

Chris Anthony INDIA 2009 diary

18th January – 24th February

18th January Sunday I am writing this on Tuesday 20th in room in Golden Sun Hotel Mahabalipuram. I suspect I could copy this first page from last years diary for this start. I had done most of my packing a day early so had relaxed on the last day. Woke at 5.0 for my English rose taxi drive to Terminal 5 at Heathrow which is nearer than the other terminals so very easy. My 'trolley bag' is a great success; thanks again. When I printed out my boarding pass at one of the machines I saw it had given me a window seat instead of my previously allocated aisle seat. I asked a BA lady why this was and she said if I really cared I could ask again at the bag drop and she hurried away. When I got there the man said he was sure I would be happy with my seat - they had upgraded me to business class. So I had a free breakfast in the posh lounge while watching the last of the Match of the Day I had missed last night, and then off through fast track straight on the plane and my welcoming glass of champagne. The seats could be turned into beds with a touch of a button. Lovely food and service and lunch – fish pie! Of course when we arrived I was one of the first off the plane and my bag was also in the first dozen. So out into the warm damp night air to find a smiling unchanged Gopi waiting for me. It was fortunate I was early out because the young driver [Mohan] did not know the way to Mahabalipuram. He asked the way while Gopi was collecting me and we set out on a novel route going south immediately instead of north into Chennai. I had often thought this should be a good route. I am not so sure as it took longer and much of the road was being built, and we stopped to ask the way every 10 minutes. As it was 2.0am there were not so many to ask but we got here by about 3.0 and were soon in our room; no 15 nearly opposite the pool.

19th January Monday. We very slowly got up for breakfast at 11.00. Beautiful weather with sun and strong breeze. Very few guests. There are still some of the restaurant staff from previous years so had a nice welcome to go with my puri massala. Our room has new bathroom fittings but there is still no hot water in the shower and the overhead fan has only one speed – loud and noisy. And the new airconditioning cooling cycle does not work. No problem. Had nice swim and dry out in the sun then the long walk at 4.30 to Mahabalipuram. The tide was very high and I think they have had recent problems as new breakwaters and walls had been recently built at Temple Bay hotel. All the fishing boats were drawn high up on the beach and there were very few people about so had a gently stroll around town. A lot of places had been recently decorated and it was cleaner than I remember. Gopi rarely says anything unless in answer to questions but he seems happy to be quiet. I went to bed too early to call Hugh to hear about his new job but woke again later so was able to hear that he had had a very good start and was looking forward to the next day.

20th January Tuesday. Had a good night although I had to turn on the ceiling fan as it got too hot, then turned it off as it got too cold, repeating through the night. Ram was supposed to be coming at about 10.30 but no sign of him by mid day so sent a text asking if he is coming. Then Gopi found he had had missed a call from him saying he had to go to the dentist with a damaged tooth – from eating sugar cane that morning and as a result could not talk. So we had a nice drifting day swimming and reading last Sunday's paper, all with the sounds of chipmunks, crows, mynahs and breaking waves. Gopi is also reading Grisham's *The Appeal* which is confused in my mind, having seen a film of one of his books on the plane – *A time to Kill*. In the afternoon, after another swim together, I left Gopi watching cricket while I walked up the beach to the next fishing village where a little boy told me his father is a fisherman and will be going out tonight at 3 in morning, returning at 8.0 in morning. We soon got a small group of little boys asking for school pens or chocolate. Gopi is now sitting chatting with our young driver, Mohan, on the beach half an hour after sunset. He just came in and helped me break into my tin of travel sweets before settling down to watch more cricket. Gopi rarely suggests anything and although he told me later he was starving he still didn't mention that it was nearly 9.0 and that he wanted dinner [I was engrossed in my book]. He had tomato rice and I had the nearest thing to fish and chips – grilled garlicky king prawns with excellent chips. We had an early night after a short cold stare at Orion on the beach.

21st January Wednesday. I am writing this in the evening in the guest house listening to Fritz Wunderlich singing Mozart on my nice little speakers Hugh gave me for Christmas. Our journey here was by way of Kanchipuram which the driver more or less knew. It was only as we got to the hilly part of the journey [the

Ghats section] that I started to enjoy it. We arrived at 2.0 and were met by the tall lame Steward, Mr Reddy, and 6 other staff including Suri who immediately asked “where is madam, sir?” Our old room was all ready and clean! New bedsheets. They even found a good table. The cupboards were clean although last year’s Sunday Independent was still there on the top of the wardrobe. I thought I checked everything – air conditioning, hot water, adjustable fan but I have just discovered there is no working bulb in the bathroom and there is no light over the sink, and the flush does not work. I am sure it will all be sorted. Gopi had to leave as soon as we arrived, to go to Chittoor to help a friend going off somewhere. I really missed Libby as I got the place organised [wish you were here].

As I had done my usual thing of not drinking before travelling I was soon very thirsty, Gopi having drunk the last of our bottle, at my insistence as he had a further 90 min bus ride. In the hot afternoon sun I plodded up past the dairy farm to the small shop, to find there are 5 shops catering for most things. I staggered back laden with 2 litres of cold water, 2 Limcas, 6 bananas, a pineapple and a 5 rupee tube of toothpaste. The man in the water shop is the son of an old man I used to chat to last year. As his father had done, he escorted me to the fruit shop to help me choose and to pay the correct price. The barriers were down for a train at the crossing, but they were no barrier to an old hand like me as I strolled under them, helping a boy with a motorbike. Fortunately it is possible to see a long way in both directions so it is safe. I then had lunch of pineapple, bananas and Walkers shortbread washed down with Limca. I failed to get hold of Moin who had planned to come late afternoon. I phoned the Department and this attracted Satheesh and then Sai Gopal, Satheesh arriving to find me as he had left me, sitting in blue shorts out on the roof in the setting sun. He then went off to buy me a simcard, so I am nicely set up. Sai Gopal is as competent as ever. He called to check my room yesterday and was told I could not move in immediately as they were giving it for one night to some high political official who had looked at all the rooms and decided ‘mine’ was cleanest [done earlier for me]. Sai Gopal offered sympathy and waived a letter from the VC stating that I was to have room 203 for my entire stay. Sai Gopal was very pleased with his little victory but not as pleased as I was. He had just been awarded a 55 lakh rupee grant [5.5 million] for equipment that afternoon so was in a very chirpy mood.

After he left Satheesh arrived with my phone. I got hold of Moin who is still in his native place recovering from a fever so will come tomorrow. My cough is still going on and I have a dull headache so I could not face going alone all the way to a good restaurant and even less to the small local one so I shall have more bananas. I tried to call Ram and was told I only had 1 rupee on my card. So I called Satheesh who had got the card for me and he told me that the 300 rupees was only for the card and its activation and it only had enough for 10 calls. This was after 15 minutes discussing earlier why I needed the phone urgently. Silly boy. I got through to him and he cleverly solved it by phoning a friend to get him to charge my card for me by some magic process. It is all so different from my earlier visits here although tonight is fairly similar, sitting alone and a bit lonely and missing home etc. But no mosquitoes [yet].

It is now 9.50 so I shall give myself the luxury of another piece of chocolate and a call home. Goodnight.

22nd January Thursday. I had a typical first night in Tirupati. It was cooler than usual so used 2 blankets and no fan. When the traffic died down the main sound to keep me awake was a couple of mosquitoes, one per ear. They were soon drowned out by a howling dog below the window. This was certainly going on for 4 hours, often in a sort of fugue with the crying baby it had woken. Of course I did sleep some of the time and I eventually woke feeling very hungry at 7.30. At eight o’clock I went down to ask about breakfast only to be told that Sai Gopal had not ordered any so there was none; he had ordered but it had not been passed onto the next set of duty staff. When I asked about lunch they again said it had not been ordered so it was not possible. So I slunk back to my room and had more shortbread and bananas. When SG arrived he went and sorted it all out. His driving inspires no more confidence than when he first bought his car last year. We slowly sorted out syllabus and met new staff. Old Srinivasulu is maintaining his silent feud with SG. After shaking my hand we sat down and he started our chat with “You are looking very weak”. A few months ago a student had been killed on campus by a fast car and so there are speed bumps everywhere and also stone blocks marking the verges of the road. I think this will increase accidents; on our drive here I was frequently thankful that we could dive off the road to avoid accidents. Lunch was served in my room as there was some function downstairs. It had been delivered from a hotel and so came in horrid little plastic bags tied with

string, accompanied by a huge heap of plain rice in newspaper. I had asked that they put it into tiffin tins before bringing to me but they did not. The beans and green slime dahl were good but I did not open the Samba and other runny stuff. Nice change from bananas.

After a 2 hour sleep and a calm afternoon preparing lectures on the roof in the sun, shared with the sunbirds and drongos, Moin arrived, happily unchanged during the year, with the same gentle manner, good English and sense of humour. His course does not start until Tuesday so he had come from his native place especially to welcome me, and to start thinking about his project. Crazy SV University; they had started the Biotechnology degree with no special staff and so his project is with a professor of Zoology whose topic is reproductive toxicology. He thinks he will study some aspects of behaviour or brain activity of mice under the influence of trace amounts of arsenic. His supervisor has little idea of anything relevant. I think we may evolve a project using Leigh's simple behavioural studies.

We had dinner in Sinduri Park hotel, where I was welcomed by 3 grinning waiters who showed me to my usual corner table where we had a rotis and Kanu Gobi, an excellent mixture of cauliflower and cashew nuts, followed by ice cream, the waiter interrupting our discussion with "Sir, I think you will want your favourite batterscotch". Ghandi Road is same as ever with its crowded happy atmosphere. I had a nice welcome in Surya Fittings from Sasi's family who gave me his number. We bought a mosquito machine as it is called; it is glowing encouragingly in the corner while I write this. Moin had to meet his research scholar 'supervisor' so we left other shopping until tomorrow night. Moin pointed out that a particularly busy intersection was 'a special accident centre'. After dropping him off at the Zoology Department I returned to ring around a few numbers including Sasi, flute Charlie, Frances Kiran, Gopi, Subramanyam and Madhu in Dubai who said "Chris I am so ashamed that I am not there to greet you"; it certainly feels that there is a missing Madhu here.

Subramanyam responded to my call by walking up from Balaji Colony with his dinner of chappatis – to eat later with my gifted banana. It was so nice to see him standing in the doorway with his big smile and his neat little earring. As expected he has put on weight and a small beard – rather he is unshaven – and the beginnings of a Tirupati tummy. He had given 3 lectures and supervised 6 hours of practical today so had difficulty keeping awake so I soon sent him off into the night, hoping he will be lucky with an auto to get him down to the hostels.

It is now past eleven so I shall take advantage of the usual traffic lull and get to sleep. Goodnight xxxx.

23rd January Friday. Today was a perfect typical Tirupati day. Slept better last night so I guess I am becoming accustomed to the hard bed and noisy background. I woke feeling stiff and slightly irritable but pretended I was not. It felt rather cool so I actually wore a vest, a good plan as I do not have a balaclava like the security man. I strolled in the morning sun up my usual bird place, through the stables and just stood still as all the best birds paraded through the tall trees amongst the pink Bourgainvillea. It started with a singing golden oriole, then a group of black headed cuckoo shrikes, both types of bulbuls, koils, sunbirds, Paradise flycatcher, both types of drongo, mynahs, crows, babblers, coucals, coppersmith, fantail and magpie robin. As I came out onto the little crossing of paths I was disappointed that there was a man standing there; usually I am expected to stop watching and chat about watching. But he put his finger to his lips and pointed at a golden backed woodpecker, the bird I have failed to photograph decently for 5 years. So I now have one decent picture.

Breakfast was the 3 idlis I had ordered but the rather dopy nervous old man leaned over me squeezing and dribbling the contents of two poly bags onto my plate like a demented milk maid. This always puts me off but it tasted good. My first lecture to the Previous students was part of the molecular biology course but I just chatted with them, after being introduced by Sai Gopal as a Commonwealth Fellow, a Fellow of the Royal Society and the author of an important text book on the birds of Tirupati. He was pleased with the book and said he would put it into the Department library but then decided it would be better to put it in the recently re-established Public Science Centre out by the Zoo. I told him I will print another or I will find a publisher in Tirupati. The students were a large group and very responsive; I think I will have a good time with them. My stroll back in the hot sun to the guest house was just like old times, followed by re-writing my industrial microbiology notes on the roof in the sun.

Our campaign to improve lunch has worked. The lady cook assistant brought it to my room in tiffin tins; rice, aubergines and dahl, all excellent.

