

INDIA DIARY 2008

15th January - 20th February

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Jan 15 Tues – 17th thurs. *It feels strange to be writing this having only just finished the final version of last years' diary. I am writing this at the end of my first full day in Tirupati, listening to what I guess is a Shostakovich string quartet on my ipod. As Hugh warned me frequently iTunes is not consistent with its labelling system so I had difficulty finding what I wanted. I have just returned from dinner with Surya's parents, feeling sleepy and bloated. I am hoping that by staying up later I will get a better night tonight.*

Woke at 4.45 to a windy wet day, to wade in my sandals through our river to the English Rose collection car. Poor Libby has a bad cold but managed to struggle out of bed to say goodbye. Had my usual feeling that it would be wonderful to change my mind and go back home to my nice family as we bumped slowly up the road. Had excellent drive in rain to Heathrow where check in was fast and security even faster. At check in they confirmed that I could take on 23Kg cabin baggage provided I could lift it into the locker unaided. After sensible breakfast I stupidly waited at the wrong gate until I realised 20 min before take off that the other passengers looked more Scandinavian than Indian so had a brisk walk to the correct gate, thus avoiding a holiday in Copenhagen. Good flight next to Irish girl visiting friends in Chennai. Yet again the airport at Chennai has improved and I was through immigration in 10 minutes into a smart modified baggage haul to collect rupees and my bag, past a 30 m long queue of welcomers to find Gopi at the end, as calm and unflustered as ever; "hello chris thank you for keeping your promise and meeting me 11 months after we parted here".

Now inadvertently listening to Strauss Death and Transfiguration.

We had a small modern type of car that would only take my case after some brutal treatment of its loudspeakers in the boot. Same surly driver as previously, very competent and safe but hooting tediously all the way to Mahabalipuram, Gopi sleeping most of the way with his head on my lap. We eventually roused someone at Golden Sun reception, who pointed out that we had not booked. I showed the printed email from them – arranged by Susai in which he clearly said we would arrive at 3.30 am on 16th. We should have been charged for the night of 15th of course. Susai had been so pleased to tell Surya that we had been charged for only two nights as a concession [16th and 17th]. In fact they were just stupid – as was I for trusting Susai and the Golden Sun. Our special room was not available so we were put in a smaller scruffy room inland. Perfectly ok for one night. Gopi was fast asleep when I woke at 8.0, sandy eyed, but able to stroll to the open air restaurant to be greeted by the nice waiters who wanted to know if madam is with me. Disappointed to miss her. Gopi eventually joined me for dosa masalas [dosas masala?]. The place is full due to Pongal [new year] festival, and staffed by lots of extra catering college trainees in their white shirts and black trousers, all looking nervously at the strange Englishman and grinning with relief when I smiled. I feel slightly guilty to confess that we did not leave the hotel area except for strolls up the beach. Our driver had gut rot for which I had to pay a trip to hospital and the medicine, and Gopi is not a tourist and I was tired and happy to swim and read all day. I missed having Libby with her enthusiasm and curiosity. Of course I felt at home there immediately and gradually settled to the routine of gentle strolls up the beach, fending off occasional vendors and herds of goats and groups of bored teenage boys; "please sir where are you from; how do you like India; what about Beckham and Rooney; please sir swim with us". This last from a group including a handsome willowy lad in his underpants doing an Indian film dance - "please sir watch Venkat he is greatest dancer in Tamil Nadu". To his delight I gave him one of my recently-printed cards which he then read to the others, emeritus coming out as EE-meritouse.

Friday 18th Jan. Fortunately the driver is recovered and we had a good [4 ½ hour] drive to Tirupati, arriving by the short cut leading to the bypass. We were told the road out to the guest

house was blocked so we went by little roads up beyond the level crossing where the road was completely blocked with waiting traffic. We were told it would be half an hour to wait so we decided to set out on foot, leaving the driver to bring the heavy luggage. The train then came so we jumped back in for an exciting race for the crossing - the traffic on our side occupying both lanes of the road, and the approaching traffic the same; nothing that closed eyes and hand on hooter couldn't sort out. There was no one I recognised at the guest house and I was treated very formally, being informed that it had been decided [by Sai Gopal head of virology I later discovered] that my request to have the same room as last year should be ignored and that I should have the bigger better room at the end of the corridor. It was better and cleaner but I preferred the old one with its easy direct access to the roof so I called Sai Gopal who turned up and sorted everything. The manager changed completely from being officious to friendly when he heard I had given the NV Naidu memorial lecture last year; he had been his technician for some years. The dining hall was packed with conference delegates eating a buffet lunch which we then shared when Suri saw us looking a bit lost. I constructed a suitably effusive greeting from Libby with thanks for all the tea. Gopi then helped clean the room - it still had my Sunday Times in the cupboards placed there last year. It will be perfectly adequate for me. Sai Gopal and the manager located the painters' bench that Imran and I had previously found and cleaned for a table. It had been transferred as a table to the conference room but the manager liked our story so he got some grumpy minions in khaki shorts to heave it into my room. We closed the windows tightly against the traffic noise and had a nice chat before walking up the road for Gopi to catch his bus back to Chittoor. He has just started a 6 month project in Bangalore as the last part of his course so he will go there tomorrow.

There has been a good season of rain this year and it only stopped about 3 weeks ago. As a result everywhere is very green and the big trees down the main road obscure the street lights. In the evening I walked down to the main University entrance for an auto for the Sindhuri Park hotel where all the staff had changed and my usual seat was taken. I had excellent alloo gobi masala and rotis followed by butterscotch ice cream, watched over by two over-attentive waiters. I staggered up out of the cool clean marble and brass hotel into the crazy tank area where stories of gods were being told with singing and dancing - as last year. I called in at Surya suitings to leave my card for Sasi Kumar who is back in Tirupati [I missed him last year]. Then down to Gugula shop for towels, bedsheets, pillowcases and lungi. The nice manager then took me a few doors down to buy a mosquito repeller [electrically heated liquid should last all trip] and dettol soap. The whole lot was about £6. It does not seem a year since I left here; in fact it seems only last week that Libby was suffering her introduction to Ghandi Road, as lively and happy as ever. I finished the evening struggling to sort out my iPod and failed, not surprisingly, to lull myself to sleep with Brendel playing Beethovens Diabelli variations. Had a poor night with stiff neck and headache.

Saturday 19th January. With the manager yesterday we had arranged that I would get early morning coffee at 7.00 and breakfast of Dosas at 8.30. So I was woken at 7 and asked if I would like tea; yes please. As it did not come I went for walk at 7.30 to usual place by pig research place. Slightly cloudy cool morning, making a vest essential. It soon warmed up and I saw most of usual birds, mynahs, babblers, singing magpie robins, wonderful chestnut winged coucals, drongos, hoopoes and orioles. When I returned my tea man turned up with a clean little tray with delicate new clean china cup and saucer and a small thermos containing horlicks! He asked did I want breakfast but our communication remained poor so I said yes to everything and finally received a newspaper package tied with string containing two rice idlis and a tied poly bag filled with repellent red samba. I had to have it in my room but it was delicious. I potted about in the morning, frustrated that I did not have any nice plastic armchairs to sit out on the roof. I later saw a lot on the veranda of the vice chancellor's suite [pronounced suit]. He only started yesterday, replacing the previous one who through corruption has, according to the newspapers, wrecked the University. They are having to delve into the pension fund to pay salaries. I was then seen by Naidu the big limping steward who waved me down to introduce

me to some of his mates who were on duty for the VC. He asked if I would like to meet him as he thought he had nothing to do. So this was arranged and I could then see what had been my nice room until last year. It is now even more elegant with nice curtains, TV, big leather sofas etc. The new VC seems very nice; unusually he has been appointed from a different university – Andhra University where he remains a professor of economics. I asked him if he knew Madahevan, our mad professor from last year. He did, so we had a lot to laugh about. On the way out I asked the steward if I could have some of the those nice chairs and that was arranged later, letting me have my first nice read in the sun, with a fluting golden oriole in the huge mango tree beside me.

It had been arranged the day before that I would have lunch here and Sai Gopal paid for it in advance but when I went down for lunch they denied that I was expected but then the small lady assistant cook appeared and offered me chapattis and green slime which was wonderful, followed by two new cups of tea. Started sorting out my previous bird photos on computer then went by auto out to Thumulagunta village. I was waylaid by Balaji's aggressive sister and made to sit in the road and show photos and drink 7-Up. This was the start of the usual parade down to Balaji's where it was much nicer with his mother. She was very excited to see Libby's photos and Kennedy of course. They all tried to steal them until I promised I would leave them when I leave Tirupati. Then the usual photo session with some of the smaller boys now promoted to minders etc. The boy with the kite was there so I could give him the pictures. I had a difficult time trying to take a group picture; I got them in place and then took a few paces back to fit them all in and they all moved forward with me. At last I found a use for my 3 words of Telugu. Charlu, Randi, Kurchoni: enough! Come here, sit down. So I have a good group photo with them all sitting. Venkataramana came towards the end. He was the first I had known in the village but we did not meet last year. In two years he has gone from a slender teenager to a tall unshaven rather ugly heavyweight who seemed to like to order the small boys about. He would make a perfect corrupt policeman in a Hindi film. On my way out of the village I spent a few minutes with his family taking pictures of his sister's new baby. After returning I had nice chat with Sateesh about my lectures – same as last year. Then, in response to a phone invite for Surya's father, went to their house for dinner, by way of the station and the Choudharies, still one of the sights of Tirupati. The huge area is filled with pilgrims and their coaches from all over India, with families sleeping between them, cows and buffaloes joining in for the warmth, drivers checking their engines and nursing their shrines in the front of the buses. There are many Ayappa pilgrims this year, wild unshaven with painted faces, bare torsos and black lungis, all having a wonderful time, having makeshift pujas on the rear boot lids of the coaches. Then through the happy evening backstreets, past the veg shops and ironing carts and tea boys to Surya's for happy welcome, photo sharing and dosas, samba, subji [veggies] and vermicelli sweet stuff with sultanas and cashew nuts. The son of their landlord came down and snuggled up close. I think I had met him there last year; he is a very small 12 yrs. He knows very little English but told me his name is Venkatesh and he wants to be a doctor. Took photos with small camera and then home by auto to write diary; *now having heard Strauss's Metamorphosen and 4 last songs and listening to the Schumann Trio that we played last term.*

Sunday 20th Jan. *I am writing this on Monday night with Arthur Grumiaux doing his stuff with a Bach Partita.* After another very disturbed night I was drifting aimlessly about wondering whether or not to wait for promised tea or go for a walk when there was a rattle at the door. With an irritable Wait Wait I grabbed a towel to hide my boxers and opened it to find a smiling Madhu standing there. Looking as elegant as ever, smiling and muttering Chris Chris you have come. He had driven the night before by bike to his father's place in Chittoor and then come here through a cool morning so had frozen hands. My usual two cups of tea then arrived and an exhausting day of chat started. He felt he had enough experience from his job and so applied to a big international company in Dubai and after 2 interviews got the job; mechanical engineer at 50,000 rupees per month plus accommodation. His boss will be the same as he originally had and liked very much in Bangalore – he had moved there 6 months earlier.

Company is called ETA [www.ETAMNE.com]. He will be living with 4 old friends from his present company. We had a nice lunch, a doze and then a gentle bike ride out to the zoo through nice farm land. Being a Sunday it was crowded and they now encourage bikes and cars and autos to go inside [to make them more money]. At the lions Madhu asked “Chris are they all strict non-veg”? So not the peaceful experience it was supposed to be. In the evening we went down Nethaji road, where all the electrical shops are, to get stuff. I got 2 small speakers for my ipod [quiet but adequate], two extension cables and a bedside light. Then to eat [again] in Sinduri park where we had their Sundiri Subji special – veggies with lots of cashew nuts in a copper pail, and panner masala and rotis, which was more than adequate so we left some. On return we found one cable was only 3 metres - not the promised 5-7 metres and the light kept switching itself off and on. After a nice sleepy chat drifted asleep for another interrupted night. There are more trains now all through the night. I made the best of it and had a nice read and woke at 6.45 to send Madhu on his way back to Chittoor.

Monday 21st Jan. At about 8.10 the manager [Adinarayana] turned up with my breakfast – Idlis plus usual stuff to be squirted out of poly bags. Tastes wonderful then in response to my request for chai I got 2 small cups of hot milk with sugar. I like it – nothing skimmed off it. Sai gopal then drove me for my 1st lecture to 1st years; “no lecture sir only interaction with students”. Only 30% were there, the rest having a slightly extended Pongal holiday. Did usual chatty stuff about family etc. Nice and responsive so should be a good time. Then tea with the senior prof Srinivasulu, still apologising for not meeting Libby last year. He is now Principal of college, the equivalent of Dean here. He immediately booked me for dinner tomorrow evening. I had a big disappointment on Saturday when Sai Gopal told me that the final year industrial microbiology students are away doing projects for 2 months so I would not be seeing my friends Chaitanya, Hare Krishna and Subbaiah. But on the way out of the building there was Chaitanya, taller darker hairier and thinner than before but with same beaming smile, taking my hand and leading away round the corner for a welcoming hug and the good news that most of my main friends would be doing projects in the Department and he would be with Satheesh. All very satisfactory. He then kept me company through the campus where we met little smiling Subbaiah, the student they gave to me last year as a “keepsake sir, please take him, he needs a good home”. He came running up like a jumping puppy. He is doing molecular biology project in the Zoology Department. I dissuaded them from coming to the guest house and had a peaceful stroll in hot sun back to guest house where I started reading a paper I have to referee. Lunch was delivered to my room as there is a special function in the dining room. I had a newspaper parcel about the size of a small football full of rice and 4 poly bags – with green slime and ladies fingers. I didn’t even open the two runny red ones. When Adinarayana came to collect the remains which I leave outside the door he was horrified that I would starve. I then started writing some notes on elementary enzyme kinetics [practical aspects] for Satheesh, as I find it too exhausting explaining everything so many times to him; he lacks knowledge and confidence. [*I am now listening to Rostropovich playing the Britten Cello Suite*]. I am getting to like my ipod’s slight randomising of my listening, altogether a great success, I must remember to tell Libby [and Hugh].

