



Final Bush Report

The Mystery and Mystique of India

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My naïveté only became clearer to me as we boarded the train. The private sleeper cars were neither private nor sleepers. As the train began to roll and we made our way down the narrow aisle towards our seats, I was able to peek through the cotton curtains which provided the privacy for the train cabins. Many Indian families, both sleeping and waking, were scattered behind the thin sheets veiling each compartment. Upon reaching our stall, we decided who would sleep in which bunk, waited for the delivery of our blanket and pillow and began to chain our bags together for our own protection. This would be our home for many hours to come as we traveled hundreds of miles across the sparse countryside on our way from Mumbai to Delhi.

I tried to sleep as the train rumbled along, but the man with the chronic cough (who, incidentally, was sleeping directly below Rahul on the other side of the aisle) kept me awake for a majority of the evening. Morning came quickly with the train attendant who ripped open our privacy sheet, turned on our compartment's light, and shouted something in Hindi which we took to mean "time to wake up." Breakfast was served soon thereafter, curried eggs and coffee, and we settled in for our chance to see India waking up outside of our window. It was 4:00 am.

Those hours aboard the express train (loosely speaking) provided the most generous time for all of us (2 students, 1 alumnus, and 2 professors) to cooperatively reflect on what we had seen. It was in those hours of transport that the student-teacher relationship explored new territory as we charted undiscovered lands and cultures together. As much as one knows about India and its attributes, discovering it with the five senses brings all travelers to shared ground. The smells, sights, sounds, tastes, and touches are overwhelming to even the most seasoned academic. This gave our student-teacher relationship vigor for mutual discovery, which is a novel basis for education for all parties involved.

I have had the great fortune of speaking at length with one of the students who traveled with Drs. Looney and Haar to India in January (2006). In hearing her tale of discovery, I was reunited with India. That is because of the deep impression that my travels marked within my mind forever. Whether it be a single story about cows in the street, the haphazard road system, the first sight of the Ganges, the smell of yet another spicy meal, or the touch of a begger, memories flood my mind carrying with them emotions that inspire new reflection and new imagination. I believe that at the heart of Christian liberal education, which necessarily includes exposure to other cultures, religions, and life, lies the charge to create within ourselves, within our world, a new imagination where peace is abundant, poverty is non-existent, love is mutual, and respect is granted willingly.

I was given the opportunity to begin the creation of such an imagination during and since my travels in India. Thank you to the Bush Foundation for inspiring students and faculty alike to dream of greater understanding with the dawning of each day. Undeniably, this is gift.

Sincere thanks, Ingrid C. A. Rasmussen