The afternoon industrial microbiology lecture was enjoyable for me as I had prepared it well but the students were a bit dull; five boys and ten girls. I think the less bright ones do this option. My cough was a bit irritating but it gets a little better every day. Satheesh gave me a lift back, collecting 4 litres of water on the way. My cooling system is working very well. I wrap the bottle in a soaking cloth [blue kitchen cloth] and stand it in front of the AC while I am out. I returned to the roof for the lovely cooling late afternoon sun to read John Keay's *India Discovered*; the recovery of a lost civilisation. I had no idea that the British were almost entirely responsible for all the pre-Islamic history. It had previously been passed on by Brahmins orally in Sanskrit with no dates or idea about time. Around 1800 British enthusiasts began to learn Sanskrit and to decipher monument inscriptions etc, finding eventually that many of these were 300 yrs BC. This formed the subject of an evening of lectures to Moin in the Kalyan Residency where we were greeted enthusiastically by reception, drivers and waiters. Moin had just heard that in his recent exams he came first in the whole department. During dinner flute Charlie [Kiran's brother] phoned to arrange for me to go to lunch on Sunday. It is so good that I enjoy Ghandi Road as much as before, as we strolled down it to buy bedsheets, broom, soap, talcum powder, floor mats, clothes hangers and extension cable. After we bought the broom and mats in the usual cramped hutch of a general store, aided by 3 little girls and a tiny boy we set off to find somewhere to buy time on my cellphone, only to be grabbed by the tiny boy who said we must go back. I had been undercharged by 100 rupees [I thought 120 rupees was not much for a broom, 6 clothes hangers and 4 substantial floor mats]. They were relieved that we did not argue, waving us goodbye as we went down the road.

It is now 10.30 and I should be able to stay awake for an hour to phone home to finish a perfect day. I have already celebrated it by having a hot wash with my nice Lux soap to give me a strawberries and cream complexion.

24th January Saturday. *I am writing this in the late evening listening to Mozart piano sonatas; not quite as good as hearing Libby playing them in the distance but it will do.*

Last night just as I went to bed my overhead fan started to make loud grinding noises. These continued when I turned it off and I finally concluded that it must be from the room downstairs. I found it very irritating until I decided to think that it is my own fan and fell asleep immediately. My plan for a long sleep was wrecked by the howling hound who woke me after an hour. I read my John Grisham novel to put me to sleep but then wanted to know how it ended so read for another hour. Although his novels do their job I find I dislike the USA so much from reading them; the horror of their legal system, the ugly language, the love of status etc. I have now started a 936 page novel by Gregory David Roberts set in Bombay and called *Shantaram*. I woke after about 4 hours sleep to a promising dawn [6.30am] so staggered up and out. *I am writing this to a background of Mozart drowned by teenage girl cricketers who have a 4 day tournament – so I learned from a very sweet girl from the AP State team. They have three rooms on my corridor/balcony and use the whole area as one communal room.*

It soon became a nice sunny morning but if it was like this yesterday I would have concluded that there is no point in getting up early to photograph [or see] birds. It was strangely almost silent, with babblers and mynahs and chipmunks but not much else. The climax of this disappointment was a dreadful bread omelette for tiffin. My lecture to Previous year on genetic code was a bit crazy. They are enthusiastic and know a lot so as I was writing out some stuff on the board they were calling out what I had to write next. I seem to have got into a regular rhythm very quickly. I walked back in the sun [hotter each day] then prepared lectures in the sun, had excellent lunch of beans, slime lentils and rice, slept for twenty minutes and back to 2nd year lectures on Satheesh's bike. After the lecture I called in at Biochemistry and found the student Ravi and ? so had little re-union before another walk home. I was walking behind 8 students who seemed to be in a holiday mood, one of them looking over his shoulder at me apparently wondering if he should speak. Then round the corner came 3 little boys on a bike all shouting Uncle Uncle!. "Remember me Uncle, I am the great cricketer Rasheed; you took my photo last year". This attracted the students who were 1st year MSc Geography going for a stroll to the Dairy farm. I had to be photographed with their leader, a tall slim cheerful chap with huge white grin and wildly decorated jeans called Govinder Rao. As we were going near the guest house he invited himself in and got a friend to take more photos. So I seem to have been collected by them and made to swear to call and see them in their hostel.

As soon as they left Suri came up on the roof with my tea; pure bliss in the late afternoon sun with a gentle cool breeze and palm swifts zipping about the roof. There are very few mosquitoes here this year; there is probably only the single one which gave me an irritating jab in the back where I can't reach to scratch it. I find it difficult to just sit still as the sun sets so I wandered over the road up past the NCC Nagar and along the back path to the University. In the rough scrub area between that road and the hills they have started building new University building so I wandered up to look but was stopped by a tiny very young security man who asked "what is your problem". I said I was going for a walk and he said that I have a problem and he waved me away. Back on the main track I heard 3 teenagers and a little boy laughing and waving so I asked them what is the problem. Apparently the guard's job is to make sure no person goes on the building site in case they get hurt. The boys were sitting waiting for the cow and buffalo to be milked so they could fill their cans and go back to NCC Nagar. I was their entertainment while waiting, with usual demand for photos. Lovely stroll back, lit by the golden setting sun, traffic noise very distant, and sleepy crows, mynahs and parakeets getting ready for bed. Back in my room while I sat tired and getting the energy to go off and find dinner Guranad phoned to invite himself to my room and to take me to dinner. He is the dull student who comes on line on Yahoo most days but never has much to say. So I bowed to the inevitable and chirpily invited him. He arrived with his mate from the class and had more photos before going as a threesome on his motorbike down to the hostels where his mate left and we went to the restaurant near Town club by the traffic lights. It was a brightly lit crowded place where you eat standing up at high counters. I rejected this as my legs were tired and told him he can be my guest at Sinduri Park where I had South Indian thali [wonderful]. I really wanted to collapse back here but felt obliged to accept an invitation to visit his home which I had already seen on his webcam. He said it was near the Town Club but it was some way out in a really nice area like a small village with very little traffic on the poorly lit narrow roads which formed children's playgrounds, and crowds strolling about and sitting outside their houses with all the usual small shops and ironing carts. He lived on 3rd floor of a newish building where I met his 16 year old pretty sister, 15 yr old dull barrel of a brother, his nice ol grand dad and beautiful mother. We struggled to chat which was fun with his sister, then after tea we had a gentle bike ride home, mainly through the University campus. Had a chat with Gopi who is busy taking his mum to the CMC hospital in Vellore for routine diabetes check and for him to give blood; this seems to be expected from relatives bringing the patients there. Then an even better chat with Hugh. It really seems that his job is going to be a success; a very good end to a very good day.

25th January Sunday. I am writing this feeling rather exhausted by a very enjoyable day. I expected that I would be doing a lot of walking so I didn't do my morning walk, but slowly tidied up the room till breakfast time, forcing down bread omelette, with the compensation that they gave me a copy of the Hindu. Another beautiful sunny morning so I did clothes washing then showered myself, drying in the sun while reading the paper. Charlie phoned to arrange lunch at his house. As auto drivers would not know the way I had to phone and pass it to the driver to receive instructions. He lives not far from where his parents and Kiran still live over by the TTD administration building. The slim Charlie is now more Kiran like. They have a nice house in a quiet district; quiet but still very lively atmosphere, especially relaxed on a Sunday morning. The father soon turned up and proved to be as nice as I remember he was when we first met, before he became habitually drunk and aggressive. He and his wife run a tiny fruit juice stall round the corner, "for filling their time". I later had a wonderful drink of grapes there, prepared using the whole grapes including skins. As they did not know what I would like for lunch they produced loads of stuff including rice, noodles, omelettes, toast, spicy roast chicken, salads and chopped up pineapple, apple and grapes, washed down with mango juice. They have a nice little 6yr old daughter and a 12 yr old son who is a sort of Indian Carl, but with big brown eyes and big teeth. Charlie is on internet so I was able to check my email which was mainly junk but with a couple of orchestra things I could immediately sort out. Charlie played his recent recording of his flute which was very nice. He is having difficulty playing his western flute because he is left handed which is no problem with his bamboo flutes. After a gentle bike ride back I lay down for a few minutes, waking an hour later just in time to set off for Thumulagunta by auto, picked up outside our little local temple. Even more houses have taken up the farm land there. It is always so cheering to be greeted by so many kids so that I arrived at Balaji's house like the pied piper. His father has rebuilt the house which is now very neat and comfortable, Balaji having his own room on the roof. We had the usual photoshoot on the roof in the golden setting sun

before I set off past the cricket match on the rough grass at the end of the village, with frequent stops for more photos. It is nice recognising the little boys growing up and then looking after the even smaller boys, kindly guarding my binoculars for me. Fortunately I got a lift in an auto for the last bit home.

I almost immediately set off down to the Balaji colony to test the new restaurant there; it has replaced the old Ardithi. As I went up the stairs to the balcony I was stopped by a youngish man who seemed to know me from my previous visits to Harry's Cove which was nearby but which has now closed down. He followed me into the restaurant, called the waiter over, helped me order, put his phone number on my phone and took my number and while I ate dull veg fried rice he took a photo of me with his phone. His English was poor and I was not interested in chatting anyway. He left with me and walked a short way up road before shaking hands and disappearing up an alley. I have no idea what that was all about but I guess he was bored. For some reason the section of road leading from Balaji colony to the student hostels is never lit, making the journey against the glaring lights of heavy oncoming traffic more hazardous than usual. I wanted to find Ravi [2nd yr biochemistry] and 1st year microbiologists so asked the way to C block where I think they live. The student I asked said I should follow him which I did in almost complete darkness while I asked what he did. He was a 1st year botany student called Gopi who I shall probably get in touch with sometime as he was keen to take my phone number. I was picked up instantly as I entered C block and dragged off to see Ravi and a gang of others who came in for entertainment. Not for long fortunately as they had to leave for dinner, after taking me to the virology students who were a very lively lot and so quite exhausting. I told them that they should entertain me so a small one called Murali did a load of very impressive imitations of phones, birds, animals, bikes etc. One of them plays violin but does not have it with him but has promised to sing some classical South Indian music. After a long bout of entertainment from me they all tramped with me through the campus to the main gate where one of them [Mujibul Rehaman] borrowed a motorbike and drove me the last bit home. He is very interested in birds so wanted to see my birdbook. I am feeling too tired to try to write anything interesting. Imran has just phoned to say he is about to board a bus to bring him here by 7.30 tomorrow morning.

I shall wash my feet, and read for a bit with *Così fan Tutte* for company.

26th January Monday Republic Day. *Writing this with Enya singing 'I dreamt I dwelt in Marble Halls'. I am not sure how that got on my iPod.* Imran had told me he is due to arrive by bus from Hyderabad at 7.15 am. I woke at 6.50 after what has become a typical night, waking at least 6 times, getting up finally with a raging headache, cured by tidying my room and an ibuprofen. I seem to be getting a bit hypochondriacal. Bread omelette [enough said]. Imran's bus was late so he had an eleven hour journey. While waiting I sat in my roof garden reading the rest of yesterday's paper. I must not take for granted the pleasure of first opening my door in the morning to warm sun and gentle breeze. The monkeys had been active in the night and had raided one of the stupid rabbit waste bins. They would not do this if the staff emptied them. Rubbish strewn everywhere but soon cleared up by an old bent lady sweeper. Having settled down happily for my read 2 students arrived; Gurunadh and a fat black friend. They had come to wish me a happy Republic day, having attended the ceremony at the University sports stadium. He is always quiet so a bit tiring so I got my camera and tried to get pics of the babblers who had invaded the roof. They are very sensitive to cameras and so I failed. Imran soon arrived and drove the students away and took the place of the babblers. He is good company but exhausting. Fortunately he slept a lot of the time so I re-wrote a lot of lectures for the coming week [Industrial stuff and protein synthesis]. I could not face the thought of spending most of the day inside so we went for a walk round the dairy farm where we met my usual friend there - Mr Kotappah; I had checked his name so was able to please him by remembering it. Imran entered his unsophisticated little boy mode as we went to look at the elephants and camels. They have had good rains this year so the trees were unusually green and full, as was the pond which had a small tree filled with bee eaters, with their chestnut wings backlit by the setting sun. A pair of rollers then showed us why they have that name; they do complex acrobatics, falling out of the sky and picking up at last minute. There were very large flocks of mynahs going to roost somewhere; they were not in the student hostel as that was completely empty of them yesterday. In the evening we went to Sinduri Park which disappointed Imran as he was hoping for non-veg, making him a bit sulky. I cheered him up by giving the responsibility of finding me a bedside light. Of course he has not lived in Tirupati since he was 16 so I knew better where to get things. I now have a nice green 12 volt light. When we got back Imran immediately grabbed the computer to play solitaire which he did for more than 2

hours, which is why I am writing this the next evening. I was very tired but spent 2 hours reading Watson's Molecular biology of the gene. This turned out to be a good idea as next day I was able to fill out the lecture with a few bits of experimental stuff and anecdotes. Imran insisted on having the fan on slowly all night and so helped me sleep better- it stops heat building up and the cycle of being too hot and too cold, so I slept well.