At 1.45 Sai Gopal came to collect me “Why aren’t you ready?”; I told him that the students would keep me waiting so I would take a bit of their time. I think he was feeling nervous as he had come by car – a small new Indian make, with big red tape L on front and rear window. He is neither competent nor confident and chatters about what he is doing all the time “ok change gear to slow down – try not to swerve when I let go of wheel to hold gear lever, brake, hoot, brake, hoot”. I was grateful for the slight comfort of the seat belt and the fact that we did not leave 2nd gear. Of course there were only ten students – less than 30%. They are the Microbiology group – as the industrial microbiologists have their projects. These were the brighter ones last year [they pay their own fees for that course] so I am left with the others. Oddly enough I am teaching them industrial microbiology. They were quite chirpy, especially the girls so I was quite encouraged. There was no point in doing much serious stuff so I did an

overview of what I would be doing. On way out I met Subramanyam who is now a teaching fellow. He is the student who, because he is from a low scheduled caste was told his fees would be paid. They then changed the law after he finished the course and he had to pay 65,000 rupees to graduate. So, he could not graduate nor get a job as he did not have his certificate. Sai gopal was good to give the teaching fellow job [he is very good at it apparently] and he will soon be able to finish paying the fees. We arranged that he would come to guest house later and we would eat at Kalyan. Then another hot stroll back, being yelled at from one of the buildings by a small dumpy man running and waving wildly. An incredible coincidence [definition of miracle?] – it was Raja, surya's friend from 14 years ago. He was the slim enthusiastic boy who used to cycle up from town to bring me presents of oranges wrapped in newspaper or melted ice creams. He is now rather fat with moustache and rather unshaven and half bald. He is working as a science equipment engineer/salesman in Hyderabad and is down here to collect some certificate which he thinks will get him the same visa that Surya has – for needed skills in UK. I didn't tell him we have loads of graduates who can sell equipment of course.

Eventually got to guest house where I finished the refereeing [I have yet to type it all out] while sitting on the roof in the late afternoon sun, accompanied by twittering sunbirds and supplied with my twin teas by the small lady cook assistant. Subbu was too tired to come to eat as he had a journey of 7 hours by bus yesterday so we got an auto and I dropped him at Balaji colony and went on to Kalyan Residency where I had a warm welcome in the restaurant and lots of "where is madam". In Madam's honour I had veg thali while peacefully reading my wonderful book. This is a 'Modern American Classic' called Angle of Repose by Wallace Stegner, about settling in West of USA in the 19th century.

It is always a shock coming out of that peaceful clean tidy restaurant into the real world – a rather dark smelly urinal of a narrow road leading to the horrible crowded dirty backside of the bus station, with the jostling buses slowed to a grinding creep by a sludge of bikes, autos and bewildered exhausted worried pilgrim families desperate to find somewhere to dump themselves. I swing from being filled with pity to an irritated loathing. I escaped into the foyer of the Sinduri Park hotel by the tank and looked at the paper for 5 minutes before setting out on the final stage through the Temple grounds and Ghandi road where I found a Provisions store where I bought 3 mats and a broom. Elated by this I bought another table lamp and extension cable from a slightly more upmarket shop than last night. I told them about the useless lamp and they thought it very funny, explaining that there is no guarantee on the lamp they sold me. I told them I guaranteed they would get it back if it did not work which they kindly laughed at, translating for waiting customers. Back by auto to home where I swept the floor, washed my feet, set up my 3 extension cables and my nice new perfect light to sit here with my clean feet on a nice clean mat and the fan blowing me cool. It has been nearly a week since leaving home and I am at last settling in, able to ignore less good things and enjoying all the good things – the sun the food, the students, the friends and the crowds of colourful people.

So, thinking of home and family, to bed.

Tuesday 22nd Jan. *I am writing this on Wednesday, tired after a long walk back from student hostel listening to Paul Lewis playing a Beethoven piano sonata.*

A nice routine day with lecture to juniors in morning and seniors in afternoon. It was hot and humid in the afternoon – the forecast said "temp 28 deg feels 36 deg". At 4.30 I set off for a walk out towards the engineering college. Still too hot for birds I think. Near the end of the road I turned off towards the hills and had a good stroll on tracks among low bushes with the wilder part on the right, entertained by little green bee eaters, Indian robins, sunbirds and little brown doves with the returning crows against the backdrop of the Tirumula hills lit by the pink setting sun. I nearly reached the bypass near the zoo then turned back toward Tirupati, arriving rather shattered after my 2 hour walk. After flinging a few pails of lukewarm water over me and washing feet I flopped onto the bed to be woken after 30 minutes by Prof Srinivasulu come to take me to sinduri park hotel for dinner. He is a nervous driver and I rather dreaded the packed Ghandi road but had a very relaxed drive with relatively empty streets. We had unadventurous

thalis – very nice and gentle adult chat [grown up – not X-rated] before another cool drive home. As promised, I texted Chaitanya when I got back and he and Hare Krishna drove up for a nice gossip, only slightly spoilt by Reddy turning up – he phoned first and I could hardly say no. Anyway he had a bike to give them all a lift home. After I went to bed I had calls from Gopi, Madhu and surprise from Leigh, feeling guilty that he had missed 4 calls from me. Very nice relaxed chat with them all.

Wednesday 23rd Jan. Had another good night, accepting the traffic and train noise as a lullaby rather than irritant. I had another slightly unpleasant breakfast, unpacked by the fussy manager, squirting stuff from bags and smearing coconut paste off a sheet of polythene beside a Dosa masala. Tasted great. Then I sat in the morning sun to prepare the molecular biology lecture on genetic code before being collected by Satheesh for his dangerous bike ride to the Department. Lecture was enjoyable but then had a frustrating time trying to link my laptop to the internet –to upload my modified website. I gave up as there was no one there who could tell me the necessary addresses. Had a long email from Tobias Erb from Germany – the young man who had almost unknowingly solved the last part of the Serine pathway. His work has all confirmed my suggestions to him and one of his mutants is similar to one of Ian Taylors so he was asking me to send this mutant – last worked on in 1974. he is keen that I visit there [Freiburg], sending pics of the mountains where he suggests we go skiing! Because there was a big function in the guest house I had to have lunch in my room with 6 separate poly bags of red, yellow, ochre, khaki and green slime. I have asked Sai Gopal to request that in future this is dispensed into a tiffin tin before presenting to me. My square of chocolate afterwards with my 2 cups of tea makes it all tolerable. It was even more hot and humid this afternoon for my lecture and it takes great will power to exude enthusiasm to my sleepy audience for the industrial production of butanol. I walked back and sat in the sun on our roof garden with a couple of street dogs doing a bit of work but also finishing my wonderful book – *The angle of repose. Have just had a chat with Surya about a friend of Gopi's who is coming to UK to study – Surya will advise him on climate and the culture of Luton!*

After my afternoon tea I started to type out my referee's report on a paper on PQQ biosynthesis when there was a knock on door and there was my old friend Sasi Kumar. I hadn't seen him last year as he was in Hyderabad and Mumbai. He is the very handsome lad who wanted to be a model or filmstar or racing driver and who turned up one day for me to photograph him in 3 different sets of clothes. He is almost as handsome but spoilt as a model by putting on a lot of weight. I am pleased that he took my advice and did the course he was doubtful about, on computer hardware. He has a job in Hyderabad at 12,000 rupees a month acting as hardware engineer in some big company. He has just resigned because the company is a cement factory and he has to wear a mask all the time and he feels it is unhealthy. He expects to easily get another job with his experience. When he left I thanked him for coming to see me, the result of me leaving my card with his brothers shop. No Chris, I am here to thank you, to pay darshan [as in homage to a god] for my most special friend. I seem to have a unlimited capacity for such homage. After he left I was lucky to get an instant auto down to Balaji colony for simple single dinner. The Athidi restaurant is being renovated so I ate in Harry's Cove where they recognised me and made me feel good for patronising them. I had excellent paneer fried rice for 40 rupees [60p]. They forgot to charge for the water so I sealed our friendship by telling them. It is always a nice atmosphere down there, mainly due to students wandering around at the end of the day. On way back I strolled up to the hostels to C block to call on Ravi, a 1st year biochemistry student who I had met in the biochemistry department a couple of days ago. He just stood staring at me, in his long lunghi – “you have come to our room sir”. So we had a good chat with him and his friend Rhagav before I was dragged off by 1st year microbiology students to their room. They were not as easy as last year's group, lacking any central characters like Chaitanya and Hare Krishna who soon invaded and pulled me off to their room where Chaitanya continued to massage the feet of Hare Krishna “I am expert at this function sir and I am accumulating much goodwill”. He later took my bag and led me off

through the dark campus by a short cut toward the guest house where I am just awake enough to finish this while listening to Beethoven's Waldstein sonata.

Thursday 24th Jan. *I am writing this evening while listening to Beethoven's A major cello sonata [Yo Yo Ma].* I woke this morning at 6.15 and immediately remembered I was supposed to send off the referee's report today so, seeing a grey dawn I finished typing that, then sorted through my notes for my molecular biology lectures. I must have successfully communicated my disgust with poly bags for breakfast as it was organised into dishes today - more pongal [sweetish rice stuff] and idlis. Always better than bread omelette. The day had by then developed into the perfect Tirupati day with very clear air, making the hills crisp against a clean blue sky and a slight cool breeze. Nice lecture presented as usual after I stumbled my way entertainingly through the class register. Afterwards I had a useful chat with Antony Johnson, one of the research scholars, very fat and jovial and an amateur expert on all computer matters, so able to advise on how to upload my webstuff onto the net. I then rushed back to get it all sorted for uploading and still had time to sit on the roof for half an hour before dinner. In the afternoon it took 40 minutes to do the uploading while I advised Chaitanya on his project. He is working with Sateesh who wanted him to work on cellulose breakdown, in my opinion absurd as the organisms grow slowly and there is a new member of staff who is expert on that, which Sateesh certainly is not. So Chaitanya decided he would isolate some antibiotic producing *Streptomyces*, a much more interesting project. Sateesh then told him he should search for information on the internet [which I was using]. When I suggested one of the many biotechnology books might be useful Sateesh said they are out of date. Twit. So we found 6 excellent books with all the media in and methods laid out well. So much of their teaching is the blind leading the blind. Actually the blind lead the partially sighted as the students are more questioning and thinking.

I got back by 4.30 in hot sun, washed and set out for the village beyond Thumulagunta [Purapalle] to deliver photos to the pole-climbing boy. I got an auto immediately outside the guesthouse but the driver seemed a bit daft or drunk and kept stopping to ask the way when I knew the way. When we arrived within walking distance we stopped and he tried to charge me 50 rupees [should be no more than 25]. He refused the 30 rupees I offered then shouted as I walked away, attracting another auto and 2 men on a bike who told me it should be no more than 20 so he then accepted my 30 rupees but sulking all the time. The clear evening light cheered me up and I was soon accosted by two kids on a bike on their way home from school. "Sir where is your camera sir?" I showed them the photos which included one of them on it so I was escorted in triumph to the edge of the village where Suresh the climber appeared, soon achieving our quorum of 25 children, mothers and grannies who are more belligerent in this rather poorer village. I think I managed to photograph every possible combination. The boy who first met me directed affairs claiming at least 6 brothers and 6 sisters - please sir one more of my sister sir, etc. Suresh then led me away through the golden light into the fields towards the hills, followed by a few of his friends. He looks about 10 but is 15 his friends claim. None of them speaks English. We soon turned round and back hurriedly past the village towards home. I promised I would come again soon and they all waved me off. I almost immediately was stopped at a wayside hutch selling drinks by a couple of girls from Thumulagunta and to my relief Venkataramana with his motorbike to give me a welcome lift back to the guest house.

I have taken very few bird photos as I have had difficulty getting away from people. I may go to the dairy farm tomorrow morning. After a blissful foot wash I slumped asleep on the bed and dosed till 7.30 before getting auto down to Balaji colony for a quiet dinner of cashew nut fried rice - wonderful. This was in Harry's Cove, an excellent place except for the screeching TV playing dance and singing stuff continuously. I decided I would get prints made of the villagers this year and deliver them before going home so wandered around the road in Balaji colony and found a print shop. The young man in charge aimed to be helpful when I was asking how much prints are but he had no English. The young lad playing computer games tried to help but failed so they did the usual thing and called in a passing stranger who

recognised me as teaching him in NV Naidu's class in 1982. The boss of the shop was also an ex-student of Naidu which then got me a special deal of 5 rupees per print [15 prints per £]. I felt too tired to walk to the hostels on the way home so reneged on my casual arrangement and got an auto direct to guest house for a quiet evening catching up with this and a few other bits and pieces. Maria Susai has just called to invite me to lunch tomorrow to attend the inauguration of his family's new house. I have a lecture so cannot go but will meet here to go to dinner in the evening instead.

