

across the lake to the bus. Here the group greeted one another exuberantly, looking refreshed, revived and ready to travel on.

Although we were a close-knit group sharing feelings of comradery, it had been good to have rested from each other for awhile, and to have had the space and privacy which the house-boat experience provided.

Nino and I had not talked these past days. Meeting on the bus again brought such a natural response of joy from both of us that the group in good fun began teasing us, causing me to blush. We both liked each other and just couldn't hide our feelings, although I tried.

The luggage packed, the bus slowly pulled out of the retreat as we waved farewell to our new friends. Twenty minutes later, we made a photo stop for a particularly spectacular shot of the snow-blanketed Himalayas which boxed us in on all sides. Years from now, as time erased memory, I could prove by this picture that I had actually been here.

A prayer that morning for our dangerous journey seemed to have calmed any fears I might have had for the day. Besides reading, I talked with some of the others about their experiences in and around Srinagar. Several of them had toured the city, while others had taken leisurely shikara excursions to the Mogul water gardens.

I then read through my journal entries on India, and realized I had failed to record some important observations I had made days ago. So, as we slowly made our way down the mountains, I set

to work recording the following:

The trip from Birganj to Srinagar brought us over a vast diverse land at times rich in vegetation, but at other times harsh and arid, in places covered with volcanic debris. We were brought face to face with men and women who laboriously repaired mile after mile of India's roads. First breaking the large rocks with picks and then breaking the smaller pieces with chisels and hammers, they spread the crushed rock on the roadbed.

This journey brought us through villages and farmlands where primitive plows were still used and where men and women irrigated their gardens and fields manually, carrying the water in tightly woven, mortared baskets and clay pots. Here we saw thatched shacks and mud brick dwellings, and watched mud bricks being made and laid in neat rows to dry in the sun. Here we also saw the locals collecting chips of dry dung, stacking them in perfect cones six to seven feet high to eventually be used or sold for fuel.

Rural India offered the popular pastime of cock fighting for the natives. Driving through villages or briefly stopped, we could observe from the bus windows heckling betting crowds encircling two pecking jabbing roosters.

As we traveled westward, the sight of men reclining on rope beds outside their dwellings beside the road became more prevalent. Oblivious to passing vehicles and pedestrians, they would sleep or smoke their hookahs, large water pipes. These beds were made of crude wood frames mounted on sturdy legs with criss-crossed rope to support the body.

Discovering animal carcasses along the road or in the fields was part of the bush loo experience. Only with our loo stops did we become fully aware of dead animals and their odors and the ugly preying vultures which circled above them or fed on their carcasses.

The traditional squatting stance of the Indians was at first an oddity, but with time became as commonplace as the camel and mule caravans and the young boys who rode their water buffaloes into the rivers and water holes to bathe them.

The water buffalo with its curiously coiled horns was everywhere, doing everything. Pulling carts, plowing fields, grinding wheat into flour and rocks into gravel, it worked slowly like the oxen and camels and the people. The dogs were mangy and sickly and the sacred cows boney, reflecting a society of poor malnourished people. The portly people we soon learned were the wealthy ones of India.

As for India's wildlife, our experience was limited to wild monkeys and vultures. We were not to see the Bengal tiger this trip!

The sounds of India were all around us, from braying camels, water buffaloes, oxen and donkeys, to shrieking monkeys and chirping birds. The music of sitars, horns, reed pipes, crude drums and jangling bells enticed me to want to learn more about India, a country over which we had barely scratched the surface.

With the journal entry made, I continued reading The Andromeda Strain until nightfall. We reached our same hotel in Jammu around 9 P.M. This time we waited for our dinner, retiring as soon as we were through.

Jammu to Amritsar
Monday, March 22

We left cool Jammu at 7 A.M. and at noon arrived at the warm Sikh city of Amritsar. Our old hotel in downtown Amritsar was rundown, needing another whitewash. I shared a bare room and bath with Myra and Megan, a tall good-looking nurse from Australia's outback. We were back to the porcelain slab toilet, a sink and a shower spigot in the center of the bathroom ceiling, no hot water or loo paper.

After leaving our luggage in our rooms, Myra, Megan and I joined some of the others at the pleasant restaurant next door for a quick bite of lunch before our tour of the Golden Temple and a

typical regional farm. Having lost my appetite, I drank a Pepsi while the others ate. At the houseboat my appetite had known no bounds. Perhaps this was due to the invigorating mountain air, but now we had returned to the warmer Indian plain. I began to feel dizzy and went outside for some fresh air.

By 1:45 P.M. everyone was boarding the bus. As we pulled out of the hotel driveway onto the busy avenue, I felt a chill travel up and down my spine coupled with nausea and knew that I would be the next victim of the dreaded illness. Despite the way I was feeling, I couldn't help but notice the poor straight-backed women balancing shining gold urns on their heads as we rode through the dusty streets of Amritsar.

Outside the walls of the Golden Temple grounds, we entered a cool lecture room and seated ourselves on wooden benches. On the stark white walls of this room hung several pictures of famous Sikh leaders. One of them was mounted on a fierce white horse holding his bloody decapitated head in one hand and his sword in the other.

