

Sabbatical Diary INDIA 5 – 22 April 2016

Day 1/2 Tuesday/Wednesday

Up early. Taxi at 9.00 to Manchester airport. Made good time. We were there by 10.20. Got checked in and through security then played the waiting game. Flight delayed nearly an hour because it was late getting in from Dubai. We will only be 30 mins late at Dubai. The pilot is putting his foot down!

Watched a film, eaten, now time for a kip. Should arrive in Dubai at 0030 local time.

Arrive in Dubai. Connecting flight in about 1.5 hours. Delayed 15 mins. But arrived in Chennai 30 mins early. Boy, is it hot and only 8.30 am. More forms to fill in! An immigration one, all the details required are on my visa application and a nothing to declare pink form. Always seems to be a long walk from the plane to anywhere. Was exhausted by the time I got to baggage collection. Had to wait ages, but eventually my case got onto the carousel. Made my way through customs and out in to India. David and a friend of his was there to welcome me.



I changed some money so I could pay our taxi driver for the 80 mile journey to Tirupati. The traffic was horrendous. The two lane carriageway became four lanes with motor bikes weaving in and out without a care in the world. The journey, thankfully in a car with a/c, took about three and a half hours. It cost 4500 rupees, about £47. I guess about a quarter of the cost in the UK.

After lunch I had a lie down as I hadn't slept for over 24 hours. My room had a/c which David had installed for me, how grateful I was! Did nothing for the rest of the day except chat with the family, drink water and eat. At 2000 I was ready for bed.



Day 3 Thursday

David and I went into the city to go to Gali's, David's dad's church. Spent a couple of hours chatting and drinking pop and eating watermelon and 'sweet cucumber'. David left us. He

needed to change the English currency into rupees so he could buy the things for the kids.

I had my first ride in a tuc tuc when Gali and I went to lunch at KFC. Had my second ride back again.

I was offered a bed so I could rest during the afternoon heat, very welcome if was too. Meanwhile, David had purchased 400



water bottles. The slum kids and those in prison do not have them and it is the one of the things they would love to have. We will also be buying them biscuits, which they rarely, if ever, have and some ice cream for a treat.

Early evening we made our way back to the campus, about a 30 minute drive. We picked up David's three sisters on the way. They were coming to the youth bible fest tomorrow.

We had a meal, chicken and chapatis, then sat on the verandah chatting till about eleven, when I went to bed.

Day 4 Friday

The day of the youth bible fest has arrived. It is Friday, and it is also a Hindu holiday so no school for the kids. I will be teaching them 'Great Big God' and speaking about the Prodigal Son. (See the video clips at www.urcbarnsleygroup.org.uk)

That was a really good day. About 70 people from kids to the elderly. Not sure where the 'youth' bit comes in!



The first 90 mins, or so, was people 'singing'. It didn't matter if they couldn't sing in tune they still did it and each song was very long. I got them jumping up and down singing Allelu, Alleluia, praise ye the Lord.

Then came my turn to address them. I read the prodigal son story which was then read in the local language, Telugu. I then spoke about how much God loves us even

when we do the wrong thing.

More singing.

Then David preached, haven't got a clue what it was about but it went on for over an hour! He said that is usual in India! Well, they are in for a shock on Sunday, 15 mins tops!

Lunch was interesting. The biggest pot I have ever seen filled with chicken biryani. There were other bits of chicken too. Everyone tucked in, using their fingers!

After lunch, more singing then many took part in a written bible quiz. Gali preached for about 20 mins while the sheets were marked. The prizes for the top



three were 1000, 500 and 300 rupees (about £10, £5 & £3). After the prizes were awarded it was time for games. Some played musical chairs (only women) after which some (only men) played 'cricket'.



Day 5 Saturday

Very hot day. Went to tirupati zoo. David said we will need to leave at 9 because of the rising temp. We left at 10.20! It really was hot. Saw baboons, elephants and crocs, had an ice cream and went home. Luckily it only cost 20p to get in the zoo!



The rest of the day we rested, tried to keep cool and played a game where you have to get draught pieces in a hole.

Day 6 Sunday

Left at 9.20 to go to Gali's church. The service started at 10.15 and finished with simple communion at about 12.45! I preached, through an interpreter, Gali, it seems to have been well received. There were about 70 people packed into the small church. Many wanted to shake my hand a after. One even asked me to anoint his arthritic hands with palm oil. Which, of course, I did.



