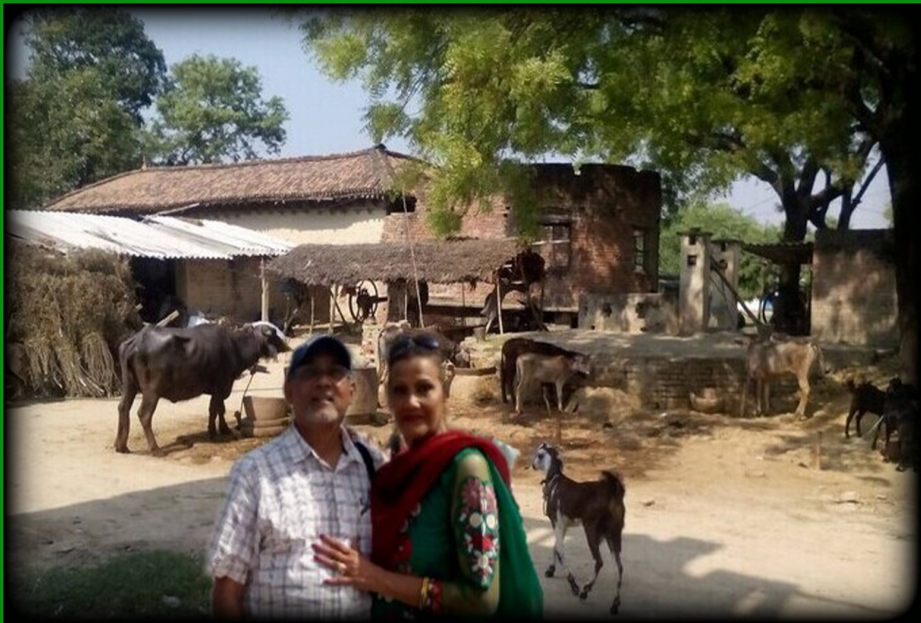


OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Kamalo & Sherma Deen

Pempaleh International Productions

KAMALO DEEN

Our Adventure in India



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Kamalo Deen asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

First edition

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Dedicated to all the people we met in India for accepting us with open arms and making our visit an experience we shall always cherish.

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Foreword

My wife Sherma & I left for India on April 7th 2015.

The purpose of our trip was to attend a relative's wedding on Sunday April 12th in one of our ancestral villages, Rehati Trilochan, in the state of Uttar Pradesh. It was also the occasion of Sherma's 70th birthday (April 15th) and we thought it would be a nice occasion to celebrate with a pilgrimage to the villages of some of our ancestors.

We had never met any of these relatives before but had developed a relationship with the wedding hosts through regular correspondence over several years.

Afterwards we'd planned to spend her birthday in Mumbai before returning to Uttar Pradesh to seek out other relatives with whom we'd had no previous contacts.

I must acknowledge that all of this was happening because of research done by my brother Shamshu Deen. He had been able to trace our family roots to several villages in Uttar Pradesh and had on occasion paid brief visits and established contacts with our closest relatives there.

I'd like also to thank my son Ishmael & his wife Sharon who

works for Continental Airlines (now United Airlines), for making this trip possible.

I had been to India on one prior occasion. I had spent one month in Mumbai completing the final edit of my movie “The Pan-man”. It was a difficult visit because besides being completely consumed by the work, I had almost starved myself because of great difficulty adapting to the spices and seasonings in the food.

Our foods in Trinidad have been so modified over the years that they do not always resemble the originals brought over by our forefathers. The original Indian cuisine was heavily enhanced by spices that I was not accustomed to. I ate very little and lost much weight on that trip.

Some of their customs were also foreign to me and I wondered how Sherma would adapt to them. I had tried to explain the differences in our practices and how she might have difficulty in accepting their ways but she was determined to find out for herself. She had made up her mind. She wanted to go.

I conceded.

We were now finally on our way.

1

Delhi.....Arrival

We flew from Newark Airport in New Jersey on Tuesday night, April 7th 2015.

After a fourteen hour non-stop flight which was eased-up a bit by the fact that Sharon worked for the airline and was able to seat us in First Class; and after losing ten hours crossing several time zones, we arrived in Delhi at 9:00 pm on Wednesday, April 8th.

Entering the mass confusion at the airport, smothered by a constant tumult of supplications by porters, touts, taxi-drivers etc. was for us like diving into a swift-flowing river. There was no similarity between this and the calmness and control of our departure from Newark Airport. The herds of humanity, the noise, the horn-honking and the zig-zagging of traffic picking up or dropping off passengers formed a constant, heaving whirlpool of confusion.

After tipping several porters and struggling through a line of

screaming touts we were maneuvered into a taxi which bumped and bamboozled its way in the traffic before arriving at the hotel Aerocity Delhi at about 11:00 pm.

The hotel seemed at first glance to be a regular storefront on a busy city street. It was simple but would eventually prove to be adequate for the night. We checked in and were accompanied to our room by a courteous young porter.

After unpacking our necessities I realized that I had forgotten my phone charger at home in New York. I asked the front desk for help in locating a store where I could buy one. They were instead kind enough to loan one to me. In the morning when I tried to return it they decided to give it to me as a gift. I offered to pay for it but they refused.

Back home in New York I had ordered a rental car through an agency on the Internet. My arrangement was to have it delivered to me at whichever hotel I was at in the Delhi Airport area. When I contacted the rental company on the morning of Thursday 9th April, they claimed that there was no listing of my reservation for a car. After several desperate phone calls and the intervention of Mr Sandeep the hotel manager, who was very firm in his tone towards them, I finally had the rental car I had ordered delivered to the hotel.

It was a TATA NANO smart car, supplied by Myles Car Rentals of Delhi. It was undoubtedly the smallest model of car in India. The car had a manual transmission. I was accustomed to driving only vehicles with an automatic transmission. I had never learned how to drive a manual. However the hotel's manager sat with

DELHI.....ARRIVAL

me in the car and gave me some basic instructions on using the clutch and the changing of gears. He convinced me that I would learn as I drove.

This vehicle was to be our castle for the next two weeks.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



2

Road Journey Begins

I must admit that I was a bit scared by the prospect of our adventure. Especially now with having to deal with the challenge of driving a manual transmission vehicle. Everyone had tried to discourage us from driving in India, but we had always enjoyed driving vacations and Sherma was as adventurous as I. We were looking forward to the freedom of being able to travel on as many back roads as we could find and to visit some of the rural villages and sites.

The traffic outside was heavy, crazy and non-stop. Everyone, including pedestrians, bicycles, scooters, cattle and goats was moving about without any regard for rules or regulations. The car was packed to the hilt with our luggage fitting snugly in the backseat area. The two front seats were large and held ample room for us.

I could not speak the language but I said a prayer for the Lord's guidance and eased haltingly into the traffic flow at about 12:30 pm. Three minutes later I was stopped by a traffic cop and

charged 100 rupees (on the spot) for not wearing my seat belt. I apologized, hoping that he would excuse my recalcitrance. He smiled but was unforgiving.

I paid, collected my receipt, buckled my seat belt and we continued on our way.



3

Yamuna Expressway

After about an hour of struggling through the local Delhi traffic, mashing clutch, changing gears, stalling often, driving on the wrong side of the road, unable to read the road signs which were in Hindi lettering, no internet so no GPS on my phone, asking directions in English and getting replies in Hindi, and fending off all manner of vehicles from every side all honking their horns at me, I finally and accidentally stumbled out of the city and onto the Yamuna Expressway. What a relief and what a difference!

This was a super highway on par with any that I'd driven on anywhere in the world. There was very little traffic, I guess because of the tolls. There were service areas spaced out just like on the New Jersey Turnpike or the New York Thruway. Now at last we could relax and enjoy the view of the Indian countryside as we headed towards Agra, 240 kilometers away.

After about an hour's drive on the highway we decided to pull off at one of the service areas. It was modern and staffed by welcoming and friendly workers. The first thing that caught my

attention, as we pulled to a stop in the parking zone, was how well the area was neatly landscaped. I parked close to the main entrance and we entered the service building.

The staff was courteous. We entered the restaurant area and sat at a booth. The girl who worked as a cleaner at our booth smiled shyly at us and Sherma immediately took a liking to her. We made some halting conversation with her. She told us her name was Aneesa. After a while she asked us if we would do her a favor by changing \$40 US dollars with the cashier for her. She explained that in India she could not just change foreign currency without special permission. But we as foreigners were allowed to. She asked this favor of us and we complied. She thanked us with tears in her eyes.

I made conversation with the young manager of the service area. His name was Shyam and he was also very friendly towards us. He spoke English and was interested in our plans and even made suggestions about hotels and some of the roads and villages along our way. He gave me his mobile number and suggested that I call him if I faced any difficulties while in India.

YAMUNA EXPRESSWAY



4

Agra - Kanpur - Allahabad

Because the main purpose of our trip was to attend a wedding in the village of Rehati Trilochan, outside the city of Jaunpur on April 12th, and fearing that time might be running against us, we decided to by-pass Agra until our return and try to get down to the wedding area as soon as possible. Agra was to be one of the major destination points for us because it's the location of both the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort. A visit there now would definitely take much time and may jeopardize our arrival time for the wedding. We decided to skip it for now.

The expressway ended at Agra and we took a local four lane highway towards the city of Kanpur which was a distance of 280 kilometers away. This highway became a local roadway at several towns through which it passed. Each of these local roadways acted as a busy marketplace and road crossing without any traffic lights or road signs. Massive crowds of people and all forms of traffic were always edging their way, trying to cross at these intersections. Should you allow this deluge to obstruct your path, it became extremely difficult to move

forward. The secret was to proceed without interruption. I developed a strategy for each crossing where I would get behind a truck and stick almost against its bumper so nothing had a chance to cut in between us.

At about 9:00 pm, after driving for several hours and after passing Kanpur by about 60 kilometers, I realized that I'd missed the turn-off for Lucknow where we had hoped to spend the night. The highway signs indicated that this new highway headed down to Allahabad, 200 kilometers away. Since our final destination was not very far from Allahabad, we decided to continue there, rather than turn back.

At about 1:00 am I stopped to fill up gas in a busy truck-stop station on the outskirts of Allahabad, intending to use one of my credit cards. After filling the tank, the station was having a problem processing my cards. Since I did not have enough Indian cash, one of the workers offered to take me to an ATM at a military base about five kilometers away. His vehicle was a motorbike.

Sherma waited at the station in the car as I rode off on the back seat of his motorbike as he sped along the highway. The only times I had ever ridden on the back of a motorbike was with my late friend Rabin Ramsahai in Gasparillo. Although the rider rode with great expertise, I clung to the small side bars. The bumps and the corners were to me quite frightening.

At first the security at the entrance to the Military Base refused to allow us to enter, but after some explanation and the involvement of a senior officer, they had a jeep escort us to the ATM machine. When we arrived back at the station Sherma was still

sitting in the car making conversation through the window with the manager and a couple of female vendors.

With our gas tank now full, we followed their directions for the road to the city of Jaunpur, which was about 110 kilometers away.



5

Allahabad to Jaunpur

We were now growing anxious about reaching the area of the wedding as soon as possible. So instead of seeking lodging in Allahabad we decided to drive on to Jaunpur. The journey from Allahabad to Jaunpur was an adventure by itself.