Friday 25th Jan. *Writing Friday evening listening to Magic flute.*

I woke at about 6.15 and gently came alive encouraged by the released pent up traffic from the 6.25 train crossing. It was obviously going to be a clear fresh morning so went for only the second morning walk since arriving. Almost immediately I saw the beautiful golden backed woodpecker and then a couple of golden orioles unusually clearly but I would still need one of the giant long lenses to get really good pictures. Then beautiful emerald green leaf birds and the clean looking white red-whiskered bulbuls and a flock of scarlet minivets like Christmas tree lights flitting through a huge neem tree. Had usual breakfast while starting to read the Last of the Mughals by Dalrymple. Beautiful weather with very clear dry air and a breeze. Inspired to do first big wash after my morning lecture. In the afternoon lecture I was a bit bored by industrial microbiology so I was asking them about the Indian mutiny of 1857 which led to the destruction of Delhi and the end of the Mughals. No-one except Hare Krishna knew anything about it. Their education is much more compartmentalised than ours, even at University level. There has been a serious outbreak of bird flu in N India and the new VC asked Sai Gopal if he could go there and bring back a sample to get students to work on it here. It took 20 minutes to explain that this might be a bad idea. My feet still ache from my long walk to Purapalle yesterday so I had a lazy afternoon after my lecture, reading on the roof and clearing up here ready for Susai to arrive at 5.30. thinking this would be Indian time I started to go through my photos, cleaning them up on photoshop. Did a huge number before I at last got him on phone at 8.30, sounding asleep or drunk apologising he had forgotten and gone to sleep. Fortunately I got an auto immediately outside and got down to Harry's Cove for mushroom fried rice, accompanied by aggressively loud Telugu musical on poorly tuned TV. Balaji colony is always nice in evening with students wandering around and others relaxing after the hot day. Again I met people who claim I taught them years ago. Fortified by a butterscotch ice cream I strolled up the road to the student hostel, the huge trees illuminated from within by the street lights, the whole road stretching into the distance like a well lit stage set. A final year student [the pushy Reddy] stopped on his bike to try to give me a lift, while fishing to know who I was visiting. I had intended to find biochemical Ravi but failed and landed up in the big room of Chaitanya, Hare Krishna and other final yr students who soon accumulated. I know them well enough now to be able to flop out on the tin beds while they entertain me. Hare found my small camera and soon cell phones and that camera were being waved around, producing rather grotesque pictures of me sprawled on the bed with students taking turns to drape themselves around me. You have such beautiful hair sir! The gentle muslim boy Babjan was sent for as he is usually away doing his project. He then tried to teach me some Urdu – the language of the Mughal poets. They then came back through the dark campus with me to the main gate to send me on my way. Babjan will now be away for 2 weeks so had a sweetly sentimental goodbye – please sir try to remember your disciple and Urdu teacher.

In the afternoon I got hold of Madhu who is still in Chittoor, slightly upset that I had not called him. I had tried to use his [wrong] Bangalore number for last 2 days. He is coming tomorrow and then going on to Bangalore on Sunday. Gopi then phoned to say that he could not come as, although Saturday is a national holiday [Republic day] his college are making up for it by having Sunday lectures. Realising it is Friday wine time I just called and had nice chat with Hugh, Libby and Stuart. It is now midnight so to bed.

Saturday 26 Jan; Republic Day. *I am writing this on Sunday night listening to West Side Story*

[My thumb slipped from Beethoven to Bernstein].

The day started sunny with a breeze so I phoned Madhu to check if he knew when he was coming. As it was about 10.00 I went for my first walk to the Dairy farm. Even more cattle than previously, making an inviting farmyard atmosphere, and providing a mountain of dung covered in mynahs and paddy birds, so perfectly camouflaged that I didn't see them until the air was filled with their crow-like honks and pure white wings. Such a beautiful place with bee eaters, drongos, kingfishers and little egrets against the backdrop of coconut palms and the red seven hills. Madhu turned up soon after breakfast – by bus from Chittoor. Had usual long gentle chat till lunchtime when he asked if I would be upset if he went by bus up to Tirumula to meet friends at the top who he wouldn't see before going off to Dubai. It saved me deciding what to do, anything requiring activity seeming implausible with the mounting temperature. So he went off and I had a peaceful afternoon on the roof and sorting some work stuff.

In the evening I went by auto to beginning of Ghandi road to start my 15 minute stroll to the Kalyan Residency to meet M who arrived about 20 minute late, enough time for me to pay for the Mahabalipuram car trip. I had promised Madhu that I would take him to a good non-veg restaurant so we had a noisy dusty auto ride past the Fortune Kences out to the big hotels where I decided the Bliss hotel would be best as they serve beer in the restaurant [I sound like an American guide book]. Up the marble steps through the huge doors held open by a welcoming 19th century soldier with gigantic moustache and feathered turban, through the foyer up the steps to a big notice on the restaurant door “No alcohol to be served or drunk on Republic Day”. A Gandian legacy I gather. Perhaps because we were celebrating the place was crowded and any chance of peace greatly diminished by televisions in opposing corners having different programs. Our nearest had David Attenborough and lions. It reminded me of Madhu's lovely question “are lions strictly non-veg chris?” We had prawn biriani and lamb biriani followed by butterscotch icecream. Our route home by very competent auto was new to me, by-passing the chaos of the bus station, the train station and Nethaji road. More dosing chat as we drifted off to sleep.

Sunday 27th Jan. Madhu asked me to wake him at 6.0 so he could get back to Bangalore in plenty of time to prepare for work tomorrow – he has been off in Chittoor this last week. I woke at 5.10 then slept till 6.45 but the early start was not critical. Off he went leaving me facing a grey humid day with a heavy headache. Cleaned up and read for a bit before breakfast of idlis and samba. Read a bit more on the cloudy roof before going for a stroll around the local streets on other side of rail track. Fortunately I did take my camera so I could snap the graffiti on the wall of the Ladies University. The first panel said ‘Revive Education; Revive India’; the second said “Bring sturcture to education”. On the way back I had a closer look at the accumulated stuff I had noticed littered on the pavement there. A couple of families [at least] were camping under tarpaulins beside a load of nice looking armchairs and sofas and other miscellaneous furniture. There was a family weaving basket from long grasses. “Please sir see our perfect baskets please buy sir”. While wondering if it would be too intrusive to snap a mother cooking on a little stick fire with her kids beside her, she saw me, abandoned her cooking, grabbed the kids and called for photos. *[Now listening to Verdi's Falstaff].*

My quick unobtrusive snap turned into a full photoshoot with the basket weaving family branch rushing up to be included and the usual teenage boy marshalling everyone. They were all rather shrill and grubby. The grubbiest was a one year old with few clothes who was dumped by herself onto a rather posh sofa, after removing the cushion, for her grubby little body. She burst into howls of grief at this but I was directed to photograph anyway. The price of getting past was to do a portrait of the boy who was not as handsome as he was claiming. So a new batch of friends. Still feeling headachy under the humid clouds I spent the rest of the day preparing my special lecture in a nearby college of the university [Shree Vijayanikethan college]. Although I have all my previous powerpoint presentations I still found I had to build a

new one. I enjoyed it and finished by about 4.30. I had made no plans for the evening so walked slowly down to the Department knowing that Subramanyam often worked at weekends [he had failed to turn up here as planned yesterday afternoon]. It turns out he had to go to his native place and hadn't thought to phone. He is the only person I know who has no phone of his own. Only two people were there – Satheesh and his project student, my friend Chaitanya, preparing media in a pressure cooker. We then arranged to meet in an hours time at Block C to go to dinner at Kalyan. I went for a stroll at back of Department then drifted towards my destination accompanied by six teenage students of the associated Arts and Science college. Two said they knew English [Venkatesh and Raju] but I think that is all they knew [We know English sir]. They looked 14- 15 but were 17-19. They had whispered debates then came up with a new question, then more whispered interpretation of my answers. They got me to C block then asked for photo before waving goodbye with requests that I visit them in their hostel [rather unlikely].

I had another go at finding Rani [1st year biochem] but he was at Tirumula so I had a chat with his neighbours in the open courtyard filled with its huge trees full of sleepy but irritable mynahs come home to roost for the night. Then dutifully to 1st year room that had 2 beds soon seating a dozen students. Rather a quiet lot, the most entertaining always coming from another department for darshan. At 6.30 I went upstairs to find Chaitanya but the only one was Subbaiah who had just woken and seemed a bit distracted; his English is not so good. So I went and sat on the wall by the main door to wait for Chaitanya. During the half hour wait I was entertained by a nice range of students some of whom I knew a little. One in particular was a bit more mature or knowledgeable than others [Moin]; an enthusiastic biotechnology student who was very excited to get my card [these have been useful and are much requested]. We eventually got to Kalyan for a really nice peaceful meal. Made friends with a small black serving lad from near Chennai. He is at catering college and on a project for two months. Could only speak Tamil but could understand a bit of English. The new restaurant manager [Mr Dillon, an Anglo Indian] came and had nice chat and explained that he had not been reprimanding our new friend but persuading him it was time for him to go and eat but he had wanted to wait until his table [us] was finished. As always with Hare Krishna and Chaitanya I can relax and do not have to perform. They came back to the guest house where they had hoped I would let them stay the night but I drove them out at 10.20. Again we had a good relaxed time with me playing music at them. Susan Penny's songs were greeted with great enthusiasm with Chaitanya doing a brilliant formal Michael Jackson moonwalk round the room. We only had the small table light on so the walls were decorated by fantastic shadows of the tall incredibly lean Chait. It is now 11.35 and I am getting twitchy so will give up on Falstaff and go to sleep. I missed my Sunday family phone call. Goodnight all.

Monday 28th Jan. *I am writing this Wednesday morning recovering [I hope] from Tirupati Tummy.* Can't remember much except that I finished sorting out my lectures, deciding what sequence to do everything in. After half an hour of my afternoon lecture I felt a rumble down below and dashed just in time to the loo. Then back to class feeling very feeble and told them I was unwell. It took some time to persuade Sateesh that I was serious and had to get back immediately to the guest house – “but you have not finished your lecture sir and they have brought you tea sir”. At guest house I lay down and shivered and sweated and dived to loo every hour. Subramanyam [Subbu] turned up as arranged to go out to dinner at 6.00 shaved, combed and dressed smartly in pressed black trousers and yellow shirt. Oh sir, sir what to do sir? I told him he could go away but he stayed and phoned other students while I lay sweating aching shivering and sleeping. I told him my legs were aching so he insisted on massaging me [“I do this for my father sir”] which was comforting rather than healing. I then had the wits to remember the anti inflammatory Ibuprofen, took two of these and within 20 minutes my slight temperature and all aches had gone. I was aware later of a mix of other students walking about the room adjusting the fan and discussing sir “he is so strong, it sad to see him like this”. At some stage Sai Gopal appeared and said he would take me to the health centre on his bike. I

tried to calmly tell him I was in no state to move then, hid under the blanket till he went away. When I checked the time I found it was past 11 O'clock. Subbu then stayed the night lying on the other bed with no pillow etc [I only found that he was there on my hourly dash later].

Tuesday 29th Jan. Enough of this. After 24 hours I took immodium and antibiotics designed for this and succumbed to the advice of all concerned that I should drink coconut water with glucose to renew salts and give energy. I agreed, assuming that they would turn up with a bottle, but I got 6 big green coconuts. The manager [Sai Gopal calls him the little humble man] then attacked a nut with my wonderful Gerber knife, emptying it into a glass [tin] and stirring in powdered glucose. I have now had 5 of these so a corner of the room is accumulating empty water bottles plus coconuts.

I spent the rest of the day reading and sleeping. Chaitanya and Hari Krishna came in the evening with some bread and jam and cakes [at my request for something dry and sweet]. They tried unsuccessfully to entertain me; that is I failed to have any energy to chat much. They wanted to stay the night. I think this has become a goal which I will accept when I am feeling better.

Wednesday 30th Jan. I had a better night and woke feeling optimistic and had 4 small slices of bread and jam but the cakes were covered in icing and piles of cream and looked too extreme. I had two cups of sweet tea and felt well enough to sit on the roof in the shade reading the history part of the Lonely Planet guide. I am nervous that I will run out of books if read too avidly. I have now finished Night Watch by Sarah Waters; it is set between 1941 and 1947 but starts in 1947, working back through 1944 to 1941. All the wartime and post-war detail brought back memories [clothing and food coupons, the chemical smell of permed hair, brylcreem, dandruff, darned clothes, sleeping under the table and the sight of the red skyline towards London burning. I found ladies lavatories featured too much and I was a bit squeamish about the graphic lesbian sex scenes – I don't like feeling I am a seedy voyeur. *I am writing this while listening to Verdi's Don Carlos and the shrill sounds of the chipmunk squirrels.* Have just had lunch, feeling rather brave. I hope I didn't offend them by bring my own water AND glass; they usually wash out a glass tin specially for me – in tap water, leaving me to surreptitiously swill it round with bottled water, discarding the washings under the table onto the stone floor. Had rice, dry carrots and much too spicy green sludge followed by curds and sugar, proudly presented by the manager. I really am up to date with this, writing within ten minutes of events. I just got two good pictures of female purple sunbird on the mango tree near the roof; they are 10cm long and fly like humming birds. It is now 4.13 and I have just finished refereeing Mary Lidstrom's paper on how methylotrophs cope with toxic formaldehyde; a good nicely written paper. I must be feeling better. I called Ram and had a nice chat; he is still failing to get a job but it might be easier now as he has extended his visa for two years. I called his father earlier and he is clearly enthusiastic that Ram should keep trying. Now 8.30. Satheesh came and chatted before going off to the gym. I managed, by hunting through my old text messages to find numbers of Murali and Raff. Raff was in when I called; he is always so good to call, bubbling over with enthusiasm that he is still remembered from India. Gave me useful advice on antibiotics – I am already taking the one he recommends. I have just tracked down my Amelia – Portuguese Fada, just right for my mood, feeling slightly sorry for myself. I am now reading William Dalrymple's book about the last Mughal who was forced to take sides in the 1857 mutiny [1st war of independence] which led to the final demolition of the Mughal royal family. I had expected Chaitanya or Hare Krishna to call and I was going to ask them bring food but they didn't [both worked late in the lab] so I survived on coconut milk with glucose and some shortbread.

Thursday 31st Jan. I had a typical disturbed night, as opposed to the recent less pleasantly disturbed nights, and woke feeling much better, although being woken by the manger hammering on the door to give me tea at 7.15 was a bit challenging. I gave in to his relentless

“Tiffen sir two idlis sir you must eat these sir - I will get sir”. So an hour later he bought a clean tin containing 3 idlis and a bowl of the usual peppery red samba and messy looking coconut chutney. Being hungry I forced down two of them, helped by more tea. When Satheesh turned up I told him I was having another day to recover. In the night I had a little fantasy – that I would hire the cook for 100 rupees a week and he could cook me what I want for lunch. Amazingly, this was achieved when Sai Gopal arrived; I told him I wanted the cook to prepare lunch of chapattis and one simple veg item [as they say here] only. It turned out this was easy to arrange as the cook [Chandra] was delighted to have something to do. An indicator of feeling better; I swept the floor, washed my hair and had bucket shower, thoroughly washed down bathroom, tidied the beds and desk and sat in the shade on the roof. My nice lunch was ready exactly as ordered, chapattis, dahl and beans. The weather now is hot [33 day 23 night] and 90% humid with half cloud. Fortunately there is a nice cool breeze, well a breeze anyway.