27th January Tuesday. Last night we had ordered Indian breakfast but this morning they said there was only bread omelette for me. Typically without telling me what he was doing Imran sent the man off to get Indian breakfast which I had only 3 minutes to eat before Satheesh arrived to take me to my lecture. We then ordered lunch for two and I went off for a very enjoyable lecture using my new notes. I was driven back immediately afterwards as Gopi was supposed to be arriving at 11.0. He hadn't arrived so I got us some tea and did a little more lecture preparation then walked up the road in the heat to buy some more water and biscuits for Gopi while Imran played solitaire. Although I had ordered lunch for 12.30 Imran decided that he would have lunch later and went off with Gopi to get his rail ticket for the night train to Hyderabad. So I had the embarrassment of explaining in sign language that they would come later. In fact they did not have lunch [poor Gopi]. I was a bit sensitive to the staff as Sai Gopal had explained that morning that the rules have changed and that I have to have permission to have visitors overnight. They had phoned Sai Gopal to ask him. It won't be a problem except that Sai Gopal will have to write off a little note every time. I had a very nice afternoon lecture as is usual if I spend a long time preparing. I rushed back in order to fit in with Imrans plan to visit a new hotel with a 'water park' but when I arrived he was in the middle of a 30 minute phone call and the plan seemed to have been cancelled; I didn't mention it as I was not keen. Instead we watched the very violent [but beautiful and brilliant] film Kill Bill [I]. The sound was too low on the computer but I linked the little speakers that Hugh gave me onto the computer and it was perfect [thanks again Hugh]. Imran's train was at 7.15 so we went down to Bhimas de luxe hotel for early dinner. We had 'breakfast' food of dosas and uppam [?] and then fought our way to the station through the pilgrim crowds that are always wandering about having arrived in a strange town and hunting for cheap lodgings. Although full of the usual Imran-induced frustrations it was a successful day as he and Gopi have not met for 2 years. We had all hoped that Moin would join us for dinner but he phoned to apologise and said he had to go and buy some mice, his usual mild manner of speech implying that this was a common thing for someone to do in the early evening; it seems they must have mouse shops in Tirupati. Of course they are for his project; he just phoned to say he had been successful and he will come tomorrow evening at 5.0. After delivering Imran to his 12 hour train journey Gopi came back for a nice gentle chat before catching the bus back to Chittoor. At last I have my nice room to myself playing some gentle Shostakovich piano preludes and fugues.

28th January Wednesday. Slept well and woke early to a dull hot grey day so spent an hour re-writing lectures on protein synthesis. My breakfast has now become standard Pongal which is ground rice with veggies and cashew nuts with some spicy gravy. Nice. There is a conference here so they were preparing for large lunch and as always this provokes fights amongst the staff; I sit reading and sipping my tea with machine gun ranting firing over and around me. Had very enjoyable lecture then tried again to get onto internet to send money to Libby. But again it is not working. Later in the afternoon I tried successfully only to discover that I did not have a note of her Bank account. I shall try again tomorrow. I had some of the conference lunch which was excellent, then fell asleep reading the last of John Keay's India Discovered. My final year lecture was on butanol fermentation, prepared very thoroughly when Imran was here so, again very enjoyable. Everyone says that summer has come; it is well over 30 so I guess they are right. The sun came out in earnest so I spent 90 minutes reading yesterdays Deccan Chronicle – left by Gopi. As arranged Moin came and we sat outside till mosquito time discussing his project. He will be doing as I suggested, and as agreed with Leigh, and using Leigh's very simple behaviour testing on his mice. He is a pleasure to talk with especially as I know he intends to take any advice; this is in contrast to Satheesh who pleads for advice but then ignores it completely. He then told me that he must be back to his work, revising for some national exam, by 8.0 so we rushed down to Sinduri park for Kaju gobi and tea, and another rush home. I decided I was too tired of talking so did not go to hostel but came straight back here. Of course it was hardly 'straight', rather weaving and shuffling and hooting and bouncing over the new speed bumps everywhere. At the Balaji Colony where we should drive straight on the lights were red so the driver turned left then did a u-turn amongst the fast traffic and went left again taking us back onto our road. So the lights designed to make it

safer have added another exciting hazard. So here I am again about to prepare tomorrow's lectures to the sound of Shostakovich string quartets.

Good night everyone.

29th January Thursday. *I am writing this at 9.30 in the evening with fan keeping the temperature down at 25 deg.* I seem to have established a sleep pattern now of sleep for 2 hours, wake [usually to traffic outburst], sleep etc all through the night. There must be a train at about 6.40 as I always wake then. It was promising to be a sunny morning so I staggered about for a bit then went for usual walk. The man who showed me the woodpecker showed me its nest hole today but it flew off immediately we got there. At last I saw a hoopoe. Breakfast was in the dining hall with conference guests; I sit and eat with a spoon while they all mill about grubbing about with their paws in heaps of rice. As always when I have prepared the lecture the night before it went well. It was 30 degrees by the end of the lecture. I walked back and cooled down with the AC on for 10 minutes then prepared afternoon's lecture and started to read my new book sitting in the sun; also by John Keay, History of the East India Company. After good conference lunch I collapsed on the bed and slept for 40 minutes before being dragged off to lecture. At last the internet was working enough to transfer the fence money to Libby's account, but too slow to do much on emails except to see that there was nothing of importance. I had a nice chat with Libby while I strolled about the roof and almost immediately Clive phoned. He pointed out that the overseas phone is the one who pays the high bill. He is recovering from another cold but is surviving bravely. I set out at 4.50 as it started to cool down to see if I could photograph the woodpecker but it wasn't there. But I did see a black headed oriole and a beautiful emerald green leafbird. A new development this year is the students sending messages to me all the time. They rarely give the names although I am gradually assigning names to numbers. They often have little poems or philosophical gems. When I asked one of them [in a text] what his name was he said "I am your secret fan sir". This one sent a text to say he is on the way to the guest house so as soon as Moin arrived to go to dinner we set off; we were not quick enough and we met my fan and a final year student who I knew as we left the guest house. My fan is Dinesh who I only just about recognised. I apologised that we had to go and got the chirpy reply that it is ok sir we will come tomorrow. We had to walk to the university entrance to get an auto then set off for Kalyan for dinner. We stopped for some errand of Moin's on the way and I tested an idea I have for getting street scenes at night; it works [using high ISO of 1600 and some exposure compensation]. I never tire of the journey down Ghandi road or the relief as we fall out of the auto and into the cool Kalyan where we met Mohan, the Mahabalipuram driver, and the manager. As we finished our dinner a rather stout man came and sat at our table. Fortunately I did not respond as I felt inclined as he turned out to be a Mr Pathasarathy who is the chief executive of the Kalyan and the owner of a lot of local businesses. We had a nice chat helped greatly by Moin acting as a gentle interpreter. I told him that Surya Prakash is my friend and he then was able to identify me, as he knew Surya well and all about his visa problem. Our driver on the way home was very belligerent and insisted on driving down the narrow short cuts hooting furiously at anything that threatened our progress, including the speed bumps. Moin finds it difficult to take more than 90 minutes off work so I dropped him at the hostels and went direct back to the guest house, abandoning my original intention of calling in to see either Alim or Gopi botany. The room adjacent to mine has another microbiologist of my age also teaching, but in food science course; he lured me in for a gentle chat as soon as I got back. He had just been taken by a student up to Tirumula to see Sri Venkateshwara where he had had VIP darshan, so only had to queue for 2 hours; worth every penny he said. I shall load some of my pics and then an early night. Goodnight.

30th January Friday. *I am writing this at 10.30 while listening to a less well-known Beethoven piano sonata played by Paul Lewis.* I staggered, stiff and bleary eyed from bed at 6.40 as usual, tidied my room and set off up the cool morning road over the railway crossing to the peace of the dairy farm down the long tree-lined avenue towards blue Krishna accompanied by temple music from loudspeakers hung in the trees. It is perfectly reproduced and quite welcome after the cacophonous crossing traffic. There are now a lot of stone roads being built on the fields so I fear more buildings will be going up soon. I was soon treated to a fly past of 5 cattle egrets on their way to the huge shady cattle field; I am sure they will be very happy together. Even during the 30 minute walk the temperature increased markedly, balanced by a nice coolish breeze. As there were good rains this year the vegetation around the sunken pond has increased so that it is not so easy to see what is there. Fortunately it is less easy for birds to see me so I was lucky to see a kingfisher before he

saw me and I think I got a good picture. I met Mr Kotappah outside his office and assured him that Libby still remembers him. Breakfast was provided from proper Tiffin tin so I had Pongal [rice, nuts etc], Idlis, Vada – wonderful. I managed to pack the whole of transcription into one lecture to the nicely attentive Previous year students, before walking back immediately to the guest house, avoiding the huge mug of sweet tea with Sai Gopal and having a nice one on back here instead. That reminds me of Subramanyam's first words to me this evening when he came to the guest house; I am sorry sir but I am ugly and a lot sweetie. I am assuming he meant 'Sweaty'. Sorting out all my mixed up notes on methanogenesis was actually quite enjoyable as I could do it sitting on the roof. *I just fell asleep but I want to keep up to date so will have a travel sweet. After another excellent lunch* One of the more oafish looking secretarial staff collected me on his very new motorbike with two horns. I finished lysine synthesis and was driven back immediately to prepare Methanogenesis on the roof in the shade. Although it was very hot I set off by auto to the bypass road past thumulagunta. The dirt road is being built at the same rate as new houses and it passes directly along edge of the other small village attracting fast bikes and cars all hooting. So sad as it was the main place the ladies sat and chatted and I made friends there. Altogether the walk was nearly 2 hours of pleasure, strolling through the paddy fields under the palms close to the hills but it was bliss to collapse into an auto for the last bit home to wash my feet and collapse beneath my fan for a sleep while waiting for subramanyam who turned up at 7.00 with Paveen a project student who came with us to Sinduri park where we discussed their project over south Indian thali followed by butterscotch ice cream. A mad auto dash down the narrow short cuts soon took us to hostels where I called in to see Moin [dressed in Muslim green silky baggy trousers, for a short while before he accompanied me through the dark campus beneath the bats, towards home. We met slim Ravi and Rhadav [pronounced Radov] who then took over the relay back to the guest house where we spent 2 hours discussing their future plans. Both are more than usually enthusiastic but a bit disappointed with their department. They eventually left me to write this while half asleep. *Paul Lewis is now on the Waldstein sonata.* I cannot stay awake so will close now. Good night.

31st January Saturday. *I am writing this while listening to Brahms songs. They seem so incongruous with the background traffic.* After my exhausting walk yesterday I slept with only 2 waking periods. My feet still felt so tired I had the luxury of doing lecture preparation instead of walking. Very enjoyable lecture followed by walk home at 29 degrees and the rest of the morning on the roof trying to make sense of some papers Subramanyam gave me. I have solved it at last. He was confusing oil as in petrol and oil as in olive; one is a hydrocarbon and the other a lipid. After the afternoon lecture I spent some time explaining and he was slightly embarrassed but it will make the project he is supervising much more sensible. I had a wonderful bath/shower and sat down to plan rest of my lectures when I made an important discovery; I thought I had only 2 more complete weeks but it is 3 weeks. I am not half way through yet. I had been thinking how nice to be home soon but it is almost as nice to know I can relax more here. This caused me to resolve to do some serious movie filming. Before that I had a really nice chat with Hugh who has an excellent 2 weeks in his new job. I started filming by sitting in the shade on the roof in a cooling breeze with the camera where I had a David Attenborough experience when the monkey troupe arrived. They ignored me while I filmed them. One had a big packet of biscuits which he was ripping apart, spraying biscuits amongst the others. They must contain an aphrodisiac as it stimulated courtship [a sort of rather pathetic pleading by the male] and a quick mating. They then started to move into the guest house so I got up and followed only to discover that they were going to my room; I had left the door ajar and it was my biscuits they were eating. I chased 3 monkeys out of the room and went for a short walk with the video camera; I am starting as if I had no other film of Tirupati, making a record. As soon as I got back I fell asleep to be woken by Moin come to chat about his project, and then to Sinduri Park for dinner after which I put him in an auto home while I walked through the station and chouderies to Surya's family. Each year the station gets more organised and clean with marble stairs and platforms. There were still a few people sleeping on the bridge and the stairs. The atmosphere in the Choudharies is so nice. Many of the pilgrims pile out of their buses from all over India and immediately get cooking on little campfires in front of the buses. Surya's parents were both in so we had a nice reunion and I arranged to go to dinner tomorrow night before getting auto home. I am about to fall asleep again, kept awake only by Paul Lewis playing Beethoven. Good night.

1st February Sunday. It has been a very strange day. I have missed having Gopi or Madhu coming. Every Sunday one of them came last year. Moin had asked if we could do something as he should be free; he is usually in a great hurry to get back to work. I decided that we would go out to the new hotel [with its 'water world' for lunch but he then said he could only spare an hour so I cancelled that plan. Although it was a beautiful sunny morning I lacked the willpower to go for a walk, deciding that I would save my energy for later. So I got up very slowly and went down for early breakfast which was as good as it gets; pongal plus one idli plus one wada plus samba plus tea. Slim Sunil Kumar sent a good morning text so I texted back an invitation to visit and he came exactly at 10.0 for a long chat in the shade of the Ashok trees on the roof. Suri bought us tea and the Hindu which is not as good as the Deccan Chronicle, having too much Andhra politics in it. There were more letters and chat about slumdog millionaire. Moin came with an auto and we went to Kalyan for a rather horrible lunch. We decided to have something new and it turned out to have paneer and very salty spinach in it. It took 20 minutes to come and Moin had to get back. The chief waiter sensed all this and gave us 15% discount. Just looking at the hot dusty streets on the way back put me off doing anything so I slept then sat outside in the shade reading paper. I had arranged to go to Surya's parents for dinner at 7.30 so set off to walk there with the movie camera.

