



What is the name of this movie we're in?

The Mumbai Airport has the longest baggage carousel I've seen. Cowboys rope calves in a shorter distance at rodeos.

Positioned in the midst of Europe, the Middle East, Russia and the Pacific Rim, the airport is bustling in the middle of the night. On our first descent into Mumbai, we could not see the slums that border its runway. The sharp juxtaposition of prosperity, world commerce and poverty is a common sight in India.

Armed soldiers with M16s were positioned through the vast terminal. Our small taxi stopped at the gate of our airport hotel while sentries put mirrors underneath the vehicle to check for bombs. Certain Indian hotels are special targets, said our son-in-law, because of their American guests.

If you have seen movies such as *Monsoon Wedding* or *Slumdog Millionaire* you are familiar with the Bollywood genre. After a few days in India, you realize why it is such fertile cinematic material. The nation's vast panoply of people is photogenic and magnetic.

Having flown across 12 time zones, we dressed for a party for our daughter and son-in-law to which our hosts, Noordin and Zarine Rana, had invited 150 friends, business associates and school friends of their son. I was pretty plain in a gray sports coat next to my wife, who was wearing a sari loaned by Zarine Rana. At a beauty salon a



Steve Forrester



Brenda Penner for The Daily Astorian

The Palace of the Winds contained spaces where women of the maharajah's retinue could view festivals through latticework, without being seen.

dresser had draped her in the sari, which involved strategic placement of safety pins.

Waiting for our transport to the party, I realized my body clock was floating somewhere over the Atlantic. Looking at my wife in a sari, I asked my cousin's husband, "I'm wondering: What is the name of this movie we're in?"

India presents life on a grand scale. One sees a Hindu temple adjacent to a mosque and a Buddhist temple. Unlike America where farm animals are far away from urban sensibilities, cows, goats, oxen and even camels are in the midst of urban neighborhoods and traffic.

Walking down alleys behind our Nagpur hotel, my son and I watched a pick-up cricket game in a park with players using a tennis ball. The young men were amused at the Americans watching them through the fence.

In other places we would see men playing cricket on deep green lawns, wearing whites. I counted four cricket channels on Indian television. In a Goa sporting good store, I asked to hold a

cricket bat. It was much heavier than a baseball bat. When the salesman offered to show me other models, I was flattered.

Our travels in India formed a scalene triangle, with Jaipur and Agra in the north, Goa at the south point and Nagpur in the east.

After two days in Nagpur, the Ranastambh Temple took us in three vehicles to the Pench nature preserve, a national park. My son and son-in-law briefly observed two juvenile tigers chasing a wild boar. We saw a prehistoric looking creature called a nilgai, the largest Asian antelope, known colloquially as a blue bull. By a waterhole we watched a colony of monkeys noisily drop from a grove of trees as they coexisted with spotted deer with huge antlers.

That night prior to dinner, our two families enjoyed a humorous discussion of the difference between driving in India and America. Traffic lanes are frequently occupied by bicycles, motor scooters carrying two to four passengers, auto rickshaws, trucks, cattle and people. Navigating this traffic

One sees a Hindu temple adjacent to a mosque and a Buddhist temple.



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Elephants carry visitors up a steep path to the Amber Fort, where the maharajah lived with his family, retainers, wives and concubines.

— S.A.F.



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