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# Mount Holyoke College Class of 1964

*After the Middle Ages comes the Renaissance!*

## Gail Simons Humphreys and her family explore non-tourist India

**28 December 2016 to 26 January 2017**

Steve and I arrived home safely and happily after a dramatic and full trip to India. India was all people and chaos--- unless it was not, as we glided through the palm-shored backwaters of Kerala both with Steph and Claire (grandchildren) and then on our own after their departure. Our last dramatic people moment was in the very silence of these backwaters when we went with Mr. Samy (our driver) and his family to paddle within the mangrove forests near Pondicherry --there we found women, up to their chests in water, walking slowly, but purposefully against the currents, to catch prawns by hand. One woman carried a pouch between her teeth---putting her live catch in as she went. (see photo.) Others carried a bag under water into which the catch went. Mr. Samy told us they worked in the water (and the humid heat) like this for 5-8 hours every day. Against this scene are hundreds of others---thousands of motor bikes, honking horns (the trucks all with "Honk Please" emblazoned on their backs---there's a honk language that keeps 'no rules' traffic safe---), desperate, dramatic, and ancient expressions of religious devotion, cows in the streets, even on the highways, and a palpable closeness to the daily acts of existence. All make India a unique place. We were blessed with terrific guides, a spirit of adventure, many opportunities to see and meet Indians, and the renewal of friendships from earlier trips.

We intentionally avoided the high-tech ghettos and upscale shopping centers with western logos. The rest of India is different. Life's essential moments are public. In Varanasi, women fully clothed in their saris and men bare-chested and only in their boxer shorts bathe in the Ganges to bring them into the arms of "Mother Ganga." 24/7 for the last 2500 years, public cremations take place along the shore---life/death in the raw. In the covered markets and along the streets throughout India, chickens are housed in cages piled 5 by 5 on top of each other, the top chickens pooping on the ones below them. (see neighborhood photo). First western reaction even from a traveler who should know better: "Aren't we fortunate we don't have to buy chickens like that?" Then, after seeing these "chicken piles" over and over, awareness finally dawns: "Wait, some family is going to have an immediately fresh chicken, never frozen, no antibiotics, no growth hormones, no pellet-fed faux organic. Freshly killed and thoroughly plucked and cleaned, their chicken will actually taste like a chicken." Conclusion: cultural imprints are very hard to shed--- even when one is aware of the problem and alert.

We took pictures, hundreds of them, so that our experiences would shine through the challenges endemic to travel in non-tourist India.

Here are 25+ pictures:



*Not a blob. Sugar and rice intentionally put on the ground to feed the ants at a Delhi shrine. All life is sacred.*



*Three pictures of people bathing or about to bathe in the Ganges*



*Reading prayers by the Ganges*



*A private dance performance in the home of our guide*



*Sikh boy at the temple*



*Sculpture at the Gandhi Museum, Madurai*



*At a flower market*



*My friend, the tea harvester and the hard work of harvesting tea*



*Indian, Kerela, backwaters*



*The monkey god, Hanuman, on a temple float*

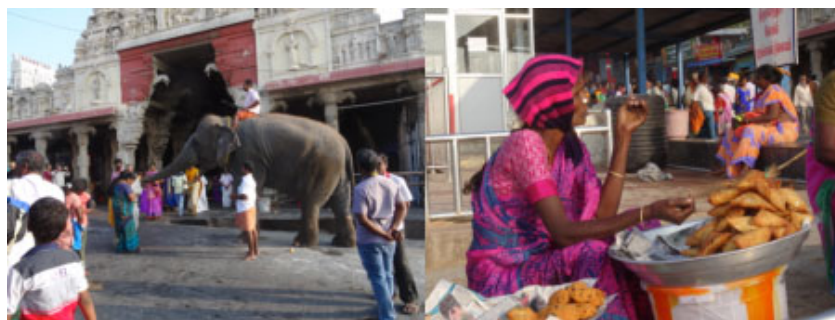


*Temple beach with pilgrims*





*Father at pilgrims' beach "celebrating" son's first haircut*



*Around the temple*



*Bringing water home in a time of drought*



*Close-up of water carrier (above)*



*Woman fishing for prawns with "prawn catch bag" in her mouth*



*Ponducherry neighborhood. Chickens and goat for sale*



*Tuk tuk "school bus"*



*Sikh boy playing cricket*



*Modernity and fashion on an oddly uncrowded street*



*At the mosque*



*Henna Hands*



*"Sound Horn"*



*Feeding 10,000 People Per Day at a Sikh Temple*





*Beautiful shrine tile*



*Bread basket*



*Even a humble street sweeper is beautiful in her cotton sari*



*Krishna and his holy cow at a local shrine*

*Submitted by: Gail Simons Humphreys  
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