A tall husky turbaned Sikh standing at the podium introduced himself to us and began to expound on the history of the Sikh religion. He explained that the mystic, Nanak (1469-1539), was the founder and first guru of Sikhism. An advocate of religious and humanitarian goals, Nanak hoped that one day Muslims and Hindus would be united into one brotherhood.

In the latter half of the 16th century, the Mogul Emperor Akbar granted the Sikhs land on which to build their sacred Golden Temple. Thus, Amritsar became the religious center for Sikhism. Decades

later, Shah Jahan's son, the fanatic Islamic Mogul emperor Aurangzeb, ordered Hindu and Sikh temples destroyed and the killing of the ninth guru because he refused to embrace Islam. As a result, the tenth guru, Govind Singh, aggressively campaigned against the Moguls and Islam. He initiated the concept of the soldier-saint with the formation of the Khalsa (pure) fraternity which advocated the worship of the sword and sacred writings.

Jen and my unanswered questions about the meaning of her jewelry from her Sikh admirer in New Delhi were answered when the guide told us about the "Five Ks," the Sikhs' religious symbols: Kirpan was the sword used for protection, Kara, the steel bracelet signifying prudence, Kesh meant unshorn hair giving strength and virility, the comb to hold the hair in place under the turban was called Kangha and the shorts the Sikh wears under his clothing are called Kachha.

Now we all understood why so many of the boys we had observed in Amritsar and the surrounding area wore their long hair pulled up on top of their heads. They were young Sikhs and in time would wear turbans like their fathers.

Lastly, the guide noted that by the late 1700s the Sikhs had conquered most of the Punjab region, northern India, from the Moguls. By the early 1800s, a Sikh state was established with Amritsar as its center. However, with the Sikh Wars (1845-59), all was lost to the British.

Following this expose on Sikhism, each of us was issued a clean white scarf. No one could enter the holy grounds without

a head covering. The fellows looked so funny in their scarves that we paused for photos. After leaving our shoes and socks under the arch and wading through a puddle of muddy water for cleansing, we entered the holy grounds of the Golden Temple.

The gleaming Temple was surrounded by a white marble pavement and a sacred pool, Amrita Saras meaning Pool of Immortality, from which the name Amritsar is derived. The water in the pool is holy and is used to heal the faithful believer. We were the only people on the grounds except for two women sitting beside the pool.

Before entering the Temple, we made a brief stop at the Sikh kitchen through another gate near the grounds. Here in the enormous fly-infested kitchen, we watched caramel colored narn being made. First the dough was kneaded on the clean cement floor; then it was slapped on large flat shovel-like spatulas and thrown against the hot walls of the underground ovens to bake. We learned that this was part of the Sikhs' humanitarian mission, to prepare enough narn to feed 10,000 hungry people daily.

As we watched this process, I began feeling feverish and more nauseous, so I leaned against a large pillar for support. The group continued with the kitchen tour, but I went outside and sat down in the shade to wait.

Eileen and Megan helped me up as the group left the kitchen for the Temple. With the sun beating down on our covered heads, we circled part of the pool and walked over the marble causeway to the entrance of the golden structure which our guide informed us

was not of solid gold as many of us first thought. Instead its bronze plates were overlaid with pure gold leaf.

Inside, a cool breeze gave relief as we observed the Sikhs worshipping. Men and women in clean white clothes kneeling on rich carpets listened as a priest read from the Grant Saheth, the Sikh holy book. At the same time the soft strumming of stringed instruments produced an atmosphere conducive to meditation.

We quietly walked around the worshipers and climbed the stairs to the next floor where two gurus in white sat cross-legged on carpets each reading softly from a large Grant Saheth. Here, I felt so weak that I had to sit down. Eileen and Megan walked me back to the lecture room while the rest of the group continued the tour.

Lying awkwardly on a bench, I was approached by a young Sikh who shyly asked me if he could bring me some tea, but I was too ill to think of food or drink. My stomach was convulsing and there were no facilities. What to do? I didn't dare ask to be driven back to the hotel before the farm tour as it was out of the way. So for the next hours, I would just have to silently endure the agony. Boris soon joined me; our giggling Tricia was not laughing now! She was ailing from the same symptoms. The tour over, the group sauntered into the lecture room after buying souvenirs. The most popular with the girls was the steel bracelet.

The forty-five minute ride to the farm over bumpy roads took its toll on my insides. We parked in a muddy drive near the barn

where several water buffaloes stood chewing hay. The group left for the tour while Boris and I remained in the bus sitting in the front seats with our legs propped up on the windows. Holding our stomachs, we rested in quiet misery for over an hour. A couple of children standing on the bus steps asked through the open door to come in. We told them "no," but they kept asking until our tone became emphatic and they left.

When the group returned, I was too weak to ask what they had learned of Indian farming methods, nor did I care. We returned to the hotel and I made it to my room just in time! The twelve hours that followed were excruciating, filled with fever, chills, a headache and continuous trips to the loo for vomiting, dry heaving and diarrhea.

During the evening Myra and Megan were very attentive. With tender loving care, they prepared and encouraged me to drink instant soup and tea. When the chills came, they covered me with extra blankets. Neil came in to check on me and gave me some of the orange pills for my virus.

I slept very little, sick and concerned about the next day's border crossing. How could I make it? But at some point my worries left me when I remembered the Bible verses, "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you," and "God is my strength and power: And he maketh my way perfect." Somehow, He would make a way for me the next day.