On the way I was way laid by two students who were there when Libby came and wanted to know about the family etc. A few minutes later Sunil appeared in my viewfinder so we had another nice chat. By the town club while negotiating the road which is much more dangerous now they have traffic lights, I was grabbed by a young bearded devotee of Sri Venkateshwara who wanted a chat about life the universe and everything. We covered some of this syllabus before I could tear myself away into the traffic stream. Next was a gang of six college students who examined me on my visit; only one spoke English but the others understood apparently. I escaped by taking their photo and hurrying down a side street where they make garlands and then back onto Ghandi road. The traffic was much lighter than usual and at the end of the road it was almost peaceful. I was called over to Surya Suitings [Sasi's brother's shop] for a chat and gifts of a SV calendar and a Surya shopping bag. After I set off I walked 100 yards then realised that I had dropped it. Looking back there was an old man had picked it up and was peering inside. I told him it was mine and he presented it to me as if it were a precious gift, followed by an exaggerated Namaste. I had planned to take brilliant films of the chowdhary bus area but it was almost empty, having only one little cooking party. At Surya's the talk was all of the wedding; it will be 12th March. Fortunately Vinod, a neighbour's son, was there so I did not have to struggle to keep awake, as he did most of chatting. Although it had been emphasised that I must be there by 7.30 we did not eat until 9.00 which was lucky as I found the mild gobi curry was dull and the rice tedious, feeling hungry helping me to eat it. Venkatesh, the 11 year old neighbours boy came in for a quick darshan and then Vinod drove me back on his Honda Hero at a nice gentle speed as requested. As soon as we start the long incline after Balaji colony the temperature drops, so poor Vinod was very cold when we arrived. *I am feeling so sleepy that I am tping with my eues closed [obviously].*

2nd February Monday. I am writing this on Tuesday afternoon so having trouble remembering it. Gopi's father wanted to come and meet me as he now works in a boys hostel fairly near Tirupati; so in the afternoon gopi came by bus from Chittoor and we met up [including an uncle] at the guest house. Neither father nor uncle spoke English but it was still a nice event, if nothing else giving Gopi and his daddy a chance for a long chat. He still has a very bushy handlebar moustache and looks very handsome. Gopi made the sensible suggestion that I show loads of photos of home and his family etc so all was very successful. As his father left I was much embraced by him "as his only way of telling how much he loves you for what you have done for our family chris" – from smiling Gopi. As he was about to get on the bike of his brother to leave there were more embraces, observed with great interest by a car load of important university dignitaries, Father's long rather dirty lunghi sweeping the ground and me trying to retain my dignity as if it was obvious I should be getting this treatment. [By my helping Gopi with his college fees the family did not have to take out a high-interest loan and it has left them free to look after the final young son better]. *I did not have the will to go for my evening walk so I am writing this before walking into town for dinner; accompanied by Beethoven's Missa Solemnis through earphones – with the great Fritz Wunderlich and Gundala Janowitz.* Moin had said he wanted to meet Gopi so he came with an auto at 7.15 and we went yet again to Sunduri Park hotel. As usual he was in a hurry to get back to work; he has an important external exam [GATE] next week and has to revise all his old chemistry. So the 3 of us sat writing chemical formulae on the paper place

mats in the restaurant. After I ordered, Moin called out to the wait “Babu please it is very urgent”; apparently this usually speeds things up. We had our best meal yet of Kadu vej [veg with cashew nuts], channa massala and perfect butter rotis – followed by chocolate milkshakes. After dropping Moin out of the auto we returned to the guest house for a quiet chat and off went Gopi for the bus back to Chittoor while I watched the second ‘volume’ of Kill Bill during which I had great difficulty staying awake. It is so violent I am surprised that I slept well, except for howling dog at 2.15. Yesterday Gopi had seen Slumdog on an illegal copy and thought it as great as we did. I developed a very dry slightly sore throat during the day which also made me cough – just when Libby managed to get through on the phone; it was also as I was having problem with computer sound adjustment so I must have sounded rather unpleasant [I think I was].

3rd February Tuesday [or as the register for virology students says “Thusday”]. *Continuing on from above still listening to Credo of missa solemnis.* After going to sleep at 11.15 I was surprised to sleep so well only waking 3 times in the night and finally getting up at 6.30 still with an unpleasant dry throat to check on the morning lecture before my morning walk. It always takes some willpower to actually put on a vest and set out walking at 7.30 in morning but it has always proved the right thing to do. I chose the dairy walk as, after the short stretch on the road it is positively peaceful. The area of dung dumping by the main cattle shed was infested with cattle egrets who ignored the workers very close to them but who flew off in irritation when I got in their range. The atmosphere is so lovely in the early morning with sun and breeze and the smell of farms, with views over the fields to the distant hills. I even found a stone seat under a tree to meditate and watch a stampede of mixed cattle down the ‘road’ into the recently cropped field. The mixture includes the huge horned humped oxen and much smaller milk cattle. I take fewer bird pictures now as there is little point unless they are better than previous or they have some interesting background. I did get a good picture of a roller flying and some beautiful Red whiskered bulbuls who came and serenaded me when I was beneath my meditation tree.

Bread omelette was on the menu again today – also by the good cook. There is a convention of all of India’s VCs in the university and their administrators are in the guest house, the staff therefore in a sort of panic mode, and a posh temporary green carpet down on the ground floor. I had a very enjoyable 1st year lecture on the operon model and then a useful time on the internet which was unusually fast today. I had a request to referee a paper with about 25 authors – on the genome of Methyloprophs; I was able to download the huge file in about 10 seconds and then Suresh the helpful secretarial assistant, printed it for me. *The music has just reached the great moment when the English rules are discarded and the chorus starts a huge section with a shout of ET [AND He rose again].* The temperature was a steady 30 degrees today like a hot air oven as we went by bike to my afternoon lecture, which was on continuous culture, and a pleasure in spite of no fan [power cut] and a bit too much coughing. Satheesh drove me back after the lecture through groups of hot irritable security people [the Chief minister is here for the function]. I then had a horrible fright when I tried to put the work I had downloaded onto my memory stick onto my computer to be told I had a virus. I don’t know if it was there from my previous experience or picked up here. Sophos seems to have removed it or put its remains into quarantine. I then spent a nice hot afternoon on the roof reading the huge paper; its most senior authors were all old friends including Mary Lidstrom, Mila and Stephane [who came from Munich to hear my seminar in Freiburg].

It is now 6.30 so I shall go to Sinduri Park again but alone with a book, and probably call in at the hostel on the way home.

That sounded simple enough and it started well, picking up an auto immediately outside, requesting a lift to Ghandi road, but we soon hit a huge build up of buses autos jeeps bikes cars blocking the road. It was the security related to the Chief Minister and they said it would be an hour to clear so my driver with his young son sharing his seat and daughter with me in the back did an about turn and struggled against the slow clogging flow of traffic behind us. Amazingly we hit nothing and were not hit by the oncoming traffic as we hurtled in the dark up toward the guest house; we had no lights but everything else did, blinding me but not apparently our driver. We crossed over the rail track and turned left and spent 20 minutes hurtling round tiny backstreets until we hit the middle of Ghandi Road. I had a nice [relatively] peaceful stroll to Sinduri Park where the local god was being taking for his boat ride in the temple tank opposite the hotel. Of course this was the one occasion I had no camera. There is a wonderful celebratory atmosphere with all the steps down to the water packed with families standing up as the raft with the god comes opposite them, the musicians

accompanying the god wailing and squawking and drumming, everything lit up like a fairground. In the restaurant I was shown to my old site by Krishna with his lady and flute so that I could read but the waiter called Suresh told me he had waited for some days for me to be alone so he could come and chat; so much for my quiet read. He is so pleased I am in the Microbiology department as he has a degree in microbiology from Nellore University. After dinner an auto took me to the hostels and I went in to C block to see Moin for a short time, answering a few questions about molecular biology. I tried to find Sunil Kumar [a final yr student] but I was captured by delighted 1st year students who dragged me into a room for a nice serious discussion. As my voice had given out I excused myself soon and set out for a peaceful moonlit stroll through the campus to home, meeting another 1st year student [Sreekanth] on the way who told me as he hugged me goodnight t off to telling me that I had changed their lives; this in almost the first conversation I had with him.

4th February Wednesday. After waking at 6.00 I bravely faced the day, checking the morning lecture and then going for the long straight walk up toward the Veterinary college. As I passed the Dairy student hostel a tall thin Murali stopped me for usual interrogation during which he was joined by a couple of friends, then on to the wild river bed area where I think I got a good picture of the white fronted kingfisher. It was a beautiful morning decorated with red whiskered bulbuls, orioles, emerald leaf birds and bee eaters.

After my morning lecture I called in to see the Profs in biotechnology and of course I was invited to give a lecture next week. In the afternoon on the roof I tried to make sense of the syllabus but it is a desperate job. They do 80 hours of lectures per semester – far too much I think, especially as so many are on boring methods, food microbiology etc. I am not sure that I can do much without being impolite.

Just as I was about to leave for late afternoon walk I was invaded by old Prof Parthasarathy. He retired from biochemistry department and now works as biochemistry coordinator in the Women's University. Of course he wants me to give a lecture there. He is unchanged with his wild hair, huge gold rings, vast bunch of gaoler's keys and his gibbon –like flinging his arms in the air to adjust the length of his shirt sleeves. I accepted of course and edged him out of the room eventually so I could go for a shorter walk. On the way I met a student from the past who give me a lift on his bike along the long road I went in the morning. As I passed the student hostel 'Murali' came running out calling for his friends to follow. They all have exams the next morning on dairy microbiology. I eventually escaped and went for a too-long walk out through the 'forest' area as far as the by-pass and then a long slog home. Hardly a bird showed itself except for sleepy mynahs and crows but the air was cooling down and everywhere looked golden in the setting sun. At 7.15 Moin arrived with an auto to take us down to Sinduri park where we managed a record short dinner of kadu gobi, paratha and ice cream, with tea for Moin to wake him up for his evening work. My cough had got worse so I came back directly to the guest house where [uninvited] Sunil Kumar and his 1st year friend Dinesh appeared. We had a nice chat about the course before I sent them away so I could have an early night, after putting 4 shirts and 10 undies in to soak.

5th February Thursday. I woke a dozen times in the night coughing so could not face an early walk, rewriting my lecture on the Arabinose operon instead. Breakfast was Wada and Idlis; nice. The morning lecture was good as was my therapeutic clothes wash. My cough got worse during my afternoon lecture and then a full cold started with a pouring nose, sneezing etc. I could not go out to eat so Satheesh has bought me bananas, grapes, breadrolls and cream cakes. I have just finished my dinner – banana sandwiches followed by grapes and cake. I had called to cancel my arranged visit from Hariveeran [to discuss his citric acid project] but had visitors anyway – Gunarada and his friend Lok.... They missed my hint that I was not good company but it was ok and they have just left leaving me sneezing over the keyboard and snivelling. I feel grim but I guess it will pass.