We emerged from Allahabad at about 1:30 am on April 10th and followed signs for Jaunpur. For about the first 30 kilometers outside of Allahabad the road was fairly good with a few potholes here and there. Suddenly as we were driving out of one of the surrounding small, sleeping villages after the village of Kandi, the road ended at a collection of construction vehicles and no sign of any personnel around.

We sat there for about 15 minutes trying to figure out our next move. I was not willing to return to Allahabad. I was hoping to find a way to go on to Jaunpur. In the night darkness a cargo truck suddenly emerged from a dirt road off to the side. I jumped out of the car and waved him to a stop. The driver seemed surprised to see me. I shouted out to him, "Jaunpur?"

He indicated that we had to go the way he had come because the entire main highway was closed at night for construction.

So rather than turn back we decided to forge ahead following the dirt road he had indicated.... 'How bad could it be?' Well it was bad. For a good 50 kilometers we drove very slowly and very cautiously along the dirt road, constantly dodging craters and huge rocks and mounds of construction gravel material.

We passed many mud huts and tiny villages but they were all dark as people slept. Sometimes the sound of a dog barking could be heard near one of the villages. Just twice we passed someone walking along the road. Each time I'd asked: "Jaunpur?" and each time they'd indicate that we were on the right track. Despite the extreme darkness and the lonely night sounds, we never felt any sense of danger or fear during the drive.

One really memorable episode we faced was when I tried to swerve away from a huge crater in the road, I drove up on a boulder and got stuck. So at about 3:00 am I had to get out of the car, put it in neutral and bounce it by hand, off the boulder. Then I had to push that huge boulder out of the way, before we could continue. My only fear was not for ghosts or jumbies in the night but of being attacked by dogs while I was outside of the car.

At about 4:30 am nostalgia hit us both when we began to notice village people walking along the road, probably going to temple or mosque or the fields

As the dawn was breaking and we left the dirt road and

approached the last villages at the outskirts of Jaunpur, we saw many sights that brought back childhood memories of our lives growing up in Trinidad...Women sweeping with cocoyea brooms, lighting fires outside their huts, making tea or roti, men brushing their teeth with datwans by the street side pumps, animals being led out to pasture....

By 7:30 am we were in the city of Jaunpur.



6

Grand Utsav Hotel

After checking a few hotels we finally settled on the Grand Utsav which sits in a private enclosure which includes two other hotels owned by the same family. I had checked out this hotel on the Internet while I was at home in New York. I remember that I was pleased with them. But I wanted to wait until I was in Jaunpur before finalizing any booking.

We had a quick breakfast downstairs at the hotel's Chatori Restaurant. After returning to our room we showered and were in bed by 9:30 am. Because of our all-day and all-night drive to get here, we were extremely tired.

At about 7:00 pm, after about nine hours of sleep, we woke up and I called Abdul Kayoom, our host for the wedding. He wanted us to come over to his home right away because he had provided accommodation at his home for us. I told him that we were in bed and will see him when we checked out in the morning. I could tell that he was disappointed but I knew that it would be unwise to get to their home without being fully rested. After

sleeping all day we had dinner in the room and slunk back to bed.

The next morning we had breakfast in our room as we prepared to meet the new day. The entire hotel staff was very pleasant and helpful, especially the manager Syed Irfan. When I discovered that the car battery was dead because I'd forgotten a light on inside, he arranged for a mechanic to come over and charge the battery and start the car for us. He also had the car washed and cleaned. The total cost for this service was just about \$3.00 US.

I then called Abdul Kayoom to tell him that we were leaving the hotel. He said that he and Dr. Yunus Ansari of Aligahr will meet us at the junction of Highway 31 and the Rehati Trilochan village road. When we were about to leave, most of the hotel staff gathered to wish us well on our trip. We left the hotel at 11:15 am on Saturday April 11th.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Abdul Kayoom

My brother Shamsu Deen, the anthropologist, had done significant research on the lineages of Trinidad & Tobago's East Indians and their origins in India. Among the many whose ancestors he had traced to India were two of the country's Prime Ministers, Basdeo Panday & Kamla Persad Bissessar. To our family's benefit and fulfillment he had also traced our ancestral roots to a few villages in India and located several of our relatives on both our mother's and father's sides.

Sixteen years ago one of our relatives on my father's mother's side had reached out to me to begin a correspondence. I readily agreed and we had corresponded since via letters and phone calls. His name is Abdul Kayoom from Rehati Trilochan, Jaunpur District, Uttar Pradesh. His father, Yacoob Ali, as a young man had abandoned his family's caste as jolahas (weavers) to pursue the path of education. As his family grew he successfully steered his children in this new direction allowing them to seek professions of advancement in the society. Mr Yacoob was a school teacher who eventually rose to the office of School

Principal.

One of his sons, Abdul Kayoom, followed in his father's footsteps and also became Principal of the local High School. However, despite his position, he and his family spoke little or no English. You can just imagine what our letters and phone conversations were like. Yet we developed a strong relationship over the years.

He and his wife had five children, three girls Zahara, Tabassum and Parveen Husna and two boys Maajid and Shahid. The two older girls and the older boy were married. The wedding we were attending was of his youngest daughter Parveen Husna. We looked on it as an honor to be invited and to be able to attend. When we decided to attend, my brother Sham and the lineage asked us to officially represent the Trinidad & Tobago relatives.

Another off-shoot from our relationship was a friendship I had also developed with Abdul Kayoom's sister's husband Dr. Yunus Ansari. He was Professor of Botany at Aligarh Muslim University. Since he was fluent in English, I corresponded regularly with him. These two families had been successful in using education to lift them out of the regular village environment.

Abdul Kayoom's older son Maajid had a Masters degree and like his father, taught at a High School. The younger son Shahid was at University in Allahabad. Dr. Yunus Ansari and his wife had four sons. The first two were scientists working in South Korea, the third unfortunately was born with Downs syndrome and the fourth was entering medical school.

The two men, Abdul Kayoom & Dr. Yunus Ansari, were coming

out to the main road to meet us for the very first time.



Rehati Trilochan

As our car crept through the Rehati Trilochan marketplace on the main road, both Sherma and I kept our eyes open, scanning the throngs of people for the faces we had grown accustomed to, from the pictures we had exchanged during our correspondence.

The first one I spotted was Dr. Yunus with his distinctive red hair and white beard. He was followed closely by Abdul Kayoom. They recognized the car from our description and were hastily approaching us with broad smiles on their faces. As they came up to the window I stopped the car and began opening the door.

It was an overwhelming moment and I felt a trembling sensation throughout my body. We were seeing them in real for the first time. But they did not allow us to get out of the vehicle, instead asking us to follow them as they hurried away. They got into a white SUV driven by a young man from the village who I came to know as Saajad.

They drove slowly and signaled us to follow. We drove behind

them as they turned off the main road and began driving the one mile or so through the village of Rehati Trilochan, towards Abdul Kayoom's home.

The sight of village homes and animals and fields awakened a feeling of belonging in me. I was captured by a sense of traveling back in time.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Our Arrival Among Family

For the final fifty yards or so we could see the house. We assumed that it was Abdul Kayoom's home because of the number of people who had gathered in the front yard to await our arrival.

Our welcome by the family was simple and enthusiastic. The adults surrounded us with open arms, hugging and kissing us with great warmth and love. The children mostly stood a short distance away, staring admiringly and shyly at their new relatives. We immediately felt like we belonged. We were from the west with our western customs and dress, but from our first encounter we never felt out of place or uncomfortable.

Although they were devoted Muslims who followed the strict Wahabbi code, they made every effort to accommodate us. These people represented the best of our religion and we were extremely grateful for how freely they shared their unselfish hospitality.

The family elder, ninety eight year old Yacoob Ali, was confined

to his bedroom and was unable to greet us in the front yard. He is the one through whom my brother Shamsu Deen was able to make his breakthrough in this particular connection to our father's lineage.

As a young man, Mr. Yacoob Ali had made a decision to use education to escape the rigors of village labor. He studied and became a teacher, initially moving far away from home to pursue his career. Eventually he rose to become a School Principal. He made sure that his children chose the path of Education.

Mr. Yacoob Ali had kept up with his son's correspondence with me and he had kept wishing that we could meet. I too had hoped to meet him someday. This was a fulfillment of those hopes.

He occupied a bedroom on the ground floor of the house and we were told that he was anxiously awaiting our arrival. Before entering his room, Bibi Khalida who was Dr Yunus' wife and one of Yacoob Ali's daughters placed an orhni on Sherma's head. When I approached him, he held my hand in a firm grip and I could feel the emotional ties of almost two centuries of family unions being rejoined and being melded together again.

OUR ARRIVAL AMONG FAMILY



The Wedding House

Despite our objections, Abdul Kayoom's elder son Maajid and his wife Parveen Bano, had graciously made their room available to us for the visit. It was a large beautiful room with a king-sized bed and private bathroom. Although the house had no air conditioning, there were two fans which kept the room cool and comfortable. We also had to familiarize ourselves with the commonly-used Indian-style stoop-down toilet with no toilet paper but plenty of water. This was not unusual for us because we had both grown up in the days of latrine usage in Trinidad.

The house was packed with relatives (adults & children) who were there for the wedding. They all made us feel like celebrities, gathering in our room, talking to us in Hindi sprinkled here and there with an English word. Making many signs, laughing and joking a lot while being able to communicate a sense of love and joy and friendship. One boy in particular became very attached and stuck to us from the first moment to the time we left. His name was Samir. He was about fifteen years old.

THE WEDDING HOUSE

I must commend my wife Sherma for being truly masterful in this type of communication, and she soon won everybody's heart with her ability to put them all at ease and make them laugh a lot. We became Uncle and Auntie to all.

From the outset a young lady relative assigned herself to Sherma as an interpreter. Her name was Kushboo. She and her husband, Kurshid, were young professionals. She was a student at the teacher's College and spoke English well.

They never let us alone and we never wanted for anything. Since they never ate on tables but on sheets spread on the floor, our meals were served on the bed where a plastic tablecloth was spread and some of the family would join us, sitting cross-legged on the bed. Because we were unaccustomed to eating in such a position, Sherma would sit on the edge of the bed and I used a chair.

In no time at all we were made a part of the family, actively involved in preparations for the wedding.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Return to Grand Utsav

At about 7:00 pm, while we were unpacking our bags, I realized that the folder containing all my documents, cash and the cards sent by the T&T family as wedding presents was missing. I knew that I had it while in the hotel because I had placed my own wedding gift card in it while there. I informed Dr. Yunus and he tried contacting the hotel by phone, but couldn't get through. He immediately contacted Saajad and made arrangements for him to drive us to the hotel in Jaunpur. Abdul Kayoom, against my objections, left his wedding preparations to accompany us. Sherma stayed at the house with the ladies while Dr Yunus, Abdool Kayoom and I rode with Saajad in his jeep to Jaunpur.

At the Hotel Grand Utsav, Syed Irfan, the manager, greeted us at the entrance with a broad smile and escorted us to the front desk. He presented us with the folder and asked me to check the contents to see if anything was missing. He explained that the cleaner had found it and turned it over to him. He had no contact in India for me so he was unable to reach me. He was certain that I would contact the hotel when I realized that it was

missing. I had forgotten to remove it from the top drawer of the wardrobe.