In the afternoon I was taken to the department to check my email and send a few important ones. I had about 40 junk mails 10 CSO mails and 10 important ones. I sent an email to Colin Murrell to offer any help with Howard’s PhD students who are doing projects I know about, and to get his wife Kira’s address; I then read the obituaries in Telegraph and University web page. So sad. I was deleting old text messages last night and came across his, thanking me for my appropriately grovelling congratulations on his Knighthood. I also had an email from Rodney Woodley after many years of losing him. He is now in South Africa. Seeing some old university photos, he was reminded to look me up on google so got my email address. Amazing coincidence; last week I was telling Gopi that my Anglo-Indian friend [Rodney] had advised me on going in 1982 to Bangalore [his birthplace] that for peace and quiet I should go to the Botanical gardens. Although I felt a bit queasy and insecure I got through the afternoon ok, with lots of smiling “how is your health sir, we are so happy to see you again sir”.

Subramanyam told me that I must thank God in my prayers tonight that he has finally paid off his 60,000 rupees fees, so he can use his degree; he is off on a 16 hour train journey Saturday to be interviewed for a PhD place. To prove my recovery I went for an evening stroll in the heat out towards NCC Nagar opposite the guest house, as it is shady and at least looks cool. Very enjoyable in spite of the fact that a lot of houses had chosen this evening to sweep up leaves and other rubbish from outside their houses and were burning it in slow smouldering fires filling the air with half burnt polybags. Was stopped on the way back by a couple of boys on a bike; Balakrishna said he speaks ‘light English’. He is studying political science at the SVU Arts College so I guess he is at least 19 yrs old, looking 14. He lives in Kapilatheertham near the waterfall temple and suggested I collect him and visit but I doubt if I will. He was very excited to get my card. In spite of marital objections [?] the cards have been a great success; it is a way of showing respect, as long as they are presented with the right hand.

Chaitanya collected dinner for me from Harry’s Cove; a huge takeaway tinfoil dish of paneer fried rice plus two little bags of curry which I discarded. I went downstairs to get a plate and found Libby’s friend Suri who jumped up to get one for me. The nice new small man there [Ravi] said that Suri had been telling him about me and my nice friendly wife; their will be a shrine to her soon under a tree in the courtyard. A bit earlier as I came off the roof I was met by a vaguely familiar face; it was Manohar my friend from about 10 years ago. Now rather well built and round faced he was then short and thin. When I first met him he was wearing security guards uniform and carrying a huge torch. I asked was it a weapon so he turned it on showing it to have faint orange glow only; “dummy torch only sir”. I asked him about his uniform and when I laughed that he was a security officer he said “no sir dummy officer only sir”. He is now a university driver, is married and has two young sons. He says he will invite me to dinner or lunch next week. The remnants of a wedding party have just turned up, to stay the night I guess, with lots of little kids excitedly running up and down the corridor.

I guess my feline rival has arrived home so I expect news of it [her] late tomorrow night. Goodnight family, missing you all.

Friday 1st Jan. *I am writing this with a headache on Sunday morning.* Woke to another cloudy day, feeling optimistic about lectures. Had dreadful bread omelette. I was asked to produce the bread which I did, left over from Chaitanya's gift of small slightly sweet squares of white wrapped bread. Usually bread omelette means omelette with pile of lukewarm bits of bread, sometimes slightly brown if lucky. In this case he had mixed up breadcrumbs with the egg producing a slightly thicker texture. Had a lively chat with Sai Gopal before we set off but as soon as I sat on his bike I had strong tummy pains so gave up and said I would start on Monday. After sitting in my room for ten minutes I felt perfect so spent morning on roof and sorting stuff on computer. In the afternoon Satheesh collected me to go to department to internet. I was greeted like a long lost friend by students and staff. I downloaded 3 obituaries for Howard then dealt with a heap of emails including one from Hugh with a nice picture of Peggy. I wandered over to Biochemistry in the hot afternoon sun and spent some time with the nice girls who had visited guest house last year; they so sweet with their exaggerations "sir you were the highlight of our year". Two new teaching assistants then appeared grinning; I could only just remember them, having taught them 5 years ago. The first year Ravi [Raveeee sir] then found me; I had met him previously in the hostels. I then had to do the sheepdog trial thing, separating him from the others to invite to eat tonight. I told him to bring his friend, but only one at 6.30 English time. Wandered back, sat on roof, went for stroll by NCC nagar then back to be met by Ravi, his friend Raghav plus a third hanger on whose name I never caught, or purposely discarded. We went to Sinduri park and had an excellent dinner. The unnamed one was a typical party crasher; educated in Telugu medium, heavy, hairy, aggressively asking questions but interrupting answers after one sentence. He also interrupted the other two who were very good company. We strolled out of the cool restaurant into the welcome warm Tirupati air to find a quiet street instead of the usual chaos, don't know why but it made me feel like a stroll through temple area to Ghandi road before getting auto for guest house, fortunately losing our crasher on the way. Did the usual picture show, then Chaitanya appeared "just checking on you sir" and the other two left with requests to come again. We then lay on beds, me feeling bloated from eating so enthusiastically, while he told me how he could not have a girlfriend in the department. Last year his seniors in microbiology were ragging his friends [making them dance or sing songs or just embarrassing them] but he would not accept this and, having unusually had some whisky to drink, went up and started a fight with them. They then complained about him to Sai Gopal and it all got round that he is an aggressive dangerous drunk and the girls would not stay near him in practicals. He says he has gradually won them back by being the most helpful of the boys.

Saturday 2nd Feb I started the day slowly with a plain bread-free omelette, dull flat taste free cardboard; I think I am recovered enough to go back to idlis and samba. Having run out of water I went on a hunt up beyond the temple at the Thumulugunta turning and found a small shop where the old man remembered I came for water last year. He said they had no newspaper, you have to go all the way down to Balaji colony, but said "please sit here sir with us and read out paper". So I did for 5 minutes but it was the local paper with no international news. All the area around there has now been developed, with many small roads lined by large very nice houses. They have kept the trees and except for the usual heaps of rubbish thrown over the garden walls, is quite attractive. It is very different from Thumulugunta; no one says hello and there are no children except for a few fat boys being ferried to school. On the way back I had a brainwave and bought 6 bananas at 2 rupees each, then was accosted by a boy on motorbike, grinning so happily. It was a Thum. boy called Kotesch Kumar who I got to know as a good friend of Balaji two years ago but saw only briefly last year. The bike belonged to Venkataramana. Kotesch is now 18, looking 15. His handsome grandfather then came up for big handshakes and invitations to visit Thumulugunta soon. I declined a ride on the bike with Kotesch but promised to visit soon, strolling back to the guest house for a morning's work on computer [writing 2 more references for people]. I was soon interrupted by two sweet girls from 2nd year virology. Ramani asked if I remembered her; I said could not remember her

name but that she sat on the front row nearest to me in lectures. “Yes sir I did not want to miss anything and you needed my pen for the register”. She is the daughter of an army man so has travelled a lot and her English is excellent. She was very enthusiastic when she saw I was reading Indian history and novels, and she offered to give me some books if I run out. “Do you like Jeffrey Arker sir?” When I told her it is pronounced Archer she said she knew that but if she says that people in India would not understand. I may leave Vikram Chandra’s huge *Sacred Games* with her if I do not have room for it. She then told me the story of “your friend Chaitanya sir; he is so strong and tall and dark, he is so frightening”. She confirmed all he had told me but she said that now he is the girl’s favourite because he will always help them and they think he was badly treated. The girls bought me a coconut as a gift, straw included. Ramani then went on to say how badly Satheesh treats them. I have noticed that although he is so helpful to me and always a pleasure to see, he never smiles when talking with students and he usually tells them off if they want something. He is the least popular person amongst the students. I remember when he was a student he always said he would aim to be kind if ever he was a teacher; he has failed. By contrast Subramanyam is loved by them all “sir I go and ask questions only to get his sweet smile”.

After a new improved lunch of dryish veg and chapattis Madhu phoned to say he is in Chittoor with his father and is it convenient to come. He did as previously and arrived late afternoon then left six O’clock next morning. As smart as ever he turned up in his pale grey flared jeans and tight scarlet shirt. He is getting ready to go to Dubai. Ramani had recommended a good non-veg restaurant [Andhra Spice] which is in the Centre Park. That sounded attractive so we got an auto there, thinking a nice stroll in the park would be a good idea. After an increasingly busy noisy auto ride we arrived at the park only to find that it is the name of a big shopping complex, the restaurant being located on 3rd floor. It was where I went as Sai Gopal’s guest last year. It was good except for unsmiling senior waiters, nervous juniors, and a badly tuned radio station playing noisy screechy film hits. We were able to find a mobile phone shop for Madhu to charge his card, to the accompaniment of testing ring tones by gangs of youths and fat old men. We tried to have a stroll exploring and found a nice fruit market without traffic but soon gave up further exploring because of the aggressive hooting autos and bikes, so came back to peaceful chat with all the old songs from last year playing on the computer.

Then an early night for Madhu to be off to Bangalore before dawn; all the good buses are full after seven O’Clock.

Sunday 3rd February. *Writing this Monday evening in the company of Angela Hewitt playing Bach Preludes and Fugues.* As planned, the day started with me waking Madhu at 5.30am. It is the time I am usually first woken by morning traffic. The day was cloudy again and humid and I soon developed a thundery headache which eventually succumbed to 3 aspirins followed an hour later by two ibuprofen [am I becoming a hypochondriac?]. I really did not feel like doing much so dutifully modified website – especially a page devoted to Howard. Then, realising that the CSO had the family concert yesterday, I modified the pages so next concert is April 5th. Just as I finished I had a call from “Balakrishnan sir”. I asked if he was a student – “I am Balakrishnan and I am coming to the guest house”. It was the young politics student aiming to be a teacher, from Kapilatheertham. He arrived and after effusive greetings said he had brought his brother to see me, and in walked the physical opposite; large unshaven, big moustache big glasses and aggressive looking. He is the son of the Professor of electrical engineering and is an older friend [from Yoga classes], not actually a brother. I then had the usual problem of having a conversation with My friend while His friend tried to hijack it. To signal an end to the darshan I took them to the roof for photos. I then walked down to hostels and eventually found Shreekanth [final biochemistry] who had been attending his sisters wedding the last two weeks. I suggested he came out to dinner and while he was getting ready his room mate invited himself to join us; I fended him off by telling him that Shreekanth was helping me with some personal matters, “perhaps another time”. We went to the Kalyan Residency for peace and quiet and also

so I could book a car for the journey home. Ravi's nice assistant was dealing with me but wrote nothing so I asked him to write down everything as I did not want to find they did not have a car; he thought this amusing but did it to humour the old chap. We had wonderful hot Gobi Manchurian [Cauliflower in onions, chillies and fried in batter till crisp]. Then rotis with mushroom and someotherveg curry followed by butterscotch icecream. Having dropped off Shreekanth at Balaji colony I returned to Guest house where it was too early to go to bed and I didn't want computing. Ravi had seen me looking at the paper in Kalyan so came over and gave me a complete Sunday Hindu so I settled down with the Shiraz wine from BA, the Beethoven Waldstein sonata and the adverts for husbands in the Hindu. Then the luxury of a phone chat with Hugh and Peggy, followed by rest of the wine sitting in bed reading Ian Rankins *Naming of the Dead*.

Monday 4th February. I woke at seven and decided I must ignore the weather and usual cloud, and go for a good long morning walk. In the past this courageous gesture has always been rewarded by the sun soon emerging, together with the best birds ever. I walked for more than one hour in very hot humid air with shirt stuck to my back, hardly a bird in sight, no sun and little else of interest. This was initially out to NCC nagar, where I had a nice chat with cadets outside their new quarters, getting ready to go to their special engineering course in the University. I then walked parallel to the new bypass on a red dirt track towards the zoo then back down through Veterinary College area, back to a flat dead thin flat omelette with life-saving teas, augmented in my room by a banana dipped in sugar [before I saw all the tiny ants that had colonised it] followed by a piece of chocolate. [*that sounds a good idea*]. Then off to a very hot sticky lecture on catabolite repression and Trp operon to previous year. Then had a bit of time to comfort poor Subramanyam who had not got the PhD place which had gone to a person with far lower marks but from within the College, as predicted to me that morning by Sai Gopal. It was an 18 hour journey by non-sleeper train but he seemed fairly cheerful. The day was so dull and no breeze so I did not sit outside at all but prepared lectures with the AC turned on. My afternoon lecture was enjoyable – on citric acid production etc. Antony Johnson [pronounced Jansan] then helped me load my modified website. It took more than 2 hours and we had to do some funny manoeuvres to achieve it – mainly to remove temporary internet files from my computer that the website was wrongly using. Now all good. He is a bit intense but I felt I should invite him in after he delivered me back to guest house where I got 3 cups of tea and we sat on roof in the slight breeze. He is very fat indeed but with a completely straight face was telling me about the high level of diabetes in India due to the increasing numbers of obese people.

