

The Sabbatical Journey – final part: India

Jo Loveridge

The pigeon that had built the nest the night before was still on our Jaipur hotel window sill sitting patiently on her nest with its one solitary egg and the male constantly in attendance. We had had a good night's rest and so we were ready for the long road journey back to Delhi. This time we stopped at the coach driver, Barak's village, rather than the motorway service station, although he insisted that we used the loos there, as the village loos would not be safe for us!



It was valuable to see what an ordinary person's life was like, and eye-opening too. The village had brick houses, with mud floor, with 3 or 4 rooms, the walls were sometimes painted bright colours. There was no running water, just a tank in the corner of each house. The beds were frames which had strings stretched across them that they could sit on during the day and for lying on at night. They had sporadic electricity which they used for the ceiling fan, the fridge and the TV. Barak and his brother kept a few buffalo and his daughter, aged about 8, beautifully dressed in a short sari, brushed up the compacted dung for the fuel for the small open air stove.

The driver's brother, also a bus driver, but out of work as the holiday season for tourists was nearing an end, showed us proudly around the village, the lake for the water buffalo, also the source of their drinking water(!) the village schools, where they tried not to send their children, instead saving

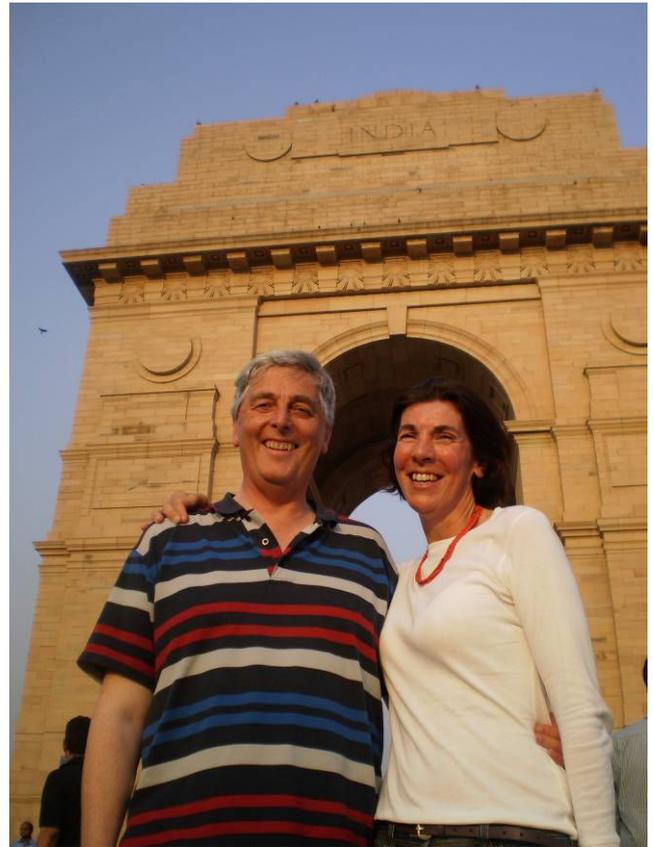
money from their driving to send them to private schools, the village doctor and chemist, the village women who gave herbal remedies which were much cheaper than the doctor, the immaculately maintained Hindu temple, the barber, the tiny shop, and most of all we were aware suddenly of the huge amount of flies and mosquitoes, not really so apparent in the cities.

There were quite a few people sitting in the shade of the tree outside the temple, friendly and welcoming to us visitors and children playing. We also noticed that the buildings and homes did not have windows or glass as this would have made the rooms too hot.



Barak's wife made us tea with the buffalo milk and sweetened, served in lovely china cups. There seemed little to do but to mind their buffalo, sit and play cards and chat. Sons had pride of place in the family, with their own bedroom and TV and desk. After

that the source of great satisfaction would be a sewing machine with foot pedal, possibly given as part of the wife's dowry. It was a great privilege to be shown around the village and into people's homes and humbling to see the contrast of how we live and how Barak and his family live and all the amenities that they don't have and we take for granted.



We returned to the hotel in Delhi to quickly check in and went out with Barak to a fort just outside Delhi. It was absolutely huge with beautiful gardens and red sandstone and marble buildings. The water features all seemed to have been switched off, possibly because it was so hot or because it is low tourist season.

We had a great return trip through the political district again and the leafy part of Delhi, stopping off at the huge archway and again being asked by Indian families to pose with them in their photos!



At the hotel we were reunited with Ann and Len who had stayed for some extra days in Nepal. Ann had been negotiating for pashminas and she had successfully bought 20 and Len had visited the part of

Kathmandu frequented by trekkers and those about to climb Mount Everest.

After the evening meal we walked out into the beautiful hotel gardens and were greeted by a very drunk Barak who said he would drive us anywhere we liked, poor man was sleeping that night on the parcel shelf of his bus as we had a rather early start for the airport the next day and as he had been given a fairly substantial tip he may have decided to blow some of it on spirits, needless to say we did not take up his offer but felt saddened by his circumstances!



The next day greeted by a rather more sober Barak we drove to the airport. At the Virgin Atlantic stand, where we were checking in, we were asked by one of the officials whether we might be able to travel the next day instead as they had rather overbooked the plane.

As Doug was not starting work until the Tuesday we decided that this would be good to stay another night. We were driven back to Delhi and decided to have a look for some traditional Indian clothes. The mall catered mostly for people looking for western style shops but in the end I found a

short sari dress and leggings and scarf and Doug found a long shirt and a short shirt with traditional Indian trousers too. I had a cooling swim in the large outdoor pool in the lovely hotel gardens and then we had our last Indian meal.

We were collected by the driver the next day and taken to the airport and found ourselves upgraded to superior economy class with more legroom (but only just a bit more).

An amazing, fabulous journey and pilgrimage!

On my journey and through my studies, I found that the God-shaped life is one where God is at the centre of people's lives, so that they are centred, grounded and given a pattern, a rhythm: this can also be experienced physically as in Buddhism and Hinduism, with pilgrimage, shrines, prayers, devotion, offerings, sounds, almsgiving, sacrifice and awareness. It is a life with daily routine, open to the experience of God with God at the centre, giving direction and being drawn into the community of faith.

Does the striving for wealth and capitalism, mirror the natural inclination of the survival of the fittest, the selfish gene, and encourage individualism?

Are we pre-programmed, predisposed for our own survival, putting ourselves first?

We may have this instinct for survival, with feeding, fighting, fleeing and reproduction driving us and reflected when people say; 'it is all about me', but we also can rise above this when we practice compassion, or right mindfulness and loving others as we love ourselves. Many of those that I met on this journey were putting this principle into action, living full and joyful lives, living, whether they recognised it or not, a God Shaped life.