

Journal - Around the World in 79 days - Spring 2013

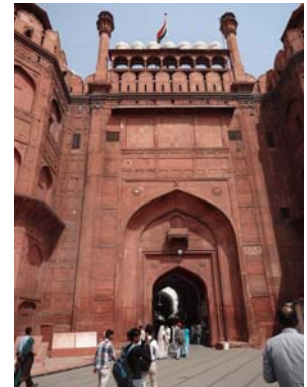
Part 7: Sights and Sites of Delhi 13-14 April A bit of a history class...

Saturday, 13 April: Basu (one of the grad students) and I had agreed to go to the Red Fort in downtown Delhi, and then stay and watch the “Son et lumiere” show in the evening. Last year, I had tried to get into the Red Fort twice, but once it was closed for India Independence Day, and the other for a visit by foreign dignitaries (self not included). We left IUAC in the late morning, taking the usual 604 bus to the metro, and then downtown to Chadni Chowk, the center of the local markets/bazaars. We had a good lunch at a little Indian restaurant, as we pushed our way along this busy street toward the Red Fort - the street is wide, but pedestrians overflow onto the roadway which is full of load-bearing tricycles, rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, cows, little vans, etc. This street is just one of many filled with stores where Indians actually buy, as opposed to just looking in the store windows - most of these stores have no windows, and they cover an area of a few square miles, roughly separated into areas of clothiers, food, electronics, household goods, etc. The students often buy lab equipment at these markets, used, but at minimal prices - it will be a while before they are ready for Ebay here.



Basu in front of the Red Fort

The Red Fort sits across an open square from the Chowk, with entry tickets following the country-wide tradition: 10 rupees for Indians and 250 rupees for foreigners: it is a huge sprawling place, originally built by Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan as part of his new capital. It is surrounded by walls several kilometers long roughly along the Yamuna river’s southern bank - the river provided the



Red Fort entrance gate

water to fill the moats, which are now just filled with grass: the buildings remind one very much of the Red Fort at Agra, near the Taj Mahal. The Agra Fort was built by Jahan’s ancestors, the Emperors Babur, Humayun and Akbar. The same Shah Jahan arranged for the building of the Taj Mahal in honor to his



The Indian Joan of Arc repelling the Brits - for a while

wife who had died after giving him about a dozen children - all of them self-agrandizing, nasty brothers and sisters full of sibling rivalry (or as Sebastien would say “sniveling” rivalry), who contributed mainly to the rapid descent of the Moghul empire. [Consult the wikipedia, or read my travelog from last year!]. I suppose the comparison of the two forts is no help



Chain gang sculpture

to those of you who never went to either - anyway, one might describe the Delhi version as larger but not as impressive, mostly

grassland, with fairly non-descript buildings dotted around - three of them forming excellent museums. The common factors are the long high and thick walls, plus the river-facing palace buildings - at least, in Delhi, near where the river used to be - which are beautifully designed and preserved. They are full of middle-eastern designs, doorways and arched arcades. You can see from some of the pictures that in the early afternoon, it was not too



Assembly hall looking out to the Yamana river



Another assembly hall



A busy assembly hall with Basu



Palace ceiling

crowded with visitors, but there are several square miles of area to visit - Basu and I did our best to see it all. Besides the picture of Tapan, found in the previous journal, we took many pictures inside the museums - the many signs forbidding photographing were cheerfully ignored by most visitors, and the sleeping guards did not wake up often enough to stop us.



Palace wall decoration

Our next goal was the nearby muslim cathedral - excuse me - mosque, just south west of the Red Fort. The Jama Masjid mosque may be known to you from several recent terrorist incidents. We had to walk through a maze of bazaars of different types to get there - one area selling tee-shirts, another jeans and pants, another fresh food, another just knic-knacs, probably from China, dodging around rickshas etc, all in 100F heat. The mosque eventually appeared at the back of an enclosed courtyard - entered only through a gate at the top of a set of about 100 steps. Obligatorily removing our shoes, we started to enter, but the guard demanded 500 rupees to enter, even though his ticket clearly said 300 rupees. The idea of paying anything to enter a temple clearly horrified Basu (he had apparently entered for free previously). He stuck to his guns for quite a long time in animated Hindi, but eventually, we said forget it. No need for another "terrorist incident". We retrieved our shoes and sat down and had a nice cool beer - actually not beer of course - none of that within miles - but it was good tasting and cool juice from one of the many sellers. We had been looking really for a nice cup of tea!



