

# INDIA DIARIES 2007

**February 10th 2007**

Having lost our luggage when we made our visit to India last year, I thought all was bound to run smoothly in 2007. Oh, how wrong was I ? We left Leeds at 11:30am on Friday .... yes, Friday ... and spent a comfortable but lengthy journey twisting through the snowy towns and cities of England. Making sure we missed no lamp post, service station or hamlet we made the regulation twelve thousand four hundred and twenty two stops before happily entering the grounds of Heathrow Airport. Our new home - as it would turn out.

Still in high spirits, and only 6 hours into the journey, we found our first queue. Quite a pleasant one as it happened. Nice and straight, tidy at the edges. As it turned out, this wasn't going to be our last queue...

Some two or so hours later, after check-in and security checks (in which my shower gel had been confiscated, sorry Mrs Poynting and Miss McDonald...) we made it through to the waiting area (very appropriately named as it turned out)

Slowly, surely, steadily passengers disappeared to board their flights. But what about Air India flight 120 ? Mm. Nothing. More passengers left. The hours ticked on. Still not a whisper.



The situation got steadily worse. Incredibly late we were finally asked to board the plane ! The terminal was practically empty at this point. We made our way to the gate only to find yet more sitting and waiting. The plane had been late arriving from India and it was going to be a push to get it ready before the 11:30 pm curfew (That's the time when no more flights are allowed over London)

Thinking our luck had just changed we were allowed at the last minute onto the plane... only to have our hopes shattered a few minutes later by the announcement, "The flight has been grounded. We have passed the curfew."

Yep, we had to get off. Two hours later, we were taken by coach to a hotel near the airport and enjoyed a refreshing 4 hours sleep before having to queue up through security all over again ! Yes - we'd spent the first night in London ! We'd been over 15 hours in Heathrow airport and we still hadn't gone !

Feeling decidedly jaded we took our place again in the waiting area. (This was after having a second bottle of shower gel confiscated by security !)



Eventually, over 16 hours later than scheduled we were delighted to make our way onto the plane and finally begin the long journey to Bachpan.

February 11th 2007

Anyone recognise these two traditionally dressed party goers ?



Sunday has been a terrific day ! We have done so much, despite actually only arriving at Sanjay and Meena's

home at 2am this morning !? After a much needed sleep we woke up to a crystal clear blue sky and warm Indian sun. We enjoyed a restful breakfast/lunch and then made a trip through Surendranagar towards a nearby farm. As we drove along the streets we passed multitudes of tiny stores, camels, goats, dogs, rickshaws, mopeds, bikes, pedestrians .... and more. The streets are just bursting with life of all types.

We arrived at a nearby farm, to find a vast selection of vegetables and fruits. There were red chillies, green chillies, garlic, onions, papaya, wheat, cotton, pomengranate and much more. Everything was only able to grow thanks to the ready supply of irrigation by pipeline from the nearby river.

After a few enjoyable moments cricket (where I had to ask a very large ox for my ball back) we made our way back to get ready for our big night - the garba.

We were kindly kitted out from top to toe in traditional Indian dress. Mrs Poynting and Miss McDonald sparkled as they displayed their dancing gear and attached ornaments. Mr Manton wore his long robe with dupatta (traditional scarf) We were ready.

Picture the scene..... a large field about the size of a junior football pitch, a moonlit clear sky, flood lighting, coloured lanterns, a live Indian band, traditional Indian refreshments, fire crackers ... and then ONE THOUSAND energetic and agile Indian dancers ! It was a truly incredible sight and a truly incredible night. Everyone wanted to welcome us to India and help us to "dance the Garba"! The dance involves the circular movement around the ground, twisting this way and then the other, lots of arm waving and intricate foot work. My most agile footwork coincided with finding an unidentified insect, the size of a grape, crawling inside my traditional top. However, let's just say we gave it our best efforts !

The evening was completed with some incredible dance routines from the children from Bachpan. The finale was a Rajasthani dance involving balancing jugs of fire on your head as you nimbly move around the dance floor ! Mrs Poynting, Miss McDonald and myself were ready to decline any kind invitation to join in with this one !

Despite being exhausted and sore toed, we ended the night full of unforgettable memories of the kindness and affection shown to us by every single one of the thousand people at the dance. It is hard to describe in words how wonderful the people of Bachpan are. Many families invite us back to their homes and shower us with gifts of flowers and cards. The Garba is a wonderful celebration of Indian life and culture and we were very privileged to take part in it.

**Mr Manton sampling a traditional Indian snack. The snack is eaten whole - and yes, it was quite big !**



**February 12th 2007**

Today was our first chance to visit the new look Bachpan School. The school has been opened for 10 years, but had a massive rebuild and makeover this year. On arrival the school has lost its old pink front and is now a very impressive triple storey yellow building !



