



February 2017 Report from India

By and large the trip went well, and the families are overall as well as could be expected in light of the conditions they live in. Bobbi, Michael, and I survived with a few challenges, but we did not let any of it stop us.

Mumbai, Nowgong, & Khajuraho

We came to Mumbai to try to help Bablu recover his passport. We thought the heft of “the Americans” might help, but the headhunters wouldn’t meet with us. We waited more than an hour yesterday for them to show up with the passport. Bablu had the address of one of the places he went before, so I guess the next step to go there.

As Michael said, Bablu’s problems seem “intractable.” We have been talking to him a lot about “a plan” for his and his family’s future, but the only plan seems to be to uproot the family and move back to Khajuraho. We have the sense that this is not a good plan. He can’t find sustainable work in Khajuraho any more than he can in Nowgong, and the section he lived in his parents’ house is in desperate need of repair as the roof has apparently collapsed.



Baba & Bablu in Mumbai

In light of all this, it’s hard to see what the advantage is in moving back to Khajuraho. The children are in a wonderful school in Nowgong and are doing well, but Chanda too thinks they should return to Khajuraho because she hopes to find farming work there. Of course, if not Nowgong or Khajuraho where? Chanda does not want Bablu to leave the family and you really can’t blame her. It’s easy to judge and even belittle, but who among us hasn’t made some bad decisions? We’ve all made a hard bed for ourselves, but we’ve usually been in a position to have options to move from that bed. It’s hard to see what Bablu’s options are. As I’ve said before, one of the terrible things about poverty is that it gives no options.



With Bablu’s family in Nowgong

Varanasi

Overall things were stable in Varanasi with the exception of a terrible accident that involving Govinda's mother.

The Saturday before we arrived the school had had a Parent-Teacher Day that Govinda and his sister, Gungun and Preetam's mother, attended, so we had a pretty good sense of how these children were doing. We also met with the principal who confirmed the parents' reports. Basically everyone is doing well enough. Ragini, Govinda's oldest, who has struggled in school, seems to be doing better. Gungun continues to bring smiles to the principal's face as do Priya and Pammy. The principal mentioned Priya's excelling several times. The principal and we noted that Priya, Pammy, and Preetam were risks that have paid off.

Govinda has another daughter, whose nickname is Nepali because she looks Nepalese (she doesn't have a legal name as the family hasn't paid the Brahman to name her), who will be turning 4. We told Govinda that he should enroll her when the new school year starts in April, but there seems to be some hesitancy on his wife's part about letting her go to school at what she considers such a young age.

We "upgraded" uniforms for Govinda's wards and visited the tutor whom Govinda seems to be getting along with better. Priya said she and Pammy did not need anything in the uniform area and Priya has apparently dismissed their tutor. She said she doesn't need one and can give Pammy any help she needs. We met with Priya and her brother at the hotel. Pammy was to come too, but never showed up. We didn't see their parents, but as I implied above the school has nothing but praise for their school work.

Govinda was upset about his mother's accident. His mother was riding with Govinda's youngest brother on his motorcycle when her sari got caught in the spokes of the wheel and she was torn off the bike. She was taken to the hospital and to a doctor who x-rayed her and said that nothing was broken. We discussed giving medical care outside the immediate family. Michael remembered that we had helped Baba's mother-in-law as she was part of supporting the immediate family structure



Paul, Govinda, Michael, & Bobbi

(I think it was Mary Lynn who articulated this “supporting the immediate family structure” criterion previously). We decided that we would help her find a doctor and pay for her medical needs.

Govinda insisted that we go to his house and see his mother. When we got there, we found her in incredible pain. She could walk only with assistance, and the process of standing and sitting seemed to be excruciating. We told Govinda and his mother that we were willing to help.

We went to the doctor’s and after examining and x-raying her, he told us she had a broken lumbar vertebrae, but the break was “stable” and would heal with time. He ordered a brace for her back that she is to use when sitting and walking, and some kind of upper support that she is to wear all the time. Apparently she has a badly bruised rib. The doctor looked at the painkillers the first doctor had prescribed and said that she should take them for a week, and then he wants Govinda to return with a report on how she is doing. The doctor also noted that she has asthma and recommended that she see someone about this condition. Luckily, he recommended a doctor whose office is right around the corner from Govinda’s home, and with whom Govinda was already familiar.