The contents were undisturbed. Everything in the folder was there. This was another truly wonderful reflection of our experiences with the ordinary people of India. Earlier that day they were all strangers to us. Now their honesty saved our holiday. I offered a reward for their honesty but Sayed, the Manager, refused. I thanked them all enthusiastically, exchanged telephone numbers and promised to remain in contact.

On our way back to the wedding house, my hosts decided to celebrate getting back the folder. We stopped for a brief lime at the busy Rehati Trilochan marketplace for some sweets and a cold fruit drink. They wanted me to experience their local marketplace on a Saturday night.



RETURN TO GRAND UTSAV



Farewell Night

Although there were a few similarities, their wedding celebration was mostly very different from ours. The public gaiety of a Trinidad Indian wedding was absent. Their Saturday night (farewell) was punctuated by families beginning to gather, children playing, adults meeting & greeting and socializing. The women were mostly gathered upstairs, cooking for the gathering families. There were no loudspeakers or music and I was not aware of any religious rituals taking place by the family members.

The grounds had been cleared in three areas, at their front yard and in the yards of two neighboring houses, where huge tents were erected by a professional company.

The cooks belonged to a professional group of men who hired out their services for weddings and celebrations. They, with all their supplies and utensils, were gathered in a tent at the side of the house. They had arrived earlier in the day. They would sleep there so that they could begin their work early in the morning.

FAREWELL NIGHT

The animals to be sacrificed were transported to a special area in another shed.

The entire area was lit-up with colorful electric bulbs which gave a sense of celebration to this area of the village. The only really unusual noise was the loud and constant sound of the generator used to provide additional power for the occasion.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Wedding Preparations 1

During the night, inside the house, the ladies had their hands decorated with mehendi by Yasmin, a natural artist and member of the family.

Earlier in the day, Sherma had wanted to go out to the shops to buy an outfit for the wedding, but the ladies would not hear of it. Instead they brought out an array of beautiful saris, shalwars and anarkalis from which she was made to choose. This of course turned out to be a fashion show for her because they wanted her to model all the beautiful outfits. She was in her element. She loved the attention she was receiving as much as the women and girls loved sharing it with her. So all her clothes for the wedding, most of which were given to her as gifts, were from the various family members.

Outside, the animals were sacrificed, the meats cut up and seasoned, potatoes peeled, rice picked, channa and dhal soaked and lots of seasonings ground on seal & lohrah by various village women.

By 4:00 am all the cooks were up and cooking activities began down stairs in the cooking tent. Brick chulhas were set up and wood fires were lit. These cooks (all men) belonged to a professional group. Everyone knew his task.

Much of the seasonings were the same that we use in Trinidad but they also had some that were unique to their tastes. A lot of milk curd, cinnamon and cloves were used in their dishes. Their roti was not like our “buss-up-shot” which is a staple of our weddings. They made a tandoori roti which looked like a mini bake and were cooked by plastering them to the inside walls of a hot clay oven. There were two versions, one salty and the other slightly sweet.

They also didn't have side dishes like pumpkin or chataigne or mango talkaree. Theirs was mainly goat meat, chicken, channa and potato, and various dhals and chutneys, all served with rice & roti.



WEDDING PREPARATIONS 1



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Wedding Preparations 2

As dawn broke, final preparations began in earnest. The cooks were in high gear in the kitchen. The tent people cleared and swept the yard spaces and covered the entire area with a thick green felt matting which came in rolls of about one hundred feet long by eight feet wide. The large canvas tents were raised over these felt floors. Chairs and tables were laid out and in the bridegroom's tent a red carpet was laid out for him, which led to the stage where he would sit for the ceremony.

The tent at the front of the bride's house was designated for the specially invited guests and local government officials. Another tent was the groom's tent where he would sit on his stage for the ceremony. This was located at the back of the house in a neighbor's yard. The final tent was designated for the "baraateers" (the people who came with the groom). It was situated across the street from the groom's tent in a cow pasture which was cleaned and converted for the occasion. Here was where they would gather and have lunch before proceeding to the groom's tent to witness the ceremony.

By 10:30 am we had had our breakfast upstairs and were dressed and ready for the day's activities. Our car was moved to Saajad's home for safekeeping during the celebration. I had designated some of the young men and boys to use my video camera and my still camera to shoot whatever they thought appropriate. I used my phone camera.

After I left to tour the prepared compounds downstairs with Abdul Kayoom and Dr. Yunus, the bride was brought into 'our' room where she relaxed on 'our' bed with her mother, sisters, aunts & new Auntie Sherma to help calm her nerves in preparation for the task ahead.

Downstairs there were long tables lining one side of the barateer's tent, packed with all manner of delicacies. Each table was manned by servers. Our hosts gave me the honor of sampling every item at each table. They were all delicious!! Everything seemed to be in order for the arrival of the wedding guests.



WEDDING PREPARATIONS 2





Guests Arrive

Guests began arriving from around 11:00 am. By my estimate there were about 700 guests and I'm sure that I was introduced to all of them. Everyone seemed happy to meet me. They tried very hard to make conversation with me even though we were burdened by our limited use of one another's vocabularies.

I was approached on two occasions by people who knew some English and offered to act as my translators for the day. One was a young man named Ebarar Ahamad of Lucknow and the other was a nine year old boy who was studying English in school. They were both very helpful. However Dr Yunus stayed with me as my official translator for most of the time.

I was also impressed by the varied religious mixture of the guests. There were many Hindus, Christians and Muslims of other Schools of Thought in attendance. I especially enjoyed the brief discussions I had with some of the Hindu teachers from the Trilochan Mahadeo High School. They seemed more interested though, in discussing my life in the United States. Abdul Kayoom

was their School Principal and they suggested that Sherma & I pay a visit to their school.

There was no representation of other races at the wedding because in these village areas there were just no other races of people like we have in Trinidad or the United States. All the guests in the tents outside were male. Women activities were carried out in the house. Sherma remained in a separate environment upstairs with the bride and the women of the immediate family for the duration of the wedding.

One other unique offering at the wedding was a table where paan was made and served. This is a concoction of spices, herbs and tobacco wrapped in a special leaf which is placed in the mouth and chewed (by the men). I think it acts as a stimulant. It is widely used here. I also noticed that a table was set up and manned by a gentleman who collected and recorded all monetary gifts to the couple.

Guests were fed on arrival and the men and women socialized separately while we all waited for the arrival of the baraat (groom's wedding party).

GUESTS ARRIVE



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



GUESTS ARRIVE



Baraat Arrives

The baraat was a little late, arriving at about 1:30 pm. Unlike Trinidad, there was no music-mike or horn-blowing or tassa-drumming to herald their approach. We were kept abreast of their approach and arrival by cell-phone communication. The long line of vehicles was directed along a side road to their designated area. In Trinidad, you can hear a baraat's arrival from about a mile away.... Not here...At least not in this type of wedding.

When the caravan came to a halt, we all crowded around the Dulaha's car which was a white SUV, well decorated with strings of natural and artificial flowers lining both its interior and exterior. The driver and another young man were seated in the front seats and the groom occupied the rear. The front seat passenger alighted and went over to assist the groom arrange himself to exit the car. Maajid, Abdul Kayoom's elder son received the groom after he'd exited the car.

The groom was then led along the red carpet to the stage

designated for him. Here he took his place, sitting on a carpet on the floor. A few of his helpers removed two silk wrapped bundles and a suitcase from his vehicle and placed them in a corner of the stage.

As the bride's male relatives, including myself, approached the stage to welcome him, the barateers (about 500 altogether) crowded into the tent reserved for them to be welcomed by sweets, snacks, fruit drinks and lassi and then a sumptuous lunch. After officially greeting the groom, some of the men in the bride's group visited the baraat tent and mingled with the guests from the groom's group. The few women who came with the baraat were directed to a separate, cordoned-off area of the tent where they were served separately.

At about 4:00 pm, when most of the men had eaten and filled the seats in the groom's tent, the actual ceremony began. The two bundles and the small suitcase were taken away from the stage by representatives of the groom. They were transported from his tent to the house and up to "our" room, which was the official wedding room for the bride. There, in the presence of all who could fit in the room, the bundles and the suitcase were opened revealing the dowry from the groom to the bride.

The dowry is a requirement in Islam. The bundles contained a number of saris and shoes and other really beautiful clothing items. The suitcase contained a variety of gold and silver jewelry. The dowry was then put away for safekeeping....It was now the personal property of the bride as is designated by the religion.

The next step was the nikkah – the actual marriage ceremony.

OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



BARAAT ARRIVES



The Nikkah

After everyone had eaten and settled down in and around the groom's tent, the Nikkah which is the official Muslim marriage ceremony, began.

The marriage officials, comprising the Imam and two other men, gathered at the groom's stage, with other's hovering around. The Imam, standing on the stage, offered a short recitation from the Quran. He then stooped next to the groom and asked his consent for the marriage. The Imam was required to ask the groom's consent three times and the groom had to give his approval on all three occasions, for it to be official. The groom's consent was taken by the Imam and details were recorded in the official Marriage application form. Then the official group left, followed by others, and made their way to the bridal room inside the house.

The bride's room was "our room". The bride and her very close female relatives were seated on "our bed". Sherma was included among the close family members. As the men approached the

room, the bride and the other women were placed in purdah. To achieve this a sheet was held up to separate them from the men.

The Imam sat on the floor at the front of the sheet and as with the groom he asked the bride's consent three times. After she had consented, the Marriage application was passed to her behind the curtain. When she had signed the form it was passed back and witnessed by the two other male officials.

The group then left the house and walked back to the groom's tent, followed by the other men. The groom was then informed of the bride's consent and the form was signed by him and his witnesses. The Imam then stood up and offered a recitation from the Quran. During his recitation, monetary gifts were offered to him (the Imam) by members of the public.

Afterwards the groom was conducted to the house where, in a separate room from the bride, he changed into a conventional suit, was offered refreshments and congratulated on his marriage.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



The Bride's Departure

In the meantime, the tent at the front of the house was packed with household gifts for the new couple from the bride's family and invited guests. I saw every possible item needed for a young couple to furnish an apartment and begin a new life. There were complete bedroom, living room, dining room and kitchen furniture and appliances; television, wall decorations, pots & pans, bedsheets, towels, microwave, air condition unit, refrigerator, freezer, stove and groceries. They even had that staple of most modern Indian families, a motorbike....You see them everywhere carrying families of up to four or five people. Later in the evening, everything was loaded onto two small trucks and taken away to the couple's new apartment in the groom's parent's home.

Shortly afterwards amidst much crying and some fainting, the bride was brought down from the "bride's room". She was covered from head to toe in a black burqa and was surrounded and followed by all the female relatives who were upstairs with her.

At first she was led to her grandfather's (Mr Yacoob Ali's) room for his blessings and to say goodbye to her old home. Then, as the weeping and crying grew in intensity almost like in a funeral procession, she was led to the waiting wedding car. As she was placed in the car, her family asked Sherma to whisper some words of comfort to her. When her husband joined her in the car, Sherma spoke a few words to him also. Amidst much crying the wedding car silently drove off into the darkness.

As a special note I should mention that, according to Dr Yunus, up to that point when they entered the car, the bride and groom had never met or even seen each other. This was an arranged marriage. I was told that they had spoken to each other by phone, under supervision, after the marriage was arranged. Most likely, the first time the veil would be lifted and he would see her face would be when they were alone in their room.



