

OCTOBER 19, 1973

## Westerners find themselves a small minority in India

By MARIA WAWER

My first morning in New Delhi awoke to glorious sunshine. Getting up, I ran outside to get some pictures of the garden. I stepped outside the door and melted. Hey, is it really supposed to be 98 degrees at 8 o'clock in the morning? It was impossible to take pictures. The camera lens kept fogging up too much due to the temperature contrast between the air conditioned hotel and the reality beyond the door.

Our WUSC orientation session in Delhi proved to be most interesting. A motley group of characters from Delhi University and the government community spoke about the politics and social problems of their country, about its culture, tradition and history.

At the same time, since New Delhi is probably the most westernized city in India (although we wouldn't have believed it at the time) we were able to acclimatize slowly to a strange new world.

Trips into town were an unending source of fascination. The main shopping area was Connaught Circus, a conglomeration of two storied shops, restaurants and offices, arranged in a huge circle around a central park. Every store on each of the curved blocks around the centre was brilliant white, and had huge colonnades. The ensemble emitted a merciless glare in the sunshine.

In these shops, curios which are expensive or even rare in North America abounded everywhere. "Madame, want to buy a cheap saree? Silver? Jade?" Just a little away from the centre, down Jan Path, one encountered small, unluxurious shops selling beautiful embroidered shirts and kaftans produced by the Indian cottage industries. (For the historically minded, the Cottage Industries were first encouraged by Mahatma Gandhi, who believed that such crafts represented one way for rural communities to achieve a

measure of economic stability. He also felt that a return to traditional methods of producing things such as this cloth could engender a greater pride among his countrymen in the traditions of India. Unfortunately, Cottage Industries do not seem to add much to the solution of these problems.)

On Jan Path, one could buy embroidered blouses for about a dollar. In Montreal these sell for \$10 or \$12. Somewhere, somebody is making a killing on the things, and it probably is not the Indian peasant.

Even in New Delhi we became aware of how small a minority Westerners are in India. One would see very few, even at the ligica; tourist sites. At the Taj Mahal, in Agra, we were the only non Indians present. I have never been particularly sensitive to such things as being stared at, yet I couldn't help but notice that almost all the Indians on the street looked up almost involuntarily when I passed - and kept on looking. In a way it was interesting to experience this, yet somehow sad to think that, at least physically, we would never be able to blend in.

We also found that certain little social cues were different than in Canada. For example, when an Indian wishes to say yes, instead of nodding he moves his head from side to side. Thus one runs into distraught tourists saying to a waiter, "What do you mean you don't have tea?! All restaurants have tea."

At the end of our stay in Delhi we were given a choice of which study group we would like to travel with. The possibilities were Madras in the South, the Punjab and Kashmir in the North, Bombay in the West, travelling down the Ganges, or going East to Calcutta and Assam.

I chose the Calcutta group. I had heard so much about this city (most of it bad) that I had to find out for myself whether it could

possibly be all true. (Actually, I came to like the city, but it did take a little while. More of that later.) Also, Assam, a hunk of land between Bangladesh and Burma, joined to India by a narrow sliver of land, sounded intriguing. It is a large tribal area, not often visited by foreign tourists. One of its cities, Cherrapunji, has the rather dubious distinction of having the largest annual rainfall in the world. It was also rumored that the place was having a malaria epidemic. All in all, this particular trip sounded like a bit of a challenge. Why bother coming halfway around the world, if you aren't going to try something a little different?

We set off by train to Calcutta, a trip lasting 36 hours. The railways in India are actually quite well run, considering the problems they face. (Overcrowding not being the least of them.) We were travelling third class, with reserved wooden bunks for sleeping. If memory serves me right, the entire trip cost about \$4 a person, and was quite comfortable.

But I will digress from chronological order for a moment and talk about trains in general. There are few sensations as eerie as that of sitting at a railway station at 6 in the morning with 50 vultures circling slowly, majestically, overhead. A skinny white cow stands placidly on the tracks. Will it move, or will it become cow soup? Finally the train moves slowly into view...with two hundred people already sitting on the roof. You know you are not going to walk on. You are going to fight your way aboard. Not nudge gently. Fight. And when you reach your reserved seat, there will already be two people sitting there.