The arrival was a Bachpan Special. We were greeted with tikka and tossed with rose petals. As we walked through the gate we were met with the sight of grinning children as far as we could see .... and then discovered another child perched above our heads who dropped a great quantity of flower petals on our heads ! Mrs Poynting next released a huge group of balloons in to the blue sky as Mr Manton and Miss McDonald were laden with flowers and cards - to top it all, Vishnu the PE teacher, exploded a number of fireworks from the top balcony ! A welcome to remember !!

We were delighted to sit and watch a welcome assembly, involving a terrific dance by Tanya Bhavani, wearing traditional Indian dress and listened to some welcoming speeches from the children.

Soon it was our turn, and we tried our best to put into words how we felt being treated like the Kings and Queens of England !

We enjoyed a tour around the new school buildings, thanks to a group of the class council and head girl, Nishi. It was lovely to see a lot of familiar things on the walls - like the robins notice board , the Bachpan Golden Rules, the Southroyd Corner, emails and photographs of Southroyd and so many more features of our partnership.

After our busy night at the dance, today was a relaxed welcoming day at school. It was after school that we were able to see so much more of Surendranagar.



Following a quick trip to the railway station we visited a large Hindu Temple. Mrs Poynting and Miss McDonald were delighted to watch the ritual of "putting the gods to bed." The deities (models) of Krishna were dressed in pyjamas, and a lullaby was sung by the priest to put them to sleep. It is an incredible ritual to watch !

Meanwhile, Mr Manton had slipped away round the back of the Temple to meet an actual Saint of the Hindu church. The Saint, wrapped in saffron robes, spoke excellent english and explained a little about the beliefs of his faith. He gave Mr Manton a warm welcome to his temple and a box of Indian sweets too ! (my first box of sweets from a Saint !)

The evening wasn't over yet - oh, know ! - after a trip to the railway station, a visit to a temple and a meeting with a Saint, we topped the evening off by being guests at an incredible Hindu wedding. The place was decorated from top to toe with colour ! Beautiful lanterns, statues.... and a football pitch sized spread of Indian foods....

... we tried soups, naans, chapatis, parratas, poppadoms, pakoras.... as we worked our way around the massive spread ! What a way to finish the evening - and what an incredible day - again !

**February 13th 2007**

[This is Tanya dancing in assembly](#)



It's been another wonderful day. We had our first chance to teach today, despite the bad news that Tuesday was the day when there would be no electricity in the school! Each week, parts of Surendranagar have to do without electricity for whole days. This was of course bad news for my ICT lessons, so I took the opportunity to play benchball (a popular game from Southroyd) with Y6 and Y3. As the sun came up over the building the playground became a very hot place and we were relieved when the final bell went!

Mrs Poynting and Miss McDonald meanwhile, were demonstrating the effects of air resistance to science classes of Y4 and Y5. In the follow up lesson they will be making parachutes to explore the effects of size and material on speed of fall!

Before lunch Mrs Poynting had to contend with a very vocal cow and sheep duet whose mooing and baaing were certainly a new challenge never met before in a school assembly. Those animals clearly enjoyed Mrs Poynting's story of David and Goliath.

Next, it was time to cook! After last year's successful lasagne (well done Mr Overton) Mrs Poynting and Miss McDonald embarked on "Super Chow Mein" - year 5 and 6 sat and waited patiently as the smell of garlic, ginger, onions and more spread throughout the room. The children of Bachpan are fans of Chinese cookery and noodles, so the Chow Mein was a real winner!

After lunch we departed on a trip into the country towards Ahmedabad. The roads were as usual full of interest. We passed wild pigs and a herd of black goats as we made our way towards a large cotton plantation.

We were met by a gentleman at the cotton plant who showed us step by step how cotton is separated from its seeds. There are an incredible number of processes involved from harvesting the cotton to turning into cloth. We were looking only at the first stage of this. The cotton from the plants feels just like cotton wool.

## **February 14th 2007**

Today we've been busy at school, working in classrooms with the children of Bachpan and also delivering our own lessons. Mrs Poynting was busy with the parachute work whilst Mr Manton used pictures and video clips to support some descriptive writing about the Indian elephant. After break we joined together where Mrs Poynting taught the children of Bachpan, the assembly hymn "Follow Me." They sang beautifully! So, now both schools in the partnership will be singing the same hymns! Thankfully the cow and sheep who made a large contribution to Tuesday's assembly were having a trip out somewhere....