6th February Friday. *I am writing this with Pollini only just drowning out the howling dogs with Beethoven's Diabelli variation, and me drinking lemon juice kindly brought by Gurunada this afternoon.* After a very disturbed night I woke feeling a little better; this was only evident when I went onto the roof to welcome the sun on the hills. I phoned Subramanyam to say I would not be doing lectures so he could stand in with one of his remaining lectures. Then Sai gopal turned up in the middle of my nice breakfast, with a friend he wanted me to meet. I took three attempts to get him to listen to me that I could not speak without coughing so was cancelling my lectures for today. He agreed and said he would tell the students. He didn't I later learned. Other symptoms had died down a bit so I went for a morning stroll out towards the hills where I had lovely

views of my favourite minivets like little yellow and red flames in the trees. I saw the blue faced calcohoa but could not get close enough for a photo. Also saw bulbuls, orioles, babblers, sunbirds, mynahs, crows, doves, bee eaters, black winged falcon, Shikra, Indian robins. This morning's therapy was to cut my fingernails [my Swiss army knife is only pair of nail scissors that does the job properly], and then to clean my razor. I spent the rest of the day reading, refereeing the big paper by Stephane, Julia, Mary et al. Libby called in the afternoon for a nice chat. I could not go for an afternoon stroll as Parthasarathy had phoned to say he would come to arrange my lecture at the Women's University at about 5.0. He came at at 5.30 and spent 20 minutes trying to persuade me to change my plans next year and do 4 weeks in his department. It is so difficult to just say no. When I found a way of saying this he said I should do 2 weeks in each Department. I told him I would not be changing my plans but he did not notice. As he left gurunada arrived. Fortunately I had put 2 chairs on roof so could at least enjoy the evening breeze. He brought the lemon juice as promised the day before. His father is a driver in Dubai and he hopes to join him in a pharmaceutical firm next year. After he left I rather dutifully loaded my bag with camcorder and set out to go down town. Strangely there was no traffic in either direction and I felt rather vulnerable crossing the road as if it was my eyes that could not see the cars that must be there. An auto kindly arrived within a minute and I spent a pleasant half hour wandering down Ghandi road quietly filming before arriving at the temple tank opposite Sinduri Park hotel where the god was going for his/her evening boat ride. Having recorded this I had dinner in the hotel restaurant. On being told I have a bad throat Suresh the microbiological waiter insisted I order soup [ginger and lemon] which I did and which did a good job on my. This was followed by butter roti and gobi Manchurian and strawberry icecream which Suresh tried to veto as it was not good for me. For the first time I actually got out of an auto after I was told the fare [50 rupees instead of usual 30]. I stepped out of one and straight into another for 30 rupees. I arrived at Moin's room to say goodnight just as he arrived from a little trek to have 2 cups of teas for keeping him awake for studying [his exam is on Sunday morning. After two minute I had a text message to say that Hariveeran is at the guest house with Sudarshan. So I soon left – as planned – and got an auto back, but only after running the gauntlet of the biochemistry rooms, waylaid by Ravi and Rhagav, then the 1st years, then Govindra [Salim's Georgraphy firend] and then Sunil who kindly escorted me to the road and flagged down an auto who wanted 5 rupees for the short trip; I was so pleased I gave him 10. Hariveeran's friend was a typical big black fat ugly friend who always answered my questions to Hariveeran, usually missing the point. All rather hard going so I dutifully flogged through last years photos with them before packing them off so I can write this. The howling dogs threaten a slow sleep so I shall see if I can frighten them away soon.

7th February Saturday. I went to do something about the dogs but failed. As I got near they went to the other side of the building where they were equally loud. *I am writing this in the company of Arthur Grumiaux playing the Bach violin partitas.* Dogs, mosquitoes and traffic made for a disturbed night and I got up at 6.15, or rather put on a shirt and went back to bed to read. My cough has almost gone. As I had cancelled my lectures I had an early breakfast and did as I had planned last year and went to the Zoo [or Jhoo park as they say here]. I got an auto up the road by the temple and explained what I wanted with the help of a man from a nearby shop – emphasising that I did not want to go by way of Tirupati. The drive was therefore only 15 minutes. I had to pretend I was getting angry with the ticket people for them to accept that my camera is not a movie camera. There were very few interesting birds but it was very peaceful for the first hour after which the cars started to arrive. It was almost 30 degrees [86 F] by 10.30 when I came back down the hill to home. I have a huge genome paper to referee and managed to finish it by mid afternoon when I got Satheesh to come and collect me ot got to the Department internet to send it off. Remarkably there was an email from John Bolbot – whose work I had look up while refereeing it. Our first contact for about 15 years. After strolling back through a relaxed Saturday afternoon campus I sat trying to make sense of the industrial microbiology syllabus, gratefully interrupted by a nice long chat with hugh. Deciding to walk down to the Hostel to wish Moin good luck for tomorrow's big exam I was called over by the staff to see the 'new' bike the small dark cook has got; the smallest motorbike ever. "Go with him sir to Balaji colony". *I got to sstop I am dropping off and may drop the laptop off my lap.* The back seat of the bike was loose, making me a rather loose cargo. The driver was clearly not well acquainted with the bike; he set off accidently before I was firmly in the unfirm saddle, hurtling towards the road. He found the brake in time but still our momentum produced a dramatic launch onto the road. I could see him nervously looking alternately at right and left

hand as if to decide which might be useful to us. Fortunately, he recognised the international signal for calm down and dropped his speed, but my nerve soon broke and I got him to stop about 300 m before the hostels. I wanted to drop in quickly to wish Moin well but without being seen by others. I failed and had a lengthy enjoyable chat with the final year students who were sitting under the tree outside. Moin had collected a lot of questions about his chemistry revision including "Why did so many physicists in the 1st half of the 20th century win Nobel prizes when they were soon proved wrong [eg Bohr's atom structure being 'wrong' according to Heisenberg]? So gave 10 minute seminar on the nature of scientific truth plus a promise that I would send Eistein's biography to him when I get home. Avoiding further encounters I had a typical walk to Sinduri Park all through Balaji Colony, Prakasam Road and Ghandi Road. I feel so at home there I always enjoy it all. Proud I was to find a place to buy a refill for my Allout mosquito killer [an alternative brand to the Good Knight version] plus a spray can. The Mosquitoes have been increasing each night and they even had the nerve to bite me. The god was on his raft again and the area around the tank near the hotel was packed with usual traffic but at twice the density of modern cars, often large people carriers. The clog up the traffic as the drivers are unwilling to physically push aside bikes and autos so creep at right angles to the traffic trying to find a way to get into the flow. My usual welcome into the hotel restaurant always makes my decision to usually eat there feel right. My microbiologist waiter saved decision making by proposing Thai veg spicy rice which was good but a little too much chopped chilli and onions; nothing that was not balanced by butterscotch ice cream. I had promised to be back at the guest house by 8.30 to meet Ravi and friends [final year biochemistry] so quickly grabbed an auto, but the driver shouted 50 rupees "one way journey sir" so I walked to next one who immediately accepted my shouted "SVU guest house 30 rupees" and then proved his worth as a racing driver weaving so rapidly I had to hold with both hands to avoid being thrown sideways out into the road, or more likely into the nearest auto racing alongside. Perhaps he was trying to frighten me. He tried to take me to the much nearer guest house until my bang on the shoulder with Straight Straight put him right. He then said it was further than expected so it should be 35 rupees so he received 40 as a thanksgiving for my surprising safe return. Ten minutes later Ravi and Rhagav arrived with a small dark smiling boy who said nothing but sat all evening smiling. Ravi had a very bad cold but it didn't stop him being his usual good company finishing the evening with wild accusations that "you British had looted India which used to be the richest country in the world". He became even more demonstrative with my camcorder pointed at him. As soon as they left at about 11.15 I flopped into bed and instant sleep.

8th February Sunday. I woke at 6.40 with an odd feeling that I should do something special as it is Sunday, although I had my only plan was to go to Bliss hotel in the evening to celebrate Moin's exam finish. *I am writing while waiting for him to come – half hour late.* I did not feel like doing anything but dutifully set off for a walk with binoculars and camera and within 2 minutes remembered why this is always such a good idea, with early golden sun and light breeze. Walking up the very long 'road' towards the engineering college there were very few birds, even when I left the road to walk up towards the hills. Eventually they joined me – koils, doves, bulbuls, bee eaters, robins and sunbirds. I have recently realised why they are called this; in hot sun they are often the only birds willing to carry on as usual. My walk eventually took me all the way across the back of the campus to the NCC Nagar and I staggered in for my usual Indian breakfast. I was pleased to get a message from Subramanyam that he was not going to his native place so we arranged that he join me here for lunch. I then tried to have a sleep but got a headache instead. It gradually dissipated while reading the Sunday Hindu, sitting in the shade of the tall Ashoka trees that line the roof. This was interrupted by Subbu's arrival with his happy smile and a proud announcement that he had just returned from the morning service at the Lutheran Christ Church. Lunch was my usual Gobi rice and spicy dahl followed by sugar/curds, my total quantity being less than half that of Subbu. After a long gentle chat in the shade on the roof he left to go for rest [as they say] and I prepared new lectures on Ascorbic acid, vitamin B12, fructose syrup and Xanthan gum. Moin came up in the evening [late] and we went as usual to Sinduri Park, except that he was more relaxed so we walked the Ghandi road section, meeting Salim from Geography for a chat on the way. One of the research scholars was at the next table to us with her family to whom I had to be introduced. They said they had heard so much about me but my only interaction with her has been when I have driven her off her computer so that I can get to the net. It is always such an experience leaving the restaurant to go back into the real world. The restaurant is quiet and cool and clean and courteous; it is in the basement. We climb up the marble stairs into the bright peaceful foyer then through glass doors held open by a rather

greasy, smiling character in turban, down 4 marble steps into the dark and noise and heat and crowds of people, autos, bikes and cars. We have learned now to avoid autos immediately outside the hotel as they always take a short cut down very narrow streets hooting the locals who live in them out of their aggressive way. So we fight to the station and so have the wide Nethaji road to race down, often two abreast [odd that; one or three abreast would be rather unnatural]. After dropping Moin off at the hostels I was delivered too early back to the guest house where I watched one of the DVD films I have [How to get a head in advertising] which I thought madly overacted and not attractive in any way.

9th February Monday. There are a lot of family guests here now in the Guesthouse and they seemed to go off at 2 hour intervals through the night, marked by their kids shouting up and down outside my room. I got up at about 6.15 to check that I understood the regulation of phage gene expression in my new notes from last year. I didn't understand it so decided to give a lecture entirely on *my* work – the stuff that is relevant to their molecular biology. Later today I spent another 2 hours preparing a new set of lectures on lambda phage from Watson's latest edition of Molecular Biology of the gene. I then went for a gentle stroll around the dairy farm where the recently cut fields were supporting big flocks of swallows and tree swifts, which are small silent swifts. After a thoroughly enjoyable lecture I got onto my email to find the one I have been waiting for from Leigh with his papers and thesis – so I can check my facts about Sickness behaviour for Moin's experiments on his mice. I borrowed Sai Gopal's pen drive to download and copy them only to discover the drive had 5 viruses on it – easily removed with Sophos. I guess it is because it is a virology department they cultivate so many. The afternoon lecture on continuous culture [last lecture] and vitamin C was nice as I had it was very thoroughly prepared. On the way out I saw Murali Kumar [1st year] and invited him to come to guest house in the evening with other 1st year colleagues. After finishing preparation of phage lectures off I went to Thumulagunta with my movie camera – recording the changes that have half spoiled my lovely paddy fields and sugar cane from the past, building very rich looking houses almost up to the village itself. As I arrived one of the more impressive of the youngest boys saw me and dragged me to his house where his beautiful young mum was doing her washing in the small courtyard of their smart house. So had to go inside for more filming before being taken to Balaji's home where I always feel so welcome. On the way I filmed a race with sticks and tyres as hoops, then played it back to half the small boys of the village. The older boys were not around. Balaji's mum made me a delicious cup of hot sweet milk to strengthen me for the ordeal of more filming of heaps of squirming fighting boys. Kotes then arrived; 2 years ago he was one of the small boys keen to get in all my pictures, now he is about 18, tall and very thin, and still keen to get in the pictures but somehow not appreciating that in a movie there is no point in just standing doing nothing so I have him and Balaji standing grinning, with me whining that they should DO something. Fortunately as we left the village an auto dumped a passenger at our feet [their auntie] so I had an auto all the way home.

I could not contact Moin or anyone else so I got an auto down to Ghandi Road again, around the temple area, and a solitary dinner in Sinduri Park – if you can call it solitary when there were always at least 3 waiters hovering around, telling me what I was eating and asking silly questions; I guess they get pretty bored. A text message interrupted dinner to say that Murali could not come because he did not know the way so he would come next day. My message telling the way got no reply so I got an auto to the hostels to see Moin to arrange discussion of Leigh's paper etc. He was not in but while chatting with some Zoology students he came running round the corner; he had met Murali who had seen me come. The student hostels are wonderful for the students. Block C is 3 stories high. I approach it from the guesthouse road in almost complete darkness up a paved narrow road between the trees. I walk in a sparse flow of students in both directions. I am often stopped as they see a white face coming out of the darkness. I then have nice chats with people who I cannot see. Near C block there is a little crossroads with a peanut stall under a lamp. This is where they come back from the 'Mess' so I am often captured by my students who take my hand and drag me to their rooms. As I enter C block there is a charpoy in the entrance with a very old watchman half asleep. Now as he recognises me he leaps up and chatters excitedly to the students I am with then salutes and lies down again. All the rooms are arranged around a central block joined by open covered balconies looking into the dark courtyard with trees as high as the block. Always students rushing about between rooms etc. They share at least 2 to a room but usually 3 in the small rooms. They are decorated in Indian institutional green. There is one chair [no room for more] and a small desk. The beds are flat metal sheets with a lungi for sheet. No cupboards; just a few concrete shelves, with clothes hung on strings across the room. The window

is heavily barred and lets in a few mosquitoes which are kept away by the noisy ceiling fan. There is very little privacy. Moin always bolts his door when he is studying and he is famous for always studying. While I am chatting with him people come banging – either to see me as a sort of specimen or to borrow his soap as he is nearest to the washrooms.

After bolting the door Moin stood panting and smiling nervously; “I ran to you sir – my heart is going fastly – you know heart sir?” I then gave a tutorial on mouse behaviour with the usual intelligent questions from Moin. Then a smile and “Sir you should be called Moin – my name means Helper”.