Delhi

Things seem to be rolling along in Delhi as they usually do. Laxmi does a good job of taking care of the families. We visited the families, the Sikh School, Jivodaya Hospital (where the families go for medical help), Max Hospital (where Annu had her surgery), and a home for mentally disturbed or disabled homeless women run by the nuns in charge of Jivodaya and Sacred Heart in Khajuraho.

The Sikh School

We made our usual visit to the Sikh School to see how the children are doing and to “pay our respects” to the principal. The principal had a terrible cold and said she was going home but made time to meet with us. Because she wasn’t feeling well, we didn’t insist on seeing each of the children’s teachers and report cards. Besides, February is a bad time to get information from the schools because it is so close to final exam time. The long and short of it is that the principal at the Sikh school thought that all our children were doing OK and that is what their parents reported when we visited with them.



One of our star pupils, Chahat, with her sister in Delhi

Chahat’s Family

It was great for Bobbi to see how much Chahat has grown and matured since Bobbi saw something special in Chahat when we were visiting the Khajuraho diaspora ghetto 3 years ago. Bobbi said that we should send her to school even though she had no school-readiness, and she did have a rough start. I remember seeing her in her first classroom sitting alone because she was misbehaving and used “bad language.” She’s come a long way. She says she likes school, and if previous report cards are any indication of her current work, she is doing well in school.

Her mother, Kapure, said she is. She has a sister, Manse, who will turn 4 in July. We spoke with the family and school about her beginning school in the new school year that begins in April.

Rohit and Anjali's Family

Both children and the rest of the family seem to be doing well. This is especially gratifying to see since we had such a rough start with this family. I'm so glad we stuck with them—the wisdom of the group. It's also great to see Anjali is doing so well. Her first tutor thought that she was mentally disabled. When we talked to the school about this “diagnosis,” they said they saw no signs of any problem. The children read and recited so that we could see how “smart” they were. Both children said they liked their school very much. There is a younger sister, Sonakshi, who will turn 4 in June. We talked both to the school and family about her starting school in April.

Amandeep's Family

We didn't visit Amandeep's school because the day we were visiting schools it was closed, having had yet another performance the night before. The school Amandeep attends, Montfort, is excellent with an emphasis not only on academics but also on the arts, so there are a number of performances throughout the year that Amandeep takes part in. We saw his report card. He is doing very well and seems to excel in dance. You may remember that when we visited the family in November they spoke of adopting Baby's, sister's child. They wanted to know if we would consider this child a part of TIG and we said we would. The child was not with them and we did not ask about the adoption situation.



Amandeep in costume for a performance at Montfort School

Jivodaya Hospital & the Home for the Homeless Women

We visited the Jivodaya Hospital and partook of the sisters' hospitality as manifested in their having us for tea. Our account with them was empty—indeed overdrawn—but Laxmi had covered the bills, which we have asked him not to do. I found a working ATM and replenished the account. They are adding on to the hospital and asked us to make a contribution. In the US if we were using the hospital as a fiscal conduit, we would have to pay a percentage for this service. They oversee our account without taking a percentage of our monies. I will make a contribution of \$100 to their building fund to show our gratitude for what they are doing for TIG. I made a similar contribution when they were raising funds to install an elevator a few years ago.

Once when we visited the hospital, one of nuns mentioned that they had a near-by home for people with disabilities. This, of course, peaked Michael's interest, so in November I asked if we could visit the home when Michael came in February, and they arranged for us to visit. It took us about an hour to get to the town the home is in, including finding the place, which is down some unmarked lane. One of the nuns had to come out and lead us to the building. It is a home for disabled homeless women, most of whom are found on the street and brought to the home by the police. The women are well cared for and make handicrafts.