He then dropped me off at the hostels so I could have another go at finding Moin, which I did. He is the nice chatty Biotech first year I met outside the hostel while waiting once for Chaitanya. He was very pleased to see me and we negotiated that he would come to eat at nearby cheap Harry's Cove, on condition that I spent ten minutes telling him about my research. Again I had to brutally reject his room mate's self invitation. He had chicken Biriani in which he said the chicken seemed to be very shy and almost invisible. I had my favourite Cashew nut fried rice. And both had Butterscotch ice cream of course before walking back to Hall. It is so much better to have only one guest at a time. He is the best student of his year and very enthusiastic, getting very excited that I had met Peter Mitchell and delighted that I could explain DNA replication on the back of the paper table mat. Back at his room his two room mates came in and immediately there was the usual business of me having to entertain them, while being unable to understand one of them at all, and Moin keeping politely quiet for his friends to have their share. We then ran the gauntlet of the rooms lining the quadrangle shaking hands, pretending to recognise half naked students in the dim light, with the occasional positive meeting, as with Ravi and Rhagav. Slim Ravi had only his Lunghi on and flexed his little muscles "Sir I am aiming to be like Stallone – how am I doing sir". Having persuaded Moin to leave me at the gate I tried to get an auto but he did not want to go in my direction. After shouting at him a fierce man on a bike told me to get on the back which was already occupied

by a sweet looking apprehensive small Carl-like boy who shifted up to his father to make room for me for a too rapid rush home up the road over the speed bumps. I was then released by the man, a policeman he told me, after many handshakes and salutes and my final brilliant ploy of giving him one of my cards – then one to his son. They then set out back down the road so they were not even going my way when they offered me my lift.

Tuesday 5th February. *I am writing this Wednesday night while listening to Grumiaux playing unaccompanied Bach violin sonatas.* After a disturbed night I got up early and prepared lectures. I find that I can hardly follow my own notes that I wrote last year on the new topics so I am writing them out more clearly in pen – on Transcription, Attenuation and Catabolite repression. I really cannot remember much about rest of the day except that I had my nice special lunch. As it was a sunny evening I went for a walk round the dairy farm. Even that peaceful place has its special noise pollution now in the form of devotional songs reproduced [very well] through loudspeakers hidden in the trees. They are not too loud and are only between the gate and the offices. I went to pay my respects to the bored swaying elephants and then was hailed by the rabbit man, promising to call in to his office on the way back [I purposely went a different way]. I am embarrassed that I cannot remember his name so I cannot go to the office and ask for him. I had a lovely peaceful walk, surrounded when near the pond by about 50 swallows and at one point a dozen paddy birds, invisible by the waters edge and then flashing white as they croak upwards to avoid me and perch in a nearby Neem tree. At one point I was accompanied by about a dozen bee eaters, alternately perching on the barbed wire fence by the path and launching out for flies, or bees I suppose, always, of course, keeping sufficiently far ahead to make a good picture impossible. As the sun sets the parakeets have a last screeching emerald fling across the sky and the crows stream home towards their eucalyptus trees to roost near the engineering building, and the mynahs set off for C block in the student hostels. As arranged Subramanyam [Subbu] arrived at about six to go out to dinner. We went yet again to the Kalyan Residency where we had North Indian Thali before walking through the horrible underpass towards the DR Mahal and Surya's house. I much preferred the old level crossing to the noise and dirt of the underpass. Subbu got very excited as he had never been under a bridge like that before. It is always a good feeling to leave the busy main road, where there always more than the usual share of beggars, drunks and aggressive arguments, into the small side roads with the green grocers and sewing shops, past the old lady sitting on the floor at the corner cooking veggies in batter and into Surya's dark street. Almost immediately there was a little squealing shout and little Venkatesh [Surya's landlord's son] came running up for a hug and a guiding hand to the house. Subbu was so nice "hello auntie, I am a friend of Chris and I work in his Department here". It was nice to have someone to chat to her – rather than the usual sitting silently smiling. We were both very full from our giant thalis and I warned Subbu we would have to fight off further food. I was right but fortunately I spotted the signs immediately and cancelled the cooking. I had a nice phone chat with Swarna who may come this weekend. We then had a fast auto back by the alternative main bypass road, dropping Subbu off at the hostels.

Wednesday 6th February. I had another disturbed night, due to alternatives of high temperature or highly noisy fast fan. In a lucid moment I leapt up and turned on the AC leaving it on until I felt really cold, and then was asleep within minutes of turning it off. For the first time for some time there was a clear morning at 6.30 so I got up and set off at 7.15 for a slow stroll in vet college/pig farm area. *I am now listening to the beautiful Abraham and Isaac Canticle by Britten.* Within ten minutes I had seen coucals, mynahs, babblers, tree pies, drongos and doves. I spent some time tracking down a bird with a quiet but irritated slow rasping call only to find it was Golden Orioles; the opposite of their beautiful fluting song. Later had a wonderful view of 3 golden backed woodpeckers playing together around a tree trunk. I don't know if it is my good mood on a sunny morning or if there really are more singing happy visible birds. The magpie robins and bulbuls, both redcrested and red-vented, sounded as happy

as I was. The little minivets were in the same tree like Christmas tree lights. There was an important meeting in the guest house so there was a special breakfast prepared in the new kitchen, the fall out landing on me, delicious hot idlis and rice pongal with my two teas. Last night Gopi had phoned to say he would be here for the day so after my lecture on Transcription to the juniors I cancelled my afternoon lecture then hurried back to the guest house. It was more than an hour before Gopi arrived so I had a nice time sitting in the sun reading on the roof in a light breeze stirring the Ashok trees and the big mango trees which again had sunbirds and golden orioles in it. Gopi arrived as cool as ever just in time for my usual lunch, in the room as there were important guests downstairs from whom I have to be hidden. We then lay on the bed chatting until Gopi fell asleep and I crept out to read on the roof again. Chandra Babu from the other college where I am to give a lecture turned up to postpone it till Friday. He is a nice man, aged about 35, recently married and nicely honest in discussing the University here. The College has only run their degree course for the last two years; it is a private college. He explained that it is a better place to work as there are not the old rules from the old university and he is free to get the support he needs and make collaborations; in SV University everything has to be done through senior professors who often don't know much. It will be an interesting experience. At 4.45 I woke Gopi, who had had to work at his project till early morning last night, and we went for a stroll to dairy farm again, where there were a couple of camels with the elephants. Very beautiful again. Then down to Harry's cove for dinner and back for a final chat before Gopi set off for Chittoor to return to Bangalore tomorrow morning. I might see him next weekend but this might have been the last time this trip.

Bedtime after the Journey of the Magi.

Thursday 7th February A nice plain day. I woke as usual at about 6.15 and got up immediately, shaved washed and then realised that there was a lot of bird noise which usually suggests a sunny morning. It was; so I went for usual stroll, nothing special but special for that. Almost immediately a coucal flew up with its chestnut back glowing in the morning light; as it stalled to land on a branch with its tail and wings stretched out fully it looks just like an Archaeopteryx. A lot of parakeets, mynahs and Koils competing for the noise prize. As I turned a corner I was surprised by a flock of 7 golden orioles moving between the trees; they were mainly female or young ones but they are not supposed to breed down here. Perhaps they are realising that their winter visitor status means their visas are expired and it is time to set off north to breed. The magpies robins continued to dominate the tops of trees and wires with their nice songs. Got a nice picture of 5 or 6 coppersmiths in the top of one tree. As I was about to get the ultimate picture of a golden oriole two men paused in their walk to grill me. "Are you still collecting specimens [they would be a good start]" ? What is your native place? UK. Ok sir, where is that place? North West of here. Got back as usual at exactly 8.30 for delicious breakfast [prepared really for special guests] of puri masala followed by rice pongal. My special lecture at the college has been postponed till tomorrow so I finished my Transcription lecture. Then back by bike to do another wash of shirts and undies, hanging them on the ladder on the roof. Again had the VIP lunch, in my room so I do not contaminate the real VIPs. Had a nice read on the roof, reluctantly leaving to get ready for the afternoon 2.00 lecture. My transport finally arrived at 2.30, but I was told I can continue till I finish. I finished within the hour – methanogenesis. After a 20 minute rest I caught an auto from the small temple up the road and went out past Thumulagunt and Purapalli to the bypass road. Then I walked for one hour in the golden evening sun out towards the hills. It is very like the old Tirupati walks before the expansion. Got a nice picture of a black winged kite on same tree as last year. It is a gentle silver gray colour with black wings and a flight more like the bouncing flight of harriers. *I must be careful I just fell asleep and woke as the laptop started to slither towards the floor.* An old man made a big thing of calling me over towards his field where his colleagues were laughing at him – or me. When I go near it was obvious he was a bit crazy or drunk. I escaped by taking a couple of photos. After an hour as the sun was setting I got back to the bypass with its collection of tea stalls and a couple of drink places. I worked out I would just make it back if I walked briskly but my legs and feet were aching a bit and I was delighted by an auto stopping.

I think he recognised me from the small temple area so I was home with enough time to have good wash and a lie down before my dinner guests arrived: 1st year microbiologist Sunil Kumar and his friend. The friend had to go to the station to meet his parents so I had to entertain Sunil who is rather shy and speaks rarely and quietly. He was at college with Srinivas, a student from last year's final year [Sunil's 'Super Senior'] and the two are rather similar. Both like classical music, both Indian and western. After looking at family photos went to Kalyan for dinner. As good as usual. Now home for an early night as I am feeling very twitchy. Goodnight.

Friday 8th February. *Writing while listening to the last act of Rosenkavalier.* My early night led to an early rise, up at 6.00 with the Koils to a grey morning with the hills hidden by mist or low cloud. It cleared away by 8.0 but I had decided to prepare my lecture anyway. Today was my special guest lecture at the Sri vidyanikhan college. It is a private college teaching up to MSc level, doing the same syllabus as SVU and also doing the same exams. It was founded, designed and built by Mohan Babu a famous film star turned philanthropist. I had breakfast with a retired professor from Canada, visiting SVU to give a few lectures on the way to his orphanage that he had founded 15 years before, and to teach at Andhra University which apparently has its campus almost on the beach. He also has a few houses he said in beautiful places; he was very enthusiastic that I visit it some time. Sound very attractive especially as he is such a nice normal pleasant man. I was all clean and wearing my clean cream shirt and clean trousers ready to go, as arranged, at 10.00 but no sign of Chandra Babu so it must have been Indian time. Sai Gopal came on time but Chandra Babu was 25 minutes late. "Why does that fellow not phone us to tell us what is happening". Reason was that Sai gopal had left his mobile in his car, as he discovered when he accepted my suggestion at last and tried to phone Chandra, only to find that his phone was really his camera. Silly fellow. We were picked up by what looks like a typical modern 4X4 to drive the 20km to the college. It was a nice drive towards Bangalore at the start and then towards the hills for 8km through farm lands. The college has a beautiful campus with nice modern architecture. I was shown round all the main departments with a trail of other staff, ending up sitting in 2 rows in front of the desk of the Principal but he never showed up so we drank coffee then went off to the auditorium. This is new and magnificent and packed with about 300 students and staff from Departments of Chemistry, biochemistry, microbiology and biotechnology. I gave my usual long historical lecture as that can bring in all sorts of subjects at different levels. At the end there were 20 minutes of questions, many of them covering what I had already discussed at length eg "what is the function of PQQ in bacteria". I was then presented and draped with a big silk shawl [as they say] and a gold garland and bouquet of roses. From the minute I arrived at the College there was an official photographer with a big Nikon camera snapping away at everything. After my adornment I was besieged by a mass of girls – microbiology students- wanting my autograph, later joined by a few shyer boys. I asked them to photograph this – it is not often I am so obviously popular. The students were then driven off so that we could drive to the School [6th form college in effect] nearby, also founded by Mohan Babu, to have lunch with about 10 senior staff in a nice AC dining room looking out over the campus. The first item was especially for me apparently – Spaghetti with tomato curry sauce. A few people tried to eat it with their fingers one strand at a time but they soon grabbed a fork and followed my example. This was followed by lots of other delicious veggie things followed by the usual sweet sago and vermicelli milk pudding.

After enthusiastic thank yous on all sides I was then whisked back to the guest house to get my notes in time to give my final year lecture, the first on continuous culture. I was very tired from the heat and constant talking and a bit irritated, especially when I saw only half the students were there. Hare Krishna apologised and had to leave abruptly to go and give blood for a baby with the same less common blood group as him. Afterwards I was keen to get back and collapse but had to have my obligatory tea with Sai Gopal, and then had to help him with understanding his plane ticket to Atlanta where he is attending a meeting. To escape I said I

would walk back but was glad to be picked up by a member of Biochemistry staff who dumped me exhausted at the guest house where I was soon sitting in the low yellow sun reading. I then had the usual decision about eating. I phoned Moin, forgetting that he is in Vellore but we arranged for tomorrow night. Then found Ravi has a fever so was staying in his room. My nice girlfriend Ramani said they have recently become strict and she is not allowed out after 6.30 so she will come tomorrow morning. So I got an auto to Ghandi road and had a really nice stroll with the little camera as far as Sinduri park for Paneer fried rice and strawberry ice cream. I then walked all the way back, exploring a few back streets on the way to the edge of Balaji colony where, in the dark under the trees near the hostels, I was leaped on by Hare Krishna, another final year student and Gopi Krishna a final year student who, I guess, had polio when he was younger as he walks with difficulty. He is so gently friendly and he rides an ancient 3 wheeler scooter. Two of them were going to get the bus to Bangalore to take a PhD entrance exam. I was about to leave to get the hostel to see Subramanyam when he appeared out of the darkness to join us. He then grabbed an auto and we came back to guest house for half an hour before he went off back to the hostel to prepare lectures. Feeling a bit sad now as Gopi just phoned to say there is no holiday for him this weekend and his mother is away so we cannot do as planned and visit his home. He will come the following Saturday just to say goodbye. I am so glad that I arranged for him to meet me this year as we had a nice long time then. I phoned Madhu to remind him that while we are in Mahabalipuram he will be able to borrow the car [all fuel is pre paid] and visit his friends in Chennai to say good bye, his flight to Dubai is only 10 days later. He was delighted and I am pleased as I like being alone some of the time there and not under pressure to entertain. Rosenkavalier has ended and so shall I.