Anyway after a bit I got auto to the guest house where Murali had come but without the other students, only a Zoology friend to translate for him, although Gonasekar’s English was not much more confident than Murali’s. Murali went through his routine of imitations of birds, animals and Satheesh, all brilliant, followed by a viewing of all my old India pictures which have proved very popular. At last they went, after travel sweets and photos. That reminds me: I phoned our Murali at home the other night – always good for morale; in this case he gave me a hilarious description of him skiing with a group from his hospital in Val d’Isere. It is now 11.50 so I can go to bed. Early nights always leave me waking too frequently.

10th February Tuesday Tirupati tummy struck in the night during a dream in which I was playing in the CSO in the guildhall and I desperately needed to rush to the loo. As I jumped off the edge of the stage I found myself rushing to the bathroom here. *The elephants are just going past with their sleighbells.* This happened twice more in the night. I woke feeling perfectly well but apprehensive so I had minimum breakfast of two Vadas [crispy doughy spicy doughnuts and tea. I cancelled my lectures – probably unnecessarily – as I had a perfectly good day. Although eating little. There was a beautiful breeze most of the day so I sat outside preparing lectures on antibiotic production and some more genetic regulation. My usual therapy worked, tidying and sweeping the room. The monkeys raided my waste bin outside my door and Suri got very worked up about them, banging two metal pipes together to drive them away. After clothes washing flute Charlie phoned and asked to come so I had good company for the 2 best hours of the day between 4 and 6. Libby phoned about 3 seconds after he had asked me the make of flute that she uses. To avoid the stress of going out I got Moin to come with a small sliced [dry] loaf and 4 bananas which made tolerable sandwiches when Cadburys chocolate was included. In the afternoon a young thin nervous boy – a secretarial helper from the Women’s University Biochemistry Department arrived with a formal notice of my lecture which has been preponed [!] from Friday to Thursday. While waiting for my bananas I modified a previous powerpoint lecture to fit them but forgot to save it, or rather I certainly saved it but in a funny hidden directory [As soon as Moin left I prepared it again.] We spent about an hour going through the behavioural stuff in Leigh’s thesis and making notes for him to use. Inspired by the success of my filming of Ravi ranting about the British in India, I filmed him explaining his project to me. The wild dog has started howling outside my room but I shall go to bed and hope to ignore him. Imran has just phoned to tell me that his mum’s operation went ok [Hstomy]. I think he has some relatively rare blood type as he often seems to be in demand for blood. When in the hospital with his mum he was told they needed some blood for an ill baby so he said they could have his and in the eyes of the father he is now a superman or god, receiving gifts of coconuts etc.

Bed time goodnight.

11th February Wednesday. *I am writing this listening to Mozart piano sonatas, feeling very tired after very nice day.*

It was a 4 stop night – not too bad but the howling dogs went on long enough for me to read till they stopped. Tirupati tummy has gone completely but I decided to have a gentle start with 2 cups of tea while I struggled to understand my own notes on lambda phage regulation. Suri went and got my nice breakfast of hot wada and pongal. After nice lecture I printed out leigh’s bits of thesis for Moin and Satheesh kindly drove me to his hostel room to leave for him there. Then back to meet Sastri from Vijayakiketan College to arrange a visit to lecture like last year but I persuaded them that it can be less formal; I do not need to meet the Registrar and Deans and have special lunch with them etc. They are so keen that my lecture title should include Trends or Recent Developments or the Future of Biotechnology. They will have Methylotrophs, quinoproteins and biotechnology and like it. Suri and the lady cook produced excellent small lunch. Jjj o I fell asleep. I have just received my evening text of wise comments from final year student Sunil. After the afternoon lecture Parthasarthy phoned to see he would collect me and take me to meet the VC of the Women’s University; I pleaded a prior engagement and he immediately gave in. After a very hot walk in the

sun to the guest house I sat and read on the roof after a short sleep. Then the magic time of 4 – 6. The low sun shines through the Ashoka trees on the roof which makes me feel I am underwater with big sea weed fronds gently moving in the breeze. And the crowfish swimming home for the night. I was blasted to reality by a huge explosion – it was firework let off by the staff to chase away my monkey friends who suddenly appeared in a troupe over the parapet all around me and up the ladders to the safest part of the upper roof, with the smallest babies hanging on for dear life beneath their mothers. At 5 o'clock I went for a stroll directly opposite the guest house towards the hills, getting good photos of purple sunbird, returning for a final peaceful read during the last of the rapid twilight as the final crows wander home. I am reading JG Ballard's autobiography [writer of Empire of the Sun] which concentrates on his growing up in Shanghai, the last part of which was in a Japanese prison camp. It is written so well I am reading it too quickly. As arranged Moin arrived about 7.0 to discuss his results and then by auto to the big 5 star hotel Fortune Kences for non-veg dinner. It was excellent because we had the buffet so there was no waiting around for the waiters. Biriani, beer and chettinad prawns followed by cake and ice cream. It cost 750 rupees so twice cost of Sinduri Park and Kalyan Residency but about twice as good, except for the non-smiling waiters. So now home listening to the Mozart and deciding to go to sleep early and get up when I wake to revise my lecture. Good night.

12th February Thursday. *I am writing this in the evening with the howling dogs trying to drown Beethoven piano sonatas.*

As usual I woke at 6.40, revised the morning lecture on the last of lambda phage then went for a stroll up towards the hills toward NCC Nagar. Although there seemed to be few birds, by the time I got back I had seen doves, mynahs, koil, golden orioles, emerald leaf birds, sunbirds, parakeets, coppersmith, robins, magpie robins, crows, and at last some fantails – like pied wagtail but they fan their tails [failed to get photo]. The morning sunlight just beginning to heat the day is worth getting up for anyway. Breakfast of pongal and vada and two teas as usual. I had my nearest to a crash this morning on Sai Gopal's scooter. As we approached a T junction a motorbike was coming fast from our right; we were turning right so SG had [typically] lined himself up on the wrong side of the road and without slowing down tried to go right – directly into the path of the oncoming bike who has the sense to swerve as we skidded slightly, wobbled wildly, brushed elbows with the biker and carried on with SG justifying himself energetically – “I indicated with my head to the stupid fellow that I was turning right”! After a nice lecture I had a ‘shower’ and dried in the sun while going over my lecture for the afternoon to be held in Women's University, arranged by mad Parthasarthy. He arrived in his new car in the early afternoon to collect me. He got a bit angry when I put on my seat belt – “no need, I know driving”. This was said as he took off his shoes to drive in his socks. He obviously trusted in the 5 little idols set in Perspex and glued to his dashboard. I asked if he wanted me to fold out his driving mirror; “no sir people will knock it off when I go too close to them”. I had to look out of the side window to avoid making comments on his weaving all over the road, often onto the wrong side, especially as he changed into top gear, stalling every 20 yards. We first went to meet the Vice Chancellor, a really nice lady professor of maths. P explained that he hoped that she would give us permission for me to spend 4 weeks teaching there next year, which she kindly did. At the guest house later P told me that he was pleased he had arranged this visit which is now all fixed as the VC is involved. I told him he should arrange nothing as I would not be doing this. All slightly embarrassing as I was his guest. *Just going outside to see if it is worth confronting the howling dog. It was only a small one and I got it to run away but it has just changed by a short distance so I have failed. Perhaps it is pining for its friend; I heard today that a leopard came from the hills to the Virology department and killed a dog which it lodged in a tree by the entrance.* The lecture was in the Senate Hall and very modern. The member of staff did not know how to find the correct drive on the computer so I had to ignore Parthasarthy's “Sit Sir we have everything under control” and deal with it. Sitting on a huge red velvet throne I then heard myself introduced as a great scientist who has published more than 20 papers in journals with impact factors of more than 2 [actually more than 90 with factors of 5 – 25]. The lecture was appreciated [judged by the smiles] and the audience was beautiful; P was the only other male. Parthasarthy gave me a little vote of thanks before asking one of the staff to present sir with a small honorarium [an envelope containing 500 rupees - £8]. It would have been good to spend time with the students but I was whisked [not the right word really except in intent] back to the guest house for tea and a read on the roof until it was time to walk to the Department to go to dinner with Sai Gopal.

He was tied up with preparations for a NAC visit – like our RAE visits – to assess the Universities. The professor of Tamil told me that I would add 10 points to their score by being present and ‘interacting’ with the panel members – not likely if I am feeling in an honest mood on Tuesday when they come. While waiting outside the Department with a few research scholars a chipmunk was hurtling about the place in a frantic way, this being explained when she appeared with something in her mouth – a tiny baby chipmunk which she dropped at my feet in fright when she saw us. As we moved away so that she could do her maternal thing there was a rushing sound and a Shikra hawk [like our sparrowhawk] hurtled between us all, shooting up into a nearby tree with the squealing baby in its claws. We were stunned into silence – finished by me insensitively commenting “well that is Nature for you” which was then passed around the group as Sir’s wise saying. After a terrifying scooter ride to Sai Gopal’s I was able to look at my emails, one of which included a long letter from Sasha in Moscow and a nice short one from Stuart. Dinner was revolting with slimy spicy tomato stuff with plain rice and special vegetable; this was bitter gourd, and gourd was it bitter. My cough was a bit annoying so I was bullied into chewing a mixture of cardamom seed and clove, before another unpleasant drive back through town to the home of the howling dogs. Having failed to get Ram on the phone for the last 6 weeks I phoned his father’s mobile and was told he is now employed in Bangalore and has a different number which has not yet been answered. It is still only 10.20 so I shall play solitaire for a while before sleep. The howling has stopped; perhaps a leopard or hawk has got it.

13th February Friday *I am writing this Saturday night, struggling to remember, helped by Bach’s Goldberg variations.*

My day started with the usual walk during which I had the uncanny experience of seeing all the birds that I did not see yesterday. It is getting hotter every day so I cannot stay long in the sun which is probably a good thing as I have a few commitments accumulating. The NAC [National Accreditation Council] is visiting next week to review the University’s teaching and research. Everywhere is being tarted up with fresh paint on signs and the new blocks lining some of the main paths in the campus being painted white and blue. SaiGopal asked me to write a brief review of the syllabus with suggested changes. It is so confusing so I spent a lot of the day typing it out in a form I could use. Having printed a version for myself to annotate the research scholar Anthony Johnson told me I must remove the virus from my pen drive which I would have picked up from Sai Gopal’s computer; he did it for me explaining that is how I got a virus on m computer which took an hour to remove last week. I saw Srinivasulu in the entrance and asked about the possible postponement of the finals exams; we need them to be postponed so Moin can come to Mahabalipuram with me. Srinivasulu said it is nothing to do with him as all Departments make their own decisions. In the afternoon a memo came from him [as Principal] saying that the exams in Departments are postponed. I have noticed this before with him – he is able to come out with absolute untruths if it suits him. Sunil asked to come and visit the guesthouse so I suggested he came at 5.00 and we went for a nice stroll through the dairy farm while he gave me his opinion about the syllabus etc. He is in his final year. He is a Scheduled Caste and so is eligible for 50% fee but only if his father earns less than one lakh per year; his father earns a little more so he is not eligible for the fee reduction which is about 40% of his father’s salary. Sunil uses his phone obsessively, filling my phone for example with little titbits of sentimental wisdom, mainly about friendship. The numbers are completely worn away. As arranged, Subbu arrived at 6.30 to go to town and to eat so we all went, starting in Ghandi Road topping up my phone balance then tracking down somewhere that sold road maps of Tamil Nadu for our return journey. My old friend in Gogula saris and lunghis directed us to the station bookstall who had one but not very good. We had dinner in Kalyan; it was very slow but I was able to see Mahesh in Ravi’s Travel desk to book our return car. Then back home for a chat and off they went back to the hostel, leaving me too tired to write my diary.

14th February Saturday. Getting up at dawn [6.10] I finished revising 1st year lecture then sorted my notes, very impressed by how much I have done with them, but sympathetic with the rather confusing stuff so I prepared a final summary of all the regulatory systems. After the lecture which was appreciated I spent a sold two and a half hours typing my syllabus criticisms; this was in two versions – for the NAC committee and a much more critical one which I hope he will take note of. I finished my final lecture to the final year students then printed out the reviews and proudly presented them to Sai Gopal who was delighted; this may change when he reads them. I was so tired when I got back that I was tempted to collapse on the bed but I dutifully went for a stroll to my usual rough forest area, immediately pleased with my decision, the late

afternoon sun gilding everywhere. At last I have seen the blue faced Calcoha again; it is about the size of a magpie but mainly black. AND I was rewarded by seeing the Paradise flycatcher whose white tail is longer than its body giving it the appearance of a very erratic undulating flyer trailing its tail like a kite streamer behind it. I have seen this bird the last 2 years when it has relatively short tail and is completely different chestnut brown. It is only in its 3rd year that it changes to the adult long white tailed version. While photographing 3 sweet little girls their friend arrived – 19 yr old Kiran Kumar who invited himself back to the guest house, explaining that his father died recently and he has to look after mother and very keen to struggle with English to ask about my family. He came in and had a sweet and swilled water while nosing about looking at all my stuff. After my experience with Praveen I was very observant but I think he was only curious. I slogged in a power cut down the dark road to near the University entrance to get an auto to Sinduri Park for dinner [Kaju gobi; cauliflower and cashew nuts] with naan followed by butterscotch ice cream; then home to meet the 1st year students [Rehaman, Manjunath, Murali and 2 others]. They went wild over pics of Kennedy trying to persuade me to let them take the pics away with them. Then loads of photos on the computer before they left, leaving me drained. This diary entry is a triumph of the human will which is being rewarded by a louder than usual dog howling. I shall have another go at stopping it before sleeping which I am already doing.

