

Dan Robinson's Report from India

February 14th – March 6th 2018

Throughout this trip of 3 weeks, I know people were praying and I had the experience of walking in the answers to those prayers as God was hearing and responding! It's hard to explain but people at home, both in our church in Takilma and those who were aware of my trip through our newsletter were praying in generalities for the most part, but God was answering in specifics. As you will read, the trip turned out far different than we had, or could have planned, and was based on flexibility. At each turn there was an obvious move of God, different than we expected and that required spontaneity and obedience on our part. We'd simply see the next direction from the Lord, pray and ask God for His grace then move on it. What a tremendous experience.

So, thank you to the prayer team. As I said, things were radically different than anticipated from the very beginning. But it was all within the will of our wonderful God.

This report is in two sections. The first is primarily about the ministry of the 3 weeks, so that people can understand the types of needs that need to be addressed in India. This is the first 18 pages. The second is about many of the observations and experiences in India so that people can get an idea about the country, culture and people of India.

As I shared with many of you, Star and I along with her mom and our daughter Lena had been planning for months to go to England to visit our daughter Agatha at her Bible school, Caperwray Hall. From there we had planned to visit our long-time friends, Patrick and Anna in France, then to continue on to Spain, visiting friends in Barcelona then near Malaga. From there we were to fly back to London, where we would separate, I would fly to Delhi to meet up with Terry Pruett and they would fly home to Oregon. The church was paying for my trip to India but we had paid for the Europe trip.

Then, as you may or may not know, while my family and I were in Spain, and due to fly to London the next day, I received e-mail communication from Terry Pruett that due to an extreme illness that came upon him and Cynthia, he had to cancel his trip to India. He would not be going at all and wondered if I could continue on, taking the teaching responsibilities. At first I wondered if this was a joke, but there was no "smiley face!" I knew he was serious and that threw me into a sudden quandary; maybe better described as a panic!

We emailed back and forth a few times as well as with our contact person in India, Siby along with pastor Rick Cook here in southern Oregon. My purpose in the trip had been to accompany Terry, assist where I could, preach on Sundays and generally get to know India. But now, without any preparation for this extensive teaching (originally four weeks of seminars in churches and Bible Schools), without my regular Bible, which is certainly my most prized tool, knowing no one in India and with no one to walk me through the initial steps upon entry into India, I had to make a decision. I knew that Terry was supposed to bring money to help pay for our expenditures, and there were other details, which caused concern. I have not been under that kind of pressure, with a very

limited time frame in which to make a decision (24 hrs.), maybe ever. I knew that this decision was going to make a very indelible mark on me and others, irregardless of which direction I went with it. Either way was justifiable and in my perspective, either way could have been the “will of God.”

We had experienced many altercations to our travel plans before even leaving the U.S., and one at every juncture in England and Europe it seemed. Some of them were a bit costly. There were multiple plane or train tickets we had to throw away because they could not possibly work (as it turned out), only to have to buy new ones. There were unforeseen expenditures as well as sickness problems at home that made us change a few plans for our kids who were left at home. Now, this!

Was this Satan kicking us all along the way trying to discourage us and prevent me from going to India? Or was this the Lord placing difficulties along the way to prepare me for this larger one? With each difficulty also came God’s solution, so I was leaning toward continuing on to India, as being His will. But, I had just recently taught about the Holy Spirit forbidding Paul from speaking a word in Asia so he would be used somewhere else (Acts 16:6). The Bible does not say “how” He forbade him, only that He did. So now, I was asking a third question, “Is this the Lord saying, ‘No!’ to the rest of my plans?” Those three questions kept circling around in my mind and we were begging God for a clue as to which direction I was to go.

I once had an experience in Communist Europe in 1985, another anxious-filled time where my decision affected the journey of my traveling companion and I. It is a much longer and more glorious story than I am about to relate, but the applicable part for us now is that we had been denied entrance to cross a certain Romanian border, though the most important task on that journey lay just beyond that crossing. We had to go back out across Bulgaria and then easily travel home through Yugoslavia. My traveling companion, Thomas wanted to try crossing a different border but I was imagining possible jail-time in a Romanian facility if things went sour. The questions kept rattling through my anxious mind, “Were we to continue this way, proceeding on our exit journey out of Bulgaria, then home, or that way, trying to get into Romania via another crossing?” The Lord finally put a thought in my mind, the story of which has been told many times. The thought was, “Yes, you can proceed and get back home unscathed if you continue. But, maybe the Lord has another plan, a miracle; something else for us if we try to go across a different border...and yet, if we don’t try, we will never know what He might have done!” I told this to my brother Thomas and we chose the road of faith and God did a series of AMAZING things for us and with us, but that is another story for another time.

Now, faced with this quandary, that experience came back to my mind. It may be the Lord testing me in this and it may be that He has a wonderful plan in mind!

The plan that had been in the making for 6 months was that Terry was to teach Bible Study Methods and I would be available to help. His outline had been developed for years so he sent his notes via e-mail, so that I might look them over and see if I could teach them. I did skim through them but did not feel peace about teaching his notes. They are great and flow well, but they are Terry’s and the thought flow just wouldn’t work through me. I said that to the men, as well as to Star and Sherry Lou, and I still didn’t have a clue.

As I was still questioning things, and with an e-mail to our travel agent to check into changing my return flight, Siby sent one more note saying, "...perhaps change the plans without them knowing it. Dan please work on what you think God is leading and we can do it with flexibility."

That was the "Go" message from the Lord to me. I knew that I was to continue on to India and trust the Lord. I told that to Star and Sherry Lou and they were 100% encouraging. Sherry Lou reminded me that I love to teach and that the Lord was maybe providing a wonderful opportunity, especially to disciple some young men, pastors in the making. Those items in place, the slate was clean, the decision was made, all doubts buried and my prayer turned to, "Okay Lord, now what?"

I flew to Delhi, went through the hoops with all arriving international passengers, and proceeded to leave the terminal, having been warned that once I left the terminal I could not re-enter! Siby said he would meet me with a sign having my name on it. We had never seen each other. Outside there were hundreds of people waiting to receive people, mainly taxi drivers, I think. A few had signs with names on them, others making offers and gestures. I walked down the line of people (on the other side of a barricade), and well down the row was a sign with my name on it. What a great relief! I was so glad because I had no other options to turn to! Siby met me with a huge smile and a Marigold-lei which he put over my head saying, "This is a traditional welcome in India."

While walking toward the taxi we talked about things of the Lord and enjoyed getting to know one another. My first experience with a taxi will be discussed at the end, under "A few Idiosyncrasies of India."

We were driven to the Centuar Hotel near the airport where Terry and I had a reserved room. Siby left me there about 1:00 a.m. and I was able to get some sleep. The hotel rents for a 24 hour period, so check-out time was to be around 1:00a.m. the next morning. After breakfast Siby came in a taxi and we were driven to his home about 30 min. from the airport. That gave us time to talk. That taxi ride is also discussed at the end. As we chatted both of us were delighted to find that our thinking and theology were very similar. We discussed the needs in India, especially in south India where we were heading. We talked about church and pastoral needs, etc. and it really put us on the same page. One of the subjects that arose from him was about Bill Johnson and the Bethel church of Redding, CA. We have both seen some very bitter results of that movement, specifically of the emphasis on seeking signs and wonders and healing for everyone, yet the actual lack of people experiencing it. We also discussed the huge emphasis of the "Prosperity Doctrine" that seems to accompany the above-mentioned things, that has swept over much of India. It's as though there was nothing else in the "whole counsel of God." There is a whole lot of disappointment that accompanies these doctrines.

Siby and Namkha

Siby is a dear brother in the Lord who was raised in Kerala, a state in south India. He is married to Namkha, a wonderful sister who was born and raised in the extreme north of India in the Himalayas. She came to know Jesus at 16 years old and was told that if she was converting to Christianity she had to leave her home. It was a dishonor to the family and community to be a Christian. She did leave and was welcomed by the missionary lady who led her to the Lord, then lived with her on a YWAM campus.

Namkha and Siby met at a YWAM training school and were married. They now have a 13 year old daughter, Karena.

They have a deep passion to win Muslim people to the Lord Jesus and have been engaged in an outreach ministry to them for years, particularly on university campuses. Between them and people they have been able to mobilize they have given out 3,000,000 Bibles to people in India, most of whom are Muslim.

On our travels Siby was able to communicate this passion to the groups and talk to them about how to converse with Muslim people. On March 28th, 2018, Siby is going to Oxford, England to finish up the work on his PhD. His subject is “Dialog between Christians and Muslims.

I came to love this brother and his wife very quickly and very deeply. Please include them in your prayer.

Puthupolli near Kottayam, Kerala

After some time together in Siby’s home, meeting his wife, Namkha and having a wonderful, though simple meal with them, I was returned to the hotel to get sleep and prepare for the upcoming teaching opportunities. We got on the plane early the next morning, flying into Cochin. From there we took a taxi to the bus, and rode a bus to the city of Kottayam. A taxi then took us to Puthupalli, to a hotel where we would spend the next three nights.

That evening we secured a taxi to take us to the church facility where the first teaching ministry was scheduled. There we met pastor Sabu and his wife Sally along with some other workers. As it turned out, their son and daughter-in-law are in Redding where he is a pastor under Bill Johnson! Siby had not known this. This church in Puthupalli is very Pentecostal as were each of the teaching and preaching points where we were to go. The purpose of meeting Pastor Sabu and the others was to get to know each other and ask any necessary questions. We had never met, nor had they met Siby so there was need for common ground and a trust factor to be in place. One brother that was at that meeting was Alex, Siby’s brother. Alex, as it turned out, was the main guy who set up most of the teaching opportunities. He is a wonderful brother who understood the expectations of each group and the culture, so was able to help me make a few adjustments. After 45 minutes together and a time of asking for God’s direction we were taken to the hotel to sleep and wait for a ride in the morning.

The service began on Friday and Saturday mornings about 10:00, an hour before we were to be picked up. They had almost an hour of “worship” prior to our arranged arrival time. After more singing and other preliminaries it was my turn to teach. The building was akin to an open hay barn with a roof to hold out rain, held up by poles. I was told that we had to quit each day by 12:30 as it would get unbearably hot. We went back Friday and Saturday evenings after it cooled off for more meetings.

On Friday morning we were informed that the bus system of Kerala had gone on strike that morning and most people came by bus! It was a bummer for them. All of them had been praying (and fasting, I was told) for 30 days leading up to this weekend together. The fasting may have been for one meal per day, it was not clear. I just know that no one looked skinny or famished. They were anxious with positive anticipation. The attendance on the first two days was around 60 people instead of the expected 300. There were relatively few people there as I began but they kept coming in as I was teaching.

