

I have a few hours because I'm looping back through our sites, by train this time, and the train to Varanasi is at least 8 hours late arriving in Delhi. I went to the train station this morning for what I thought would be a 6:30 AM departure only to find that the train isn't to leave until 2:30 PM at the earliest—only in India. I called the travel agent to confirm that the train was really that late and he said it was due to weather. (I started this e-mail yesterday where I spent most of the day at the train station. The train never came. I'm now at the airport to take a flight to Varanasi.) It's monsoon raining here in Delhi—somewhat strange for this time of year. Overall the weather has been lovely—like spring. Nancy and Mary Magdalen left yesterday, so I'm feeling lonely. They proved to be wonderful traveling companions, and Mary Magdalen is like an encyclopedia about India. Baba said, "It's like she's been here 20 times." He got that right. They are going to join the Oversight Committee, so we'll need 11 for a majority. The same rule about voting will apply, i.e., we go with the wishes of the majority of those who have voted within 24 hours of a request for a decision. When I get home Sean is going to implement a new voting tool, but don't worry fellow Luddites, if I can use it anyone can. Regarding the report, Liz and Kathleen, post anything that seems right for posting. Nancy and Mary Magdalen, correct, add, and amplify on what follows.

Delhi

Bablu and Family

The flu is going around the family, but other than that, things seemed on course. We braved the flu bugs and had dinner with the family. We visited the school and the children are doing well. We met with the headmistress, who is also now the principal, as the former principal left under circumstances mysterious enough that Bablu asked us to ask the headmistress what had happened to her. We didn't meddle with this one. We did question whether we were paying more than other families as Bablu had alleged. She said we were not and that we were getting a reduced tuition fee on one child as is, she said, the school policy for families with more than one child in school. Bablu does not like the tutor the children are going to. He introduced us to the tutor to be, who, as is the current tutor, is a teacher at the school.

We also visited the hospital and met with Sr. Justi. We put enough money in the account to bring it up to ₹8000 (about \$130). Bablu has bought the new batteries for the mini-tuk tuk and gave us the receipt for them (and for the hospital visits).

Following the instructions from our last meeting, we talked with him about getting ID. He very much wants to do this as he feels he needs ID if he's to drive the tuk-tuk out of his immediate neighborhood. Here's the situation as we (at least I) understand it. Bablu has a friend (I've met him) who either is a policeman or has connections with the police. Through him Bablu can get some kind of Delhi ID. Of course, it's not quite legal, but an ID can be bought. Bablu, who's one of the best about money, said that getting the ID would cost around ₹7000 (about \$115), so we gave him this amount. The 3 of us agreed and those at the meeting had said that he should get an ID. I told him that we wanted him to start making enough money from the tuk-tuk to pay his rent and feed the family. He said he wanted this too.

Chahat

We visited Chahat's family. She seems to be doing very well in school—at least that's what the report card shows. Bablu and Chahat's parents are in agreement about changing tutors.

Amandeep

We had lunch with Amandeep's family and visited his posh Catholic school where his teacher didn't have time to meet with us, though she said he was doing well but needed to practice speaking English more. However, we were able to meet with the principal of the school. He was quite affable, much to my surprise as he's seemed quite "uninterested" in my previous encounter with him. Amandeep's parents have found a tutor for him who went to the school. They are apparently paying but we have no idea how much as the tutor said he was paid whatever a family could afford. We didn't offer to pay for the tutor.

Anjali and Rohit

Remember them? They're the children of the mother from Khajuraho, living in Delhi in the Khajuraho ex-pat ghetto, who took her children out of the Sikh school after we had paid half a year's tuition. She was furious because we were supposedly cheating her father, who took Baba's children to the tutor's. As we left Chahat's, a woman with head bowed and face covered approached Baba. He said she was crying. It was the fury from Khajuraho now turned penitent. As you may remember she's related to Baba and Bablu (not a unique situation by any means). They call her their "sister," but I think they are cousins. She's begging through Baba to have us take her children back into the program. I asked Baba

about the turnaround, and he said her husband is very upset with her for making the ruckus she did. Again, you may remember, she and her husband had words and more about her behavior. She left him with Anjali and Rohit after an altercation and returned to Khajuraho. He brought her home, but apparently this “missed opportunity” is a sore spot in the family life. Baba said she wanted us to come to her house, which she previously barred us from, to beg forgiveness. Too much drama. Here’s what I suggest: We take the children back into the program on the condition that the parents pay us back the ₹19,205 (a little more than \$300) we paid for their children’s school tuition but lost when they took the children out of school. This is a lot of money, especially for the families we’re working with; it’s also a lot of money in light of our limited funds. I think we should be made whole. We can work out a repayment plan. I’d say ₹500 or ₹1000 per month.