15th February Sunday. Slowly waking up I realised it was Sunday so no urgency to get going, so slowly drifted into life and set off for walk at nearly 8.0, going to the same place as yesterday but from a different side hoping unreasonably to see the Paradise flycatcher again. Of course I didn't but I did see the Forest wagtail which should not be in this part of India. I then realised that the place I was walking was behind where I had first seen it on the roof of the pig shed. Anyway, it was a beautiful walk through parts of the 'forest' I had not been in before. My photoshoot with the wagtail was terminated by a phone call from Hare Krishna – last year's student Buddha calling from Hyderabad with best wishes from him and 'your favourite, Chaitanya – we are staying in same room now and enjoying our jobs'. The pleasantly warm sun soon became very hot; it went up a degree every 5 minutes. The roaring of lions in the distance was a clue that I had come rather a long way and was within sound of the zoo [I hoped]. As I came in, 2 hours late for breakfast, Suri came hurrying up with his slightly panicky muffled nasal grunting, making the international sign for tiffen; so I had pongal and idli and vada with hot curry sauce which was wonderful, washed down with my 2 cups of tea. Charlie rang to remind me to go to his house at 12.30, and to ring him when I got an auto to get instructions for the driver. I then found I had only 2 rupees balance on my phone so I left early and walked toward Balaji colony to get balanced. The auto I flagged down was a shared auto, bulging with 5 bulging policeman. The Chief Minister is coming to town so the streets are being swept and the place is filled with armed police. After 4 days of failure I got hold of Gopi on one of the 4 numbers I have for him. It was answered by his friend Dilip, shouting against a very noisy background; eventually it was passed to Gopi who explained that [again] I called when he was in cinema so he came outside to chat. When I told him that Moin is able to come to Mahabalipuram he said that now I am happy. Well, I am happy about that but unhappy that Gopi is not coming. He sounded a little bit relieved as he is extremely busy job hunting in Bangalore. He will come to say goodbye on Friday.

There is a lovely relaxed atmosphere in town on Sundays so after I added some money to my phone balance I walked some of the way up towards Kapilatheertham near where Charlie lives then went by auto the last part of the way. The father was waiting for me so the autodriver changed his charge from 25 rupees to 15. Kiran was away again but his little sister, now a very nice teenager, was there with the little girl and Steven [12 yrs old]. He has his daily programme pinned to the wall: Rise at 6.30; prayers; breakfast; School 8.30 – 6.00; 6 – 6.30 play; dinner; 7.0-9.0 tuition/homework; 9.0-10.0 watch TV; 10.0 bed for sleeping. As lunch would not be ready for a long time I suggested we went for a walk around the gardens at the TTD admin building. I had loaded many family pics onto a pen drive and transferred to Charlie's computer for everyone to enjoy; Kennedy is a great hit. Charlie then played some favourite film music on his flute with a very loud tracking – as he uses in his gigs. It was all very loud and I allowed myself to fall asleep. Lunch was served on the floor but I was excused and had my own small stool as a table. Excellent roast chicken, and goat [mutton] and rice, watched intently and imitated by girl [I hope I remember her name soon] and stared at in amusement by Steven. I had to fight off their grandmothers heaps of extra rice CHARLU CHARLU not helped by her deafness. After lunch we watched YouTube downloads of Yo Yo Ma playing Bach Suites and

Charlie copied the whole of my ipod onto his computer. He has learned to make his own bamboo flutes and is making a special one for Libby. We drove on the bike back to guesthouse in the hot afternoon sun with daughter sitting in front of Charlie; he is the safest rider I have been with, always waiting for people rather than competing – so it can be done. As we reached near the University the road was blocked for the Chief Minister so I directed us back through my favourite back paths in the University campus. I had lent my small camera to the guesthouse staff for some function of theirs so spent the end of the hot afternoon loading their pictures and tidying up with Photoshop, finishing the afternoon sitting in the shade on the roof enjoying occasional wafts of cooling breeze, unfortunately laced with slightly choking smoke from burning leaves and rubbish. Burning leaves in UK is the smell of autumn – here it is the hot smell of the arrival of summer, the smoke being probably carcinogenic from the poly bags mixed with the leaves.

Moin was due at 9.30 with my biriani dinner, cooked at his home by his mother especially for me, so to pass the time I called Sunil who immediately asked if he could come, which he did. He reminds me slightly of pictures of Viet Cong boy soldiers; always green or jungle coloured shirts, fair khaki skin and dark wavy hair and so thin he claims he can pass through my door without opening it. His English is good and his gentle voice is quite a relief. He also knows about the Department so is a help for many things. He has a typical Tirupati expression which is so useful when explaining something: “so, sir, the bike was coming to the town; *why sir?* – because he needed petrol”. The explanation is always preceded by the “Why sir”. He bought a gift of chocolate brownies – 4 in a decorated box; “for you only sir but you may give me one only”. He is the boy who sends me good morning messages at about 6.50 everyday with little bits of philosophy or affectionate greetings. He is always doing things to help friends, usually with girlfriend problems, so tonight he wanted me to tell him [“you are so wise chris sir”] “if I will one day be rewarded for all this and have nice girlfriend problems of my own”. He was pleased when I told him that he is such a nice boy that he will almost certainly have girlfriends but no problems. “If I have then I will come to you for help my dear chris sir”.

Moin arrived soon after Sunil went back to the hostels and we had cold but nice mutton biriani for the second time today, served from a genuine stack of tiffin tins, followed by very sweet dough balls soaked in syrup – wonderful. So I went to bed filled and sweet.

16th February Monday. Having woken at 7.30 it was too late to walk so I had early breakfast then waited to tell Sai Gopal that I would not be coming to normal lectures as I have finished all my scheduled stuff. We made arrangements for the NAAC visit tomorrow and off he went to do last minute preparations. I went for a stroll up the road to get some water. At the entrance to the Thumulagunta road it is always nice and lively and also a pleasure, as long as the temple loudspeakers are not on as they are loud and poorly tuned. Opposite the temple is the heap of autos who always welcome me, expecting a fare but they are always chirpy even if I don't. One of my very small friends was there with three classmates, I usually see him with his little sister on my evening strolls; today he was all dressed in his blue uniform calling me over – Uncle uncle. So a few more pictures which always means I make other friends there as they like this. On the right side of the road there has been an extensive development of very classy houses so I wandered amongst these for a bit before finding myself at the water bottle shop where I had to invent excuses why I had not been up there recently. On the way back near the temple my old dairy farm friend Chowpatti cycled up and suggested we have tea together there; he collected the very hot sweet tea in tiny polythene cups and we sat on a stone bench watching the traffic go by. This included my old Thumulagunta friend Venkataramana on his bike with 3 friends who came skidding up beside us to say hello; they were just off to Chittoor, reminding me of my visit from there years ago by Imran, Madhu and little Gopi.

The rest of my day was spent preparing a new lecture for Sree Vidyanikethan Engineering College on Methyloproteins, Quinoproteins and Biotechnology. It is too hot to sit outside for long so it is ok working at the computer with door and windows open and the fan keeping it all cool. I get some funny looks as people peer through my barred window at what appears to be a naked man facing them over the top of a computer. It was very enjoyable [the lecture preparation I mean]. Having finished by 5.00 I went for a stroll to the place of the Paradise flycatcher again but no luck. The distribution of birds each day is very varied. The last few days that particular area of open ground dotted with many trees and infested with low thorn bushes has been full of displaying Indian Robins; they are black except for a small white wing patch and rich rusty red rump which they flash furiously while flitting about singing on the tops of bushes or preferably on phone and electricity wires. There were none today and not much of anything else although I did see again the rear view [like a

black magpie] of the blue faced Calcohoa. There was a beautiful breeze making it a lovely evening for a long gentle stroll during which I arranged dinner on my phone. I had yesterday invited Sunil and also made vague arrangement with Moin. When I called him he was obviously hoping to get a lot of reading done so said he would only come if it was essential to keep me company – if Sunil is not coming. Sunil was running out of battery so I got a text that said Phone dying, I am dying to meet you for dining at 7.30. I am writing this while waiting for him.

When he arrived he had nice smiling silent Hariveeran with him, a final year student doing a project on citric acid production who, he tells me, is best friend of Moin. I heard later from Sunil that he had attached himself to him when he met in Ghandi Road and said he was on the way to see me. He is ok but he was taught in Telugu medium and so not confident in English. Most of my conversations with Sunil have been personal chats and this is not possible in Sundhira with a 3rd person so it was a quiet dinner. I had promised to call in to see Moin on the way home and found him in his room sitting cross-legged on his bed looking very solemn. “Please be seated, I do not know how to say this to you”. His family have had a feud over land for some years and it has been solved in their favour by the court and to finalise everything he has to be there on Friday and Saturday to join in all the legal signing etc, so he cannot come to Mahabalipuram. He has been looking forward to this all year and I was looking forward very much to having him with me the last few days. He is the best company here, being very affectionate, intelligent, thoughtful and witty. So he sat staring at me with big brown eyes with tears welling up saying that he had let me down and I am the best experience of his life [etc]. He really thought I would be angry with him. When I got him to stand up and hugged him he soaked my shirt while I bravely sniffled. So so sad. We got an auto to come to the guest house and sat being sad and brave for an hour. I could not let him walk all the way back again so I walked with him catching an auto for the last half km and using it to take me back home. *I am writing this next evening which is his last here while I am here waiting for him to turn up to go out to dinner.*

17th February Tuesday. I slept poorly, still upset by Moin’s sadness, and woke to an early start, for Tuesday is NAAC day. I negotiated an early breakfast of Idlis and Wada and was collected by Satheesh, obeying Sai Gopal that everyone must be in the Department by 8.30, the committee being due to arrive at 9.0. Of course they did not arrive until 9.25. We all stood up and introduced ourselves and SG started his presentation. This clearly described what a good department should do but ‘we’ do not actually do it – regular discussions with students and staff, regular updating of curriculum etc. The Chairman of the committee kept interrupting to ask pertinent questions like ‘When did you last discuss the syllabus and what changes did you make’. He did quite well and I made a couple of contributions when he got out of his depth [on internet access which is much improved]. Anyway they got a good feel for the place and seemed happy. Sai Gopal – the only one with a suit on, could at last relax. I was whisked back to guest house for more lecture preparation.

Chowdappa, from 1982 intake, arrived from Bangalore in his new Hyundai – similar to the Mondeo only slightly shorter. He presented me with two 2kg boxes of grapes grown on his farm; his day job is high up in India Horticultural Society. He took us to the Bliss hotel where I had very spicy jumbo prawn curry, then back to GH where some of his friends came to pay their respects, using my room for their reunion. Appa Rao from Biochemistry then turned up and seemed slightly surprised when I instantly accepted his invitation to give a lecture there on Thursday morning. I then read in the shade in a cool breeze on the roof until Sunil turned up for a chat. I eventually got Gopi who confirmed that he was still happy to come to Mahabalipuram. As Sunil left, Moin arrived with an auto to take us to town for our last dinner, first warning me that it may not be the last; in fact his father phoned later to say the he does not need to go until Thursday so we have gained a day and had a nice relaxed evening, dropping off during our trip to Sinduri park at a photocopying booth to copy the whole of the latest Stryer biochemistry; total cost with binding about £5. We had a nice positive evening, coming back to guest house for a last minute seminar on the Ramachandran Plot, decisions on what he would like me to leave with him [light, extension cable etc], and plans for tomorrow [we hope to visit Thumulagunta together]. I am now feeling very sleepy so will try to get a good night and an early morning so that I can have one of my last morning walks.

18th February Wednesday. I had only 2 waking times in the night which has a downside that I wake with a headache; I ignored this and went for a morning stroll in the sun but not a single bird photo. As directed by Sai Gopal I was ready to be picked up for my ride to Sree Vidyanikethan college where I was due for a lecture at 11.30. The driver [Chandra Babu] arrived at 10.50 but then went off down the town for 10 minutes. He

returned after 20 minutes and we had a fast frantic drive the 12 km to the college. The campus is beautiful and peaceful with interesting looking buildings and a very impressive lecture hall. We arrived 10 minutes late but got a cheer as we finally walked in. I was introduced in the usual exaggerated way [I like it of course] then gave my usual lecture but with more biotechnology [as directed]. The audience was mainly students [about 250 total]. I was presented with a pink silk shawl with golden ornaments on it followed by official photos etc. We then drove with the principal and Dean to a private dining hall in the Degree college for lunch where the other 4 guests of the Principal were shy of him I think and he was shy of me so we have a rather pointless sort of question and answer conversation. After a sedate drive home I prepared my two lectures for tomorrow – Biochemistry Department. My last visit to Thumulgunta should have been this afternoon with Moin but he phoned to say that the research scholar who is supposed to help him with his work insisted that he wait until 6.30 for a discussion. So we had our usual thrilling ride to Sinduri Park for dinner.