The interpreter I had was a brother named James, also a pastor. When I first laid eyes on him I assumed that he was in his late teens or early twenties. I then heard that he was married and had three kids...in their late teens it turned out. He was 42! What a dynamo of an interpreter. I could not have asked for a better one. He was instant, he used the same dynamics I did, and when necessary he elaborated deeper so they would understand the full concept! What a precious gift he was to us!

I was asked to teach through the book of Titus. This came because Alex had communicated with Terry Pruett who told him that I had a good teaching on that and it might really be a great blessing for the people. It is pastoral in nature and could fit the needs of the various churches. I came with the idea that I would teach my five basic Hermeneutic guidelines. So, I combined those two ideas and incorporated those guidelines throughout the first two days. The guidelines are as follows:

1. Context
2. Simplicity (keep the text as simple as it allows)
3. Scripture interprets Scripture
4. Test your own Preconceptions
5. Identify the difference between Interpretation and Application

Those guidelines were used three more times in the next three weeks. Their purpose is to help us understand the Bible and discover truth. Each point was modeled and elaborated on using Scripture examples. At this church it was using Titus.

So Friday and Saturday I taught verse by verse through Titus 1 and 2, and brought in the context of the geography of the island of Crete, Titus' relationship with Paul, etc. and the people were riveted on the teaching.

On Sunday Alex, Siby's brother informed me that I was expected to "preach" on Sunday instead of "teach." I asked the difference and he had a good explanation. He said that teaching is more informative and preaching is more direct, expecting action and a response. It is also a bit more passionate in delivery than teaching typically is. In my Bible school days this was a topic that surfaced and got batted around now and then. I smiled and told him I would make some adjustments, though the two days prior certainly had some passionate points! Alex smiled knowingly. This was a cultural expectation.

Sunday morning was quite the experience. There were 300-400 people under that roof. The pastor, in his excited passion, addressed the people many times getting them to be more and more electrified. The music was loud and upbeat with a whole lot of clapping. We received communion together and had a number of other elements to that service before I stood up to speak. My topic was "Religion vs. Relationship" and I came primarily from Titus 3. I took a number of diversions to other passages, modeling "Scripture interpreting Scripture," and it had plenty of application. It was really well received, even as if they had never heard it before.

After the service (the same happened at the previous meetings), I had numerous people come up to have me pray for them. Most often the need was for physical healing. In one case, it was for a young couple to be able to have a baby, and another, for a husband who was an alcoholic. Sunday morning one little lady came and got my attention, whose skin pigment seemed to have congealed in blotches (I saw this twice in India), leaving most of the visible skin as pink as mine. People didn't appear to touch her, and her appearance was almost repulsive like leprosy but with no obvious wounds. She

talked on and on as if I understood, but my friend Alex came to my aid and explained that she had been unduly rejected by her family and asked me to pray for restoration, which we did. Before I prayed she slipped something into my pocket, which turned out to be a folded 100 rupee note which had the value of about \$1.50. I am keeping that note! God help her.

But the other main request was to pray for people's financial plight...debt. Their pastor fervently prayed each day, both during the service and at the end, for healing over everyone and for God to "cancel all debts."

Well, I did pray for each need that came. For the financial ones I also included the need for wisdom in handling their finances. That pervasive doctrine of prosperity would have these people be debt free, thus God would be enabling them to be irresponsible and not pay for what they are using! And the high hopes for healing as a promise from God had left people in a state of disappointment before I ever came.

It was obvious to us that the church really did not have much discernment about truth, about the Word of God, etc. Neither Siby, Alex, nor myself felt that Bible teaching was part of their Christian experience. It is par for the course in Kerala. It was a huge blessing to watch them come alive as they heard the Word of God explained! Truly a bittersweet thrill for us. And in some cases, their pastor was not even a pastor. The thought of seeing "sheep without a shepherd" was often in my mind.

But pastor Sabu was truly a good pastor and we had a great time together. How much Bible he knows or teaches was hard to determine. I know that he is stuck on the two issues of prosperity and signs and wonders, but he does love the Lord. At the end of the service they honored me with a bunch of roses, 17 to be exact! I've never received roses before. It was truly an honoring moment as each leader and the pastor came and gave me a hug. They asked when I would come again (but next time bring my wife.) One couple insisted that I visit their home which I could not do this time. I found out that it is illegal for a foreigner to stay over night in a private home.

Kochin (Cochin)

After the service a brother drove us to the train station in Kottayam. That station was packed with humanity including people stretched out on the floor under blankets. When we arrived we looked at the reader-board and found that the train was to leave that same minute! Vying for position by pushing his way to the ticket counter (that's how it is done in India), Siby managed to secure our tickets and we ran to the train (thankfully, it was late to leave), managed to push through the people standing in the doorway of the coach, and found a small spot on a seat for the two of us. One guy joined his friends on the opposite bench so we would have room. What a ride. Doors and windows were all open, every conceivable empty spot, standing or sitting was filled and the smell on the train as well as coming in the open windows and doors made Siby cover his nose with a cloth. He said it was to keep the dust out but I'm thinking it may have had another motive. It was pretty vile. There was a bench above our bench seat as well as one above the bench which faced us, and someone was stretched out on each. It seemed to be a first come, first served arrangement, though there were numbers on the seats.

After one or two stops there was a strange experience when a "better-dressed" young woman walked into our area of the coach which was essentially a birth which was not enclosed, having two benches facing one another and two benches directly above, and

having an isle on the side with a bench against that wall, facing our birth. The woman looked at the young men on the bench facing us and clapped her hands and proceeded to touch two of them on the head, hard enough to make me think that she was related to them and did it in fun. They ignored her. She again said something and pushed both of their heads a bit gruffly, obviously expecting them to jump up and move. They again ignored her, not making eye contact as if they were unaware of her presence in the coach. She gestured in frustration and moved down to the next birth and repeated it, or so it sounded. I assumed this because it was so noisy and clogged with people that I lost track of her. But I wondered if this was a “caste-system” move. They were obviously laborers with no belongings and she seemed to think herself better. I asked Siby about it later and he thought that it had to do with the seat number but I’m not certain he saw what I saw. There had been another incident with a seat number and a woman and after a tussle the man moved to let her have that seat. I will never know, but I am suspicious of what I saw. After she moved on the young men looked at each other and smiled as if they had gotten away with something!

We made it to Cochin and it was certainly a pleasure to get off of that train. It was a great baptism into their culture however and not to be my last train ride. More on India trains later.

From there Siby secured a taxi but while he was away for 30 minutes or so, a beggar came near me to ask for a hand out. He was a memorable guy with a blanket around him, wild whitish hair, bright, intense eyes and a smile, mocking me for ignoring him. He tried several different languages and I just waved him away. I had been advised several times to give nothing as it simply enables their lifestyle rather than helping them. And if others see a handout given, that will cause them to swarm!

The taxi came and we were taken to the YWAM training center in Cochin. Another meeting had cancelled out because no one signed up for it so Alex and Siby called this center and we were spontaneously invited. There, we were met by several young men, then one of the leaders came out to meet us. We were shown to our room then to the dining area since it was time to eat.

My teaching plan was to teach hermeneutics. However, as we sat at dinner with Raj (short for Rajneesh), the planned speaker of the week, Siby told him that I had been engaged in a ministry into communist Europe in 1985, smuggling Bibles. Well, honestly, we did take some Bibles in, but my main task was to come along-side pastors to encourage them. We also took many other items as we became aware of their needs. So Raj wanted to hear some of my stories. I shared a few then he asked what I was intending to share the next day and I told him. Raj told me that he really felt that this small group was not in need of more teaching but that my testimony of these experiences would be very valuable. The more he talked about it the more we agreed and that is what I did the first day. The 7 young men were riveted on the stories. The second day I decided to go further and share my personal story, my salvation testimony then what the Lord did for me after the Eastern Europe experience to guide me to the next ministry. The purpose was to give a living testimony as to how God has led in my life with the hopes that they could trust God with theirs.

As it turned out, these young men were pretty young in their faith. One of them most likely did not know the Lord yet. I picked up on this as several others were trying to

witness to him. I do not think they would have been ready for Bible Study Methods or Hermeneutics, but God knows.

These guys were in the YWAM Discipleship Training School (DTS) of which there are many scattered around the world. But I was quite saddened at their training program here. It didn't seem to be training in truth from the Scriptures, nor knowledge about God but in seeking some experiential thing from God. Siby, who has been with YWAM for years affirmed this to me including the fact that not all centers are the same.

Their early morning session was a "worship" time together and it woke us up. It was loud, and it sounded a bit monotonous. A keyboard was playing and everyone seemed to pray as loud as possible, and all at the same time. Later I was in their dining hall and saw a poster which had a saying in English: "Only extreme worship is true worship and brings extreme results-Transformation" – Bill Johnson. I can't help but wonder what he meant by that statement. It is so vague that I can make it mean many things. But now I had more understanding of what I heard in the early morning hours. It was their interpretation of that saying. I mentioned to Siby what Romans 12:1-2 says about worship and he was tracking exactly with that. But, we had a short moment with them (two days) and hopefully impacted them toward following the truth.

Vandipariyar

From Cochin we were able to borrow a car and driver (Nelson) and head up into a mountainous area 5-6 hours east where Siby and Alex were raised. That was a road to beat all roads. I haven't said anything about the roads and the driving yet but I'll insert here that it was almost nothing but ascending curves. The straightest stretches after we started up were no more than 40-50 yards long. We shared the road with many taxis, cars, motorcycles, full and mid-sized trucks, dump trucks, pedestrians and many buses. The width of the road itself was made up of two narrow lanes with a dividing line, which was sometimes solid and sometimes broken. All traffic passed all other traffic at some point in time and it was most often on turns with the solid line in place since that made up most of the road. What was most unbelievable was that it worked! More on traffic later.

We arrived safely at Siby's home where Alex and their dad were waiting for us. Their dad had been cooking a meal for us in anticipation of our arrival. What a wonderful meal! It included a dish made of tapioca (extremely different than we know here in the west), which was most like a starchy potato dish. More about Tapioca later.

He also made spicy fish, beef, other vegetables and a tortilla-like bread, I think it is called, "Pan," which we had at most meals. It was an amazing meal.