THE BRIDE'S DEPARTURE



Our Departure Postponed

The wedding was officially over. What an unforgettable experience! That night some of the relatives began leaving for their homes in other villages and cities like Lucknow, Allahabad, Mumbai and Benares. We received numerous invitations from newly met relatives and family friends to visit their homes. We thanked them all but explained how difficult it would be on this trip.

Our plan was to leave on Monday and do some touring of other villages and cities as we worked our way back to Delhi. I was hoping to meet two of my (correspondence) friends Professor Chaman Lal Jnu in Delhi and poet Alisha K. Khan in Lucknow. I had met Professor Chaman at University of the West Indies in Trinidad while he was there as a Guest Lecturer. Alisha K. Khan was a Trinidad poet who lived in India. Our correspondence was based on admiration of each other's writings.

But Abdul Kayoom and his family insisted that we remain with them for Tuesday when we would join their entourage to the

groom's home to bring the young bride back on her first visit. They said that it was the groom's family's opportunity to host the bride's family and that the occasion would be as grand as the wedding itself. They said that this was an important ritual and that we would honor them by being a part of it. So we agreed to stay on.

That night the workers had the area cleared and back to normal in quick time. The tents were broken. The kutyas, chairs and tables were stacked and carted away. The kitchen area was cleared and all utensils were cleaned and ready to go. We spent much of our time comforting the bride's mother & father and arranging phone conversations for them with relatives in Trinidad.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Around the Village

On Monday morning things were beginning to settle back to normalcy. Abdul Kayoom and his son Maajid went to work at the High School. Kushboo, Sherma's English translator, went to classes at the Teacher's College. Sherma spent most of the morning with the other ladies and girls relaxing in the house. I went walking through the village with some of the boys, who were more than eager to show me around.

Some of the mud houses I visited seemed to reflect a life from a distant past. There were signs of extreme poverty and the difficulties of a laboring class of people with inadequate sanitation and poor hygienic practices. The major pond in the village was referred to by the boys as "bad water", which they avoided. Yet it was at everyone's doorstep. This, along with the heaps of cattle dung, tended to attract hordes of flies and mosquitoes on hot days. This was definitely a community in transition from an ancient lifestyle to a more modern one.

When we got back to the house I engaged some of the men in

conversation about the area from which our forefathers came. Their ancestors, like mine, had left the village of Taleanee (Teliyani) due to plagues during the latter half of the 1800s. (This is fully explored in my brother Shamsu Deen's second book : "Lineages and Linkages – Solving Trinidad Roots in India"). While our line of the family found its way via Calcutta to Trinidad, theirs had moved to surrounding villages, settling in Mariahu for a while before finally setting down permanent roots in Rehati Trilochan.

What I found most interesting was that, from their calculations, it seems that on Thursday night/Friday morning, when Sherma and I had undertaken the last leg of our difficult drive from Allahabad to Jaunpur, we had passed through the area of Taleanee, (from where our shared bloodlines had originated), before arriving at the "good" roads near Mariahu.

In the early afternoon I noticed that I wasn't feeling well and that I was beginning to get a temperature, so I went up to the room. I lay down in bed and in a short while I was shaking with a raging ague fever. I also developed diarrhea which made me very weak. It was so bad that at one time Sherma had to help me to the bathroom and back to the bed. She said that I had passed out. I don't remember.

I do remember later on when Abdul Kayoom and Samir came to the room. They stripped off most of my clothes and massaged my body with a special oil. I fell asleep after that and sweated out the fever.

When I awoke in the evening the fever was gone but I still had

the diarrhea and I felt weak and dehydrated. I tried to check the diarrhea with Imodium tablets and a mixture of orange juice with baking soda. Nothing could stop the constant rumbling in my belly. I couldn't eat but I drank two cups of dhal, made by Parveen Bano, which at least gave me some strength.

Later I found out that Dr. Yunus, his wife and their son had also suffered from slight bouts of the same problem.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Groom's Family Home

On Tuesday morning I woke up determined not to make my illness dampen the festivities of the day.

The night before, Brother Liakat Ali and his wife left for their home in Lucknow. Before they left they asked us to visit them in Lucknow and spend at least one night with them. We promised to try. He is a businessman there. He had introduced me via a phone conversation to his son Abid who has an international business in Lucknow, India and Cleveland, Ohio. We promised to maintain a relationship.

I had some fruit for breakfast while Sherma had roti with channa and aloo along with some of the ladies. I was still feeling a little weak but my belly was holding up well, so I determined to not take any chances by being very careful with what I ate.

Several vehicles were hired to take us to the groom's house in the village of Chaura, which was about 30 kilometers away on the road to Varanasi.

This practice of bringing the bride home for a brief visit is also practiced in Trinidad and is usually undertaken two weeks after the wedding. Back home we refer to it as “Second Sunday”. Dr Yunus explained that in India it was an opportunity for the groom’s family to reciprocate by hosting the bride’s family and guests.

We left home at around 11:00 am. The bride’s mother, her nanee and a few other older ladies remained at home to greet her on her return later in the evening. Abdul Kayoom and Dr. Yunus chose to ride with Sherma and me in one of the hired SUVs. The driver took a short cut through the back roads so we had a chance to see some other villages and more of the countryside.

We emerged onto the main road at the last marketplace before the groom’s village. Here all the vehicles formed a procession for the final leg of the journey. From the last turnoff to the house, a distance of about three hundred yards, the roadway was decorated with colorful banners and bunting. We drove up and parked in a special area that was reserved for us. We then entered into a celebration which was as elaborate as the wedding at the bride’s home on Sunday.

The ladies were escorted into the home and we were greeted very cordially by Arif (the groom) and his father. All the guests were led along a very long table loaded with all manner of delicacies. I respectfully declined to partake, but Arif’s father insisted that I at least have some of the lassi. Although I tried to explain, he insisted, so I had a small cup.

The whole afternoon was spent socializing and meeting lots of

new people. There was an abundance of “wedding food” and sweets. Dr. Yunus made sure that I had a supply of cold bottled water, because I was not eating anything. At one point he took me to a neighbor’s home to use their toilet facilities and to rest in a kutyah.

Late in the afternoon, Abdul Kayoom took me upstairs to visit the newlyweds’ apartment. In the bedroom Parveen Husna (the bride) was seated on the bed surrounded by the family women who had gone to bring her back home. It was not until it was growing dark that Parveen Husna was brought down and the procession left for home.

Earlier on, Abdul Kayoom had called a doctor and described my symptoms. He said I had an amoebic infection and prescribed some medication. He also suggested that we remain in Rehati until at least Thursday. This meant that we would celebrate Sherma’s birthday tomorrow with the family there, a development which they greeted with much joy.

Along the way our vehicle dropped out of the procession so that Dr. Yunus & Abdul Kayoom could get some fresh fruits and the medications for me. As we approached the house the rain which had threatened earlier, came down very hard, so we had to struggle through the rain and the mud on arrival.

OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



GROOM'S FAMILY HOME



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA





Sherma's Birthday

The next day, Wednesday April 15th was Sherma's 70th birthday. We had planned for the day to be spent in Mumbai, but fate determined that we would celebrate with our new family in Rehati Trilochan.

The first people to enter our room in the morning were some of the young people who were anxious to wish Auntie a Happy Birthday. Shortly afterwards, Parveen Bano brought us breakfast of roti, fried vegetables and dhal. I had some of it along with some fruits.

The medications prescribed by the doctor worked very well. He had prescribed three doses of three different tablets each day for the next three days. I took the first dose of three tablets the night before and was feeling much better in the morning.

By noon-time everyone began piling into the room to extend birthday greetings to Sherma and to bring her gifts. In their strict Islamic tradition they do not celebrate birthdays as we do.

There was no birthday cake and no balloons or candles. There were however many Happy Birthday wishes, presents and much laughing and joking around.

In the privacy of the room, some of the young people, led by Samir, even hooked up a small speaker to a cellphone and played some Bollywood music. A few of the children even danced for and with their new Auntie. All the ladies, including sisters Jahara and Tabassum, sister-in-law Parveen Bano, cousins Kushboo, Yasmin & Shabeen and even the new bride Parveen Husna joined in, encouraging the children in their merriment. We had become so much a part of the family that all of this celebration took place in my presence.

Earlier in the afternoon Dr. Yunus and his wife and son had come to say Goodbye since they were leaving on their eleven hour train-trip back home to Aligarh. Before leaving they made us promise to spend at least one night at their home before leaving India.

Bhabhi (Abdul Kayoom's wife) was not feeling well and although she spent most of the day in bed she still came to hug and kiss Sherma and wish her a happy birthday. Brother Rasheed and his wife and Maajid and Saajad and Saied all brought her their greetings. After he got home from school later in the day, Abdul Kayoom came up to the room to wish Sherma a Happy Birthday and to have dinner with us.

During the evening she had received phone calls with greetings from New York, California and Trinidad.

I'm sure this was a birthday Sherma will always remember.



SHERMA'S BIRTHDAY



Goodbye To Rehati Trilochan

Thursday morning had arrived. Today we would be saying goodbye to our dear relatives and hosts of Rehati Trilochan, Uttar Pradesh. They were my relatives through my father's mother's mother, who I had the pleasure of knowing during the earliest years of my life. She had come to Trinidad as a seven year old girl in the company of her parents and siblings.

Now, it was difficult to believe that we had met these wonderful relatives, for the first time, less than one week ago. The bond we had developed with them was very strong and we knew would be enduring. Their selfless devotion to our comfort during our brief stay with them had been overwhelming. We'd never forget it nor could we ever fully reciprocate.

Because Abdul Kayoom had to return to work this morning, we arranged to drive over and visit him at school at 11:00 am. We also planned to tour the Trilochan Mahadev Temple which was on the same compound as the school. Afterwards we'd head back home to have lunch and say our goodbyes. We went with

our rented car. Saajad drove. Kurshid, Kushboo's husband, rode in the front. Sherma and I sat in the back seat. On the way we stopped at the Teachers College to pick up Kushboo. She was taking the afternoon off and was anxious for some of her classmates to meet us.

When we arrived at the Trilochan Mahadev High School, we were met by Abdul Kayoom and other members of his staff who took us on a tour of the school. I was truly impressed by the discipline of the students. I was particularly moved when they stood up in unison and greeted us by reciting in English: "Good morning Sir, Good morning Madam. Welcome to our school."

I was asked to say a few words so I told them that I was happy to be there, and that I was very impressed by them and that they should study hard because who knows, maybe among them was a future Prime Minister of India. One of the teachers translated into Hindi and I could see that they were pleased by my remarks.

Afterwards we were taken on a tour of the Trilochan Mahadev Temple which adjoined the school. The Temple of Trilochan Mahadev has been an ancient place of worship for Hindus. The Temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The devotees of the temple were very hospitable in receiving us and eagerly showed us around this important holy site. When we returned to the school, we spent about an hour drinking cold fruit juices and posing for pictures with the students and their teachers.

We then headed home for lunch and a tearful goodbye to all the members of the family. For me it was particularly hard to say goodbye to Abdul Kayoom and his ninety eight year old father

Yacoob Ali who was the key link to this particular family lineage in India. At this late age in his life I considered myself fortunate to have met him and recognized that I might never see him again.