After a while we went to a restaurant. I had a spicy prawn dish and fried rice and some of David's biryani. Mine cost about four pounds, really cheap. I hope I don't suffer for it later!

After lunch we went to the slum area. Lavanya led the children in song. I did the alleluia, praise ye the Lord with them and told them how Jesus wanted the children to come to him when the disciples wanted to send

them away. The parents of these kids are Hindu but the lowest cast. They are delighted that some people from a high cast can be bothered to even meet with them. They loved being given water bottles, and biscuits. If they wanted water during the night they had to go outside, in pitch black to get it. Rather scary and difficult. Now they can take it to bed with them.



From here we went to the boys prison. Only time for one song but I also asked them to memorise John 3:16. They also loved getting water bottles and biscuits.



Ate a couple of bananas on way back, different to the ones we get in England. More chewy and less flavour. We arrived back at the campus, followed by an ice cream tuc tuc which David waved down as we passed him.

Day 7 Monday

Lie in today. Not going to the classroom until 10.30. Actually went at 10.15. The, kids sang loads of songs including some I knew e.g. if you're happy and you know it... I told them about the miracle of feeding the 5000. Gave out water bottles and biscuits. Every child told me their name, we had loads of photos taken and they all wanted to shake my hand. I left at 11.15.



Relaxed for rest of day until about 5.20 when the afternoon school came to the hall. A couple of songs and prayers. I told them the story of the Good Samaritan. Gave out water bottles and biscuits.



Then Mr. tuc tuc ice cream arrived. All the kids had a tub. So did we! Each tub costs only 10p but the kids can't afford it as their parents are so poor they may only be able to give them 1 rupee every now and then. Therefore it would take a long time to save for one small ice cream.

Veg curry and chapatis for dinner. Very nice too. Had water melon earlier, lovely and fresh but why do they feel the need to sprinkle spices on it, ok I like ginger

with honeydew but a sort of pepper? Just wrong imho.

Day 8 Tuesday

Relaxing for most of the day. Went to girls prison later in afternoon. Taught them John 3:16. Gave out water bottles and biscuits! They love them too.



Went to Gali's church for a while. David had an appointment elsewhere and said he would be half an hour. We went upstairs to their flat to wait. One and three quarter hours later he returned! Indian timing!

We then went to the home of a church member for dinner. A third floor flat, six flights of stairs and still very hot. We ate chicken biryani and mutton curry, washed down with Pepsi.

Butterscotch ice cream completed the feast. We stayed chatting till about ten and then set off back to the campus, totally exhausted.

Day 9 Wednesday

Sightseeing day. Went to the Hindu temple in the hills. Very high up, quite a few thousand feet. A bit disappointing. Seemed to be simply a place to extract as much money out of the visitors/pilgrims as possible. One of the main offerings they make is a coconut which the temple people make oil from which



they sell. Guess who sells the coconuts to the pilgrims in the first place? Correct. The temple. There are dwellings up there but the temple bought them all so that they are in complete control. The whole temple area is a fairly large town heaving with people.



Just after 6.00 we arrived at the old fort. Monkeys everywhere. At 7.00 there was a sound and light show.. Very entertaining but in Telegu so I couldn't understand a word of it!



Stopped off to get some 'Five Star Chicken' for our dinner. A spicy version of KFC and very nice too.

Day 10 Thursday

Into Tirupati again. Our Taxi took us to Talakona Waterfall. So so hot.

The heat and steep climb did for four of us so we didn't see the falls. Only David and Israel made it to the top. After two ice creams we set off back to the church to pick up David's car.



Then headed back to the campus. We stopped on the way to visit another slum area. Told the kids about Jesus wanting the children to go to him. Taught them, 'yes,



Jesus loves me.....' Gave out water bottles and biscuits. Almost 400 distributed now. Mission accomplished.

Ate pizza when we got back. Spicy chicken and loads of onion! No tomato on base, just cheese. Nice though.

Went to my room and read Gali's book, 'Know the word, Know the power'. Interesting and contains some useful bits. Possibly some I can use when leading the next minister's retreat, especially the part about Psalm 19.

Day 11 Friday



Last day before travelling to Hyderabad. Went to the church again. This time for a pastors meeting. I spoke to them about the need for retreats and solitude and quoted various texts to support my views. 'Be still and know that I am God' being one of them.