After dinner Siby, Alex, Nelson and I headed out on the second leg of our journey, to another town where a man met us and led us by motorcycle up to a property with a sign that said, "Children's Home." It was Thursday evening and we had traveled all day. This facility was where I was to meet with some young pastors for a two-day seminar starting the next day. After we met a few people I asked about the "Children's Home" and they said that some radical Hindus had caused some problems. They were jealous of them and of their money so had accused them of taking kids from homes (almost a "kidnapping" accusation) and brought them here to convert them. They tried to find out the source of the money that was required to keep the kids and would not believe that people voluntarily donated to help the kids. The Hindus insisted on having the

Orphanage for themselves so they could run it and that had forced the people to shut it down one year ago. The folks were very sad about that.

Because of the potential local pressure from the radical Hindus the hosts wanted to make sure I was safe and told us not to go on walks, and not to be too public. They did not seat me in the front seat of a car as they had been doing, but in the back. Typically the front seat is the seat of honor. At our meetings we did not use microphones and were very discrete. Something happened at our second meeting as I was teaching. Someone walked up toward the building where I could not see, and several of them became a little agitated. One of the guys was motioned to get up and deal with it, which he did. I never did find out what that was about.

Later Thursday evening we were driven to a place, kind of a guest house, in which it was legal for us to stay, as long as we stayed out of sight. In the morning they brought us breakfast then we drove down and joined them for the first meeting. The teaching time each day was to be about 3 hours.

The first day I taught on “The purpose of a pastor.” We spent a lot of time in Acts 20:17-30; 1 Tim. 1:3-5; and many other places. The group was made up of a few leaders, both men and women, as well as other people from their church. There were 20-25 people. The young lady who had organized it, Jency, was my translator. She had gone through the YWAM training and was hoping to go back into ministry with them. After the second day she pulled me aside and kind of whispered, “Please pray for me. I am 33 years old and not married. Most women get married in their early 20’s. My parents won’t let me go back into ministry or to a YWAM school unless I am married.” I did pray for her and still am praying. I told her that I felt she was pretty, intelligent, loved the Lord, cooked well, and that there were some dumb guys around! It made her smile but she truly is in a cultural plight. Anyway, it was her first experience translating and with help from others now and then, she did a great job.

That evening we had an impromptu time with 7-8 people inviting them to ask questions. The main question that arose was, “How do you prepare a lesson or sermon?” So I talked about personal preparation, then about knowing the subject and knowing the class or congregation. I talked about the introduction, intending to draw people in, then the main body, then the conclusion. As I heard many years ago, I told them, “Tell them what you are going to say, say it, then tell them what you said.” I also used the illustration of an airplane 1. taking off, 2. flying, 3. landing and related this to the teaching/preaching opportunity. This led into some great conversations. After a while we were served a great meal then drove to our guest house.

The second day I led them through the Hermeneutics guidelines and they really responded with excitement. Going through this study was different with each group but the response was always one of delight, as if they’d discovered a treasure!

Two of the men that had come had ridden a small motorcycle (about 150c.c.) for about 300 km (180 miles) to join us! One older woman was a laborer, who, if she missed a day of work it really messed up her budget. She came both days! Another man was J. J., also formerly with YWAM but came home four years ago to deal with some family issues. Jency had called J.J. and invited him to the meetings so he came, partly out of courtesy to her, but also he was praying for direction from the Lord, he told me later. He asked God, “Please let the speaker give me some direction from You.” He also told me that he came the second day out of desire because God really had spoken to him! The

teaching on the “Purpose of a Pastor” the first day had a renewed excitement in him for ministry. But the second day as I taught the Hermeneutics guidelines, he was reignited in his desire for God’s Word and asked me to pray for him. He felt he had a pastoral calling but in the previous four years he had gotten lazy, etc. Now his former zeal was ignited and I believe that he has the potential of serving the Lord in a mighty way. His heart for truth from the Bible was wonderful! After the first session of the second day, Jency asked him to take over with the translating. It was almost flawless! He shared with me later that initially he really did not have much of an interest in coming to our meetings, but God had met him there and he was so appreciative to me and glad that he came!

After the first day of teaching Siby and Alex wanted to take me on a boat tour at Periyar Tiger Preserve also known as Periyar National Park. When we got to the kiosk where we were to buy the tickets we were told they were all sold out. So a new plan came to order. We met Jency and her mom in another town, and her brother drove a motorcycle accompanying us up a long mountain road to the crest of the mountains. On the way up we saw many hills/mountains covered with tea plants. This area is well known for its tea. The tea plants were very old bushes, low growing like some of our mountain bushes. They were thick with growth, tight together and had paths criss-crossing all over the hillsides where small groups of people would walk in order to harvest the top, tender leaves. There was a tourist stop at the top and booths selling trinkets, food, etc. It was an amazing overlook though a bit hazy from pollution. It was there that I had my first monkey experience. Several smaller monkeys were a cute nuisance to people who were walking on the paved path. They hung out on the metal rail or chased random people who ran as if it were a tiger! I tried to act nonchalant and they did not ever “attack.” I think they loved to get a rise out of people and feel superior. They were obviously begging for handouts yet seemed to be somewhat irritated that we were there. Traveling with these people and experiencing things like this together allowed us to relate to one another and grow close in a short period of time. When we came back to the teaching environment it was more like family.

After the second day of teaching we went to the home of Jency and her family and were fed a wonderful meal. I am very fond of India food, particularly in the south. These ladies must cook from wee hours of the morning preparing the 5-7 course meal. The people in these areas were quite poor. The people had to work hard each day to exist, yet fed us as if we were royalty! Their heart was truly engaged in hospitality. Upon departure this family gave me a baggie half-full of black pepper corns that they had harvested from wild pepper trees near their property. These are hand picked individually which must have taken quite some time. Pepper corns are available in our stores at home, but these became nearly as valuable as gold to me. What wonderful, loving people.

When we left their home after that final meal, we took a man down to the nearby town we were passing through. He turned out to be a “healing and prosperity doctrine” pastor with very little Bible knowledge. Prosperity and seeking signs and wonders were the only two points he seemed to believe in. He and Siby bantered back and forth all the way to town. Now and then I picked up an English word so was able to track a little bit. Siby, Alex and Nelson filled in the details later. This man had only been at the second meeting, but even so, he had heard the whole hermeneutics teaching. God knows what He is doing!

From there we proceeded to a type of state park called “Kalvari Mount Ecotourism, Valley of Wonders,” to look at the large lake formed by a dam which was seen just above our hotel in Goshen. Not far from this site was Siby and Alex’s home where they were raised, though inaccessible from there. It was certainly a beautiful lake with steep hills jutting up out of the water. It was the same lake on which we wanted to tour the day before. There was a simple though intriguing item I saw here. There was a hinged horizontal pole barrier stopping each car that came up to the gate. On the building side where the rangers waited for a payment, the horizontal pole had a rope attached, going down to a pulley anchored to the bottom, then up to a pulley on the under side of the roof, then to another pulley further in and still under the roof, then the rope came down into the hands of a ranger. The opposite end of the barricade was hinged on an upright pole, and had a short end sticking out. That end had a huge rock (for weight) permanently attached and suspended to that end. The simple process was that the ranger would slowly let rope out while the weight of the rock pulled down, tipping the long end of the barricade up allowing the car to pass, then pull it back down. Ingenious use of leverage and weight! No motor required.

From there we drove to the town of Goshen where Nelson and I would spend two nights in a hotel owned by believers. Siby and Alex caught a bus to go back up to their dad’s house for the next two nights.

Before they left we stopped in to a Chai shop outside of our hotel and indulged. While sitting there, enjoying our Chai (about 5:00 p.m. as I recall) music, then a voice chanting a prayer came over a loud speaker which was just up the road about 50 yards. This was a Muslim prayer and the volume was high so everyone could hear. In fact, it was so loud that no one could get away from the penetrating sound. Thankfully it was only going for a matter of minutes. To my surprise I was awakened at 5:00 a.m. the next morning (Sunday) with the same routine coming from the same loud speaker! It did come to an end but after about 5 minutes loud music began to play, even closer and louder than the former! I thought, “How miserable to live here. You’d get little solid sleep!” Later on that morning Nelson and I were talking about it and he told me that the second one was from a Christian church! I had to laugh. Competition at its finest! I later realized that in the bigger scheme it may have been a Catholic church which broadcast their version of prayer and praise, but in that culture it would have been much closer to what a Christian believed than the Muslims! But I also found out from Siby that prayer for a Muslim was a requirement for salvation. If he missed one of the five prayers a day his salvation was in jeopardy. There are other similar pressures of legalism, which often gave Siby an open door of dialog with a person of Muslim faith.

Spending the night with Nelson also gave us some good time to talk. He told me that he usually does not talk much but rather, sits back and listens. But he felt comfortable with us, sensing that we were honest and open for conversation so he was able to share with Siby and I about some of his concerns about YWAM leadership and the problems he was having with the prosperity and healing doctrines. But on our second night he told me that there were three desires he had and asked me for advise, for resources and for prayer. Those interests were, 1. Inspire people to start Christian schools in India, 2. Start seminars where children can be taught (like our 5-day clubs or V.B.S. ministries), 3. To encourage people to step up and strive for more. He was referring to politics, administrative positions, education, all having to do with mobilizing them to set

their aspirations higher regarding their vocation, especially to make a larger impact for Christ in their state and country. Nelson was full of fun, full of life and vision, and was an excellent driver. He gave us 4 full days of his time leaving his wife and two small children back in Cochin.

Vazhavara

In the morning (Sunday) Nelson and I met Siby and Alex at the church in that area. The church building was a small cement building like a concrete bunker. It echoed like one as well. When we walked up Alex and the pastor were there and we spent a few moments together. People started to arrive and we all removed our shoes and went inside. There were about 15 chairs and mats on the floor in front of the chairs. Most sat on the mats.

I was told I would have 30-40 minutes to preach and no longer. For some reason they are sticklers for ending on time though starting is always on their “Indian Time.”

The service began with the pastor on his knees in prayer, praying with more and more intensity. Then he began to sing with a powerful diaphragm and clap his hands louder than I would think possible and did not let up for the entire song, of about 15 minutes. The only other instrument was Siby’s dad playing a small drum with a homemade drumstick, a stick with a cloth knob on the end. They both kept a marvelous beat. As that song ended another one began without the clapping. This went for at least 10 minutes as well.