I spoke to the family and thanked them for their hospitality during the past few days. I told them that the way they embraced us and welcomed us into the family was an experience we will never forget.

With everyone standing in the front yard, shedding tears and waving to us, we drove off to continue on our journey.



GOODBYE TO REHATI TRILOCHAN





Varanasi

During the long fourteen hour flight from New York to Delhi I had spent time re-reading my brother Sham's second book "Lineages and Linkages – Solving Trinidad Roots in India". In this book he'd detailed his efforts to locate and to visit our relatives and their villages in India. I had paid close attention to the sections dealing with our families' roots.

Because of the reception we'd received from our relatives in Rehati Trilochan, who were from my father's lineage, I began to sense a desire to seek out relatives from my mother's lineage as detailed in Sham's book. I was motivated by a desire to walk the grounds they had walked and to possibly embrace some of my new blood relatives.

My mother's father's lineage came from the village of Zahurabad and my mother's mother's lineage came from the village of Ashrafpur, both in Uttar Pradesh. We decided that, since we had the car, we should make an effort to visit their villages. To do this, meant eliminating a Mumbai visit from our

plans and greatly limiting our activities in Varanasi.

We had two invitations to visit relatives in Varanasi, who we had met at the wedding, but decided to forego them to gain the time needed for this new detour. Our rationale was that both Mumbai and Varanasi are major cities and can both be easily visited in the future, but getting another opportunity to locate and visit these villages of my ancestry would not be such an easy proposition.

We set out from Rehati Trilochan on Thursday with a couple of significant setbacks. First, I wasn't feeling completely well. I had not taken my prescribed medication the night before and I was beginning to feel a return of the symptoms. I didn't say anything because I was determined to do and see all we could in the remaining days. Secondly, I didn't have a viable road map and my phone GPS was not working because I couldn't get any Internet service. I did have some pictures on my phone of a school map of Uttar Pradesh showing the cities and some of the larger towns. I would have to depend on this and asking directions from locals.

We drove down to Varanasi which is just about sixty kilometers from Rehati Trilochan. Varanasi was a difficult trial for me. The temperature was about 100 F. The streets above the famous and popular Ghats were extremely crowded and I was not feeling well. It was definitely the most difficult driving I've had to face during the whole trip to India. The streets were so overcrowded that most times it felt almost impossible to move. People, traffic and animals hustled haphazardly in every direction around us.

VARANASI

We stopped briefly at Tulsi Ghat and then spent a few hours fighting a battle to get out of the city. We knew that we would have to return to Varanasi sometime in the future to truly enjoy this historic city. We finally exited the city at about 4:30 pm, after sustaining a few scratches and dents to the car and smacking a few pedestrians' elbows with my side mirrors. There was no observance of regulations and no one complained or even seemed to notice, including the police.

We drove out of Varanasi on a quest to locate the village of Zahurabad.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



VARANASI



Mohania, Bihar

I took Highway 74 south from Varanasi to Highway 19 which brought us to the town of Chandauli. There I asked at a gas station along the highway and was told to branch onto Highway 24 and follow signs to Zamania. From there I would easily find my way to Ghazipur. I knew from Sham's book that if I got to Ghazipur, the small village of Zahurabad was located only about ten kilometers away and was well known to the Ghazipur locals.

It was beginning to get dark and in my haste and with the extensive highway construction that was going on, I missed the turnoff for Highway 24 and continued for several kilometers beyond, still on Highway 19. By the time I realized that something was wrong, it was nighttime and I knew that I had to find a hotel before my belly really began acting up. The only two hotels we found along this stretch of road catered to long distance truck drivers and were full.

At about 9:00 pm, I pulled into a gas station on the highway and after filling up, I asked the attendants if they knew of any hotels

in the vicinity. There were none. Since the gas station had a fairly decent bathroom and remained open for 24 hours and had a rifle-carrying security officer on patrol, I asked the manager if we could park our vehicle and spend the night there. They very graciously agreed.

However, during our struggles with our Hindi/English/sign-language disjointed conversation, a young man about 21 years old, rode up on a motorbike to get gas. He saw our efforts to communicate with the manager and approached us. He introduced himself as Mohammed Shabazz, and informed us that he spoke English. He said that he had recently returned from working in Dubai.

He asked about our predicament, and we explained our difficulty in obtaining lodging for the night. He told us that if we were willing to follow him he would lead us to his hometown of Mohania in Bihar which was only about 15 kilometers away. He said that he was acquainted with the management of several businesses there and was sure that he'd be able to take us to a decent hotel. We immediately agreed.

We followed his motorbike as he led us to the Hotel Kaimur Vihar in Mohania. He spoke to the manager and stayed with us until we were properly checked in. He told us that he lived just across the highway from us and exchanged telephone numbers so that we could contact him if necessary. He also said that he lived with his parents and would have invited us to stay at their home but that they had no air conditioning and he didn't want us to be uncomfortable. We thanked him profusely.

After settling in, we went down to the hotel's restaurant for dinner. I remember that they served us Indian Chinese food. It was late and the restaurant was empty, but the food was freshly made and very delicious. Later I made sure to take my medication before going to bed.

The next morning Mohammed Shabazz called and came up to our room at 7:00 am. We were still in bed. He said that before he left for the day he wanted us to go to his home to meet his parents and have breakfast. We felt bad to decline because we could not be ready since he was leaving home at 8:00 am. Instead we promised to keep in touch with him.

By the time we got out of bed, we were well rested and I was feeling much better. We had breakfast in the room. During the night the hotel manager had had our car washed and cleaned. At about 9:30 am we were packed and ready to go.



MOHANIA, BIHAR



Mohania to Ghazipur

According to the hotel manager and the chef at the restaurant, we had to double back from Mohania for about ten kilometers to the small town of Durgauti, which was also in Bihar. From there we would take the Durgawati - Ramgarh Road to Zamania. It was supposed to be an easy drive from there to Ghazipur.

The distance from Durgauti to Zamania was only about thirty five kilometers, but without doubt it was one of the worst pieces of road I had ever driven on. It was all dirt with huge craters and mud pools and huge breaks where the road fell away into ravines. If it wasn't daytime I could not have done it. There were depressions and banks in the road that I had to maneuver with extreme caution.

No wonder I did not encounter any other vehicles except once near the village of Nuawan, when the only passageway was blocked by two parked heavy duty construction trucks. I had to wait about five minutes for the villagers to locate the drivers to have them move the trucks for me to pass. They seemed to have

been surprised by my appearance.

I never considered turning back though, because whenever I stopped and asked: “Zamania?”. The locals always pointed in the direction I was driving. The villagers we passed along this route were all very friendly and I felt comfortable that if we should get stuck I would not have difficulty to get help. Along the way we also passed several families of monkeys.

About five kilometers before Zamania the dirt gave way to a paved asphalt road. Shortly afterwards we came to the bank of the Ganges. Here we stopped to rest for a while and to get a good, close-up look of the river. We had entered this road at Durgauti at about 10:30 am and were now in Zamania at 1:00 pm.

From here we drove across a long bridge to enter the outskirts of Ghazipur. We got directions to the ghats from a policeman and paid a short visit to the river and the temple located there. There were some devotees bathing in the river. We took a few pictures and left, wending our way through the extremely narrow and extremely busy streets in search of a hotel.

My plan was to find a hotel early in the day, settle in for a good rest and leave early in the morning in search of Zahurabad and Mama’s father’s relatives. Rather than drive around aimlessly, I stopped in the busy bazaar and approached a clothes vendor. I communicated that I couldn’t speak Hindi and since he could not speak English he located a friend who could. The gentleman’s name was Himanshu Srivastava.

He was very helpful by contacting the Hotel Residence and

reserving a room for us. Then he gave us directions to the hotel and his telephone number to contact him if we should have any problems. His directions were good and we checked in at 3:30 pm. I called Mr. Srivastava to thank him and to let him know that all was well.

We spent the remainder of the evening relaxing in preparation for what we hoped would be an exhilarating day tomorrow.



Ghazipur To Zahurabad

We were up early on this bright and sunny Saturday morning. We had a simple breakfast of toast and coffee in our room and drove away from the hotel at 8:30 am.

We couldn't suppress our mounting excitement and anticipation as we slowly wended our way through the narrow streets of Ghazipur's crowded Urdu Bazaar to Highway 31 which would take us out of the city and towards the village of Zahurabad about thirty kilometers away.

As was now standard procedure for us, we stopped several times to ask: "Zahurabad?" And as was customary the locals were only too eager to smile and point us in the right direction. At Gangoli we stopped and asked some villagers for directions which they pointed out to us. Although several gathered to try to communicate with us, it was very difficult.

When we arrived at the turn-off to Zahurabad I stopped at a barbershop to make further inquiries. The barber smiled broadly

when I mentioned who I was, that I'm from Trinidad and that I was looking for two gentlemen by the names of Shafrudeen and Mahaboob. He told me to drive the approximately two kilometers to the village and ask anybody. They would direct me. I guess that the work done by my brother Sham was pretty well known to some of the people here.

As we were driving to the village, and Sherma was videotaping, the video camera stopped. The memory was full. When I checked my phone I realized that its memory card was also full. How could I visit this ancestral village where my Nana's family of old walked the streets while conducting their lives and not be able to record it? I pulled up and parked in the shade of a tree and called my son Ishmael in New York. He instructed me on how to switch the memory card in the video camera and advised that I use my instamatic camera for still pictures until I could buy another memory card for the phone.

When we arrived in the village I immediately pulled aside and asked a lady who was sweeping the front of her house, if she knew a man named Shafrudeen. She recognized the name but couldn't understand anything else I was saying. By this time however, a small group had started to gather and a young man told me in limited English, to follow him as he quickly walked off and turned into an extremely narrow street.

We followed slowly in the car, and after some twists and turns we drove past a mosque where he signaled us to stop at a house near the end of the road. I noticed also that several people had followed us to the house.

I must confess that I was a bit nervous. Here we were showing up at these peoples' homes uninvited and without any prior notice. What if they were offended by being caught off-guard on a Saturday morning at their most relaxed and unprepared time? Well, there was no need to worry.

When we got out of the car we were greeted very warmly by my relative Mahaboob and from deeper inside the settlement my relative Shafrudeen came hurrying to meet us. It seems that word of our inquiries had arrived moments before.

Their welcome was so warm and so spontaneous I couldn't hold back the tears. How happy my mother must have felt when Sham had located these relatives of hers! How happy she would feel now seeing another of her children embracing them and being embraced so enthusiastically by them!!



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Mahaboob & Shafrudeen

Although these were my blood relatives, my wife Sherma, with her engaging personality, immediately endeared herself to them. Her ability to communicate despite the language barrier constantly amazed me.

All the households were trying to entertain us, with tea and sweets and biscuits. We agreed to grace the homes of both Mahaboob and Shafrudeen during our short visit.

Shafrudeen, followed by the entourage of well-wishers, led us to his home about fifty yards away. There, within their humble means, we met his wife, daughter-in-law and the rest of the family. One of the children tried to be inconspicuous, as she came in with a bottle of cold mango drink and a package of cookies, which she had obviously been sent to buy.