Saturday 9th February. The day started so dull I launched into domestic stuff when I got up at 6.45, washing trousers etc. As there was some function I had wonderful breakfast of fresh idlis, pankora, samba, pongal rice and some sweet orange rice and nut thing. I completed all my lecture preparation; attenuation and stringent response for 1st years and continuous culture for final year students. I had prepared the lectures before but I wrote the lot out again as revision for myself and to ensure it was as logical as possible. As arranged previously, Ramini and her friend came again and had another nice gossip about the department. I was rescued from them by the cook who had done aubergines and dahl and chapattis; a great system this has turned out to be. In the afternoon I finished the continuous culture during a few splotches of rain – wonderful. After a short doze I got down to finishing editing my photos of Thumulgunta in case I decide to print them out for them. Moin then called to say he was back from his conference in Vellore on plant biotechnology, and asking if he can come up. So he did and I showed him family photos then he asked for me to tell him about my research so I gave him yesterday's powerpoint presentation. He really is one of the rare students who is very interested in his course; this was confirmed by Ramini's friend who is on the same course as him; "we are a little bit scared of him sir, as he is our course number one and he is always working. He then threatened my plans by saying he would eat in his hostel instead of coming, as planned, with me to Kalyan. He was eventually persuaded "I think you are kidnapping me sir". Yep. We had really nice evening, as his English is excellent and he has a genuine interest in things. I do not have to perform. I dropped him off at the hostel, making me a parting offer "I like to be kidnapped sir; please do it more often whenever you are bored sir". I came back here, finished photo editing and now to bed feeling twitchy.

Sunday 10th February. As usual I woke before 7.0 and immediately got up; I find this stops me getting necky headache. As there was a completely gray sky I went into dull mode, shaving etc before turning my brain on. I went out on the roof in my boxer shorts only and looked at the gray sky and clouds obscuring the Tirumula hills and cancelled my plan for a long Sunday walk. Alternative plan was effective and raised my spirits; swept floor, washed out bathroom, killing the giant ants with near boiling water; then tidied my desk area completely and sorted cupboards till everything looked neat and tidy – so at least I had achieved something. When I

went down to breakfast the dining hall was filled with the economics conference delegates staying here, having a nice buffet breakfast. My nice cook made me sit down on side while he fought the hungry rabble for a nice plate of idlis, pakora and pongal rice. Immediately I was pleased that a delegate came and sat beside me. I had noticed him earlier as he was the only one wearing a tie; he also had glasses on a gold cord, swept back greasy hair and aggressive beard. He asked if I had just arrived then, hearing I am teaching here he asked what was the University like in my subject. I diplomatically said that they work very hard; “Oh yes the work hard *these people*”. So I immediately felt defensive against his patronising tone and was about to make a suitable comment when he just got up and walked away. My shudder of disgust was detected by a nice old man sitting near who pulled a face in agreement. I was then ushered upstairs by my cook carrying my two tea cups. I was due to go to Swarna’s for lunch at 12 ish so spent the morning sorting pictures and editing my bird pictures. By 11 it was hot and very sticky as I set out to walk towards Swarna’s. Fortunately I got an auto to Ghandi road so I could have enough energy to walk through the temple area with camera, over the station bridge, through the Choudhary area and to Swarna. It took about an hour as I stopped for sunless pictures. I missed a good picture through being too English and sensitive. At the bottom of the stairs from the station there was the usual huddle of homeless men, one of whom jumped up and started shouting at me, looking very photogenic. The others stopped their card game, jumping up and telling me that their friend “is a mad man sir, he is lunatic so don’t worry, he is harmless”. Later wondering about the etiquette of photographing a fruit and veg cart with nice lady by it, I was waved over by her as she dumped her little nervous daughter amongst the fly covered heaps of grapes, demanding a photo. She was not expecting to see it and got very excited, calling the other cart people to come and look. Swarna was good company telling me about their apartment and her nearby job dealing with the accounts of a real estate company in Hyderabad. Her 5 year old son is better than when I first met him and is quite impressive in how much he can write and tell of his 7 times table etc. We had a nice chapatti and veg lunch with sweet semolina – nut – sultana thing at the end, accompanied by two surreptitious Ibuprofens to get rid of my thundery headache. I retraced my route back to town and walked all the way to Balaji colony, dropping in to the cricket ground where a few boys came up and asked if I remembered them. Oddly enough I did remember one of them [Imran] whose name is the same as a great cricketer so that lead to lots of excitement. I soon gave in to the sticky heat and got an auto back where I then threw buckets of slightly warm water over me then lay damp under the fan. I read the Hindu on the roof where there was a slight breeze then came in to plan my evening.

I had thought to go to Thumulagunta but could not face the need to be an entertainer although it would have been nice to see Balaji and Kotes. I then had long chat with Leigh, only the second since coming here, this being interrupted [as I was saying goodbye] by Libby telling me they were about to have roast Sunday lunch with Graham and Susan Penny; I dribbled onto my cellphone. Imran had decided not to come this weekend as it is a 26 hour journey; I had suggested that Madhu need not come although he had bravely offered [he is coming next weekend to Mahabalipuram]; and Gopi had to cancel his visit, including us going to his family in Chittoor, because his mother had to go away to attend a wedding. Most of my student friends were away so I dithered about what to do and decided to eat in the simple Harry’s Cove and then wander in the Hostels if I had enough energy. Balaji colony was in its usual relaxed Sunday evening state so I wandered up and down the road chatting to a few locals, then braved the dark and TV noise of Harry’s Cove. After 10 minutes the waiter came and said it would be another 15 minutes before he could cook. After 10 minutes he said the same thing to 2 new customers so after I waited another 5 minutes I left and went next door where another well-lit restaurant has opened. Everything was in Telugu and there was no menu. The enthusiastic manager shouted at me that I could have chapattis and vegetables. Perfect I said, only for him to tell me they don’t have perfect. A teenage boy who I have often seen watching TV next door then came up and I managed to get him to agree to get some food, but failed to mime bottled water well enough. The food was simple but tasted good and the bill was 14 rupees. So I gave a 35% tip to my young friend who took me by the had to deliver me through

the open front to the pavement where I was greeted by a huge thunderclap and lightening flash followed by huge cool spots of rain, enough to cancel hostel plans and rush back home by 8.00. Sitting wondering what to do I had a nice phone call from Moin and then from Chaitanya asking me if I had a powercut – which I did as they called. The next hour was spent watching a ‘film’ that Ramachandran had put on my laptop in which it was argued very convincingly that the whole 9/11 event was a government plot. I have had 3 powercuts while watching the film and typing this. It is time to go to bed, an enticing prospect although I need the fan full on. Goodnight all.

Monday 11th February. *Writing this while listening to a Byrd Mass.*

I woke to another gray dawn at about 5.50, checking the weather by walking out onto the roof in my boxers. It was quite cool, meaning that it felt pleasant but the lack of any hint of sun to fight the cloud I went back in and went to sleep until 7.00. The cook didn't appear till 9.20 but then Satheesh did not come until 9.40 [20 minutes late]. Sai Gopal had forgotten me and had phoned Satheesh who was lecturing in the Agric college. So I arrived 20 minutes late to find that half the boys were missing. Fighting down my irritation I gave a miraculously lucid account of the role of attenuation in the Tryptophan operon. I had re-written my notes on this again but still had difficulty following it. Even I understood it at the end. The internet was not working but I was interrupted anyway in Sai Gopal's office when he introduced me to 7 new MSc students of nanotechnology, a new course by physics and virology together. The students have to pay 36,000 rupees per year for two years. If the course goes well then it will be adopted by the University and the State and the fees will drop to 4,000 and the State will give the University the money. The same thing applies to the new Industrial Microbiology course. I was then instructed to interact with the students as they stood in a polite line nervously looking interactive. So I rebelled and told them I only interact outdoors so we ignored Sai Gopal and trooped out to the open corridor with its view over the campus to the distant hills and cooled slightly by a breeze. We then interacted – this means I ask questions and gradually they relax and we had a nice chat. They always expect me to provide instant wise advice on “should we concentrate on biological or physical aspects of nanotechnology” or “is there any use being good at maths in nanotechnology”. Satheesh then drove me back to guest house where I sat in the sun reading his M phil thesis. It is not good and I would be inclined to fail it if it does not improve during his final PhD year. It is not entirely his fault as his supervisor knows no enzymology. But he had completely ignored the lengthy, carefully prepared material I had given him last year and had gone ahead with his supervisor's way of purifying and assaying his enzyme, making the fundamental mistakes that were made by the Madras student whose thesis I recommended should fail a few months ago.

In the afternoon I was collected to attend a lecture by a visiting Indian microbiologist from Michigan State – on Lignin utilising microbes. It was interesting but he packed in too much detail for most of the students. I had to give a little vote of thanks which was fun, because he was quick witted and we had nice little arguments. Typically Sai Gopal had changed the start time so all the students were stuck as usual in the lecture theatre with doors and windows closed [to provide darkness for projector] for 40 minutes before SG arrived with Dr Reddy, the guest lecturer. Afterwards he sensibly dismissed the staff so that he could interact with the students. I then spent the rest of the afternoon on the roof with Satheesh's thesis amongst impressive black clouds with silver linings, finishing with a birdless stroll up to NCC Nagar under the lines of returning crows. Chaitanya phoned so I arranged for him to come so that we could go to Kalyan to eat where I gave him a lecture on assaying his enzyme – the same as the one Satheesh mistreated. We had a decent dinner, the ice cream being the usual highlight, then returned by auto to block C where I failed to find Subramanyam and Ravi but found Moin in, working as usual. Unfortunately his room mates plus 4 others soon arrived. One of them insists on asking blunt questions about molecular biology “How do you isolate a gene sir”. Within 2 sentences he gets bored and asks another and so on. My eventual escape took a good 10 minutes being reminded of their names and wished well, as they trooped behind me and Moin

as we negotiated our way out of the hostel, only to be met by a small student who dropped his bag and came running up to fling his arms round me. It was sweet little Subbaiah who looks like a blacked up Charlie Chaplin. After our usual failure at conversation Moin and I went on our way, his mates gradually dropping off before we reached the main road where we parted and I slogged the last uphill 1.5km back to the guesthouse.

I am now falling asleep so better do it properly rather than drop the computer.

Tuesday 12th February. *Now listening to Mozart Str Quartet E flat.*

My day started with a vivid dream that woke me up. I was in the garden in Eastfield avenue in Watford sitting on the lawn and Richard was beside me playing with dinky toys and Mum and Auntie Alice were laughing at something stupid I had said. It was before the extension was built. It was a really nice feeling so I got up and potted about before seeing it was only 5.50. So I went back to sleep for an hour then set out for usual walk although it was disappointingly cloudy again. Didn't see any birds of note – wrong – I saw a paradise flycatcher. On the way back I was called over to the stables where the NCC keep their horses, to chat with a man there. He had seen me the day before chatting to his friend. Two nice stable boys then called me over to show me their favourite horse, called Everest; so I did my duty and took a photo of all three. Breakfast was omelette plus 3 bits of toast. As they were hot and almost crisp they were nice but I have been perfectly happy with just the omelette. I finished off the lectures on regulation; the his operon and RNA regulation and the Stringent response. At last after years of hearing Terry Drabble talk about it I have had to understand what it is. The sun had come out by the time I was delivered back to the guest house so I sat and read on the roof, hoping to get enough tan to prove I have been here. Sai Gopal collected me after lunch in his car and almost immediately drove out of the entrance without looking and just missed a bus. Such a silly man at times; “that bus was going too fast to see”. I saw it while still in the guest house grounds. I enjoyed my final year continuous culture lecture which I had completely rewritten to ensure the lectures were neat and organised. They seemed to like it. On checking my email I found I have another paper to referee, by Mila this time on methanol dehydrogenase mutants. Looks interesting.

The rest of the afternoon was spent alternating the hot sunny roof and my air conditioned chilly room until 4.30 when I set out in hot sun to go round the dairy farm. The contrast is wonderful, entering the green watered lawns and shrubs and palm trees with the gentle temple music playing, after the dusty noisy trudge up past the railway crossing. The area around the big well and water tower where there is a water tap had been taken over by pilgrims all dressed in bright yellow lunghis etc, most with beards and ashy painted faces. They were washing their lunghis and shirts and hanging them on the barbed wire fence with crows guarding them. Just after passing them there was a shout and three wild looking farm workers came running up waving machetes. One of them was the one who on Republic day had run over to me to give me some kind of goodwill sweet. I indicated that I thought they were going to attack me; great laughs “no sir you are our friend we only cut grass today”. Isn't friendship a good thing!.

Although still hot at five O'Clock there was a nice cooling breeze and I had a glorious walk; I even saw an elephant walking past the maize field with the Corn as high as the elephants eye; O what a beautiful evening. I even saw a coucal [cuckoo pheasant] fly up from the damp ditch where I had first seen one 26 years ago. On the way out I saw our rabbit man who then told the yellow pilgrims [from Tamil Nadu apparently] that I was an important professor from England so three of them stopped staring in their rather frightening way and came up to tell me their names and have their photos taken. On the way over the rail crossing I heard “Sir Sir Randi sir”. So I went over to the man who operates the gates to explain that madam isn't with me this year, and to be told about his son who is a software engineer [who isn't?] who went to UK last week. Eventually I escaped and hot and tired had a wonderful two bucket shower before lying down beneath the AC while I waited for Subramanyam who came at 6.30 Indian time [7.10] to

go out to dinner, probably for the last time. After a long chat about his plans we went to Sinduri Park for excellent dinner [“this is our last supper sir”].

Wednesday 13th February. Sticking to my policy of not being irritated when woken by traffic noise I just got up and started to shave. Realising that I felt rather sleepy I looked at the time – 2.15 so I slumped back on the bed and slept till 7.00, waking to a sunny morning. Finished shaving and went for stroll. Leaves are leaving the trees fast now and the red berries are out on the big tree in the horse area. Previously this has meant loads of birds there but there were only squirrels. I got a good picture of a female koil with her red eye ignoring me and concentrating on berries. Saw a beautiful Chikra, like a sparrow hawk but rather tame with his dove grey back and striped front. The woodpeckers were there again but always obscured by branches and as always moving a lot and easily scared; so I have yet more poorly focussed golden backed woodpeckers in my collection.

Have to stop this now as Hare Krishna has just phoned to ask if I am free for him and Chaitanya to visit.