The pastor said or did a number of things that I could not follow, but I assumed that they were typical of a Sunday morning. I kept looking at my watch knowing that I was to stop by 12:45. He then said to turn to Ps. 23. I did so and enjoyed myself there. He read a bit then began to preach, it seemed to me. There were plenty of “Amens” and “Halleluiahs.” I figured it must be good, so kept indulging myself in the Psalm. At one point Siby leaned over and said he would tell me what the pastor was saying later. As it turned out he did exactly what they expected. He took one word without the context and preached about something to do with their need to give money to get prosperity (or something) etc. It was probably the words, “I shall not want.” But they said that it had nothing to do with that wonderful Psalm, whatsoever. It really disturbed all three of the men that I was with. He went on for 20-25 minutes then finally had Siby come up to introduce me. As I went to the front He sat down against the back wall behind me, and kind-of out of sight of most of the people. I figured that was his common practice and started in with my message. I did a little bit of a conglomerate of the messages I had taught in Puthupalli, primarily addressing the difference between religion and having a relationship with God, and trying to encourage them to individually seek God in His Word, not just waiting for their pastor on Sunday morning.

Alex and Siby both encouraged me when they said that what I had preached “was exactly what these people needed.” I have to say that God did this over and over on this India trip. I don’t feel that I am smart enough to come up with such need-meeting sermons spontaneously! In this case I had not previously known this pastor, nor anything about him. I did not have any idea of what he sang nor what he “preached.” But God did! And God loves these people.

Anyway, at the end of the meeting the pastor did not hang around very long. He stayed for a few minutes then took the offering out of the box and walked down the path

with his wife, caught a passing taxi and they were gone. Alex and Siby told me that was his habit. He did not know the people, did not eat with them, he just performed this routine each Sunday. He had been there one year and had two more to go, as the custom of their presiding Pentecostal leaders was to place someone new as pastor every three years. The people are praying for a real pastor to come. When all this and more was explained to me, the wording of the Bible came back to mind, "They are as sheep without a shepherd!" This was not the last time I would be reminded of that picture. There was no accountability between the leaders of the Pentecostal denomination and the leadership of about 30 churches in this area where they would place men to "pastor." Most of these men apparently had no idea what a pastor was, nor any desire to find out. Theirs was but a mode of life and the people had nothing else so they put up with it. The last pastor was truly a cult leader and took half of the people and all the money (he even tried to steal the building and property), and started another work. The people were afraid of him. He had been violent and threatened them. Siby was told that at the next town he went to the people of the town had beat him severely and broken some teeth out! He died a bit later of a heart attack.

On the bright side, the people genuinely loved God and knew that they were to gather together as believers. That allowed them the grace to put up with the men who had unfortunately been placed over them. That genuine love seemed to explode with delight as I taught some very basic things from God's word. It truly was as if they had been starving and sat down to a meal and ravenously consumed it!

We drove away and the men filled me in on the sad details about these pastors which I mentioned above.

As we drove we stopped at another church facility just off the main road and met a man who had been at the meetings at Jensey's home. His dad was a pastor there and they had a Bible school, similar in design as the YWAM Discipleship Training School. We met the 6-7 young men who had come there for school, got a complete tour of their facility then went on our way. What we did discover is that the main leader (a second son who was away) seemed to be pretty impressed with himself as was seen on his business card which we all received. He had 3-4 sets of letters after his name, but some of those included his high school accomplishments, Nelson told me! Then it seemed that the accreditation group that they were associated with may have been started by them! Oh what a mess.

We drove back to Goshen and the following morning we picked Siby up and went on that boat tour of the Periyar Tiger Preserve. We bought the bus passes, bought a parking pass and rode the bus up to the boat launch and kiosk where we had to buy the boat tickets. We had to use the toilet and found that we had to pay for that also! Siby and Nelson were not impressed with the pay, pay, pay part of our day. More about this tour later.

Pune to Lonavala

After the tour Nelson drove us the rest of the way to Cochin and dropped us off at the airport. We gave money to him to cover gas, car use and for his time. Again I must add, what a dear brother.

Our flight was during the night so as to arrive in Pune early Monday morning. Because of the way they do things in India we were not allowed to enter the airport until

closer to the time of our departure and not without a ticket. Because of schedule changes we had to toss my original tickets from Pune to Nagpur, then Nagpur to Delhi, so we needed purchase a different one that ended up in Delhi one week earlier than originally planned. We attempted to buy that final ticket in Pune since we had time and we did not fare so well. The first lady we spoke to in a booth outside of the terminal said it should be no problem to simply change the dates. She then directed us to another young lady seated next to her, who, after assessing our ticket said it would cost 4,500 Rupees (the full purchase price). Siby tried to negotiate, tried to get hold of Rick Cook (in Oregon), then went back to the lady, who told us the price was now 7,700 R's! Then it jumped up to 11,000 as I recall before we walked away in frustration without purchasing my ticket.

The flight from Cochin put us in Pune early in the morning on Monday. We caught a taxi which took us to the train station where we bought tickets for Lonavala, walked on a ramp over the tracks (which is a very good idea, mind you), and got on a train. We did not expect to meet that schedule so had planned our arrival at the YWAM center much later. The train arrived 1½ hours later in Lonavala, midway between Pune and Mumbai (formerly Bombay). We got off the train at about 7:00 a.m., walked to the end of the train and Siby looked across the tracks and said, "Let's go!" We jumped down the 4 feet from the ramp to the tracks, crossed about 3 more sets of tracks (looked for oncoming trains) and headed out through a hole in the fence where a bunch of three-wheel taxi's were waiting for business. He negotiated with one driver, we got in and he delivered us to the gate of the YWAM center. He honked the horn and a guard came out of a building and unlocked it for us. As it turns out, that was the guy's occupation. Whether someone comes to relieve him or not, I do not know. But he waits in his hut, sleeps through the day or night waiting for someone to come so he can unlock the gate. This includes vehicles or pedestrians.

We arrived at about 7:30 a.m. on Monday and Siby messaged the leader (Shibin) while we were waiting for the gate to open. Shibin met us as we approached the buildings and welcomed us with a heartfelt greeting. We talked for a few minutes then he showed us to our room and told us that breakfast would be delivered to our room.

Shibin informed us that because he thought we would arrive later he had switched the class I was to teach with an afternoon session, for which I was very glad! There was an assembly at 10:00 a.m. that we were welcome to attend, which we did. After the session we arranged to meet with Shibin to discuss the week ahead of us. I really needed to be clear as to the expectations.

The assembly was of 300(+) people, and 250-270 were students. They had some loud music on stage for their time of "worship," then a speaker from the U.S. was introduced who was quite motivational. The Lord started bringing thought after thought as to what I would present to this group at 4:00p.m. What amazing potential in this room!

But as I talked with Siby and especially as we met with Shibin things became more clear. This school was one of YWAM's University of Nations (U. of N.) and the Discipleship Training School (DTS), in which I was to participate was one part of that larger school. In fact each facet or area of study was considered a separate school. The DTS students were 37, not 270. I told Shibin about the reasons that Terry Pruett could not come and that the Lord had put on my heart and mind to teach Hermeneutics, and possibly the book of Titus. The other possibilities were the Purpose of a pastor or a need that Alex had mentioned, teaching on forgiveness.

I asked Shibin what his expectations were and he said that the students were expecting an overview of the Bible. Whoa, that was not what I had heard. But, he said the school was set up with that as the course for the week, so I said, "Okay! We'll do it." And as we were talking the Lord started showing me how I could weave Hermeneutics into the week of lessons and it could greatly enhance the overview of the Bible. I winked at Shibin and said, "I know how to submit!" We all laughed.

I was told that the classes began at 10:30, then had a 10-minute break at about 11:30 and would end by 12:30-12:45. Essentially I had two hours a day to work with and he said that "breakout sessions" with questions for them to talk through in small groups then answer in the larger group would be really helpful. As it turned out, it was expected. That cut the teaching time down even more!

One of the drawbacks for me that I mentioned at the beginning was that I did not have my normal-use Bible. The thought of losing it to thievery or it becoming damaged from extensive travels or lost in a piece of baggage was not something I was willing to go through. Thus, I left it home and took a much older, somewhat broken and worn out Bible that I retired years ago. The newer Bible has more extensive notes and dates that I have written in it and is truly my best tool after all these years.

So, I had till 4:00 to come up with the first lesson and try to figure out how to cover the 66 books of the Bible by Friday.

4:00 came and I was introduced. I told the class where we would go then read from 6-7 passages in the New Testament where people preached about Jesus, yet they only had the Old Testament as their Bible. This gave the first purpose of the O.T. to them and they got it! I put the first three points of the Hermeneutics guidelines on the white board and referred to them over and over. We began at the beginning (Genesis, the book of beginnings) and talked about the simplicity of accepting what God said about creation though no one was there to observe it. I also spent some time with 3:15, the first prophecy about Jesus. The prophecies about Jesus became one of my main themes as I pointed out many through the O.T. books, which reinforced the guideline of Scripture interpreting Scripture. We certainly talked about obscure passages that must give way to the obvious under the heading of that same guideline.

On Tuesday I put the 4th guideline and worked it into the teaching, and by Wednesday or Thursday the 5th guideline was applied. They got it!

By Wednesday at 1:00 we had accomplished the whole of the Old Testament and these students were excited! The O.T. had always been a boring, closed book for them and now they couldn't wait to read it more extensively! Praise God! We were making far more headway than any of us had anticipated! Also, at each meal Siby and I were seated with two or three different students, allowing us to get to know each one, answer questions and give advice. Between those meals and class time I came to love these students and staff! There was a wonderful collection of some precious servants of God.

On Wednesday I had some students come and ask me to teach these things to the pastors in their area. Remember, I was teaching an overview of the Bible and Hermeneutics, very basic stuff. On Friday another student, Prejith in his mid 20's told me that his dad, a pastor and several other pastors in Kerala decided that they did not want the current things passed on to the next generation of pastors. They see the desperate need for change. Prejith and fellow student, Ansen asked if I might come to disciple the young pastors in Bible study and Bible teaching. What a privilege! They have begun falling in

love with God's Word, which will deepen their knowledge of God and produce a more pure worship. That is a direct answer to our prayer. Our God loves those people and is most interested in truth!

The other consistent message that I was able to preach at each location was the difference between religion and having a relationship with God. It was understood and well received. May the Lord graciously displace the lies with truth. Amen!

Thursday and Friday saw the finishing of the New Testament, and with plenty of work with the Hermeneutics guidelines.

Backing up, on Tuesday (I think) Shibin asked me to present a teaching to the staff of the DTS on Wednesday. The one-hour session was to be divided into two subjects: 1.) Biblical Conflict Resolution, 2.) Leadership Qualities.

This session was designed to help the 11 staff members deal with these DTS students at school but also when they take them out as teams on their 11-week outreach into some part of India on March 30th. The session seemed to be very helpful to them.