Spent time chatting with Gali and David. Then David and I went to a restaurant for lunch. He had biryani, as usual. I had chicken and sweet corn soup, not quite the same as in England, but fairly close. Then I had a huge bowl of chicken chow mein which was really nice. My soup and main cost the grand total of £3.00.

Day 12 Saturday

Flew to Hyderabad from Tirupati International Airport. (International? You can only fly to Hyderabad from it!)



We are staying in Hyderabad for four days.

Day 13 Sunday

Preaching again. This time in a small church in an upstairs room, felt very biblical. David asked that I spoke to them about the need for solitude as I had done at the Pastor's meeting, I was happy to oblige and the dozen, or so, in the room were happy to listen.

My preaching and speaking was now complete. I spoke to 10 different groups:

- Youth Festival
- Church in Tirupati
- Slum kids in Tirupati
- Kids in boy's prison
- School class
- After school group
- Kids in girl's prison
- Slum kids in Kuppambadur
- Pastor's meeting
- Church in Hyderabad

Day 14 Monday

Now the tourist part begins.

First up. Snow World.



David and his family had never seen snow, other than in photos. Ok, this was machine made snow, but they had a really good time playing in it, as did everyone else. It was nice to be somewhere cool for a change. The outside temperature was 43c (in the shade!)



Day 15 Tuesday

We spent today at the largest film studios in the world, 47 sound stages! Plenty to do and see in the searing heat at Ramoji Film City.



Day 16 Wednesday

Today we flew to New Delhi. On arrival at the airport we located our taxi which would stay with us for two days. We headed off for Agra. The journey took about four and a half hours.

We stayed overnight at a very nice hotel.



Day 17 Thursday

Early start. We set off at 6.45 to the Taj Mahal (only about five minutes away). Seemed to take ages to get in. First the taxi had to park in the car park which was quite a way from the Taj Mahal. We then chose to travel in a horse drawn carriage.

The place was packed, even this early in the morning. Security checks happen everywhere in India at the moment, due mainly to the activities of Hindu extremists.

The guards here were armed to the hilt, everyone was checked, even after going through airport style scanners. The ladies all had to tip out the contents of their handbags. When all this was done we could take the short walk to see this famous monument.







We then made our way back to the hotel for breakfast. After checking out we went to see Agra's Red Fort.



My stay in India was almost over. Our taxi took us back to New Delhi. A journey which took over six hours including a lunch stop and the most delicious ice cream I have ever tasted. It was too hot to eat anything else!

We checked in to our hotel in New Delhi and paid the taxi driver for the two days he was with us and at our beck and call. It was a grand total of about £70!!!! I wonder how much it would cost in this country? £250 - 300 possibly.

Day 18 Friday

After breakfasting, a taxi took me to the airport for my journey home. David accompanied me to make sure I didn't get lost.

My flight to Dubai was delayed by about an hour and a half which meant that all those making the connection to Manchester didn't arrive in Dubai in time. Emirates Airlines took us to a hotel, gave us a room each, and vouchers to have lunch and dinner. We were booked on to a flight at 3.00am instead of 2.15pm the day before.

I, eventually, arrived at Manchester airport just 13 hours later than expected. Luckily I had been able to contact the taxi I had booked to change my arrival time.

It was cold in England!!!!!!!

During my visit we gave water bottles and biscuits to 400 children and ice creams to about 70.

We travelled quite a few miles, almost the full length of the sub-continent.

Chennai – Tirupati (Kuppambadur)... 79 miles

Kuppambadur - Hyderabad... 356 miles

Hyderabad – Delhi... 964 miles

Delhi – Agra... 131

Agra – Delhi... 131

Total miles travelled – 1661

Plus many short journeys.

This trip was a fantastic experience, one I will never forget, and, I am told, one which the people I met will never forget.

I am grateful to The United Reformed Church for granting me a sabbatical and for providing funding, and to the Coward Trust for their grant so that this trip was possible.

The remainder of my sabbatical was spent completing my book of meditations *On Autopilot?* Which now contains 300 meditations based on hymns. Just need to find a publisher or, more likely, self publish the book so that it is available to others.

Oh yes, nearly forgot, Lorraine and I also went on a cruise for a week, I think she deserved it after being left alone for nearly three weeks.

Nick Percival