I was picked up at 8.45 by Sai Gopal to call in to see the Registrar who was new, in the 3 year cycle of appointments. A very dark man who is a great actor, always playing the parts of the bad guy apparently. He was most impressive, waving aside Sai Gopal’s obsequious chat to ask if he could come to one of my lectures so I suggested my special Saturday morning lecture and he said he will come as he is trying to always put academic matters before merely administrative duties. After my morning lecture I had to attend a public viva of one of the virology PhD students [called Srinivasulu]. We waited around for 40 minutes for the Dean to come. A nearly-retired professor of physics called Reddy. The viva was a powerpoint lecture by the student with all staff plus friends and other research students attending, filling the lecture room. He did a good job although too quiet for me to hear comfortably. In the middle the mobile phone of the Dean [chairman of the viva] went off and the wretched little man answered it. The student had to decide whether to politely wait or to carry on. He did this while the Dean chatted for 5 minutes. I was strongly tempted to let the built up irritation overflow and to suggest that we have a break for the mobile phone users. I resisted. After the competent lecture the Dean, without even turning round muttered “any questions or doubts”. Silence, so silly Sai Gopal turned round, laughing nervously, and asked if professor Anthony had any questions so I asked a simple question that I was interested in and got a sensible answer. This encouraged one of the visiting professors [not a virologist] to ask a silly question based on the false assumption that if the symptoms of two virus diseases are similar then the viruses are related. The student explained that this is not the case but the man droned pompously on until the students supervisor, Prof Sreenivasulu turned round, irritated and explained. After a couple of trivial questions little plastic tumblers of tea were issued with a tinfoil plate with 3 biscuits.

We then had to go to the Bliss hotel for lunch at the invitation of the candidate. This was a nice buffet and I managed to get away from the old men and sit with students. The ride to Bliss was not blissful. On the back of Satheesh’s bike we struggled in the worst traffic I have ever seen down Ghandi road in midday heat with continuous horns. We had encountered the elephants and a god on his platform carried by 12 men. It took 15 minutes to get past. I had to leave early to get back for my continuous culture lecture to the final year students which went well. I got a lift back to guest house and lay on the bed working out what to do. Prof Srinivasulu had invited me to go out to Fortune Kences hotel for dinner; when I said I had a prior engagement he just said Ok I will pick you at 7.00. So I had to give in. I copied all photos of Thumulagunta from this year and from 2006 onto a CD and got auto to the village at about 5.30 where I was met of course by charming kids who escorted me to Balaji’s house. He was delighted as he had last year’s CD to look at on the TV but not previous ones. I included the next village on the CD then secretly gave him 400 rupees to get the pics printed. He tried to reject this but I told him it was my present to the village and not to him so he accepted and said he would give prints to the next village. My young friend from last year turned up – I missed him at my first visit. He is now 6 inches taller; he told me his name is Ratkumar which I got

him to write in my notebook. My escape was the usual prolonged affair going by way of Balaji's brother to take photo of baby which I did but crying etc. It is always a sad time to say goodbye to the village, as they all tramped out to the road to wave me off, leaving me to the long hot walk home, autos never straying that far. There were two trains at the crossing so a huge build up of evening traffic on both sides. I stood there for more than 10 minutes after the trains had gone, waiting for it to be safe enough to risk walking over the crossing in the glare of the lights, hooting of horns of a main line of buses, mixed with autos, autobuses, bikes and cycles, filling every space between the buses. I collapsed on the bed, then dutifully emptied buckets over me for the arrival of Srinivasulu who then gave me a scary ride on his new scooter out by the long bypass route to the Fortune Kences. His constant plaintive hooting sounded more scared than aggressive. At the slightest threat he hoots, swerves and brakes [like eats shoots and leaves] even if the threat is merely a small pile of cow dung. We went to the veg restaurant and had N Indian Thali which was the best food I have had here, although the service was still slow. I generously suggested that he should drive straight home and I would get an auto but that ruse failed "no sir no problem and I must do my duty". We went the direct route back but hit the elephants in the Nethaji road so had a hair-raising ride through some neat short cuts. I hope he did not correctly interpret my "thank you so much for getting me safely home". Hare Krishna and Chaitanya then soon turned up and entertained me as I lay bloated and exhausted on the bed. Chaitanya asked me what present I was going to send my wife for Valentines Day. I told him I would send a missed call, this brilliant response being passed round the department by the next morning. Chaitanya then joined me collapsed on the bed, hugging me violently and promptly falling asleep. Hare Krishna then helped prise him off me and they staggered sleepily away.

Friday 14th February. *I am writing this at 5.10 while waiting for Sai Gopal to come and collect me for dinner; he is supposed to be coming promptly at 4.50 so that we arrive at his house in time for me to take photos from his roof. The cook has just come in to collect my tea cups and told me it is raining so I had to rush out and get in the washing.*

Today's joke: Woman to husband – God made me beautiful but stupid, so you would fall in love with me and I would fall in love with you.

I woke at 7.10 to another cloudy day so I did a very thorough job of preparing all my final 4 lectures on protein synthesis and continuous culture, and as a result the two today went well. The attendance is now usually full which makes for better continuity. Satheesh came back after my morning lecture to discuss his M.Phil thesis which is similar to ours in being a stage towards PhD. It was pretty bad with basic errors which he claims are just small mathematical errors – although they lead to completely wrong conclusion; all based on undergraduate failure to distinguish between mmoles and mmolar. He wrote 2 pages of notes on how to make it better and after the afternoon lecture I spent another 40 minutes with him and Chaitanya who is doing the same work as a project with him. I think I am at last getting through to him.

Sai Gopal was supposed to be coming at 4.50. He arrived rather damp at 5.50. We hung about till it stopped raining then had the usual scary scooter ride to the other side of town to have dinner at his house. I gave his wife and daughters Libby's messages and they were delighted to be remembered. We then spent half an hour looking at a computer load of pictures of last year's visit and of an exhibition the department ran during last year. Then a very nice dinner of puri masala followed by sweet beetroot desert, then drove home by car, feeling a little more safe, although more likely to cause accidents as he is not very experienced. When we arrived back he asked "how excellent am I as a driver"? You would have lost your licence for driving while talking on mobile phone – as if there are not enough hazards. He still managed to keep up his random hooting. Over dinner he explained that since he, as head of Department, had failed to appoint as lecturer one of Prof Srinivasulu's past students [it was not in Sai Gopal's power to decide anyway], Srinivasulu has refused to talk to him. He also stopped in the middle of a course he was teaching and refused to teach any more to the microbiology students. My respect for Sai Gopal has gone up, because he has not told me about all this previously and he does

seem to have behaved rather well, apologising for anything he may have done, only to be told that Srinivasulu did not want to talk to him. I learned today that one of the MSc nanotechnology students had attacked the nice one I chatted with the other day, with a stick and he is now in intensive care and the attacker is in jail.

I am writing this while waiting for the arrival of Ravi, my biochemistry student friend who was coming here at 9.0. It is now 9.30.

Friday 15th February. Ravi did not come last night; I found out later that he was ill. I don't know why he did not phone me. I had a very restless night; even with the fan full on it was too hot but I did not want the noisy AC. Eventually I did sleep and woke at 6.50 to a sunny morning so went for my bird stroll. There is no doubt that the birds like the sun, by 7.30 they were in full song with bulbuls and, best of all, magpie robins – like plump pied wagtails with a lovely song. I saw, for the first time for a few years, a black headed oriole and rufous bellied babblers. Just as I was thinking that I had not achieved any photos of new birds or better photos of old ones I got a nice picture of my favourite little minivet like a little flame dancing through the leaves. For the first time I saw a white browed bulbul and again saw the black-headed cuckoo shrike. I had a very enjoyable breakfast [bread omelette] with a visiting Professor of South East Asian Studies who was as enthusiastic as I was about William Dalrymple's book on the last Mughal. He then gave me lots of mini lectures on aspects of Indian history and the influence of British, good and bad. The latest absurdity in their politics here is that opponents of Sonia Ghandi, President of the National Congress Party is being condemned by her enemies for accepting an honour from the King of the Belgians; they say this is equivalent to swearing allegiance to him, so she is a traitor. I had a full house again for the first year students and spent most of the time talking about my research – so they will better understand my lecture tomorrow. Afterwards mad old Parthasarathy [ex biochemistry prof] came to see me in Sai Gopal's office; "I have tried my level best to see your good self, how is madam and your sons Nice Nice" As soon as he had left the present head of Biochemistry, Appa Rao, arrived to arrange a special lecture. I have been here 4 weeks and he leaves it until the day before I leave to try to arrange something. I gave in and agreed to give a lecture after my final year lecture this afternoon. So after 90 min lecture in the morning and a one hour lecture in the afternoon I gave another 80 minute lecture – after struggling for 15 minutes to get my computer linked and the powerpoint to work. Half way through there was an alarm bell and it went into hibernation – they had linked it to the power socket that does not work in their theatre. Of course I enjoyed the lecture and the students seemed to do so, presenting me with a framed relief picture of Krishna with his flute and girlfriend Radha, and a bouquet and nice red shawl. After a brief chat with the students I called into virology to receive my money; Sai Gopal has managed some arrangement where I am paid by the hour 32 days, 3 hours per day at 150 rupees per hour, plus living expenses, giving a total of 21,000 rupees. Ravi's friend then drove me back on a borrowed bike, explaining as we went very gently through the campus that he had chosen the picture for me. We returned just in time for Ramini and her friend come to say goodbye and to bring me a promised book "The monk who sold his Ferrari". I had thought it was a novel but it is a sort of parable story book that will 'develop joyful thoughts' and will bless my life. In exchange I gave her the Dalrymple book that is so good which made her so excited. I have the same book in hardback at home. I then had to fill in her autograph book [star sign, favourite actor, favourite clothes etc]. After they hurried off to get in to the hostel before closing at 6.30 I mooched about in the sunset on the roof, very peaceful. When it was dark I went in for a doze while waiting for my friend Mohammed Mazahar Moin, the biotechnology student. He is their best student getting average marks of 87%. I have just realised who he reminds me of - Andy when he was 16 years old. He has a lovely sense of humour and is really relaxing company. We went down to Sinduri Park where he was disappointed again that it was strict vegetarian and I learned his full name for the first time, so finding he is a muslim. He came back to the guest house for a farewell chat and exchange of email addresses and promises to be friends for ever – sealed with a gift of the CD of Biochemistry of Methylotrophs! So that was the first of my sad

farewells, leaving me a bit sad and the sudden realisation that I have to prepare a special lecture for virology / microbiology department for ten tomorrow morning, where the Vice Chancellor is expected to be Chief guest [Sai Gopal had accidently printed this as Cheap guest]. I then have my farewell function in the afternoon at 3.00. Gopi comes in the evening and I have to arrange friends for dinner with Gopi; probably Subramanyam and perhaps Chaitanya and Hare Krishna. *I am writing this while listening to YoYo Ma playing unaccompanied Bach Cello Suites. But now to bed.*

Saturday 16th February. *I am writing this at 1.00pm on Monday in our room in the Golden Sun Hotel in Mahabalipuram. Madhu has driven into Chennai to say goodbye to friends as he is off to Dubai on Saturday.* My last day was almost completely good, except for the threat of packing and leaving hanging over me. The morning was bright and clear so by 7.30 I was off to my usual bird stroll place, past the Stable area, past the derelict pig research place, out towards the hills lit by the morning sun, through the scrub area back to NCC Nagar and University campus. I had decided to list the birds I saw but perhaps I will not now remember. As always there was the calling of Koils and Mynahs as I set out. As soon as I entered the bird area I had a wonderful view of the bird said in my birdbook to be the most beautiful bird in India – the Indian Pitta. It is a little larger than a starling and had legs set very well back and it has every colour on it. There was not time to photograph it as it flew like a cascade of jewels out of the tree into the undergrowth 20 yards away. Strangely, I had been thinking how sad it was that I had only seen this bird once before, on my first visit to Tirupati. The list: Koil, crows, mynahs, Pitta, little brown dove, spotted dove, paddy bird, Golden Orioles, Black headed oriole, Kingfishers, Magpie robins, Indian robins, Black drongos, black shrike, shikra, babblers, Tailor bird, prinyas, parakeets, golden backed woodpeckers, hoopoes, purple sunbirds, tree pie. The stable boys and cadets were riding around the stable grounds jumping over white tree trunk jumps. They are so proud of their horses – especially Everest and Maharaja.

My breakfast was bread omelette, always better than previous years as he puts enough salt in and the bread is always hot. I quickly modified my lecture which was aimed mainly at 1st year students, put on clean shirt and trousers and waited at 9.50 for Sai Gopal who arrived 20 minutes late, to my irritation, saying “are you ready for your lecture, we must go, the VC and registrar may be waiting”. They didn’t come; I think it was just another of SG’s little plots to make his department more visible. They had set up a computer linked to the LCD projector but it struggled for 15 minutes with my presentation until they found a way of doing it. I was told by SG that it should be for 90 minutes but I kept it down to just over one hour. There was the usual muddle at the beginning with the Chief Guest being introduced; he had been a student of NV Naidu and later director of a crop research lab. I told SG he should introduce me and then leave as he had heard it all before. Fortunately he agreed to this, coming in at the end to give a vote of thanks which included “He is a truly great scientist and it is a privilege for one and all to have interacted with him; we fully expect this year to be able to send our congratulations to him on winning the Nobel Prize”.