I mention this because it really reminded me of when we were children and family dropped in unexpectedly. Mama would send us to the parlor to buy a couple of sweet drinks and some

sweet biscuits. Sherma and I glanced at each other with a true understanding of the moment.

We partook of their offerings with great relish and appreciation. We sat on kutyas in the shade of their home as we enjoyed their refreshments. We talked and anyone in the crowd who understood, translated. So we were able to communicate.

Shafrudeen then took us to his workshop which was an extension to his modest home. He is a jolaha (weaver) by trade and wanted us to see what he did. He was very proud of his simple machinery, showing us how it was operated.

Afterwards he draped Sherma with two shawls that he had made. These he offered as gifts for the two of us, with the hope that we will never forget him and his family. We were so touched. I could see Sherma's eyes filling up as she hugged him.

When we left his home to head back to Mahaboob's, a group of the youths wanted to show me their cricket ground which lay in a strip of land between both homes. They were extremely passionate about cricket and knew very much about the West Indies and our cricketers. They assured me, with total conviction, that someone from among them will play for India one day. I immediately drew a mental connection with my relatives in Mama's hometown of Preysal who are famous for their cricketing abilities.

It was fascinating to see how much talking was going on between Sherma and the group, and how well they seemed to understand one another.

At Mahaboob's home, the ladies came out in full force. They served us tea and biscuits and surrounded us waving little fans that looked like flags to keep us cool from the midday heat. Mahaboob took us on a tour of his home, which we really enjoyed because it gave us an insight into their everyday life.

The men then took me next door to visit their mosque, which was a newer building than the one my forefathers had prayed in before leaving the village for their journey to Trinidad. So many emotions ran through me as I removed my shoes and walked upon that historic site.

Afterwards we gathered to bid them goodbye. The ladies wanted us to stay and at least have a meal with them. But time would not permit it. We thanked them for their hospitality and their display of love and affection for us and assured them that they will always hold a place in our hearts.

So with heavy hearts from having to leave, but buoyed by the reception we had received, and followed by a large entourage of new-found relatives and friends, we made our way out to the main road. We waved sadly to everyone as we left Zahurabad, once the home of my Nana's (Abdul Karim's) mother Faheema.

I could feel my mother smiling.

OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA





OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Zahurabad To Azamgarh

As we drove away from Zahurabad heading towards Azamgarh on Highway 34, I kept a lookout at all the marketplaces for a store where I could buy a memory card for my phone camera.

In a busy marketplace just before we got to the city of Mau, I spotted an electronics store. The young clerk was very helpful and with the assistance of some others who stepped up to help translate, I was able to get an 8G memory card, an electric adapter and an 8 pack of AA batteries, all for 200 Rupees (\$3.00 US).

We found Mau to be a very clean and orderly city. From there to Azamgarh was a pleasant drive, mainly through miles and miles of wheat fields on generally good roads.

On entering Azamgarh, I stopped at a welding shop and asked about hotels. Here also, the workers were very pleasant and helpful. They directed us to the Hotel Deep Continental about two kilometers away.

This was a decent facility with the amenities of a modern western hotel. We checked in at around 4:00 pm. After relaxing for about an hour we went walking in the nearby market area. The hotel's desk clerk had directed us to an air-conditioned mall, so we went there. At last Sherma had a chance to do a little shopping.

Later in the evening we had a relaxing dinner in the hotel's restaurant. Before retiring for the night, I gathered all the information and directions that I could for the village of Ashrafpur, from the hotel's front desk employees.

We went to bed, satisfied with our accomplishments for the day and feeling well prepared for what was to follow.

The next morning we had breakfast in our room before leaving at around 10:00 am for the village of Ashrafpur.



ZAHURABAD TO AZAMGARH



Raheem Of Ashrafpur

A family of monkeys lounged on a wall alongside the Hotel Deep Continental as we drove out of the compound.

Although it was Sunday morning the streets and marketplace were as busy as the day before. There seemed to be no rest days in this country. Cows, goats and pedestrians mingled freely with cars, rickshaws, bicycles and scooters. This seemed to be the normal scene on a normal day in a normal marketplace wherever we went in India.

Soon after we had left the hotel and exited the city, we found ourselves driving along Highway 66, through fields of wheat and neatly stacked mounds of dung cakes. My anticipation began to mount again. Yesterday we had met my mother's father's family in the village of Zahurabad. Today we were hoping to pay an unannounced visit to my mother's mother's family in the village of Ashrafpur.

According to my brother Sham's research, twenty year old

Emamally, had left the village of Ashrafpur in 1868 and came to Trinidad where he was contracted to the Williamsville estate. While there he married Najeebun and had several children. One of their daughters, Baseeran, was married to Abdul Karim of Preysal Village. Among their children was Macsooman, my mother.

Sham was able to learn that Emamally had left behind a brother named Hassanally in Ashrafpur and that among Hassanally's descendants was Raheem who still lived in the village with his family. We hoped to meet this relative today.

Following the directions we had received at the hotel we didn't have much difficulty locating the village of Ashrafpur. For about the final three kilometers the road leading to the village was dusty and unpaved.

On entering the village I stopped to ask a young man about Raheem, my relative. He knew him and was trying to give me directions when another young man on a motorbike stopped to offer help. When we mentioned who we were looking for he suggested that we follow him. He led us through a maze of narrow dirt roads to a group of apartment buildings.

Just like at Zahurabad, a small crowd quickly gathered. Among them was Raheem, his wife, daughter, granddaughter and several relatives and friends. When we identified ourselves as relatives from Trinidad, they invited us into their modest home. We accompanied them in and the entire entourage followed. They expressed so much joy to meet us, and we felt the same towards them.

Raheem's youngest daughter Shanaaz, took an immediate liking for Sherma. She lived with her young children in her parents' home, because her husband was away, working in Dubai. She kept begging us to spend a few days with them. When I told her that we had to go she pleaded: "Uncle, you go, but leave Auntie with us."

They served us tea and biscuits and made us feel so comfortable and so loved in the little time we spent with them that it was indeed difficult to leave. After a short visit of just over an hour, we said goodbye with heavy hearts and teary eyes.

As we drove away from Ashrafpur, I felt such a deep sense of accomplishment for having visited these various relatives in India. These were no longer thoughts and images of my ancestral roots, they were actual people and places with whom I can now have real, tangible relationships. A great sense of accomplishment overcame me....I can only imagine how much greater was the feeling Sham must have experienced when he first met them.

As we got out to the main road, I turned my thoughts to the city of Faizabad and our next destination.





Ayodhya

Although the Trinidad village of Fyzabad had played an important role in our courtship and marriage, we had no truly personal need to visit its namesake in India. Except that on its outskirts lay the small ancient city of Ayodhya.

Ayodhya is revered by Hindus as the birthplace of Lord Rama. Because we both have many very strong ties to a significant number of friends and relatives who are devoted Hindus we thought that since we were here in the vicinity, those who are unable to visit may have the opportunity to see it through our eyes.

The writing of their holy book the Ramayana was started in Ayodhya by the poet Valmiki and much of its story is set there. However by the 15th century the site was largely in neglect. During the 1500s The Moghul Emperor, claiming that the site was being neglected by the Hindus, had the area cleared and a mosque, the Babri Mosque, constructed.

For the next almost four centuries both Hindus and Muslims worshipped at the location. By the late 1900s Hindu nationalist organizations began demanding that the site be placed under their control because of its deep religious significance to them. Most of the Muslim population had also by this time shifted to Faizabad where several mosques had been erected. But the remaining Muslim population of Ayodhya refused to bow to their demands. Conflicts developed, blood was shed on both sides and in 1992 the area was invaded by Hindu militants and the Babri Mosque destroyed.

The Indian army had to step in and take control of the disputed area. Now an effort was being made to rebuild a temple on the location believed to be the spot where Lord Rama was born. The site was now considered “disputed territory” and was under the guardianship of the Indian government. Very strict checkpoints and regulations were in effect for all visitors.

At 3:15 pm we drove across National Highway 24 from Chowk Ayodhya Road, and were greeted by a young man who identified himself as a guide to the city of Ayodhya. He told us that he would lead us into the city and hand us over to an English-speaking guide who would take us to all the relevant sites for a small fee. We agreed and made room for him in the back seat.

Within fifteen minutes we were in the heart of the ancient city where we were introduced to our equally young English-speaking guide. His name was Chander Pandey. He was twenty one years old and said that, like his father, he was a Pundit. He was a very good guide, giving us a running commentary of the history and religious significance of all the sites.

We visited the Ganges and Ghaghara rivers, Ram & Sita's Palace, Hanuman's Temple, the site where all materials and ancient columns were being gathered for the rebuilding of the temple and the birth-site of Lord Rama. We were also taken to meet the Swami who had dedicated his life to the rebuilding of the Temple commemorating Lord Rama's birthplace.

At some of the locations we were allowed to take pictures, but at the disputed territory which included the birthplace of Lord Rama, no cameras, phones, electronics or metals of any kind were permitted.

Besides the cattle, goats and dogs there were more monkeys in this city than I saw anywhere else. According to our guide, they were revered there, in honor of Hanuman who had helped Ram in his rescue of Sita.

During our short time here we saw no signs of conflict. However the presence of the country's military was very noticeable.

Our visit was hurried because of how late in the day it was, so that around 7:00 pm, as night was descending on us, we dropped our guide off at the entrance to the city and headed towards the city of Lucknow, approximately one hundred and forty kilometers away.

OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Lucknow

We were supposed to have two meetings in Lucknow. Mr. Liakat Ali and his wife, who we had met at the wedding in Trilochan, had invited us to visit them when we arrived in Lucknow, and Ms. Alisha Khan, a poet from Shimla who was in Lucknow for a period of time had agreed to meet while we were there, to exchange books.

We had not scheduled the date or times for these meetings because we were not sure when we would arrive there. And since I was without Internet connection, I was unable to text or to send emails. I had mobile phone connection but the past few days were so hectic that although I tried a few times I could not make contact with either of them. Now we were driving to Lucknow with no contacts and no hotel booked for the night.

Driving along Highway 27 at night was very challenging. It was very dark and there were many vehicles with no tail-lights on the roadway. I also had to be on the constant lookout for bicycles and animal carts and scariest of all, people dashing across the

dark roadway.

After a trying two hours we were happy to get to the outskirts of Lucknow where at least the highway was lit. Here however, the traffic had grown very heavy as other major roadways began to merge with us. I also noticed that our car's exhaust was sounding louder than normal.

It was about 9:00 pm when I exited the highway to try to find a hotel. As I drove along a quiet road in a residential area, I saw what I thought was a police station, because of the number of uniformed cars parked at the front. I decided to seek information there.

We stopped and when I asked at the front office I was told that it was not a police station but a Taxi company and a Guest House. This was at the Indira section of the city. They had one remaining room available in the Guest House. After Sherma checked it out, we decided to take it for the night.

The proprietors, who lived upstairs turned out to be extremely nice people. The owner, Beeresh Singh was only about thirty years old. He, his wife Chandni, baby daughter Aadhya and his widowed mother Mrs. Bimla Singh took an immediate liking to us. The baby, in particular, took to Sherma right away.

We decided to stay for two nights so Sherma could do some shopping and also repairs could be done on the car before undertaking the long drive to Agra, our next stop.

