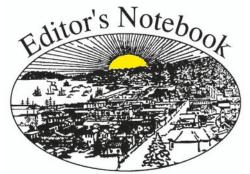
OPINION



4A

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

The Mumbai Airport has the longest baggage carrel 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



Steve Forrester

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.

f 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



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?"

ndia presents life on a **I** 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 they coexisted with spotted deer with game in a park with players using a tennis ball. The young men were amused at the Americans watching

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

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

After two days in Nagpur, the Ranas

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

huge antlers.

involves lots of honking. Everyone miraculously passes without injury. As Zarine Rana drove the wrong way up a one-way street she told my wife that India is all about breaking rules.

Brenda Penner for The Daily Astorian

eaving the Ranas, we flew to Delhi and motored to Agra to see You-Know-What.

Speechless is what I was following my first glimpse of the Taj Mahal. It is a much larger compound than I had realized. Our guide warned us about all of the freelance hustlers we would encounter between the parking lot and the park's entrance. If the Taj Mahal is a gem of architecture, the city of Agra which surrounds it presents a very rough and ugly outer skin.

ur most exotic adventure was seeing Jaipur, the heart of the Rajasthan era. We saw the walled city with the multiturreted Amber Fort, which housed the maharajah, his That night prior to dinner, our two family including 12 wives and 100 families enjoyed a humorous discussion concubines, his retinue and his army. The visitor rides atop an elephant up a steep path and through the gates into the palace's parade ground. It is an architectural marvel of tiles, mosaics and arcades of arches. Within the walls of the Pink City we saw the Jantar Mantar observatory that was built in 1728 and resembles a collection of bizarre sculptures that serve as sun dials giving the time of day, or day of the year. The most fantastical sight is the Palace of the Winds - a sevenstory structure that only holds spaces where women of the maharajah's domain could watch festivals through latticework, remaining unobserved. They reached this palace through a tunnel from the main palace.

One sees a Hindu temple a mosque and a **Buddhist** temple.

adjacent to

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

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

> n American may travel in India Arelatively inexpensively. A boon to our travel was an Indian travel agent — a boyhood chum of our son-in-law – who worked through various logistical arrangements. In Astoria, Roxanne Fick of Sundial Travel helped my wife arrange transcontinental air travel.

> Security at Indian airports was heavy and redundant. We would typically show our passports three or four times before boarding.

> On one in-country flight, there were two other Americans. They were from Portland. The man said to me he had been to India in the 1990s. "It got into my blood," he said. I understand what he meant.

> > -S.A.F.



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



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