Varanasi

Govinda and Family

We visited Govinda’s home for dinner and, of course, the school. We met with the principal and with the girls’ teachers. I think I reported in my previous e-mail that Govinda’s daughters, Ragine and Kusum, seem to be doing better in school.

Gungun’s Family

Gungun continues to shine in school. The teachers really light up when you ask how she is doing.

Gungun’s mother asked that we accept one of Gungun’s 2 brothers in the program. I’ve often wondered why she didn’t ask us to take her sons into the program, and now she asks that we take one of the boys, the younger, into the program but not the older one. Govinda said the younger boy is very smart, and he read from an English book for us though I suspect he did not understand what he was reading. We agreed to accept him into the program. I will find a donor at the \$450 or \$500 level to support him. If/when I ever get back to Varanasi, I will take him to the school for the admissions test.

Priya’s Family

I reported earlier that Priya is doing very well in school. When you mention her name to the teachers, they smile as they do when you mention Gungun’s. Diana found a sponsor for Priya’s younger sister, Pammy, so we took her to the school

to take her admissions test. She did better than I had expected in light of Diana's comment about and our experience of her limited command of English. In her current school she is in the 4th grade. Imperial accepted her at the 3rd grade level, but no one seemed bothered that she has to go back one grade. We bought most of her uniform clothes, and when I get back in Varanasi, I plan to buy the rest of what she needs.

Priya's family also invited us to their house, but we just didn't have time to go. However, much to Govinda's displeasure, we did go out on their boat.

Canadian Literacy Organization

We also met with the director of the Canadian Literacy Organization, the group that is tutoring the girls. The organization continues to struggle. They reported that Priya had stopped coming for tutoring. Priya confirmed this and said that they weren't teaching her anything. You get what you pay for, and this tutoring is free, so I suspect Priya is right. Govinda reported no complaints about the tutoring other than the cost of getting the children there. We allocated ₹1200 (about \$20) per month for tutoring transportation, but the transportation man hasn't been happy with the pay. Govinda says that he can't find anyone who will take his girls back and forth for this amount. We asked the director and he confirmed that ₹1200 seemed low, so we agreed on ₹1500 per month for transportation.

Khajuraho

Baba and Family

As I reported earlier we had a rough start with Baba when we got to Khajuraho. He had been celebrating Shivratti too much with the Lord Shiva's favorite herb. We decided that he could not work for/with us if he were high. I told him this and he got his act together. He was very helpful during the rest of the trip. He too invited us to eat at his house. His wife prepared fish that Baba had gotten up in the morning to catch as he said he wanted us to have fresh fish. We were also able to find a substitute medicine for Antabuse. The pharmacist told us it was illegal to sell us the drug without a prescription and then sold us more than 200 tablets—enough to last Baba for almost a year as we have him on a very low dosage in light of his epilepsy. I think he has not been drinking because he is afraid of getting sick or having a seizure while on the medication. I also suspect he is smoking more. He said you want me to give up everything: drinking,

smoking, beeties (a nicotine product Indian men chew and spit out), cigarettes. Where's the fun?