The next day the owner's cousin Lavesh, who helped run the

business, took me to their mechanic and arranged to have our car repaired. The muffler had to be replaced and the dents and scratches repaired. The total cost for parts and labor came to \$30.00 US.

While work was being done on our car, Lavesh took us shopping and sight-seeing in one of their taxis. Sherma had the opportunity to purchase some items at the renowned Seva Chikan Chikankari boutique.

The family also arranged for their cook, Meethu, to prepare meals for us at no additional charge. She (Meethu) also took a special liking to Sherma, and spent much time trying to communicate with her limited use of English.

We also spent time sitting around the kitchen table, talking with the family about Lucknow, their business and their family, and of course they also wanted to know all about us.

On the second night Liakat Ali finally got through to me on the phone. He was very apologetic about not being able to communicate before. He insisted that he come for us to spend the night with his family, but it was already about 9:30 pm and we had to leave early next morning. I told him that we'd always be grateful for his invitation and would hopefully honor it one day.

I was also able to speak with Alisha Khan, but would not have the time to meet with her.

The next morning some of their drivers helped us pack the car

as we prepared to leave Lucknow. The whole family, along with their working staff, came out to say goodbye. Here were people we had met by chance just two nights before. Now we felt so sad to say goodbye, because they made us feel like family.



LUCKNOW





Taj Vila Hotel, Agra

Agra was three hundred and sixty kilometers away and our plan was to spend the night there.

Today was Tuesday 21st April and our daughter-in-law Sharon had booked us on the 11:00 pm flight from Delhi to Newark Airport on Thursday 23rd. This, we hoped, would give us enough time to spend the night in Agra, visit the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort tomorrow, drive to Aligarh later in the evening, spend the night and some of Thursday with Dr. Yunus and family before driving to Delhi in time to return the car at the airport and catch our flight on Thursday night.

The car felt like a new car now after the work that was done to it in Lucknow. We were making very good time as we headed to Kanpur. It was early in the day and I didn't feel too burdened about having to rush to find a hotel in Agra. Beeresh Singh of Lucknow had told us to call him when we were entering Agra and he would be able to locate a Guest House for us there.

The drive to Agra was leisurely and uneventful except for one incident as we approached the bridge crossing the Ganges River at Kanpur. About one kilometer before the bridge we ran into a wall of stand-still traffic. After sitting there for about fifteen minutes, I noticed that about fifty yards ahead some trucks had crossed the divider and were forcing the creation of a lane in the oncoming traffic. Soon a whole line of trucks was occupying the fast lane of the oncoming traffic, going in the opposite direction.

Wasting no time, I steered my tiny car onto the divider intending to join them. I was halfway onto the new lane when my rear wheels got stuck in the loose dirt. The more I tried to rev my way out, the deeper my rear wheels sank. I was blocking the lane and all these big trucks were blowing their horns like crazy. Since there was nothing I could do, I got out of the car, stood on the roadway, shrugged and indicated that if I didn't get some help, I wasn't going anywhere. Well, no one could understand anything I said but they certainly understood the signs I was making. In no time, several helpers from some of the trucks had jumped off and lifted my car onto the road.

Soon I was moving swiftly across the bridge, sandwiched in a long caravan of cargo and construction trucks, in this newly created lane on the wrong side of the highway. And the best part of this episode was that the police on the bridge immediately accepted the lane and began directing the legal traffic away from "our" lane. Once on the other side of the river, I followed the line of trucks along the highway's service road for about one kilometer until we got past the construction area. If I hadn't taken the chance, I don't know how long I would have been stuck there, and I really was not in a position to sacrifice much time.

Another area of special interest through which we passed was the city of Firozabad. This city is known as the glass bangle capital of India. There are many factories here manufacturing bangles to be shipped all over the world. Everywhere we looked, huge quantities of bangles of every color, were being transported in every conceivable form of carriage. It seemed like if everybody was involved in this industry.

Despite the delays, I was surprised by how early it was when we arrived in Agra. By 3:00 pm we were in the city and following signs to the Taj Mahal. We wanted to get as close to it as possible, before finding a place to stay for the night.

Near one of the Taj Mahal's gates we were approached by a gentleman on a motor scooter who introduced himself as Ramu. He asked if we were looking for a hotel and we said we were. He asked what kind of hotel we wanted. We told him we wanted something nice but not overly expensive. He said that he worked, recruiting guests, for several hotels near the Taj Mahal.

After making some phone calls, he got on his motorbike and had us follow him. He led us to the Taj Vila, a truly nice hotel. Upon hearing about some of our adventures, the manager offered us their super-deluxe suite at a 25% discount. We took it.

After checking-in and resting for about an hour, we had dinner at the hotel restaurant and went for a walk at around 7:00 pm. The area was very busy and there was a lot of music everywhere. We learned that there were several weddings taking place in some of the hotels. These weddings were much different to the one we attended in Rehati Trilochan. Here it was more like

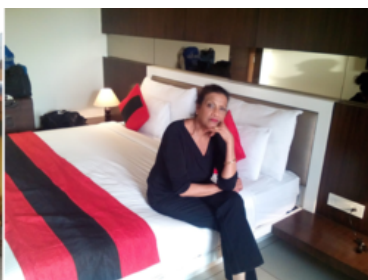
a carnival celebration with much loud music, drumming and dancing. I got a chance to videotape one.

We mingled for about an hour with the wedding crowds, then hired a tok-tok (auto rickshaw) to take us to look for a store where Sherma could buy a suitcase. We went to a few night-bazaars until she found one suitcase that she liked. The driver was a pleasant elderly man named Adil. We liked him so we arranged with him to pick us up in the morning to go to the Taj Mahal.

When we returned to the room at around 9:30 pm we called Beeresh in Lucknow, to let him know that we had gotten lodging. Then I called Abdul Kayoom in Rehati, Dr. Yunus in Aligahr and our son Ishmael in New York to bring them up to date with our travel.



TAJ VILA HOTEL, AGRA



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA





Taj Mahal

The next morning we were up by 6:00 am. We got dressed, had breakfast in the hotel's restaurant and were outside to meet Adil and his tok-tok at 8:00 am. He was waiting for us. By 8:30 am we were on the grounds of the Taj Mahal.

Without a doubt, this was the most beautiful and most magnificent construction I had ever seen. In fact, I can honestly say that it was one of the most breath-taking sights I had ever beheld. No amount of pictures can adequately express the true splendor of this place. No wonder it is known as one of the "Wonders of the World".

The glistening white marble mausoleum appeared to be lovingly embraced by a circle of red-sandstone structures, each magnificent in its own right. Sherma said to me: "He must have really loved his wife!".... And of course she wanted to know when I was going to build a Taj Mahal for her.

We didn't want to leave. There was so much to see here and

we checked out as much as time would permit. What was most welcome was the impeccable cleanliness of the entire site and how very organized everything was. This, I believe, was one of the reasons that accounted for the reverence with which everyone seemed to hold the place. Just to walk on the glistening white marble tiles, we were made to wear soft coverings over our shoes.

Besides the impact of grandeur that struck us from every viewing angle, we were also drawn to the fine, detailed etchings of Quranic verses in Arabic lettering so delicately chiseled in gold into the white marble. Even the carefully manicured grounds displayed a devotion to detail. Sitting in the cool, windy, shaded, marble arcades at the back of the structure, looking out over the vast expanse of the Yamuna River, was to both of us, the ultimate in serenity. The Emperor Shah Jahan must have truly loved his Mumtaz!!!

At 10:45 am we met Adil outside the main gate, where he was waiting, and he took us to Agra Fort. We knew that our time was limited because our checkout time at the hotel was 12:30 pm, so we just saw some of it, took a few pictures and left. Back at the hotel, we paid Adil and thanked him for his services.

We checked out from the hotel at noon and had our bags packed in the car. Then we went back in, and had lunch at the hotel's restaurant. At 1:00 pm we left for Aligarh and our visit with Dr. Yunus and his family.

OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



TAJ MAHAL



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Dr Yunus, Aligarh

I had been corresponding via email, Facebook and telephone with Dr. Yunus Khalil Ansari for more than five years but had never met him until we all got together for the wedding at Abdul Kayoom's home in Rehati Trilochan. He was the husband of Abdul Kayoom's eldest sister Khalida who was my relative on my father's mother's lineage. He and Khalida Didi had four sons. Two were scientists in South Korea, the third had Downs Syndrome and lived at home with his parents and the youngest was entering medical school.

Dr. Yunus was a Professor of Botany at Aligarh Muslim University. He was fluent in English, so during the entire time in Rehati Trilochan for the wedding, he was my constant companion, translating and explaining everything that was happening. Before they returned to Aligarh from the wedding, they made me promise that we would visit them at their home, before returning to New York.

During the period of time we were on the road, Dr. Yunus called

me regularly to make sure that we were okay. Since Aligarh was only about one hundred kilometers from Delhi, we calculated that we could spend Wednesday night, which would be our last night in India, with them and have enough time to drive to the airport in Delhi on Thursday.

The drive from Agra to Aligarh took about two and a half hours. We could have made better time but we were slowed down by quite a few stretches of road that were riddled with potholes. We entered the city and called Dr. Yunus at around 3:00 pm. He suggested that we make our way to Aligarh Muslim University and he'd meet us there.

I asked directions from locals a few times and struggled through the usual local heavy traffic before we arrived in the vicinity of the University. I called Dr. Yunus and when I explained my location, he told me to wait where we were. In a short time he arrived on his motor bike and beckoned for us to follow him.

It took about ten minutes for us to get to his home, in a newly developing residential area. We were warmly greeted by Khalida Didi and the two sons at home. I was also very happy to meet another of my blood relatives, Abdul Wahid. He was a brother of Khalida Didi and Abdul Kayoom. He lived in Benares but was spending time with them while he was undergoing some medical treatments in Aligarh. He was a very pleasant man but like most of the other family members, was unable to speak or understand English.

After a short relaxation, they took us across the road to see Didi's kitchen garden, of which she was very proud. Abdul Wahid was

helping her with it while he was in Aligarh. We also had a tour of the new construction being added to the house.

Didi prepared a very nice dinner and we stayed up late, talking. That night because mosquitoes were a problem in Aligarh, we slept under a mosquito net. I hadn't done that since I was a child, growing up in Gasparillo.

Dr. Yunus and Khalida Didi were very generous hosts and did everything possible to make us welcome and comfortable in their home.



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Aligarh Muslim University

The next morning, was to be the morning of our final day in India.

After a comfortable night's sleep at the home of Dr. Yunus Ansari, we had a hearty breakfast. Khalida Didi packed some of her aloo parathas in two parcels for us to take with us. They also gave me a gift of two topees and two tasbees, which they had brought from a Haj trip to Mecca. We bade a sad goodbye to the family, but Dr. Yunus went with us.

We had a few chores to take care of and he offered to accompany us to have them done. He also wanted to take us for a quick visit to the campus of Aligarh Muslim University, where he taught. I wanted the car washed and cleaned before returning it to the rental company. For this he took us to his friend's auto garage. They took the car from us and in about thirty minutes had it looking like brand new. From there we drove to the University.

Aligarh Muslim University was first established in 1878 by Sir

Syed Ahmad Khan and is today ranked #3 among all Universities in India. Despite its name, AMU caters to all castes, creeds, religions and genders. It draws students from all over India and foreign students, especially from Asian and African countries. The campus covers an area of approximately fourteen square kilometers. It is the most prestigious institution in the city of Aligarh.

