

Hyderabad: Day 3 (Sunday)

Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India - February 10, 2008

Naresh:

Having done nothing except to be pampered for the past few days (Madhumanti & Tapas are excellent pamperers—I give their accommodations five stars), I was feeling itchy to use my feet again. So I got up before the rest of the gang and wandered outside before Amy could wake up and say to “be careful, don’t cross the street.”

I explored some of the area around the apartment. I wandered up the main drag (Road #2) then into some side streets, then side streets of the side streets, and so on, in partial hope of getting lost so I could experience in incomparable thrill if get unlost (and to test some theories I’d read about how internal maps are created).

This area of Hyderabad, called Banjara Hills, is pretty upscale. There are wide and new sidewalks in many of the streets—these sidewalks are still not used by anyone for walking (so far I’ve only seen that happen in Mumbai), but provide a much classier urinal than we’ve seen in most Indian cities. Around this area were nice housing developments, a lot of small offices housing software-development businesses, schools, doctor and dental offices, one clinic specializing in “weight loss, weight gain, and weight maintenance,” a larger-than-usual temple complex (mega Hindu church?). There was also a row of businesses which all sold the very best marble, kids playing cricket in the street, many buildings under construction, women sweeping dirt off the street, an ATM full of money for me, and it’s hard to remember how much else. I wish now that I’d taken some pictures during the walk to remember better.

The oddest site in this area, I think, is the field next to T&M’s building. It’s a large barren plot of land (1 acre, 2?) with just a small shack in the middle and regularly about five guards who sit at an outdoor table and play cards. Tapas clarified that this is a plot of government-owned land and the guards are there to keep anyone from squatting on it, because once squatted- upon it’s hard to unsquat. It’s common to see small plots of land with large signs saying that so-and-so owns it and trespassers will be removed, and it’s also common to see tents set up where someone is setting down roots on unguarded land, but I’m impressed by the use of five guards to make sure that this plot remains unused for any purpose but the card game.

Of course there was ample breakfast waiting for me when I got back.

Amy had been wanting me to get a haircut for many days. Each time we’d seen someone with a haircut

stand in the street she'd given me an eye (despite many warnings we'd heard about skin rashes and spreading of diseases from unwashed street equipment). Well, today was the big day that Amy got here wish! Tapas wanted a haircut too, so we went out together. He said there was the 30 rupee barber in the alley across the street, or the 300 rupee cut in a fancy salon. I did the math and selected the one across the street (not knowing that Tapas was going to pay for it :-). The barbershop had three or four chairs full of barbers snip snipping away. I watched those ahead of me get a haircut, which seemed completely normal until the end when the barber would



start massaging their heads (nice), gently pounding on their heads (nice), and twisting their heads about their necks to generate giant cracking noises (not so nice anymore). My turn came, I gave my elaborate instructions for the coiff I prefer ("this short" showing my thumb and forefinger a half inch apart) and sat in the chair. While my hair was being cut, I could watch the big Indian/Australian cricket match in the mirror, but I had trouble understanding what was going on (no doubt because the mirror made everything backwards, and so it made no sense). When the clipping was done, and he told me two step down from the chair without doing any neck-cracking (although no massage either) I felt that I'd dodged a bullet. When he didn't take money (I didn't know Tapas had paid), I felt that I'd dodged two bullets and that India was the greatest place ever. They offered to cut my beard, but I didn't want to frighten Amy with too much of a change, and so I declined. From another customer I saw that they'll also shave armpit hairs, but I didn't ask for that service either.

While Tapas got his haircut I read the classified ads in the local paper and did some mental calculations about how much it would cost to rent an apartment, hire some maids, a "boy" (to do errands and stuff), a driver, and a "she" or "maid" (cook), and decided I could live pretty nice if I could keep a bay-area salary and live here. Then I read the help-wanted ads and learned that I could earn up to about \$12 a day working from home with my own internet's connection. While that is much more than Google pays me through ad-words revenue on my blog, it is not enough to get an apartment and car and maids and a boy. Dang! I also read some ads about people seeking spouses. None of them applied to me, partly because I was never of the specified caste and didn't meet most of the job or age requirements (but did fit for many who wanted to marry IT workers), but mostly they didn't fit me because I'm already married. I didn't have time to find the job listings that offered bay-area salaries because Tapas' haircut was finished. He didn't get a neck-crack either. That's the end of the great haircutting adventure.