So, with this new need in mind, and to be further helpful to the staff, I also designed many of the questions for the "breakout sessions" to be based on self-evaluation in conflict resolution from various passages of the Bible. I remember particularly Proverbs 15:1-2 with the basic questions, "How should you apply these principles with your roommate here at DTS? How can you apply them as you go out together on your outreaches?" Several testimonies came later that they had never seen these verses in that light. They had read them, but now the verses made sense. One girl called home to talk it over with her parents, apologizing to them for her attitude in some things she had done or said! Others made things right with their roommate. The application was tremendous.

Siby left me Wednesday, taking the train back to Pune where he had arranged to talk with some people who were in ministry reaching Muslim people. This is Siby's passion and he has been involved reaching Muslims for decades, so had a lot of experience to draw from to assist them.

Before Siby left on Wednesday morning he was asked to address the staff of the whole U. of N. about Servant Leadership on Friday afternoon.

On Wednesday morning there was a full assembly of students at 10:00 a.m. and the wife of the main director of the U. of N. headed it up. She addressed the students about the abuse that many of them had experienced in either their families or in public schools. In both places abuse is a form of training, so they think. But it does tremendous damage, often damaging the child for a lifetime. They are told that they are stupid. They are beaten. Some of them experience sexual abuse by the teachers or staff while being told that they will amount to nothing. The lady had asked several students to stand up and give their testimonies (in generalities, not specifics; it was done tastefully) so that others could relate, realizing that they were not the only ones in the crowd. The students did talk about Christ coming into their lives and making a difference as well as their acceptance at the U. of N. but especially about how God really sees them. Then the leaders had students and staff come forward who had been teachers, though not necessarily abusers. They stood and asked the students for forgiveness for their fellow teachers who had done such things. Then the leaders called for people to come forward to have people pray for them, for forgiveness, for healing, for release of lies that had bound them. And they asked anyone one who felt so inclined to come forward to pray for different ones. It was a precious time.

One of the ladies who shared her story was from Romania and had been in school before the Iron Curtain had come down in 1989 as well as afterward. The abuse and pressure there was about the same as these Indian students were sharing. It was gut-wrenching to hear some of the stories. After the meeting was finished I made my way over to the Romanian lady and found that she was from the northeast where I had never been, but we shared about her people and the needs as well as my love for her people.

After that assembly and prior to our class, Shibin asked if I could address some of the same issues as we went through our classes. So, at the next class I shared some of my own testimony from a dysfunctional background and how the Lord had walked me through a process of forgiveness and healing. The people of India have a narrow paradigm about Americans. Not only are we rich but we also come from very normal, healthy families, which are typically Christian. My, how wrong they are, and I was able to tell 37 students the truth. I believe that this also helped them to relate to me and was fairly endearing.

While Siby was gone a lady asked me if I was going to speak, addressing the staff of the whole U. of N. about Servant Leadership on Friday afternoon. I told her that I had not been asked to speak, only Siby. When he returned on Thursday night we chatted about the subject somewhat, prayed together and he was up till about 3:00 a.m. working on that presentation. We went to the assembly auditorium at the designated time on Friday and found a seat in the circle of 60-70 staff. The main leader introduced “us” and said that “we” were there to talk about Servant Leadership! Siby and I looked at each other and kind-of laughed at the inside joke of it. So, he talked for about 30 minutes and did a good job. Meanwhile, I was quickly jotting notes of principles, of Scriptures and of illustrations that I had either heard or lived through myself. So, Siby ended and introduced me! I would say that between the two of us we got the bases covered well and the people were definitely challenged. Afterward, the leader publically said that principle of Servant Leadership is one of 11 principles that YWAM has in their main guidelines. They had all memorized it along with the other guidelines but had never really worked it through! They were so excited and thrilled about the principle, as if it were a new one. I had staff that I had not previously met come over to me that day and evening saying how much they appreciated what I/we had said. This was another spontaneous ministry opportunity from the Lord. Little did anyone know of the sweating I did privately for about 30 minutes!

At the end of our last class on Friday Shibin asked the class for interaction. One of the comments was from Prejith who said to me, “It seems like you have the whole Bible memorized! How do you do that? Do you have any tools?” I told him that I certainly don’t have it all memorized, by a long site, but what I do is memorize a passage one phrase at a time, going back to the beginning each time I add a new phrase. And what you need to do is, start with the first verse!

Two weeks after I had come home Prejith e-mailed me. In my return note I asked if he had started memorizing Scripture yet? He responded, “*I am practicing to by heart the verses, and it’s really effective. I am really thankful to you for the way, and tomorrow onwards I will start with 1 Timothy.*” What a delight for me to read that and know that he is serious!

As this week in Lonavala ended, by God's grace I was able to share with hundreds of people over the 3-week period on 17 different occasions, in 5 different locations. What a trip!

Delhi

Early Saturday (5:00 a.m.) we were to leave, so Shibin arranged for a Taxi to meet us at the gate. We woke the guard up, then the taxi took us to the train station. I recall that taxi ride as the most terrifying of them all. Though it was early and there was somewhat less traffic, this guy was aggressive and not to be stopped! It's kind-of mentally belittling to be in a dinky, squatty, three-wheel glorified golf cart going up against a full-sized bus or truck. But he didn't care, speeding as if he had a death-wish!

We arrived at the train station, secured a ticket and proceeded to Pune where we would catch the flight to Nagpur and then to Delhi, we hoped!

From the train station we got a taxi to the airport, and successfully purchased my ticket (an item of prayer for days) for the same plane and with seating next to each other. By God's grace we flew to Nagpur then proceeded to Delhi. There we took a taxi to Siby's home and rested for the remainder of Saturday. On Sunday we went to Siby and Namkha's church along with their 13 year old daughter, Karena. This church had more in common with us at Takilma Bible Church than most churches in America. They are strong on expository preaching and are similar in many of the ways we do things (the how to's of practical ministry) as well as theologically. One of their elders preached out of John 13, concerning Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. It was most excellent!

We met a long-time friend of Siby and Namkha's for lunch after church and had the most wonderful Chinese/Taiwan meal that I have ever eaten. It was probably closer to true Chinese than we have here in America.

Gift buying ministry

We then went to a Delhi-Hutt, an outdoor market place with representatives of people and hand-made commodities from all over India. Siby paid 30 R's for himself, Namkha and Koreena (total) to enter the site and 100R's for me! Tourists pay more.

There were many booths with silk or woolen scarfs, blankets, clothing, a booth full of brass gods, booths of carved wood, etc. If we were to look at each booth and enjoy all the variety of food it could easily have been an all-day experience.

As I looked toward the first booth of Kashmir silks, the man operating it saw me, and as he walked toward me was saying, "Kashmir, Kashmir," and showing various items. I actually felt accosted and did not stay there. Booth after booth was just like that. I had been warned previously that if you are American, you are rich. So, I felt like I was shouting, "I am white, therefore I am a rich American!" I could not get away from them pushing me to buy their wares. Well, being a bit stubborn, I would wave them away and not even look at their items. That was to their loss as well as mine. But I felt as though I was raw flesh and they, a mosquito! It was somewhat enjoyable otherwise, but I didn't spend one Rupee except on the entrance fee.

It was Sunday and I did want to buy a few gifts for my family since they had put up with a lot, sacrificing in certain ways that I might be away for so long. So, when we arrived back home Namkha brought out some of the commodities she had for sale and I was able to peruse them for hours, thinking about each person and what they might like.

Siby and Namkha have a unique ministry among Muslim people, which includes those commodities. They visit Muslim homes in villages in the north and when they find items that the people have made they purchase a bulk of them. It helps the family financially and it builds a relationship. That gives Siby and Namkha an opening for conversation about their faith and their God, and an opportunity to make them re-think about their own religion. They always give them the gift of a Bible, which is received with surprise and delight! Namkha then sells the items at local events at home in Delhi, events that are held by their Christian school, or church, etc., as well as sell them to people like me who are passing through. As they sell the item they say to let the item be a reminder to pray for the Muslim people who made them! The money is then recycled back into the purchase of more items. It is a brilliant outreach! I was able to bring home items for my family from Muslim people in Kashmir, Ansari, a people from Saharan Pur in Uttar Pradesh (some 40 million Muslim families), and wooden things from Gujarat, which are made by Hindu families.

Monday was spent as a relaxing day, primarily packing (stuffing) my carry-on case and day-pack. I took a nap in the late afternoon then was awake with them till the taxi came at 11:20 p.m. to take me to the airport.

My flight left at 3:15 a.m. Tuesday morning arriving in Amsterdam at 7 (something), Tuesday morning. It was an 8 hour, 2 minute flight and we lost 5 ½ hours. After a 2 ½ hour layover the next flight left for Portland, OR and was 10 hours and 15 minutes long, and we lost another 9 hours. We landed in Portland at 11:40 (or so) Tuesday morning. Doing the math, that meant that my Tuesday morning was 25 hours and 30 minutes long, not including one minute of the afternoon.

Ironically or by God's design, on the flight from Portland to Medford I was seated next to a woman who had just come from a friend's home in Idaho. One thing led to another and she told me about attending church with her friend in Boise. She asked, "Have you ever heard of the Bethel church, and Bill Johnson?" What an irony after everything I had just experienced concerning that poison in India. Well, as it turns out this woman was not a believer, though "open," she said. But she is very concerned about her friend because a lot of what she just experienced was not very credible. I don't remember her words exactly, but she was kind and very relieved that I, as a pastor did not buy into what Bill Johnson and that movement was propounding. All the conversation that ensued was very friendly, and I felt I had been somewhat comforting to her. I see that as an appointment set up by our Father.

A few Idiosyncrasies of India

I'll include here a few excerpts of experiences or observations that I made in the 21 days I was in India.

Time difference

Oddly, and with no explanation to this point, India is 13 ½ hours different than Oregon. 13½ hours; not 13, not 14. In every other place I have ever traveled the time difference was based on the even hour. Maybe someone can enlighten me?

My first Taxi experience and typical city driving

Rick and Terry had informed me that I should not just “hail a taxi” but go to the “Prepaid Taxi” kiosk and pay for a taxi. We then hand the driver the voucher and he can’t charge more for the trip. It sounds like a great system preventing being taken advantage of. Siby and I went to that kiosk and Siby held his ground pushing his way up to the counter. If you don’t you’ll always be pushed out of the way and maybe never make it to the front of the line. Get used to it, it’s India!

We paid 270 rupees (about \$5.00) and took the voucher up to the next taxi in a long and wide line and showed it to the driver. The taxis were lined up three and four deep, though it was meant for two lines, max. From there they are all funneled into a single exit slot where they have to show the voucher to an attendant, then proceed out.