Annu

Certainly the most exciting part of the trip was around Annu after her surgery. Her surgeon, Dr. Choudhary, was again gracious enough to meet with us. He was pleased with the results of Annu's surgery and said she would look better as she healed. He is pretty sure that he wants to do some kind of laser treatment on her face in about 2 months. The hospital has a new, high-tech laser machine that can deliver 2 levels of laser treatment at the same time. The machine had just arrived and not been used yet, but the laser procedure will fit within our budget limit.



The doctor also strongly recommended that Annu begin to use make-up and wrote a prescription for some ointment she should use on her face. In light of what the doctor said, we went to the cosmetic department at the mall next to the hospital where a make-up artist, with Bobbi's help, told Annu what to use and even gave her a makeover. Laxmi told me she said that having the makeup made for "the happiest day of her life."

One of the collateral benefits of our efforts with Annu is that Children's Burn Foundation and Dr. Choudhary have established a relationship. This had always been Deborah's hope/dream that by introducing CBF to a world-class surgeon outside the US, they might reconsider their policy of insisting that all burn victims come to the US for treatment since there are great doctors outside our borders. Deborah's vision has apparently come to fruition. Dr. Choudhary told us that CBF had been in touch with him about a very severely

burned child, "much worse than Annu." He convinced CBF that they were wrong about it being less expensive to have the surgery performed in the US, so after some bureaucratic matters are worked through, Dr. Choudhary will perform the surgery at Max Hospital in India.

Shelly Batra

We also had the opportunity to meet with and have a presentation by Dr. Shelly Batra, whom Martin and David introduced us to in November. She has developed a grassroots model for identifying and treating TB in Indian and other countries. Her organization's name is ASHA (<http://www.opasha.org/>). We took Annu, Laxmi, and Baba to meet her. I thought it was especially important for Annu to meet an Indian woman who is so outstanding. She gave each of us a copy of her book on exercise. She will be giving a TED Talk that I am really looking forward to hearing.

Laxmi

When our Delhi account gets depleted, Laxmi pays for what is needed, e.g., school bills, medicine for the families, out of his pocket. I told him that he should not be expending his own funds, but contacting us to replenish the account. He said he would do so in the future but without much conviction. After several discussions, we worked out an acceptable system that will be fair to him.

Potential New Students

Laxmi's youngest, Anushka, will turn 4 in October, so she may be ready to go to school in Khajuraho the coming school year. If all the potential "newbies" go to school, we will have 4 more in school next year. As Michael has said, "Our primary growth is internal" since we are committed to seeing all the school age children in our families educated.

The Passport

Believe it or not, we got Bablu's passport back. Thanks to those who prayed and threw positive thoughts into the universe on this matter. None of us thought there was a snowball's chance in hell that we would see that passport again. I think our being with Bablu and calling the headhunters helped, but most of the credit goes to Bablu's persistence in pestering and threatening them. When they returned the passport the application for Bablu to work in Saudi Arabia was there. Bablu said the Saudis had rejected his application. Whatever the reason, I think he's better off not being in Saudi. Though this is not a TIG matter, we also got \$300 back.

Money

The money situation has been a real pain. The problems we've had before (finding a working ATM and change) have definitely been exasperated. There are no longer ₹1000 (c. \$15) bills. You have new ₹2000 (c. \$30), ₹500 (c. \$8) and ₹100 (c. \$1.50) bills. No one wants to accept the ₹2000 bills because they don't have change, but if you want to get ₹10000 (c. \$150), the ATM give you 5 ₹2000 bills. Outside of the urban areas, I've found some machines that only give ₹100, so you can only get ₹4000 (about \$60) at a time. Businesses have been hurt because of the money situation and PM Modi has been getting substantial backlash on this issue.

I've found the trip tiring as always, but "grounding," reminding me of why we founded TIG, to offer succor to our families, especially when they are hurting, in the most humane and efficient manner. We can do so because we are small and not a bureaucracy. Often when I'm dealing with legitimate TIG issues at home, I lose sight of our *raison d'être*. Those important but really ancillary issues take on more than a life of their own. They, rather than service to our families, become the center of my focus and time. This trip to India helped to refocus me.

**Keep us in your thoughts and prayers.
Peace and Love,**

Paul