This was especially bad during a steam engine strike that took place in late July. There were suddenly twice as many people travelling on the diesel trains. Nevertheless, the railways made heroic efforts to leave and arrive on time.

Compared to travel in India, going from place to place by train in Canada is insufferably boring. When the train moves into an

Indian station, it is immediately surrounded by 20 little men in dhotis running around shouting "Chae, chae, chae!" (Tea for sale.) They carry a kettle with a little burner underneath it and pour the hot tea, with the milk and sugar already boiled in with it and pour it into tiny disposable clay cups. The tea is invariably excellent, the clay cup helping to add a specific flavour. When one is finished, the cup is simply thrown out the window. It disintegrates after several good rainstorms. One also has visions of hundreds of little men all over India busily producing the little receptacles.

To the 'Chae' cry is soon added another. "Bakshish, bakshish!", loosely translatable as "Alms for the poor." The train became inundated with beggars of all types and sizes, little children, some blind, mothers carrying babies, gnarled old men playing flutes. Some are quiet, some pushy, touching you, gently scratching you. It would be impossible to give to all of them. In a way, one never becomes used to them. Some have stories of great misery written all over their faces and bodies. Even if you do give a couple of paises, or the extremely princely sum of one rupee (14 cents), what good does it do? After a while, one finds that one stops

caring to a large degree. We were all somewhat dismayed that we were becoming this 'cold' so quickly, yet the problem is so big that dwelling upon it becomes a useless exercise. One waits until the train is beginning to pull out of the station, and drop a bit of money to whatever beggar is near - if one gives the money earlier, all the other beggars from near will gather at one's compartment.

"Chae." "Bakshish." The banana vendors, the chapati sellers, the coconut man all swoop down on the train, stepping over the people sleeping on the platform. This is an especially unsettling sight at night - all those quietly sleeping bodies, anonymous under the rags with which they cover themselves.

But the train goes on, through mile after mile of rice paddies, over muddy, swollen rivers, by coconut palms and banana trees, little mud huts, small villages everywhere. For a Canadian used to wide open spaces, the unrelieved sight of cultivated land, and tiny isolated houses and villages everywhere really brings home the fact that this is a country of 550,000,000 people. One sees the farmers everywhere, busily transplanting the rice seedlings, up to their knees in muddy water. Do these people ever rest?

Next week, Calcutta itself.

Fredericton, N.B.

Phone: 455-3335

### DIAMOND TAXI

Prompt Courteous 24 hour service  
Fully Insured  
Radio Dispatched Taxis

Direct phone service at  
Hospital - K Mart - F'ton Mall

## Blood donor clinic a success

By KEN CORBETT

A quota of 600 pints was set for the Red Cross blood donor clinic held Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of last week in the SUB ballroom.

As of Wednesday at noon, a total of 342 pints had been donated. Of these, 269 were received Tuesday, 69 over that day's goal, and a further 73 were collected Wednesday morning. Thirty-six pints of blood designated especially for hemophiliacs were given Tuesday, and an additional 30 pints Wednesday morning.

The blood designated for hemophiliacs must be transported to Saint John and processed within 4 hours, so that the clotting agent in the blood can be extracted for

preservation. If this is not done, the clotting agent in the blood will deteriorate.

Blood to be transfused to persons in normal health is first stored in the freezer truck outside the SUB, and transported to Saint John at the end of the day. In the laboratory, the clotting factors are extracted from the blood for separate storage, and the plasma is frozen, to be preserved for future transfusions.

Several residences engaged in a contest to see which house could donate the most blood. Red Cross officials involved in the operation stated that they were pleased with the effort shown by the university community, and expressed hope that the quota of dearly needed blood would be reached.

## FRONTIER COLLEGE

Prospects for full time and unexotic work: guaranteed to erode illusions and strengthen (or destroy) character. Frontier College is now recruiting for Winter employment.

Applicants welcome at room 118 of the SUB.

Monday, Oct. 22, 1973. at 1:00 PM



featuring the  
**PIZZA HUT**

## ENTERTAINMENT

7 nights a week!

**PIZZAS**  
to suit your  
**INDIVIDUAL tastes**

LICENSED

for your eating pleasure!

LINCOLN ROAD

PHONE: 455-4200