Well, Siby presented the receipt to the first driver who pointed down the line and said something I did not understand. We went down the line and presented it to another driver who pointed back up to the front of the line and had some more words. Meanwhile the taxi drivers looking for riders or trying to exit, as well as cars on the other side of the dividing wall were taking turns forming quite the chorus with their horns. Monotonous horn-honking accosted our ears. Aside from the honking there was a lot of yelling and vying for position, taking any opening and making it bigger.

We presented the receipt to another driver near the front of the line and he again pointed down the line and quickly walked away. We repeated this one more time, with the same results, usually with the driver walking away quickly. Siby told me to stay put and he went to the booth to find out what the problem is. He came back and we went up to another driver with the same results. It seemed that the front drivers would find a passenger, slide them in ahead of us, motion for us to find a different taxi, then head out the cattle chute. The drivers then added one further dimension, they started to yell at Siby to go somewhere else, then yell at each other. It was now approaching 12:30 a.m. and we were tired and getting very weary of the game. Siby finally walked up to a car, opened the door with the taxi driver yelling at him, told me to get in, then had some words with him. The driver drove forward, shut the car off, got out and found another passenger, put him in the front seat, still yelling at Siby, and we started to leave. It is illegal for the taxi driver to have two different clients like that, at least in Delhi and with this company, but we stayed and with many words drove out and toward the Centuar Hotel. Siby held it together quite well, in my opinion. The problem was that the Hotel was not very far away so they would not make much money. Thinking about it since then I realized that once they leave that taxi area, they also lose their position in line and have to start over again at the back, waiting for the forward taxis to leave. What a fiasco!

And did I mention that they drive on the left side of the road as they do in the U.K.? Britain had been in control of India for decades so that is one of the results.

The next Taxi ride was in the morning. Siby came to the hotel, picked me up and we drove to his home before coming back to the airport later in the afternoon.

That ride was with my eyes open. Very open! I did not want to shut them, and I later told my wife that if I put a blindfold on her while we traveled, she would love India!

The first words of description as I jotted down notes was, “This is not for the faint of heart!” My exact written words, while experiencing the drive were these: “A two-lane road with some room for parallel parking becomes a four-lane road that includes the side

parking. Lanes designated by a painted line were mere suggestions – all cars, taxis, motorcycles, buses, pedestrians, bicycles, some of which were pulling loaded utility trailers, were sharing the road – every road and turn for 25 minutes of travel... all were cutting in and out, driving within inches of each other, front, back and sides. They were taking turns honking at each other.” After more experience I began to understand that there is a method to this honking madness, described later. I also wrote, “I cannot adequately describe the reality of the driving, it’s worse than this. Often we were the culprit or the victim of cutting in front or to the side, squeezing someone else into an object, which they did not want to hit, so they yielded! No one allows (freely or courteously) another vehicle of any sort to be ahead of them.” This held true (at times, mind you) for ambulances as well! Everyone at some point needs to cross the traffic to get to where they need to go. It starts with honking, and waiting for an extra yard of clearance into which you place the nose of your vehicle, bicycle and even pedestrian bodies with their hand raised, though they were a bit more cautious. Next, you wait for the slightest gap in the next line (if you can call it that) and put your nose into it! Doing this allows you to weave your way across with no one voluntarily giving way, and with everyone honking, including you, and you arrive at the other side, relatively unscathed. Working one’s way into traffic or against traffic is the way of life. There is no other option. At our last meeting with Rick (who has been going to India for 20 years in ministry) we were talking about driving and he said, “I will never drive in India!” Now I fully understand.

One particular note of mine stated, “A three-lane road with two painted dividing lines had 4 lanes of cars with a lane of motorcycles in between each one, and a ‘bunch’ or ‘cluster’ of motorcycles on the far left, buses and trucks vying for position, all waiting for the light to turn green. Just before the light turned green, horns began honking. After it turned green everyone had to funnel into a narrow corridor that was wide enough for maybe two cars and a motorcycle!” I remember that it could not be accomplished quickly by anyone so all the horns behind us lite up! Combine that picture with an additional three wheel taxi wanting to cross traffic from the left to the right against all the traffic going both ways in order to turn onto the cross street! The word, “mayhem” works.

Frequently I also noticed vehicles of all sizes pass one or more vehicles, then stop to turn right or left just a few hundred feet up the road. Passing is what is done. Funny from a distance; hair-raising up close.

But, all in all I only saw one traffic accident, and that had happened before we arrived. I look at our condition in southern Oregon and we have what seems to be many more accidents per-capita and many more fatalities! Somehow the driving in India works so sit back and make the best of the ride. Also, pray that you get a driver as conscientious and careful as Nelson. I’d still go to India again though I heard of one missionary family who abandoned their post shortly after arriving in India due to a minor car accident.

After being on the road many times I realized that a single word does describe the driving in India and it is not the word, madness, mayhem or insane, though those carry some weight. It is the word, “strategy.” A driver is always thinking strategically of getting from where he is to where he wants to be. On the way home, flying from Amsterdam to Portland, I searched the movies for something to pass the time. “Cars, 3” was an option and I watched it. In the irony of it all, there was one scene that depicted

this driving very well. The trainer lady was working with 'Lightening McQueen' trying to get him back into shape for the next big race and they found themselves in a pasture surrounded by tractors, depicted like cows. The only instructions were simple, "Look for a window!" That is a priceless scene, and one that is worth renting the movie for, if nothing else but to understand the roads in India. Tractors were everywhere, close on each side squeezing them and all were moving the same direction, though switching positions; it seemed hopeless. But then one tractor slides slightly to the left or right, leaving just enough room for our two heroes to force their way forward and through. I laughed when I realized how unbelievably similar that depiction was to India.

Another of my notes stated: "Along with strategic, all driving is offensive, and I mean that two different ways. Remember, if there is a gap, front, back or either side it will be filled. Narrow slots are an opportunity." In all the riding I did on the roads of India there was only one time that I tried to slam on the brakes, but remember, I was on the passenger side, though instinctively I felt I was on the driver's side. The floor of that taxi may have two depressions in it! And the large truck didn't hit us, but I'm not sure how we got out of that one!

Driving in the mountains of India

I had the privilege of riding on three trains, several buses, one scooter, many taxis, both three and four wheel, and several personal cars.

We hadn't been on the road too long before I asked Siby if he drove, to which he replied, "No!" which came across more like, "No Way!"

So, driving with Nelson at the wheel was amazing. This brother was patient, not too aggressive, very cautious and always alert. He saw traffic signals or signs that I never did see! At one point in a small city he turned off the main road onto another one and in amazement I asked him if he was following his instinct or what? He said he had been there once before... then admitted that he had seen a sign! To me all I saw was a mass of signs, but he was able to pick the road sign out from all the business advertisements. I was duly impressed.

But no matter how careful a driver is you still have the roads and other traffic to deal with. The mountainous road to Siby and Alex's house was all up and mostly curves. It didn't take me long to notice that there was a suggestive line in the middle which was sometimes broken (you can pass safely) and sometimes solid (pass if you dare). The road was not wide enough for two full size buses (somewhat larger in girth than our typical school bus) to pass one another in opposite directions, but they did. As they drove, their inside tires were commonly over the center dividing line out of necessity. In fact, those buses had strong diesel engines and the drivers were incredibly aggressive. They passed going up hill, they passed going down. They passed on curves and steep hills with no visibility.

On the trip up the mountain we were passed by a school bus loaded with children, uphill, on a blind turn, only to pull off the road in a mile or two! We were keeping up with typical traffic speed so not going that slowly, but he just had to pass!

One of the close calls, but common I learned, we were passing uphill, and starting into a turn. We were nearly clear of the other vehicle when up ahead a car was passing coming down the hill and men were working on the side of the road. There was no

shoulder but rather a drop-off on the left and a hill on the right! But everyone braked and maneuvered and we all made it, at least past that potential incident.

American-sized dump trucks also shared the road, took up the road is more accurate and passed us at times. Two-cylinder, three wheel taxis would pass vehicles with curves ahead and little more momentum or power than the vehicle they were passing. Dealing with the buses was a memorable thing. I told Nelson at one point that they need to design these buses to pivot in the middle so they can make these turns in their own lane. There were hairpin turns beyond number on that road and when a bus comes around the turn, if it is an inside turn to them they have to take up the full outside lane as well. If it is an outside turn they must take up the inside lane. There is no other way. So, imagine an innocent vehicle traveling along, minding their own business. A turn is approaching but you cannot always see the oncoming traffic. All of a sudden, an aggressively driven bus is taking up your lane as well as theirs! Brakes are king in India. If stopping does not help, bailing off the road does, but as you might imagine, that is not always good for your health as cliffs, vertical up or vertical down, are not uncommon. Several times we were accosted by a bus or a full-size dump truck in this manner and Nelson was able to escape, at times at a full stop while the other inched by. I commented on his expertise several times and commended him for it. I did tell him that I noticed that everyone's mirror had no dust on the outside of the frame. He laughed heartily, understanding my point.

On another occasion Nelson and I were on our way to get Siby and a full sized truck with a flatbed was hauling an excavator. It was something I often see here at home. But I looked closer and saw that the bucket arm of the excavator was curled in as normal, but it was holding a motorcycle onto the truck, which had been placed at the rear of the excavator and jammed in between the tracks! We laughed and I said, "Why not?"

I have to be careful here because Nelson might read this someday. After I had related many stories to him and Siby, some from America, others from my travels, he said, "Now I am worried, hearing all these. What kind of stories are you going to tell about India?" We laughed and I assured him that I would be nice.

Horns

Horns are a way of life in India. Don't leave home without one. They are on every moving vehicle. The bicycles and adult tricycles even have little thumb ringers! They are used to alert someone else that the light is green; that someone is getting uncomfortably close; short beeps seem to be required if you are approaching someone and are about to pass; if a pedestrian is on either side and about to be squeezed by you and other traffic; on a mountain road you are expected to sound the horn as you go around a turn, blind or not. But, one long beep always means, "I am mad at you, you are obstructing my progress!"

Paving the roads

While on the mountainous trip we came across a paving crew. I took a picture (with their nodded permission) of a machine that could have stepped right out of the 30's or 40's. The dump truck was newer but the paving equipment was ancient looking. The pavement was somehow mixed in the machine then worked by hand on the road. There was a small truck, which had a large pivoting can of tar on the back, which was brought to the mix. The pavement was flattened by a large iron, rolling machine that was also ancient and from the same era. I failed to ever get a picture of one though I saw quite a

few. Wow, what hard workers these guys were. Nelson assured me that there were also very modern pavers in India. He didn't want me to get the wrong impression but knew it would get into my journal.

Cement Workers in Cochin

While teaching at the YWAM center in Cochin we were having a difficult time hearing one another. There was excessive noise coming from outside and close by.