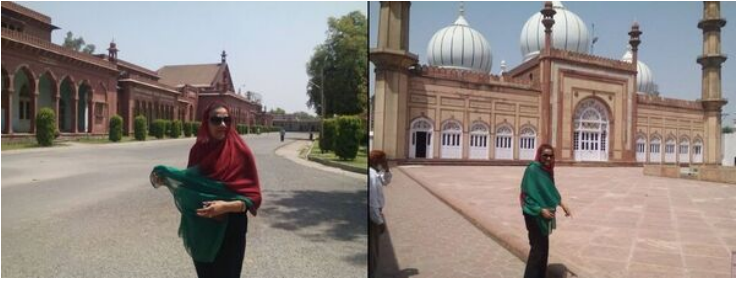
Dr. Yunus took us first to visit his Department of Botany. Then we went to the University Library where we met some of his colleagues. Afterwards we visited the University's mosque. It is a beautiful structure and is a central area of the University.

After about two hours at the university, Dr. Yunus took us to one of the very busy bazaars in Aligarh for Sherma to make a few purchases. He also bought me an Indian outfit as a gift and a box of sweets for us to take back to our New York family. He then directed us to the highway leading towards Delhi. There we said a really sad goodbye to him before he boarded a taxi back to his home.

Dr. Yunus and our Khalida Didi and the rest of the family were truly gracious hosts. It was a privilege to have been able to spend some time at their home. I'm also happy that Dr. Yunus has introduced my book "Curry Cascadoo" to the Literature department at AMU and it's already being circulated among the students.

Now we were on the last leg of our trip as we aimed our car towards Delhi.

ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY



OUR ADVENTURE IN INDIA



Goodbye From Delhi

After we had navigated several local roads for about forty five minutes, we entered the Yamuna Expressway heading north towards Delhi at 1:40 pm. We were both unusually quiet as we began to realize that our journey was coming to an end. It was like if, for the past two weeks, we were transported into a wondrous cave from which we were just emerging.

The beautiful and thoroughly modern Yamuna Expressway lay before us like Dorothy's yellow brick road as we rode our trusty Tata Nano steed towards our final destination. We looked over the miles and miles of wheat fields and the women who labored there in the midday heat, and realized that in a way, time had stood still for them. On the other hand, the countless small brick-making factories indicated to us that village homes were constantly being transformed from thatched mud huts to more durable brick constructions.

Driving closer to Delhi, signs of major development were becoming more and more apparent. As we sped past the Jaypee

Sports City with its brand new Cricket Stadium, I thought of all our cricket-loving friends and relatives, and the Indian boys here who had told me, with full confidence, that they would one day play for their country.

There were no signs on the highway for the airport so I had to get directions from the toll collector. The last several miles had me facing the heavy, chaotic Delhi city traffic. Still, I was outside the Indira Gandhi International Airport at 4:30 pm.

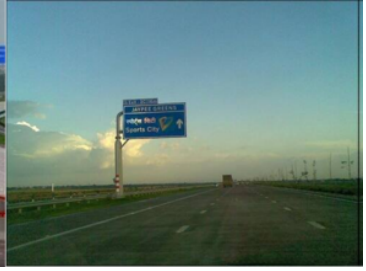
I filled the gas tank in preparation for the rental car return and I called the rental company. Its representative had arranged to meet us in the departure area of the airport at 5:30 pm.

By 6:00 pm the car was returned. The rental company was pleased as were we. Sherma and I both stood watching as “our car” was being driven away. It had been our companion for the past two weeks and during that time, had served us well.

Our flight was scheduled for 11:00 pm but the United Airlines counter would not be opened until 9:00 pm so we settled down for a few hours wait in the terminal. We had a couple of Khalida Didi’s aloo parathas and shared a large super sweet sapodilla that Dr Yunus had bought for us at one of the market places.

We finally boarded a full plane at around 10:30 pm and took off on time. After a fourteen hour, fairly comfortable flight we arrived safely back at Newark Airport. Our son Ishmael greeted us there and drove us back to our home in Staten Island, New York.

GOODBYE FROM DELHI



Thanks For Joining Us

Within the previous pages, I had imposed my accounts of our India journey on you. I hope that it was not too much of an inconvenience. Both Sherma and I were so overwhelmed by the experience that we thought we should share it with you.

We had decided to go because we had an invitation to attend a wedding in a small village in rural Uttar Pradesh, at the home of relatives we had never met. Sherma's 70th birthday was also around the same time and I wanted her to have a memorable commemoration of that milestone. It was an opportunity to achieve both goals.

Against everyone's advice, we decided to rent a car and travel independently. We knew that our approach involved some risks but we were willing to take up the challenge. We didn't know if we'd ever have a similar opportunity again.

We faced several disadvantages along the way. I was only able to rent a manual vehicle although all of my driving experience

had been with automatic cars. I was driving in a country where you drove on the opposite side of the road to what I was used to. The traffic regulations were mostly non-existent or mostly alien to my understanding. The roads were very often in bad shape especially in the areas we had to visit. Road signs were in lettering that we could not read. We had no road maps and because there was no Internet connection in almost all the areas we visited, we had no GPS either. We couldn't speak Hindi and most Indians could not understand English. The foods and spices were not of our usual taste. Many local customs and practices were alien to us.

And yet despite all those negatives, this was one of the most enjoyable, entertaining, educational and satisfying times we've ever had away from home. Why?..... Because of the people.

At no time on the entire journey did we encounter anyone who did not display an interest in our journey, an eagerness to help us and a genuine effort to be exceptionally friendly. Many were the entertaining communications we had with the local people; they speaking Hindi and we speaking English, all accompanied by wild and elaborate gesticulations. In the end, however, we always succeeded in getting our messages across.

Everyone we met on this trip, we met for the first time; only Abdul Kayoom and Dr. Yunus Ansari had I been communicating with before, and yet now we have many new friends, most of whom were from chance meetings in various towns and villages. Every moment of this trip was a memorable experience for us, even when there were setbacks.

In that short period, we had the opportunity to be house guests and experience an Indian wedding from the inside; searched for and located accommodation in different communities; interacted with the people from many walks of life, in villages, in cities and on the road; faced the everyday traffic and trials that the locals faced and had the opportunity to visit some of their iconic sites along our route.

We were not tourists. We were grateful guests who charted our own course, used our own transportation, chose our own accommodations and ate as we desired.

I must also mention that in that land of the infamous caste system and teeming with differences in religious persuasions and economic diversity, I saw no signs of intolerance of one another. I also saw no alcohol use, very little smoking and hardly any meat consumption (except at the wedding).

When we finally left the country, we did so with a sense of fulfillment. My wife Sherma assures me that she could not imagine a better way to have celebrated her milestone 70th birthday.

Thanks to my brother Shamshu Deen for his research on our family's lineages.

Thanks to our West Indies cricketers. They have paved a glorious path in that country. Wherever and whenever we needed to communicate, we just had to point to ourselves and say: "West Indies." And everyone would flock around with broad smiles on their faces, calling out the names of our cricketers.

THANKS FOR JOINING US

Among the young people our cricketers like, Lara, Gayle, Narine, Bravo, Pollard, Simmons etc. seemed to be more popular than Bollywood stars.

Thanks to our gracious hosts, Abdul Kayoom & his family, Dr. Yunus Ansari & his family, and all the people in India who contributed to make our time there such a success.

Thanks to our daughter-in-law Sharon, son Ishmael and their boys Nabeel & Kareem for making this trip possible.

Finally, visiting ones roots, whether actual family or just the land of ones forefathers, where your feet can touch the soil where those mythical figures from your past had once played or had pursued their livelihoods, gave a sense of fulfillment that was rewarding beyond all imagination. Everyone should experience it.... We are glad we did.



A Few Comments

Sherene Ali

This was truly amazing. I felt as if I was there. Many times tears came to my eyes. Thank you very much for sharing.

Zahara Mohammed

I felt I was on that journey too.

Barbara Shyama Lee Chong

Very much like village life in Trinidad....I'm in India with your narration ... loving it.

Safeeya Mohammed

I can only imagine how truly life changing this experience was! So amazing!

Sohaila Deen Omardeen

Truly an amazing experience!

Janice Lawrence-Clarke

WOW!!! What a lesson in culture! Thank you so much, Kamalo!

Khursheed Alam

Thanks uncle for coming here and joining us with much love.

Zakeya Deen Hosein

Really enjoyable reading.

Judith Lezama

Great writing Kamalo....very humane, kind encounters so very rare these days...soak it all up...safe journey.

Sheraz Karmally

Sounds like a movie.

Milton Zaifdeen

Malo, you have more B-lls than me. I don't think I could have rented a car and driven in India although I was living/working there. Good on you man and thanks for sharing.



About the Author

Kamalo Deen was born in 1944 in the village of Preysal in central Trinidad and grew up in Gasparillo. He has worked at various professions, including schoolteacher, waiter, composer, director, taxi driver, businessman, actor, courier and writer. As a Caribbean filmmaker he's created three Trinidad and Tobago feature films: "Bacchanal Time", "The Panman" and "Jahaji Family". Among his published works are "For All Our Children" a children's book and "Curry Cascadoo" a novel and "My Gasparillo - 1940s to 1960s". Among his songs are "The Patriot's Song", "Dear John", "Singer of Songs" and several others written for the movies "The Panman" and "Jahaji Family". He's traveled extensively and has worked and lived in Trinidad, Mumbai, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, New Jersey and New York where he presently resides. He's married to Sherma (Ali) of Gasparillo and has two children Shyama & Ishmael and five grandchildren.

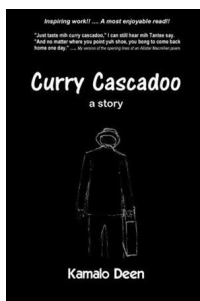
You can connect with me on:

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Also by Kamalo Deen



CURRY CASCADOO

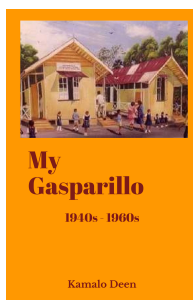
A story told in letters, poetry and recollections.



FOR ALL OUR CHILDREN

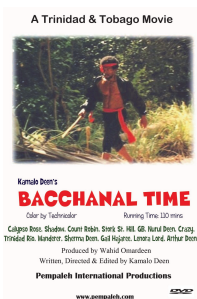
“FOR ALL OUR CHILDREN” is a collection of original Trinidad and Tobago songs and stories. One of its songs “The Patriots Song”, arranged and performed by George Victory, was chosen by The National Days and Festivals

Committee as its theme song for the 21st Anniversary of T&T’s Independence celebration.



MY GASPARILLO - 1940s to 1960s

“My Gasparillo – 1940’s to 1960’s” is based on the author’s memories of life in his hometown of Gasparillo, Trinidad during his growing up years.



MOVIE.... “Bacchanal Time”

A Trinidad & Tobago comedy set at Carnival time.



MOVIE.... “The Panman”

A troubled young man seeks a focus in his life and finds it in the pan, the national instrument of Trinidad & Tobago.



MOVIE.... “Jahaji Family”

A two hour long docu-drama which follows the exploits of an indentured immigrant from India to the sugar cane fields of Trinidad.