somehow. Soon after this the chief security man with a couple of assistants called into to check something (that we hadn't stolen the TV probably), then I actually had a couple of hours sleep while Madhu did some last minute music copying onto his MP3 player. At 11.45 we did the last minute packing of computer and cameras only to find that my good international phone was missing. Madhu was very concerned and very thoroughly searched everything, stripping the bed, moving all furniture, emptying all bags including his own, and all our pockets till it was certain it was not there. I assured him that I had probably left it in my shorts pocket in the main bag which was in the car at the entrance. We had a goodbye tearful hug, feeling so sad but slightly cheered by the fact that we can so easily phone. Then the short drive through wide empty streets to the airport with Madhu's damp head on my shoulder and me cheering myself with thoughts of returning home. Said genuine thank you to the driver who just stood there wagging his grinning head. Then Madhu ran off to find a trolley. He could probably have got a ticket to come inside but I did not tell him as this would mean him standing on one side of a barrier watching helplessly as I stand in the distance in a long queue. So a short goodbye, both smiling bravely, then a few steps to wave as I made my way through the outside security staff into the jaws of Departures. Check in was easy, directed by a charming smiling BA staff member (a boy in a BA baseball cap) to a special desk after checking that I was on his printout of online checked passengers. Everything went very smoothly, arriving soon at the gate lounge where I spent 90 minutes writing up diary. The plane was completely full and I had the usual slightly oafish elderly fat man beside me. So glad to have my usual aisle seat [Leigh worked out that they must have a record of previous flights because I always have the same seat]. The flight was at 4.00 am and set off on time. They have the usual problem of knowing what food to serve. We had breakfast of mixed grill which was disgusting; the attraction of a mixed grill is freshly grilled tasty food – not long-congealed but hot splurge of egg, anaemic rubbery sausages, anaemic rubbery mushrooms, STOP. The whole plane is full of the stink of this. Another meal I had vegetarian lunch [?] which was tolerable but the best was a cheese and tomato roll. Watched a film while dozing – Biopic of Johnny Cash. Arrived in Heathrow after a relatively unpleasant too-long flight in snow at 3 degrees. Soon got bag and quickly confirmed that my phone was not there [also later found that my small Canon camera was also missing], then out to be met by unchanging smiling Leigh for a nice drive home hearing his news. During previous years there have been big events during my time away or immediately on return [thesis, house selling, new friends]. Nothing special this year so news was all chat about his papers, grants, experiments etc. Home by 11.30 to find Libby and Hugh waiting to give me a very welcome welcome with coffee etc. It is Clive's 27th birthday which we celebrated with lovely dinner of recognisable crumbed chicken with recognisable potatoes and mushrooms and carrots with Clive, Tiffany and John Traill. I then went off to rehearse Tchaikovsky's last symphony to prove I was really back.

So another great trip, more packed than ever with events and friends. The guest house was better than ever, with hot water, good food, milky sweet chai in two rather dirty flowery cups in tea filled saucers. Sai Gopal was efficient and always meant well and Prof Srinivasulu was dignified and sensible in everything while sorrowful about the silly bureaucracy that was always present. The teaching was as usual satisfying and appreciated by my affectionate and enthusiastic students. I made a few new friends but the visit is more memorable for my old friends Satheesh, Subramanian, Susai, Surya's family including Vinod, Imran, Gopi and the great Madhu. Tirupati itself is getting bigger and more full of motorbikes and even cars but it remains noisily charming. I never walked through Balaji colony or Ghandi road without a positive light heart, with the crowds of people, students, cows and buffalo, boys trying to lure customers into the shops, ladies sitting on the ground at the side of the road hoping to make an unlikely sale of flowery garlands, bananas, oranges or nuts.

Busy evenings usually finished with the relatively safe thrill of an auto ride or bike ride through the flexible traffic or on the long chilly night ride back to my welcoming new room.

So thanks yet again to my friends in India but more especially to my dear Libby and Hugh (and Clive) who I have missed so much and are so wonderful to come home to.

Birds: Bay-backed shrike (zoo); Forest wagtail (pig place) This is said to be rare in that part probably worth reporting. Identified initially by appearance – like a ringed plover (its bib), 2 wide white wing stripes, tail wags side to side. Blue-faced Malcoha; this is the only Indian bird with blue eyes which is all I saw when I first saw it near the pig farm.

Koel; black headed oriole; little green bee-eater; coucal; greenshank; common sandpiper; White-fronted kingfisher; pied kingfisher; black drongo; white-fronted drongo; paradise flycatcher; myna, jungle crow; house crow; tree pie; red-vented bulbul; red-whiskered bulbul; Ashy swallow-shrike; blackheaded cuckoo shrike; common wood-shrike; purple sunbird; purple-rumped sunbird; common babbler; Indian robin; magpie robin; white browed fantail; yellow wagtail; white wagtail;

Paddy bird; cattle egret; black kite; common swallow; palm swift; coppersmith; golden-backed woodpecker; Indian roller; hoopoe; rose-ringed parakeet; black-winged stilt; collared dove; red turtle dove (?); little brown dove; shikra; dabchick; house sparrow; chiff chaff; tailor bird; ashy prinia; Indian prinia; common iora; spotbill (duck).