Feeling rather jaded by travel and changes to our diets, this afternoon is a quiet time. We are in rest before taking on the mighty Indian Cricket XI (well actually it will be Sanjay, Pratik - his son- and a couple of their mates versus Mrs Poynting, Miss McDonald and Mr Manton) The wicket is being prepared (the large pair of cows have been invited to move) and all is set for a tight match. The wicket looks quite fast (especially if you hit the patch of concrete between the gravel) and a large crowd is already forming (well there's a couple of wild dogs, the cows that were moved on and an occasional wild pig) Come on England - you can do it !



**Pratik helps himself to another boundary off some more juicy English bowling. England are toiling in the field.**

## STOP PRESS

After a closely contested match, I think we lost by about 3 innings and 476 runs. But we did ourselves proud.

Following the cricket match we were invited to the homes of Romina Ma'am and Tejal Ma'am. Romina's family welcomed us into their home and showed us around. We also had a very interesting journey through the centre of Surendranagar. It bustled with activity and excitement ! The streets narrowed as they crammed with cows, bikes, mopeds, small children, scooters, dogs, goats, camels, shopkeepers, carts... and I'm sure we even saw a wild pig or two..... There were lots of different stalls, including some beautifully coloured sari shops and impressive looking jewellers. Our roads will seem very strange after travelling through these streets.

Back to our mosquito net cages for sleep and another fabulous day was over !

**February 15th 2007**

## A cup of country tea - boiled over a fire.



Another packed day at school and now the whole of Gujarat can sing some of our favourite school songs. Years 1,2,5 and 6 learnt the songs ready for a big assembly together tomorrow. So, listen out at about 2am and you may hear the merry voices of Bachpan singing "Follow Me"!

This afternoon we are taking a trip out into the countryside to visit a farm. We will be able to taste papaya and mangoes fresh from the fields. The sun will be setting, so we should enjoy a clear and starry sky. We will then enjoy a cup of traditional Indian tea, cooked over a camp fire, in the fields.

Afterwards we are promised a visit to see the milking of buffalo in a tiny village. We left Sanjay and Meena's home and took an eventful 45 minute drive into the fields. As usual we passed a host of new sights - including a camel train of nomadic people, a herd of sheep, multiple herds of buffalo and numerous religious temples.

On arrival at the farm we were met by some local hosts and given a cup of local village tea. No kettles here ! You had to boil the water on a pan over a fire made from collected wood. In the hot climate of Surendranagar, farming is only possible because of irrigation (piped water from bore holes and the nearby river) The farm area was full



many crops including cotton, chillies, wheat, onions, garlic, aubergine, tomatoes, sugar cane and more. We sampled fresh fruits and vegetables as we made our way around the fields.

The sun set quickly, leaving a beautiful starry sky as we moved back to the nearby village to watch the buffaloes being milked. The simple village house includes room for the important buffalo to live inside. So, from one side of the house you can see a buffalo and on the other a television ! As usual the families were incredibly welcoming and loved to have their pictures taken with us..... we felt like visiting royalty again !

One last stop before bed, was Chataill's home for dinner. Another day action packed left us certain there can't be anything else we haven't seen yet ! I bet we're wrong !

### **Sampling sugar cane in the countryside.**



### **February 16th 2007**

Today has been our last day of teaching. The week has flown by. We began the day with a morning assembly. This time the news headlines and thought for the day were followed by the presentation of a poem.

Our lesson began, and despite an occasional power cut, Miss McDonald was able to make her parachutes with Y6 and Y5. The children dropped the parachutes they'd made from the top balcony to see which ones had the greater air resistance. Let's hope these won't be needed on Sunday's flight back to London ! Despite the power cuts Mr Manton managed to work with Y3 and Y4 on descriptions of dragons. The children coming up with some excellent words to describe the creatures.

Next, it was everyone to the hall. The first chance for the whole school to sing together their new favourite, "Follow Me." Come on admit it, some of you did hear it didn't you ? Well I think if you'd listened hard you really could have.... the children sang it so loudly and full of heart ! On Tuesday we will be able to sing along in Southroyd with the children of Bachpan singing on the video..... an international performance of "Follow Me"!

We enjoyed a delicious lunch at Tanya's home (a girl from class 4) We were looked after, once again, like royalty, enjoying a wide range of traditional Gujarati and other Indian dishes. Fantastic !

After a restful afternoon, in the baking sun (over 30C now) we visited Sanjay Sir's hospital. We saw a number of delivery suites, overlooking the busy streets below. We saw an operating theatre, met the hospital staff and enjoyed ice cream.

To complete the day, with an eating theme, we took to the Shiv International Hotel to meet the staff for a delicious sizzler (lots of different flavours all in one ... helped down with a naan bread)

With full tummies, the day was over and our last day was about to begin.