We visited the Jain school. Milli is doing better but still struggling. Her best subject is English. Krishna seems to be doing OK. Baba, his wife, and Milli want her to leave the Jain school. We spoke with the tutor, Vicky, and Baba about changing schools. Vicky recommended against it. He thinks the Jain school, which he and his brother, Deepak, who is now the acting principal, attended, is a good school. He also said that the only English-medium school worth considering is Sacred Heart. When we were at Sacred Heart about Jagjeet, we spoke with the principal about Milli. She said Milli would have to take an admissions test. We asked if she could take it while we were there. Of course she couldn't. We also visited All Saints, the English-medium school Baba would like Milli to attend if she can't go to Sacred Heart. Vicky also gave us his evaluation of All Saints: Not good. He told us that Deepak had actually taught there and hadn't liked the "atmosphere." When we asked Deepak about All Saints, he was pretty non-committal, saying he hadn't had contact with the school for a number of years. I think Nancy and Mary Magdalen were more comfortable with All Saints than I was, but the more I think about it, the more I feel that as long as Milli can speak, read, and write enough English to help herself and her family, we shouldn't stress about exactly where she goes. Our philosophy has been to let the parents have a big say in where their children are educated—something we didn't honor when we moved Milli to the Jain school as the family would have liked for her to stay at Sacred Heart. I think you can't fight city hall, so if the family wants All Saints, our sense was we should honor their wish. I did tell Baba that this was the last school move for Milli and she might be put back a grade. He said he understood. Milli's real forte seems to be in the art area. We visited with Raj, the artist and Milli's art teacher. He says that she is doing very well with her art lessons. Nancy and Mary Magdalen, who are themselves artists, and I talked about the possibility of Milli's going to an art school. Of course, we know nothing about art schools in India, but we did see art students at the Crafts Museum in Delhi sketching, so art schools do exist in India. We can certainly find out about these schools.

Baba called yesterday to say that Hemant has typhoid (again). When we were in Khajuraho, Baba said that they had gotten little sleep for several nights because Hemant cried all night. I told Baba if Hemant didn't get better, he should take him to the pediatrician in Chhatarpur.

The Christian Hanotes

We visited the Hanotes school, Mt. Zion—what a name for Hindu and Muslim Khajuraho. They have about 100 students in grades pre-K through 8. Actually we thought this would be the best place for Milli as Mrs. Hanote would pay special attention to her, but Baba wants no part of the Hanote school.

Son Sam is not doing as well in school as in previous years. He's not failing anything, but Mrs. Hanote noted that each year his grades seem to decline. This she blames on the school, Sacred Heart, and teachers rather than on Sam. I don't know who, if anyone, is to blame. We did ask her why she didn't move Sam to her school. She didn't answer the question, but said that she didn't know if he would continue at Sacred Heart. She's never had good words to say about the education there and she may be right.

Luxmi's Family

Mary Lynn gave us money to support one of the Luxmi's girls. Luxmi, related, of course, in some way to Baba and Bablu, works in Delhi to support his 6 girls and wife who live a few doors from Baba. We visited the family. We went to the Jain school with Luxmi, who came to town for a wedding (we attended the groom's pre-wedding dinner), his wife, and the child they chose, Chaya, age 5, the second youngest, to use the scholarship money for. I thought Luxmi and his wife would want her to go to an English-medium school, but they wanted her to go to school wherever Krishna is going, i.e., the Jain school, since Chaya and Krishna are playmates and close to the same age. She will be entering Lower Kindergarten (LKG) next school year. Another daughter, Muskan, as well as neighboring children, came to the school with us. Muskan was sitting there at the school with her family; Nancy, Mary Magdalen, and I talked and asked the family if they would like for Muskan, who is almost 8, to attend the Jain school. They did. Mary Lynn's donation is enough to support both girls, so we also enrolled Muskan, who is now in the second grade, but will be put back into the first. The Jain school is our least expensive school.

Jagjeet

I previously wrote about Jagjeet. No one at Sacred Heart had anything positive to say about his work, behavior, or attendance. However, when we spoke with the principal and what I took to be his homeroom teacher, she said, "Don't stop now.

Let him take the [state] exam.” When we asked if she thought he could pass, she said she thought so. He has to pass in English, Social Studies, and one of three other subjects. We paid his school tuition for this year so he could take the exam. If you remember, we paid for him to get tutoring related to the exam. Jagjeet claims that the tutor, who is also a Math and Science (I think) teacher at the school, said that if Jagjeet didn’t pay for more tutoring, he would lower his class grade. We reported this to the principal with the proviso “Jagjeet said.” She said that Jagjeet had also told her this allegation. She said we didn’t have to worry as she would have the final say over grades.

When I revisit the families, I’ll give you another update. Peace and Love

Paul A. Ramsey