In the market/bazaar



Cycling his way through

We still had at least 2 hours to wait until the son et lumiere began. Even Basu agreed, time to go home! We were both tired and saw no advantage to waiting around or wandering thru yet more bazaars. Instead we caught a cycle rickshaw to the nearest metro station - for 30 rupees (60 cents), we got an exciting 20 minute trip through incredibly crowded streets - did that guy have to work hard for his money! (See the pics of the ride).



The boys in front

Basu suggested we get off at the first stop of the metro since there was a refreshment stand actually inside the gates of the metro. This is at Connaught Place, the old British center of New Delhi, where two major metro lines now cross below a double circle of shops around the center - the buildings remind me a bit of the crescent at Bath. But this was where a whole new side of Basu came into view. The three young men behind the counter welcomed Basu profusely as a very good friend - it turned out that they owed their jobs to Basu: For at least 15 years he has been working for an NGO mainly to help people in his village back in Bihar, a very poor Indian state just northwest

of Calcutta, in part to place them in jobs in both his village and in Delhi. So our drinks and icecreams came free. We stopped near the lab at one of the better restaurants - to make up for missing the son et lumiere show. I have now been taking much more seriously his rationale for getting a physics degree, which is to go back to his village and use what he has learned to become both a teacher there but also to help improve the life of many families by improving the farming using technology and scientific testing of the crops, etc. It will be a long road for him since his physics understanding in the classes does not come easily to him. He is probably going to make it, but it will take quite a bit longer than he expects. One of the devices I am taking to the Woodstock teachers could make an ideal agricultural testing instrument - it takes a spectrum of impurities in liquids - so we have been trying it out to give him some ideas for the future - an anti-Monsanto initiative....

Sunday, 14 April: I found on the map the “Vasant Square Mall” about 2 km from the lab, and hence decided to check it out on the way to a visit to the Lodi Gardens. It really is a Mall, a single building with shops around a central open core. However, all the shops were shuttered - clearly not a successful place - just a couple of little restaurants - one a Subway, plus one store called “The Big Bazaar” - an Indian style department store, and a tourist agency, closed for Sunday. So after a bit of lunch, I found in Big Bazaar just what I had been looking for since my arrival, even in Shanghai - large but light luggage cases - the traditional large one I have already weighs about 7kg with nothing in it, but the new metal-looking, but actually strong artificial fibre, suitcases have less than half the weight - and here at the Bazaar was a half-price sale (about 1/4 of the US price). Since I was on my way to the Lodi Gardens I told them I would be back around 5 pm to buy them - I am sure the assistants thought that was the last they would see of me!

To get to the Lodi Gardens necessitated a short busride, and then the metro almost all the way downtown. While waiting at the bus-stop, along comes this small private bus, looking for customers to take to the metro station, so I jump on - it has about 15 seats but holds at least 30 people - and costs 5 rupees instead of 10 on the regular bus (a dime instead of 20 cents): Chicago and other US cities could use some of this private competition - they tend to run just before the regular bus (which has no regular schedule anyway), and are always completely full by the time they get to their destination. I suppose there are a few safety and licensing laws that they can ignore in India, and they certainly contribute to the crazy traffic situations. You can see from the pic that they are



Entry to Saf's tomb



Saf's coffin (empty)

pretty beat up from various scraping problems and other traffic irregularities, and the buses themselves may be even older than Geb.

Between the metro station and the gardens was the beautiful mausoleum/tomb of Safdarjang from 1754 - he was the prime minister for one of the later Moghul emperors. A nice beginning to what proved to an afternoon surfeit of moslem tombs and mosques.