In the afternoon at 3.00 was the students’ “Farewell to our beloved Garu Professor Chris Anthony”. It was a pity that the first years had responsibility for running it but few could actually attend as they were preparing food etc. As always SG took over, telling them what to do. I was invited by the student acting as MC to come to the dais [there isn’t one in that lecture theatre], to be presented with flowers and garland. As I walked into the department earlier, flowers – mainly marigold - were strewn in my path and then they were thrown like confetti over me. The function started with a prayer sung in rather filmi shrieky voices by two of the girls. Then one by one staff and students stood up to say how wonderful I am [don’t worry I don’t believe all of it]. “He is such a clear lecturer, he clearly loves us and shows it in his lecture style; he teaches molecular biology with so much love we so much want to understand it with him; he tries so hard to say our names properly so we are not angry when he never succeeds”. “When he comes in he is such a gay man, filling us with joy”. Towards the end of these Satheesh stood up and said the same as always and then Subramanyam, now a teaching

assistant, stood up with his lovely smile and said “Professor Chris Anthony guru sir, I will only say that I agree with each and every one that has spoken; all I can do is to say that you are my dear friend and I am so sad you are leaving us”. Fortunately I did not have to overcome my little throat frogs and reply immediately as SG had his final speech, including “please tell our best wishes to Queen Elizabeth your wife and also to your sons and to your new grand daughter; we are sorry you were ill with your tummy being food poisoned; We wish you Happy Bon voyage”. I cannot remember my reply, just usual things ending with telling them at the end that I did not come to enjoy the noisy traffic or the poisoned food, or the Department, or SV University but I come for you, the students, which always brings loud claps while I quickly hide behind my little plastic beaker of papaya juice. I was then presented with a box containing a China-made carriage clock and a nice cream-coloured shawl.

Now writing 8.00pm in Mahabalipuram. Fortunately the chief guest and SG left, leaving me to enjoy chatting to students with the usual embarrassment of autographs and then out we went for photos, with the difference this year that there were more mobile phones being waved about as cameras. Eventually I escaped on Satheesh’s bike back to guest house where Gopi soon arrived, looking as usual so cool and relaxed even after his 2 hour bus ride. His only luggage was his toothbrush. My three biochemistry students soon arrived to say goodbye; Ravi, Raghav and Prasad. I did not spend as much time with them as I would have liked as they were amusing and independent. It was sad to see them running down the stairs. Ravi then ran back up for a final hug and promise to come back. When I previously had told his friend that he looked like a film star [his friends agreed] Ravi claimed he also looked like a film star and they all clapped when I said he looked like a cartoon character. Eventually Subramanyam, Chaitanya and Hare Krishna arrived and we set off in an auto to the Sinduri park, two of them sitting on the front seat with the driver. I had entered the nervous last bit of my time where I had to pack up. Subramanyam took my bedside light and extension cable and they all left with promises to come back to say goodbye in the morning. Gopi was delighted to accept the picture/mirror that the biochemists gave me, for his mother and then said he wanted the mats and bedsheets. He then helped me pack and we got to sleep by eleven.

Sunday 17th February. I was woken at 6.30 by a phone call from Srinivasulu, a student who left last year who said he was coming to visit. I explained that I was leaving soon and he said he knew. Half an hour later he arrived with his brother, both very cold having come by bus for three hours from their place. I tried sitting outside but it was too cold so we sat and chatted quietly, leaving Gopi to sleep on, wrapped up in his sheets. Both Srinivasulu and his brother are both working as lectures in BSc colleges. S is in a government one at 7000 rupees per month and his brother earns twice that in a private college. They wanted the usual advice – how to arrange to do a PhD in UK. I had so many conversations with S on this last year but he will not accept what I say. It is so tedious. I have also emailed him telling him the same. Eventually I told them where they could go up the road for tiffin as I had to finish packing. Madhu arrived by eight, looking cool as ever, so I could leave him chatting with Gopi while I said goodbye to Subramanyam and Satheesh and Sai Gopal with his daughter. The car arrived about ten minutes late with a new young driver also called Madhu. Said a sad goodbye to dear Gopi who set off with his parcels up the road to get the bus back to Chittoor while I set off with Madhu. The driver did not know the direct route by way of Kanchipuram – he only knew the way to Chennai airport. He was very fast and competent. It was not as bad as our drive to Chennai last year but it was pretty grim in the heavy noisy traffic through Chennai. Fortunately Madhu had lived in the area near the East coast Road so was able to direct us past Guindy to the correct route. We arrived eventually in a record time of 4 hours and were soon in our room and then having a nice lunch in the open air restaurant. Immediately afterwards Madhu was on his bed watching India / Australia cricket while I wandered about and went swimming. Watching a funny American film made us forget the time and we just made it for dinner in the restaurant here – at ten o clock - very good. I had a very bad headache, probably due to shaking around in the car, eventually cured by 3 aspirin.

Monday 18th February *Writing this at 3 am in Chennai airport.* I woke at about 7 and to avoid headache got up immediately and wandered down the beach, meeting the driver [also called Madhu] on the way. Madhu had arranged with the reception that he should be allowed to sleep on the crude wooden recliners under the thatched shelter on the beach. He said he had slept well and had a good swim the day before. I wandered back, meeting up with Madhu looking for me for breakfast of Puri masala and COFFEE and papaya juice, and bourgainvillea and kingfishers and see breeze. Wonderful. Madhu then drove off to Chennai to spend the whole day with his friends, saying goodbye before his Saturday flight to Dubai. This left me for a perfect day swimming and reading and having Fish Malabar curry for lunch. At 4.30 I walked into Mahabalipuram, paddling all the way, thinking of last years walk with Libby, arriving in time for the evening launch of fishing boats. When the sun set and I had taken too many pictures I walked back through the town past the stone carvers and other tourist shops. It is all much more tidy than previously, the beach is cleaner and everywhere is painted. Assuming that we would be coming back as arranged in the evening I bought no presents and did not even go into Luna Magica for tea, as I said I would be back by 6.30. Oddly, there were no autos at the usual place but a nice man came up and asked if I wanted a taxi, telling me it was same price as auto. They usually ask 50 rupees and accept 30 so I was willing to pay 50 rupees for the 4 km ride back to Golden Sun. As soon as I arrived and had the wonderful feeling of washed feet Madhu phoned to say he would not be back till about 9.00. He was having a great time he said. I gave in and went and sat at a table on the lawn with a bottle of Kingfisher beer and a grilled cheese sandwich, and the nice manager who told me a bit more about the place. The serving boys there who are usually very good are recruited from Tamil Nadu villages and know nothing when they start. I have noticed how he is always going up to them and surreptitiously advising them on how to pour beer or carry glasses hygienically. They all seem to like him. I had a nice read and then went back and had a short sleep before being woken by a delighted excited Madhu. It has turned out really well for him, driving all over the place and finishing with a little party for him. It was too late to go to Mahabalipuram and we got to the restaurant just in time to order dinner of mutton biryani for him and fish and chips for me. At the long table at the back we were joined by 18 Russians who we later learned were artists. They kindly kept to stereotype as I was telling M about the tradition of toasting at Russian dinners, our neighbours standing in turn to propose toasts while the bemused serving boys stood in a line ready to fill glasses. Fortunately the permanent server there who is always so welcoming was on duty and also the one I made friends with 5 weeks earlier so I could give them tips without hunting them out in the morning.

My battery is going and my flight goes in 45 minutes so I better go and find the gate, and also escape the 3yr old English girl running round with her sister screaming amongst the sleeping passengers.

Tuesday 19th February. *I am writing this in bed eight in the morning at home.* The plan to leave today to go to the Trident Hilton for our last day felt very good when I woke. This was at the usual time of 6.45 so I got up and sneaked out to go for a walk, crossing the East Coast Road to the huge area of salt marsh and flats on the other side. This is divided by dykes and ditches to form flats for salt production. My first reward was a pair of red wattled peewits [must look up proper name later], quickly followed by two kingfishers and a sweetly chattering group of bee eaters. And then a flypast some distance away of the huge painted storks. I guess these were coming from their night time roost at Vedantanal sanctuary. As I got closer to the area where they seemed to be landing, flocks of Spoonbills flew overhead, with little egrets and great egrets in the pools. As I neared the large flat where I guessed the storks had landed, creeping up behind an old wrecked wall, there was a cheery shout from the only other person within miles, coming up to be friendly. Fortunately my wave and finger to lips sent him away. There were about 50 storks mixed with spoonbills, egrets, herons and a few pelicans cruising amongst them. Eventually I guess they saw me and all flew up together, a wonderful sight. It

had become really hot by then [eight in morning] so I trudged across the flats on the clinging mud back to masala dosa with Madhu. I had expected to go swimming this morning but, as I have found before, I was already focussed on leaving it all behind and so just walked to the sea with Madhu to say goodbye then slowly packed while M lay on the bed watching cricket. It was so much nicer leaving in daylight without the midnight anxiety of a drive to the airport and we had a nice drive up the East Coast Road with its rapidly increasing numbers of resorts, meeting the spreading arms of Chennai earlier than expected. Madhu the driver did not know Chennai and got trapped amongst the buses and autos, forcing us to go right at a major crossing instead of straight on towards the airport. Fortunately that was the area where M had lived [Adyar] for 3 months last year so he was able to go an alternative route, soon arriving, hot disoriented and dusty into the marble cool foyer of the Trident, where we were soon in our luxurious room which was fitted with wi-fi internet connection, allowing me to check in online. We later checked Gulf Air for Madhu's baggage allowance for next Saturday. We went down for lunch in the open restaurant area near the foyer with its super smart, over-attentive, handsome smiling waiters. Madhu had his standard Hyderabad lamb biryani; "Chris, what does lamb mean?" "Lambs are baby muttons". "Ok chris I will have lambs". I kept to my veg regime which was a mistake; I had Okra, ladies fingers, stuffed with peanuts; this was too much as a single dish and too salty. Madhu got the attention of all others in the restaurant when he yelled "chris the water is 175 rupees". That was Evian water; the homegrown Himalayan water was only 110 rupees – this is 20 rupees in Tirupati.

M then stayed in the room watching India playing [and winning] a one day match against Australia while I sat by the pool, reading my wonderful book Q and A about a young waiter who wins a billion rupees in a quiz show. I swam or rather floated on my back looking at the coconut palms with their flocks of mynahs, disturbed by jets still struggling to get properly airborne. It was not as peaceful as it had been with Libby last year as they are building a better changing room and of course there are more hooting bikes on the nearby road. Ram's father was too busy to arrange a visit so he sent a family friend to collect Ram's presents. As the sun set M came down to sit by the pool with me, India having won the match, asking questions about flying etc. His mean company have not paid his last month salary; they say they will do so when they have checked that he finished all the parts of the project he had promised when he gave notice. It will be another month before he gets any money in Dubai so I am leaving him with the remains of my Tirupati cash, some of which he will use to pay for the car. The driver reminded him that we have not used all the mileage allowed and suggested that he would drive M all the way to Chittoor, shortening his journey to Bangalore that night. Because he needs as much time in Bangalore as possible before leaving on Saturday morning, he has changed his original plan of staying in the Trident till after breakfast on Wednesday morning and we agreed it would be better for him to leave at 9.00 tonight which he did after a nice long chat. It is unlikely I will see him again as he will be in Dubai for about 2 years. "Don't worry Chris, we will meet again somehow and you are always in my heart anyway". I then tried to sleep but failed so watched news on TV and read a bit.

Wednesday 20th February. Got my wake up call at 1.15, checked out and went the five minute drive in the hotel car to the airport. Although very expensive, the whole business of leaving has been so much more relaxed that I am very pleased I did it this way. It was also much better for Madhu. The flight home was noisy with little English girls contributing a bit of general nuisance and almost continuous babies crying and an old English man in front of me smashing my kneecaps as he tried to find room for his. I listened, at last, to the 2CD lecture by Deryke Cooke on Wagner's Ring Cycle, followed by part of Das Rheingold. At the time the journey seems endless but it disappears into nothing on arrival where we had to wait for 20 minutes over Watford because of the foggy landing conditions. When we pulled up at our final stop the pilot said "Isn't that wonderful, in these conditions we just sit back and let the plane land itself which it successfully did, just as we expected". After a long wait for baggage I was met by dear Hugh and Jim in his mini which, surprisingly, took my big bag easily, and then a

misty drive home to be met by Libby who had to leave almost immediately for the funeral of Peter Davies [bassoon and ISVR].

For the first time I seriously thought it might be my last visit, especially when I had gut rot AND it rained or was hot cloudy and humid AND the traffic noise is sometimes unbearable AND I find I am unnecessarily illogically feeling anxious while waiting for cars to airports AND Madhu, Gopi and Imran are scattered etc etc. Now I am back such thoughts seem unjustified and all the good things are floating to the surface. The simple life in my cell; the genuinely useful teaching; the enjoyable students; the birds, the friendly people, the dairy farm, Thumulagunta, and the special student friends [this year Chaitanya, Buddha, Ravi and Moin]. And the putting into their proper perspective my dear wife and sons and grand daughter and cat. It was wonderful to be there but even better to be back.

Books: Sarah Waters: The Night Watch
Barry Unsworth: The ruby in her navel
Ray French: Going under
Robert Edrich: Gathering the water
Vikas Swarup: Q & A
William Dalrymple: The Last Mughal
Wallace Stegner: Angle of Repose

New Staff: Miss Ranjany [Lizy]; Dr G. Narasimma; Dr M Charitha Devi.
Shre Vijaynikethan College. Founded by Mohan Babu.

Sasi Kumar 9885669113 was with WIPRO Hyderabad [desktop engineer].

Pole climber in Pura palle [??]. Suresh. 9885602896

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Bala Krishna

VCJ Mohan

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Kalyan. Mr Leslie Ditton. Young helper – N Sabarinathan

Biochemistry students: Ravi Shreekanth [cartoon]; Rhagav [film star] Prasad

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Raghav SRAGHAV.bio@gmail.com

Prasad tammi.biochem@gmail.com

Kotesch Kumar [friend of Balaji]; 9966913354 age 18.

Virology girls. Ramini [9989376527] and Priya [biotec].

1st year micro [thin, friend of prince nivas] Sunil Kumar 9966291720. Friend is Bhuvayeshwar.

Thumulagunta. 'Special' boy from last year; N. Ratkumar [IX year] only saw on 2nd visit.

Balaji 9885984362

Michigan visitor. Lignin use. Prof CA Reddy.

Nanotechnology Ch L R Jaidev. E block hostel.

K.Venkatesh [12] Surya Landlord's son. Madhu, gopi, 3 biochemists. Student groups. Other university.