We got back to the apartment with a little time to watch more of the cricket game before our planned lunch outing. Tapas explained more of the fine details of the game. As we left, Sachin Tendulkar, possibly the most beloved person in India, was batting and showing off why they love him so: he can hit the ball just about anywhere he chooses.

Tapas drove us all out to lunch. Tapas said that he drives himself on Sundays in order to keep his skills up. We told him what the phrase “Sunday driver” meant, but that that wasn’t him because, as Rainmain says, he was an excellent driver.

The place we went for lunch was called Little Italy. They had a brunch going on with lots of stations (crepes, salads, pizzas, bar, pasta, soups, breads, fruits, desserts) and also brought dishes of appetizers to the table. It was very Mountain Viewish and we felt at home. I was thrilled to eat a salad, the first I’d had in India (I’m usually afraid to order one because I want to avoid things recently rinsed in tap water—that’s right, in India I’ve hypocritically and completely changed my stance on bottled water).



big brunch



photo shoot

At the restaurant Amy taught Akanksha the term “photo shoot,” and took many adorable pictures of Akanksha wearing her new glasses. (Sorry,

Madhumanti and Tapas if we’ve just turned your daughter into another Jon Benet Ramsey.)

After bankrupting the restaurant with the amount of food we gobbled, we drove back to the apartment and the cricket game, and Sachin Tendulkar was still batting. Really. He’d been batting the whole time. They bat until they get out, one lakh pitches have been bowled, or the sun goes supernova, whichever comes first. I’m not kidding.



photo shootier

For the rest of the afternoon Amy continued her internet research on transportation and reservations for our Kerala trip. I watched more cricket and studied the Bhagavad Gita, and chatted, and napped.

In the evening we met with Raj, our friend Virginia’s boyfriend, who we were surprised to learn was working in Hyderabad and was staying a few minutes away from Tapas’ place. He came over and we went with him to the other side of the alley, just a few feet from T&M’s apartment. We’d had no idea that that building was such a big mall inside. We rode with Raj up to the fourth floor where the restaurants are. First we went into a super-duper fancy restaurant for drinks. There were streams running through the floor of that restaurant (watch your step). Fish were streaming through the streams (I got a

little hungry for fresh sushi).

Raj and I shared a bottle of wine and Amy had a chocolaty yummy martini. Amy plied Raj for all of his stories about being a doctor, local ER horror stories, traveling in the US, climbing, meeting Virginia, his BPO medical transcription business, his friends and families weddings, and so on. He's a super-duper nice guy; so nice, in fact, that we felt bad that we bankrupted him for the super-expensive drinks. (Amy and I had made a clever plan of only accepting his offer to buy us dinner, and on a technicality insisting on paying for drinks, but Raj saw through our scheme and insisted on paying.)

Raj showed us some gifts that he bought for Virginia, and gave them to us to bring to her at home. I won't show any pictures of those here because that would ruin the surprise.



Raj bears gifts

Then we crossed to the other side of the mall floor for a dinner at a restaurant specializing in South-Indian cuisine. Amy ordered Chicken 65 (no one knows what the "65" is for), and Raj picked out some other hot and spicy soups and items for us. For desserts he ordered yumminesses in the form of apricots, ice cream,

and a rice or bread-based orange-colored carrier of sugars and spices. He mentioned that the restaurant itself was a typical "Andra Pradesh" house with wooden beams and more wood than we had seen in other places.



many southern scripts on restaurant wall

Raj was really nice and we felt as though we had known him for a long time. But we left him in the alley (we're nice that way) and crossed to T&M's apartment. I chatted with Tapas past midnight about all sorts of critically important topics, till I was too tired to think deep thoughts anymore.



Raj in restaurant

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