During the break I went out on the open-air upper floor and looked directly down below. What I saw impressed me; it intrigued me. There was a large cement mixer on the ground level. It was motor-driven and maybe six feet in diameter and eight feet long so it held a relatively large batch of cement. Men had rounded metal bowls like a large wok, two feet across and with two handles on them. The process began by men taking a bowl full of rock, carried on their head to the mixer and dumping it in. Others would take sand and do the same. Another emptied bags of cement into the batch and a hose was used to add the water. This process did not cease until it was time to empty it. Cement was dumped so they could start a new batch while the wet cement was being delivered up a ladder to the next floor. The wet cement was put into a bowl, placed on someone's head and carried up a ladder. Two men on top of that floor would take it off his head, empty it into an awaiting bowl and hand him the emptied one. Then the same two men would lift the newly filled bowl up while the person to receive it placed an empty one in its place. They put it on the head of that person who would then walk it over to where the floor was being poured. They would dump it and return to the line of three to wait for their turn to take the next full bowl. I did not notice at first but the three final carriers were women! The pour was 4-5 inches thick and had a grate of re-bar as we do. Then there were finish workers, both for the initial pour and then to finish it just before it dried. Everyone had their job and had to work hard and fast to keep up with the rest of that cement chain. These workers were tough. Siby told me that they received very little pay. If they missed a day of work it might plunge them right back into poverty immediately! Another sad thing is that if they got injured it was their problem. There was no insurance, no compensation; they would simply be replaced by someone else. So sad, but that's their life.

Again, both Nelson and Siby assured me that India did have modern cement trucks, which included pumper trucks. But I wondered if there was less money paid to those workers than to rent the more modern equipment? That is a mere speculative question but legitimate, if feel.

Periyar Tiger Preserve also known as Periyar National Park

Waiting for the tour boats to load we were accosted by more monkeys. Nelson and I were leaning up against a rail and a monkey ran across the fiberglass roof, came down a pole and sat on the rail planning something. People moved away except for Nelson and me. Pretty quick the little guy ran across the rail, teeth barred and grabbed at Nelson's sleeve. Some of the other people panicked and screamed the warning, "It will bite." Nelson leisurely moved, and I slowly grabbed my pack, which was leaning against the rail and moved a bit. There was a park ranger standing there who did nothing, said nothing, he just stared blankly. I wondered what he would have done if the monkey

would have bitten, or if one of us had hit the dumb critter. Would it even matter? I am certain that these were not on the endangered list, but who knows what response would have happened.

A bit later, while we were still waiting, most of the people had gone to sit down on bench seats set up as if for a ranger talk. There were many rows of seats and a man and his son (5-6 years old?) were on the very back metal bench. A monkey came up from behind when he saw the boy holding and eating food. The man tried to shoo the monkey away and the monkey deliberately waited, then ran up and swinging his arm, hit the man on the arm then ran back as a young child would do! He did it a second time and the man just laughed, not at all on edge! People around got worried. The man then raised his backpack and kind-of went at the monkey and it quickly scampered away knowing that it had met its match!

We were finally herded onto the three boats and ours left first. The ride was very slow allowing plenty of time to look for anything on the shores, in the water or on the dead trees still standing in the water. As it turns out the high and curved dam, was one of the largest and oldest of its kind, and was put in over 100 years ago. The rivers backed up and a lake was formed. I was looking at full-grown trees still standing in the water, dead because of the water, yet not fallen over after 100 years! I wondered what kind of trees these were? They were extremely hardy and the cured wood must have been a fabulous treasure for a woodworker! I thought about Antonius Stradivarius who supposedly built his unparalleled violins from submerged dock wood. These trees were probably older, and harder than steel! I was fascinated.

As we progressed we saw several wild boars, several kinds of nesting or fishing birds as well as some large turtles. At one point, looking at least a mile ahead of us I saw some large dark critters and knew they must be elephants. I pointed these out and sure enough, when we got closer it was a small herd and the bull was irritated and was trying to move the cows and calves away! We passed them and went another mile or so and came to the end of our outward tour. Upon our return I again saw the small herd and paid more attention. There was one bull, four cows and two calves. As we approached they all maneuvered themselves into an amazing configuration. The four cows backed up against one another with their back ends, their fronts pointed out as if forming a north, south, east, west configuration. The two calves were in the middle of them. Nothing could have touched the calves without going through these mommas! And the bull was off to one side, actually facing the trees, moving around, throwing his trunk around in a threatening way. He would have taken the first charge of an enemy while the cows guarded the precious, more helpless ones! Again, I was fascinated. What a design by their Creator! I pointed these observations out to Siby, who replied, "We've got some things to learn from them about family, don't we."

We never did see a tiger, but I didn't really expect that to happen.

One mode of hauling stuff, tricycles.

These tricycles were full size with 28" (?) wheels and a bit larger than our adult tricycles. The front is a bicycle wheel and handle bar, the rear two wheels have either wooden or metal spokes with solid rubber around a steel rim. The rear tires were not pneumatic. On the back is a wooden or metal box larger than our everyday garden cart.

I saw one cart being peddled down a city street with two large cardboard boxes on the back. They looked to be the size of a tall (5'), narrow refrigerator the size that Siby and Namkha own. I was amazed and wondered if that could be so. The next day I saw a man peddling a similar tricycle directly below Siby's balcony. There were two cardboard boxes on the back and sure enough, one was a refrigerator and the other box was a large air conditioner.

While waiting for the Chinese restaurant in Delhi to open, two tricycles with a box on the back went by. The first one was being peddled, the other pushed. This was a common sight in India. What was uncommon (to me) was that there was a stack of 3/4" or 1" re-bar, full length (21'), bent in the middle into a tight arch and the tails crossed over and were tied together. The arch went over the front of the handlebars and was suspended and the tails were in back. The full weight was on the wooden cart. It appeared that there were three or four "sticks" of re-bar wired together in a bundle and each of these bundles were piled on top of the whole. From 30' feet away it was hard to count but there had to be 10-12 or even more pieces on each tricycle! Doing simple math, the weight that each man was peddling or pushing had to be tremendous; unbelievable, had I not seen it and taken two pictures!

Tapioca

I got an education from Siby and Nelson on many plants and herbs in India and one of those was about tapioca. Siby and I were walking near the hotel/bar where we stayed in Puthupolli and he pointed out a small plantation, asking me if I knew what those small trees were. I did not but they appeared like juvenile papayas to me. He said they were tapioca plants. The trees get cut, the tubers dug up and then processed. The tree is then stuck back in the ground and the cycle starts over. At many market places there were piles of many different fruits and vegies, including piles of tapioca which were brown tubers, similar looking to brown yams or sweet potatoes. They were up to about 3" in diameter and up to 18" or 20" long. They are used several ways. One of those was to dice them up and boil them up like potatoes. The end result resembled potatoes but more starchy, thus sticking together more. Spices were added and they tasted pretty good. They were not my favorite but I took a second helping each time they were part of the meal. The other way I experienced them was dried like potato chips. The drying process was done in any manner that the people possibly could dream up. For instance, we were traveling up that mountain road toward Vandipariyar and it was quite hot. As we rounded one tight hairpin corner we saw a lot of yellow/white flat things laid out on the pavement. There was sort-of a fog line and these things were laid out flat, outside the fog line, touching one another and taking up the whole area of pavement around the turn. It looked like white or yellow rose pedals. Siby asked if I knew what they were, and proceeded to tell me that they were drying tapioca! Again I thought, how ingenious! They were using the elements as they had them. That pavement was hot and the sun was direct. It didn't take long for them to dry out. So, to get tapioca in the form that we know it, it has to be dried far longer than it was on that road. It gets extremely hard, the more it is dried. I did have the chips and they tasted good! I enjoyed them a lot.

Do what you have to!

The first hotel I stayed in was the Centuar Hotel, quite fancy looking with a lot of marble, and a large open area in the middle of the building, looking up at the ceiling and circular balconies of the second and third floors above you. It was fancy, though it had seen better days, I think. Walking down the corridor toward my room on the second floor there was a young man vacuuming with a shop vac. His cord went well down the hallway, probably 100' long. To get to my room I walked past where he had it plugged in. To my surprise, yet delight, for his ingenuity in making it work, there was no plug on the cord. It was simply two wires stuck into the receptacle. Hey, it worked. But, mind you, the electricity is 220v. not 110v.

A bit more about trains

One night a man from the YWAM center in Lonavala had invited me to his home for dinner and to pray for his mom who was in her last days. We met at 7:30 p.m., got on his motorcycle (scooter), honked at the gate-keeper who came out and opened the gate then proceeded out and down the road. About a block later we came to the railroad tracks where the boom was down and several other motorcycles were parked, motors off and were waiting for a train to pass. One bicyclist took his bike under the barricade and went across the tracks but ours were all too big. At least 15 minutes later we saw the lights of a train proceeding very slowly and heard his horn. It did pass by and gained momentum as it went, eventually moving quite fast. Finally the train was gone and we were still waiting for the boom to be raised. Well into the long minute of waiting the guys started to honk. That's when I noticed a building on the opposite side of the tracks in which a door opened, shedding light from the inside, and a man came out, looked both ways then obviously pushed the button to raise the boom!

I had the experience of riding on three different trains and I'll admit, some of the memories blend together and I still smell the smell, still rub shoulders and hips with strangers and still rock from side to side in the memories.

The trains stopped frequently and if you were "up-line," you were certain to get a seat. But don't get comfortable, you will be constricted shortly. Some of the passengers were students, others were workers, and who knows what else. Some of us had suitcases which made it a bit difficult for all to negotiate. They had to go somewhere, and preferably somewhere secure. That meant that the traveling bags were placed in the overhead area if they fit, or under the seat, or in between your legs on the floor. Most people were not interested in friendly chat, so when Siby tried to engage them they seemed to be uncomfortable.

If there are not enough seats (when, rather) each coach was equipped with hundreds of handles suspended from the ceiling. If someone was trying to move from their position toward the door, for instance, they would do so by a hand-over-hand strategy using those handles.

The doors were always open and people were always standing in the doorway holding onto the center post, a handle or a side-wall. Windows were open as well.

One of the trips found Siby and me walking the platform looking for a coach that was not quite so full. We finally found one that only had a few occupants and we got in and sat down. As we did, and the train started to move, a seated man informed us that this

was a first-class coach! Oops! We did not have a first-class ticket. As a side note, I'm not sure that the first-class ticket was much more than the second-class, maybe \$5.00(?).