19th February Thursday. *This is being written in Mahabalipuram with Gopi watching TV between sneezes so I will have some difficulty remembering everything.* I was collected efficiently by Appa Rao to take me to my lecture in Biochemistry. It was all well organised and a real pleasure. All the staff came and sat in the front row as I was introduced; I then told them they had heard it all before so could go and do something useful, which they did. I only knew Ravi and Madhav – from last year and they were organising gifts and drinks but apparently listened through the door to the corridor. They enjoyed my pics of Tirupati from 1982 then gave me nice green silk shawl and a rather heavy picture of flowers which Moin accepted for his mother later. I rejected the staff invitation to tea afterwards and stayed for 'interaction' with the students. The boys sat in their places while the girls crowded round asking about study in UK etc then requesting autographs. The boys then started with a very intense boy asking why there are so few Indian Nobel Prize winners. My answer took about 20 minutes [including arguments etc]. They were so appreciative – the usual thing that there staff never seem to have any informal interactions with them at all. I rejected Appa Rao's offer of a lift back and got Ravi and 2 friends to come back to guest house, forgetting that at midday it was a bit hot [29 degrees]. We stopped at my usual little drink hut to get water and I bought us all badam milk and took a photo of the sweet shy girl who serves there. The boys then left after agreeing to come to dinner the next evening. After usual dull lunch I had to finish preparing the Virology formal lecture, interrupted by Charlie who arrived as planned with a gift of a bamboo flute [in G] for Libby. I got Satheesh to collect me early so I could print off the reference I had written for Moin and to check my email. All the students were packed into the lecture theatre in the heat while we waited for the new member of staff [a rather silly man] to come and introduce me, Sai Gopal being away. I knew he was in his office and he knew the time but when 10 minutes passed I got the lady assistant professor to introduce me instead which she did very nicely with about 2 sentences. The proper introducer turned up 25 minutes late. I was told later that he often does that sort of thing to appear important. Very enjoyable lecture with the pics of Tirupati at the end, and also my joke pictures of Naidu and Sai Gopal which got lots of applause.

I got back by 4.30 to sit in the setting sun waiting for Moin. He had had another reprieve but this was definitely our last evening before he goes home. He arrived at about 5.30 with auto so we could call in to Thumulgunta to say quick goodbye. The village seemed almost deserted and we were told Balaji was not there as his gran had died [not the one I know] and they had all gone into town. I saw a few of the gang of boys but it was a rather slack sad end of my visit there. As we walked out an auto drove up with Balaji and we were able to have a quick goodbye and he gave me his full address to send a CD with photos to him later. Moin was a bit sad when he realised this was the only time we had done anything in daylight as he has always been so busy with his study and project. We took Balaji's auto and went direct to Sinduri park where we had usual stuff followed by butterscotch ice cream, then out of the AC restaurant up the stairs for the last time into the heat and noise and excitement of Tirupati, racing back down Nethaji road to the guest house. After a nice but sad last chat he suddenly decided he could come and visit tomorrow before leaving in the morning so we were able to cheer up and walk back down to the hostel where I had arranged to meet Sunil to come to guest house. I phoned him and he managed to get to Moin's room without being seen, avoiding having a repeat of other occasions when others invite themselves to join us. So we sneaked out of the hostel and back through the dark campus to the guest house for another last chat. Sunil lay on the other bed quietly chatting till I realised it was 11.30. When I said he ought to get back to the hostel he said no this is too comfortable and promptly fell asleep. I threw a blanket over him and was asleep in two minutes. Sunil is the

student who has worn out his keypad so it only has blank keys. He sends me good morning messages with bits of philosophy every morning, usually about the importance of friendship.

20th February Friday. Sunil was sleeping very soundly when I got up, with his blanket pulled close around him and his phone by his face on his pillow. He went off early so I could go for my last morning walk which was really a stroll through my favourite local bird place. Yesterday morning there were hardly any birds anywhere but this morning all my favourites came to say goodbye: coppersmiths, bulbuls, golden orioles, drongos, Indian robins, magpie robins, bee eaters, doves, Shikra, babblers, mynahs, kingfisher. The leaves are really coming off the trees now and it was very hot by 9.30. After my usual nice [but cold] breakfast I started to slowly sort my room and pack so that I would not have that stress when saying goodbye. Moin came at 11.30 to say final goodbye. He has been very special this year so it was all a bit sad but we managed to chat about molecular biology etc, “we call this displacement activity”. He said he could not decide to leave so I would have to throw him out; so I told him to go and I did not want to see him in my room again -please go, please go, so grinning happily he ran down the stairs while I went onto the front roof to wave goodbye. After lunch I was collected at 3.40 for my 3.30 farewell function. We nearly missed it completely when a stupid girl on a scooter tried to overtake on the inside as we turned left into the university.

The students had covered everywhere with mango leaves and marigolds and beautiful welcoming patterns in coloured chalk on the floor. Once again the students were packed into the hot lecture theatre while we waited for the special guest – the rector. At 4.00 I suggested we start but was told this was impossible as he was very important. Sai Gopal always does this, inviting some high University type to show off his foreign special visiting professor. He at last had a good idea and we got the students to all come out so we could take photos before the function. At 4.20 Sai Gopal phoned the rector again and he finally confessed he was not coming. So we had the usual function, starting with Kiran singing an extremely complicated traditional Carnatic prayer. Then came the usual over the top nervous little speeches from the students about ‘dearly beloved friendly professor with all his jokes and his loving us students’. One item involved a student reading out my CV [short version]. After my chat I was presented with a plain Kashmiri wool shawl and a sari for madam and 2 nice music CDs. We then had a sort of samosa and nice milk sweet with tea followed by more sunset photos. At some stage the secretarial assistant Suresh appeared with a sheaf of papers needing 9 signatures across 5 rupee stamps. I was then brought an envelope filled with 15,000 rupees. Sunil was coming out to dinner but had disappeared so I phoned to arrange to pick him up at Senate house in Sai Gopals car; he gave me the impression that he was not accustomed to picking up students. As planned, Subramanyam appeared at the same time as Gopi so they could renew their friendship and we autoed down to Fortune Kences for buffet dinner with the biochemists Ravi. Ragav and? The food was good but I had to put in a lot of effort to get people chatting. The tradition seems to be that people pay attention to eating then chat later. Outside the Kences is one of the less pleasant parts of town, directly opposite the huge bus station and it is a shock to leave the air conditioned clean quiet interior into the dark noisy hot humid chaos outside. We divided up for our two autos and had a lengthy farewell with Ravi and friends, then another when the others stopped off at SVU First gate as I have at last learned to call it. I was so pleased when Gopi and I got back to find I had done nearly all my packing.

So a gentle chat and so to bed.

21st February Saturday. Clive’s 30th birthday. Libby had sent a message to remind me but no need as Clive phoned himself for a nice chat. Remarkably, our car was nearly on time, delayed by the need to get a spare wheel – only carried when going into a different state for some reason. We omitted breakfast, stopping for some in a country motel but feeling nervous I decided to forgo it. The total journey was 4.5 hours by way of Kanchipuram, very hot but I filmed a lot to pass the time. Although I had actually paid the Golden Sun in advance they had no record of this but fortunately they had a room [Rachmann told me later that they always keep one room free for important foreigners like me]. There was a beautiful breeze going through the open air restaurant which was packed, as was the pool with noisy families from Chennai [about 200 guests]. The beach ‘hut’ had very loud film music but it was still peaceful compared with Tirupati. I cant remember what we did but we did not go into Mahabalipuram. We spent a lot of time chatting and I had a swim, Gopi being too shy when so many others were around. I had grilled prawns with chips, the prawns being unusually tasteless. The kitchens were struggling with the huge number of guests. The beer was wonddererful. We then had more chatting about stars etc sitting on the beach in the half dark. Gopi is always easy company but

more relaxed at speaking English this year. He is still job hunting, during the worst time for many years for getting a job.

22nd February Sunday. Had a really nice day, most of the guests having left so there was no beach music and the pool was empty except for Gopi, me and a couple of elderly ladies from Berlin. Gopi had acquired an aggressive cold in the night and spent a lot of time watching TV while I sat in the sun reading a detective book [Rebus, set in Edinburgh]. In the late afternoon I walked up the coast past the other resort to the fishing village which was similar to Mahabalipuram before the tourists. A large shoal of fish had come in close to shore and the sea was stirring with them as they jumped out of the water. About a dozen fishing boats had gone out to take advantage and where the village met the shore was filled with children and old ladies all looking out to sea. There were some high scaffolds of tied wooden beams forming a great playground for the boys, bravely climbing high and jumping off for my camera. The ladies all demanded photos and one small boy dragged me over to film his friends playing a complicated game that was a cross between Boules and marbles. A man I assumed to be a fisherman came up and asked me to take a picture of his daughters then found we did not have a pen to write his address. He was not a fisherman but remarkably was an expert on diamond mining, working in Chennai and I had great difficulty declining his invitation to dinner; if it had not been our last night I might have accepted. After a dinner of fried chicken and chips we had another astronomy chat during which I discovered I could get good pics of Orion nebula by using my most sensitive 'film' speed. By then it was a bit late to get my tripod but I must try some time.

23rd February Monday. *I am writing the last 3 days in the Trident Hilton hotel having just had a last sad call from Moin;" I am calling from my room where I am reading Stryer hoping you will call to invite me to dinner at Sinduri Park". After promising to call in exactly 24 hours I ran out of balance on the phone.*

On this my last morning in Mahabalipuram I woke to the sound of the Slumdog music and a continuous programme where everyone was getting so excited that it was winning Oscars. After Puri Masala for breakfast we sat on the shore for an hour then I returned to pack. Then off we went by a new route, bypassing Chennai, to the Hilton hotel arriving just after midday. My first act was to check in online and print my boarding pass. We had biriani for lunch, which was very good as it should have been at about £6 each. Gopi spent most of the afternoon watching cricket and the Oscars, SM winning 8 including best director, film, musical score, original song, cinematography, editing, screenplay while I spent the whole afternoon by, and in, the pool. The pool area is now very smart and still has the same man [Bala] attending with towels etc. Remarkably, as it is so near airport and the main roads, there are a lot of birds there, a beautiful kingfisher sitting on the tree beside me most of the time, with bulbuls singing and of course mynahs and crows, and as the sun went down some very noisy Koils. It is now about dinner time and time to finally pack. Dinner was boring fish and chips for me and chicken curry for Gopi. He is still so shocked at the cost of everything that we make a point of having tap water rather than pay 140 rupees for bottled water [usual price 22rup].

24th February Tuesday. I am writing this at 2.30am in Chennai airport. My idea had been to go to sleep at 9.30 till our wake up call at 1.00. I tried to do this but not very successfully as Gopi kept the TV on, channel hopping between very noisy violent Tamil films and detailed coverage of the Oscars and Oscar-related scenes of excitement all over India. He had also discovered that the complicated device by his bed played the most popular songs, including of course the Oscar winning song from SM [International code for Slumdog Millionaire]. He kept this going at same time as the sound from the TV. I did get a couple of hours sleep I think before I had 3 wake up calls, none of which woke Gopi. Checking out was simple and we set off in our separate cars. Our car, rented from Kalyan Residency, was needed in the morning so it had to return direct after dropping me at airport. The driver agreed to take Gopi direct to Chittoor before returning to Tirupati. It is a great, but expensive, idea to leave from Trident as the last stage is only a 5 minute drive. It seems that most people check in online so it is not so much faster. I asked at the check in desk how nice do I have to be to get upgraded and he said I seemed nice enough so he added my name to the list in case there was a place, only to be found later as I board. When I arrived to show my passport at the plane I was given a new boarding pass and shown to my business class seat/bed. So I had a very comfortable trip back, getting a few hours sleep, interrupted by wonderful classy food. I was 10th passenger out of the plane and my case was 3rd off carousel and there was Libby waiting with my fleece and a nice big warm car for a drive through wintry countryside to my nice home. *I am now writing this a few days later.*

Within a few days I am taking everything here for granted. Good food with wine, and cheese, things I dreamed of when eating green, cold curried veggie slime with cold rice some lunch times in the Guest house. As usual when I return I find part of me remains for some time in Tirupati. I have chatted for a few minutes every day to Moin; “I am in my room sir reading my beautiful Molecular Biology book and waiting for my friend to come to take me to Sinduri Park for dinner”. That regular feature of life there was special for me also this year, having such a gentle friend who wanted nothing from me except friendship plus tutorials in which he was often more knowledgeable than me. I miss Sunil’s morning snippets of wisdom and his kindness. I miss very much the hectic auto drives through Balaji colony down Prakasam Road to Ghandi Road and the chaos at the end as we struggled with traffic from the station and pilgrims from the temple to get round the temple tank to sinduri park or Kalyan Residency.