The Lodi Gardens are a Hyde Park London type of expanse, within which are the remains of the mausoleums, etc, of several Lodi Emperors - perhaps a dozen partial ruins scattered around, sometimes difficult to spot amongst the



Safdarjang's tomb



One of Saf's fancy ceilings



Lodi Garden blossoms

trees, but plenty of directions and maps are given from the various jogging trails - yes, the Indians apparently jog too, although I never saw anyone jogging - perhaps they are too sensible to do it once the temperatures hit 100F in the afternoon - the people of the parkland



Sikander's mausoleum



Badagumbad

were similar to what one would see in London - families, young couples and old people resting amid the bustling tourists and rushing-about children.



Badagumbad triple mosque

The pre-Moghul emperors in this region (they built the initial red fort at Agra), but clearly Delhi must have been their capital for part of their dynasty, about 1440 to 1530 AD, until they were knocked off by the first Moghul emperor Babur.

The Lodi were the



Sheeshgumbad-opposite Badagumbad

The area is mostly well tended grassland spotted with enough trees so that the pathways are in shade, but with plenty of flowerbeds; the blossom season was mostly ended; even a dirty green lake at one end with lots of geese (I prefer the Serpentine).



Badagumbad's owners

Tourist groups abound around the ruined mosques

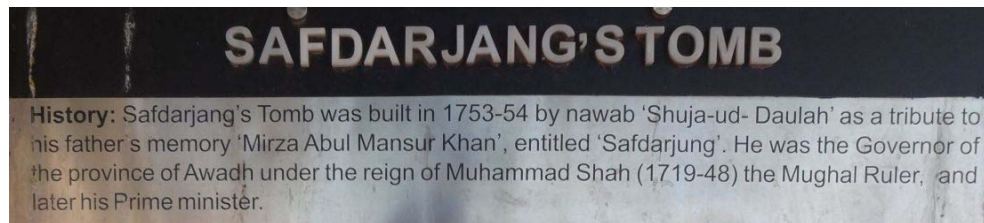
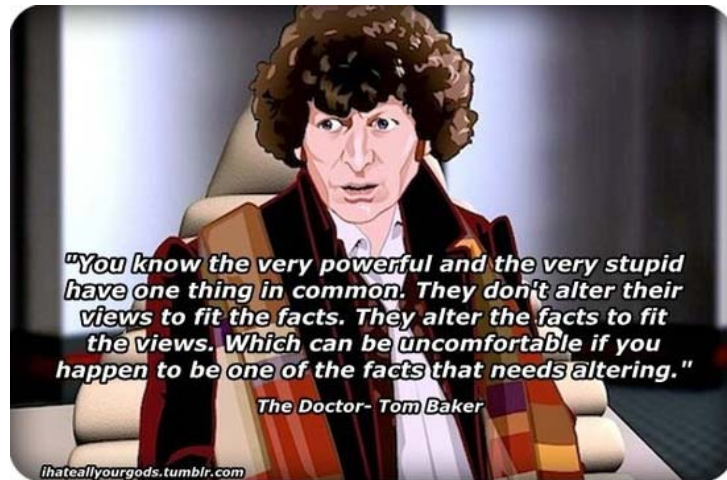
and tombs, and there are many helpful signs from the Indian archeological service with historical explanations. I enjoyed my two hours of wandering around exploring, before, surprise, surprise, up came some black clouds, thunder and lightning - amidst the beginning rain I walked rapidly back to the nearby metro station, and headed home.



Mohammed Shah's mausoleum

The rain had stopped by the time I got off the metro; I then took another "little-bus" ride to the mini-non-functioning mall and collected my two new pieces of luggage - surprising the attendants by my return. The 2 km back to the lab gave a good test to the wheels - the 4-wheel variety - in time for supper, and to prepare for the following morning's class.

While pondering the fall of the Lodi and the Moghul Empires, I saw this recent quotation from Tom Baker as Dr. Who. It makes one believe that the present sorry state of political affairs in the USA (and probably Europe too) is part of a similar process..



Next stop Woodstock....