So, Siby got a little nervous and at the next stop we jumped off with our two cases each and ran to the second-class coach just behind. The door was jammed with people who did not want to move for us, so we had to push, forcing our way on as the train was starting to move. We did get on and eventually got a seat as people disembarked, and we considered ourselves fortunate.

The funny thing to me was that the train cars on this train did not interconnect with a corridor, thus a conductor could not make his way down the line of coaches. If there was any conductor on this train his job was hit and miss! The first-class coach that we had left behind was right in front of us and looking through the windows, the people were very comfortable and a conductor never did check anyone that I observed! There were even people lying down, stretched out on benches trying to sleep. What a difference from the coach we were in.

Another time we were at the stop in Lonavala and attempted to get off the train. But people were in such a rush to get on that we nearly didn't get off. I had my day-pack on my back and a carry-on suitcase in one hand and actually got jammed with a guy trying to force his way on! Siby said something which parted the waters long enough for us to get off. A conductor-looking guy stepped up to the doorway as we left, yelled something and hit the backpack of a young man who was up on the step trying to enter. He turned around and got off the train. I assumed that this guy was trying to steal a ride and got caught.

I do have one appropriate, telling photograph of one of our coaches at one point. It was taken from my lap without raising the camera and showed nothing but bodies tangled in the square of the picture.

Another memory in the car where the woman pushed on the heads of the young men was that every ten minutes or so a man walked through the coach carrying a large metal jug announcing, "Chai! Chai! Chai!" Behind him by a minute or two was another man carrying another metal jug announcing, "Coffee! Coffee! Coffee!" They went from one end of that train to the other in that routine, then turned around again to repeat the trip. I couldn't help but wonder how much they actually sold? Did they make money for their time as they did this or only if they sold something?

Wildlife

After the meeting about forgiveness on the YWAM campus I was talking with the young lady from Romania and another girl. We were standing out on a plaza area with many other people and sharing thoughts about the spiritual quality of the Romanian people before and after the fall of their Iron Curtain in 1989. We both agreed that there was a marked difference and not for the good. But as we were talking I caught a movement out of my peripheral vision. I looked in time to see a monkey larger than I had previously seen, who went loping across the paved area behind us. What was shocking was that no else gave it any mind, whatsoever, they didn't even look. They had to have seen it, but it meant no more to them than a stray cat would mean to us.

A unique moon

While I was traveling from the south to Pune I kept my eye on the moon at night. The moon was growing to a full moon from a small crescent. I was not disappointed in what I observed as I had seen the same in southern Mexico. The moon itself went straight overhead, not in an arc across the southern sky as in the U.S. Not only was it directly overhead, but the crescent was not a bow such as we see. It was a bowl, and if one would imagine it as such, it could hold water without spilling out! This has to do with being in the southern hemisphere, near the equator and our standing position on the earth makes our view of the crescent moon different. The perspective from that angle places it as I described. This was fascinating to me!

Religion in India

Religion in India is visible everywhere. There were many billboards with pictures of gurus or religious leaders including supposed Christian ones who were bringing healing meetings to town. One billboard picture that we saw several times particularly caught my attention. This was advertising for a group called the “Jacobites.” Siby gave me a bit of their history and it is certainly a cult group without the gospel. The picture itself was of two guys dressed in priestly garb, with an appearance of an Orthodox priest. They were looking at each other and smiling very pleasantly. The obvious leader of the two was holding a staff and the brass or gold top went into the shape of two snakes each coming out of the staff. They split apart and their heads came back together and they stared at each another, forming a sort of heart. It was really strange and Siby had no idea what that imagery was about.

Translating English

I saw some wording on a number of signs at restaurants that was certainly meant to attract English speaking tourists, or those of other dialects who know the common language of English. The sign was proof that direct translation doesn't always work. I pointed it out to Siby and he didn't get it until I explained the nuances of certain words. It read, “Homely Food!” And, on one occasion, “Homely Food” with the word “Mess” underneath it for emphasis. The word, “Mess” may have referred to a large variety!

An acceptable Communist Party

In south India, Kerala specifically, the Communist Party is considered the people's friend. The reason is that most of the people are in the poorer class, the working class; and that is what the Communist Party stands for. They are a somewhat powerful group and play a persuasive role standing for the rights of the people. It all seems great at this point, but most of us know what the end result will be. Throughout the history of Communism they start out in a favorable way with the people then gradually they become oppressive, even terrorizing and murderous. My heart hurts for their future. I saw quite a few red signs in Kerala, which were the Communist insignia, the hammer and sickle.

Did you see any cows?

I have had several people ask me if I saw any cows in India. Many of us have seen pictures of cows on the streets of India or beside the roads and that picture is sort of

a representation of India, so I understand the question. We have also been told that cows are sacred, even worshipped. The cow is particularly precious to the Hindu whose belief in Reincarnation means that a cow might have been someone's grandmother who died.

The answer to the initial question is, yes. I did see cows both on rural roads and in the middle of packed traffic in the densest of cities. But I did not see a healthy cow. All of them were gaunt and looked as if they were starving to death, particularly in the city where the cows have absolutely nothing to forage on. They are walking the streets looking for anything to eat. There are people who will feed some extra veggies to a cow that happens in, but it is not enough to sustain it for long. It will bring the cow to the same location the next day, however, and a daily routine begins. In the cities there were a few areas I saw that I concluded were dump-sites. There were people picking through getting rags, skinny dogs finding little tidbits to chew on and yes, cows were there also foraging for any food. One of those sites had a hole dug down about five feet by some machinery and as we passed by I saw the backs of several cows down in there with their heads in the grub. I guessed that they could get out again but that's not certain.

The cows did not in any way seem to be holy or worshipped. They were shooed away by some people, or skirted around by vehicles, but no one seemed to pay much attention at all. I did hear a saying, "He who carries the stick, owns the cow." But I did not see anyone with a stick herding any cow.

There was a "holy" day when I was in Lonavala, a "day of color." I did not really understand what it was about except that it was the one day where people, particularly kids and teens would throw water on people and that water often had dye added to it. It was somewhat a time of carnival. Not everyone participated nor appreciated it. It was a day of "legal" pranks to say the least. Driving down the road the next day I saw a forlorn looking cow, out in the middle of a busy intersection with a pink head!

From Siby's balcony I looked down on their narrow ally one morning and saw a bone-protruding cow slowly making its way down the road. Now and then it would just stop, put its head out and send out a loud, squealing bellow, then take another step or two before stopping to repeat it's bellow. Animal Rights people would love this! But somehow it might not fit their personal hinduistic preconceptions of what "holy India" is really like.

God made sure we all have natural utensils

I read about it before I went to India. I was told about it by Terry and Rick before I went to India. I went to an India restaurant in Grants Pass, Oregon and asked about it before I went to India.

So when I got to India I was ready for my first meal, served on a plate but without utensils. I was in India so I looked around for a quick tutorial and then dug in with the fingers of my right hand. To some people in India it does not much matter which hand you use, but with many others, please remember: DO NOT USE YOUR LEFT HAND. For them (and it is projected on you), the left hand is restricted for bathroom and toilet duties. The right hand is strictly for food. Now I did notice that some of the people did hold a piece of bread with their left hand while they ripped it, or use the left hand to help steady a chicken bone on the way to their mouth. And at times they would pass food to others with the left hand, but mostly it was kept either laid across the table or on one's lap while the right hand stayed busy stuffing food into the mouth.

I had trouble keeping up with other people at every meal. They always finished or went back for a second helping about half a plate ahead of me. We had white rice with almost every meal. It was fixed in a variety of ways and usually it was a little on the messy side. There was a breakfast dish I had on several occasions that was crushed rice which had been steamed with coconut in it, and served with a bunch of three-inch long bananas. You were to peel a banana, squish it up, grab a fist full of rice with the sticky banana and put it in your mouth. It was quite tasty. There were many dinner dishes of meat or veggies that often had a liquid base, like gravy. All of it was to be eaten with your fingers only. At times I was issued utensils, and at times I used them. But most often I chose the God-issued fingers. A stack of flat-bread (I think it is called, "Pan") accompanied many meals and also served as a utensil. What I noticed was that they appreciated the fact that I was eating with my fingers like them. Many of them had experienced Americans or westerners who could not ever get used to the idea and some expected utensils. At one meal at the YWAM center in Lonavala some of the young people were serving me and brought utensils. This was a bit of a quandary because I didn't want to dishonor them by not using what they had given me. Honor was a huge thing for the India people. So, I asked, "Would it be okay if I ate with my fingers?" One of the guys, Prejith from Kerala got a huge grin and said, "Always!" We had a great meal together.

I don't know how many times I was asked some question about being comfortable eating with my hands to which I generally replied, "Hey, I'm in India!"

I can't say that it ever became natural but I acted as suave as possible as I plunged into each meal. It didn't take me long to conclude that I love Indian food. I was often asked if I liked the food? Or, Is it too hot for you? I told them truthfully that it may be my second favorite food, with Mexican being at the top. And no, it was not too hot. The variety of unique spices, as well as the hot spices were wonderful to me. But now I can't help but wonder if eating it with my fingers might have made it taste all the better?

My first meal after my arrival back home with my family was a wonderful venison roast meal, potatoes, carrots, gravy, broccoli and salad. I hadn't said anything to them about Indian utensils but after one bite with my fork I put it down and said, "Well guys, here's how I ate for the last four weeks!" and I started in. My wife was not impressed. Chloe and Lena immediately took the hint and dove in likewise. The other kids were somewhat mortified and my wife couldn't get the look of disgust off of her face. It was fun, though. But at the next meal I had to say to Chloe and Lena that we were in America so don't get any ideas. They acted a bit bummed but with a knowing smile.

Who needs a plate?

At the meal in Jency's home we were about to sit down when someone stopped us, said a few words in their language of Malayalam (I think) then went outside. They came back in a few minutes later with the 18" end of a banana leaf, which they put down in front of me. They proceeded to fill it with wonderful food, at least five courses.

I was told that this was their traditional plate before there were plates. Again they had done this to honor me. All the others were served on plastic, household dinner plates. It was a beautiful thing to me, and somewhat humbling. I did not feel worthy of all the honor but tried to graciously go with it. What a wonderful people.

Water

Bottled, only, including brushing my teeth. My traveling companion(s) made sure I had it at all times. There were times that I almost forgot to use bottled water when brushing my teeth; it was close, but I managed to remember each time.

Another cultural difference was that the Indian people love to drink hot water with their meal. It has a slight "something" added to it but it was hard for me to distinguish a flavor. It came out of the pitcher with a slight pink hue. Anyway, it was boiled so I did drink that on a few occasions. According to them it also had the purpose of helping digestion by melting the more solid oils and fats as you eat!