India

My husband Clif and I spent 3 months in India. India is a world in itself. Sri Lank hangs below it like a teardrop. India is 2,100 miles from the north to the south, 2000 miles from the Indian ocean.

We saw many Sikhs. They do not shave nor smoke. They have thick beards, uncut hair, and wear turbans. All Sikhs are Singhs but not all Singhs are Sikhs. Punjabi men wear ballooning pants. The woman wear pajama like pantaloons, topped by knee length blouses nipped in at the waist.

The dhoti, which is what Ghandi wore, is a white like a sarong or loincloth. They also wear shirts with tails flapping out, and maybe a sleeveless sweater. Nehru wore the high collard tunic. Jains wear white cloths over their noses, to avoid breathing and thus destroying small insects.

All the wealth was taken from the Maharajas through their death taxes, but they are still around, some earning money by renting out their huge places to those who come to India to visit. We saw snake charmers, and men who had red teeth from chewing betel leaves.

Castes do not encourage human charity. There seems to be a rickshaw caste. India flows by inscrutable with creaking of well wheels, the clamor of crows.

We were living in the State of Gujarate, a part of the subcontinent of India which hadn't been visited by the seasonal monsoon for "3 or 4 years." We were there during the months of Sept. Oct. Nov. and Dec., a time when, had I been back home in the US, I would have savored the crisp autumn weather. Instead, temperatures in our city of Ahmedabad rose to well over 100 degrees every day. My husband was picked up by a chauffeur and

went to work every day, leaving me alone. Because of the extreme heat, I didn't venture out of the hotel past 9:00 a.m.

I was a stranger in a foreign land, and time was heavy on my hands. I had brought my own typewriter, but it wasn't company enough for me. And while I eventually met people who spoke fluent English it didn't happen those first few weeks. Therefore I seemed to spend a lot of time just peering out the window.

Behind our hotel was the dry Sabermathi River bed. Here there were literally hundreds of make-shift huts, erected by Hindu farmers who had no source of income because their land, without rain, could produce no crops. They had moved, in droves, into the city where they hoped that kindly folk would feed their cows which are considered sacred. Perhaps, too, they planned that the men could find work as waiters in fine hotels such as the one in which we lived.

The woman's work began at dawn. Dressed in bright cotton saris, they wound their way past the hotel to the wells, where they filled their clay jugs, and balancing them on the heads carried them back to their huts. Then, to cleanse their naked young, they poured and splashed water over them in a bath ritual before they were fed.

Next they began washing their laundry against blocks of cement, flailing and beating the laundry. Their laundromat provided instant drying!

I felt so sorry for them. They were so poor. They had no amenities. They worked so hard, for so little. Even the children didn't seem to have anything; of all the children I saw frolicking in the sun only two appeared to be attending school, always there were men asleep on charpoys arms thrown across their eyes to shield their eyes from the brightness of the son. Some of them, I imagined, had worked during the night; others perhaps could find no work. Only occasionally did I see a man help with a child. All

of a sudden I was forcibly struck by what must be a universal truth.

You need to be needed. Who should be feeling sorry?

Here I was, living in an air conditioned room where dinner was provided by the staff. I didn't have to lift a finger. But I was far from friends and relatives, away from my church, away from my comfortable, modern home. And there was nothing to do.

The universal truth is that we need to be needed. Society is not so unjust after all. Even the poor have friends. All the money in the world cannot make one happy. Even the poor have those who need them.

At a 2-day vacation in Rajasthan, we stayed at the famous 15th C Jain temple where we were greeted with closed palms, folded to the chin as they bowed. We draped leis made of sweet smelling yellow and white flowers and literally rolled the red carpet out for us!

Following a temple tour we were served a Jain vegetarian dinner on thalis (metal trays) of poories, chappati, dahl (lentils), and curds. We slept on hard, flat mattresses with feather quilts complete with a canopy for mosquito control. You can't kill mosquitoes but you can hide from them! For bathing there were pails of water and a plank to stand on in a corner room. Outside our windows black-faced langurs scampered through the trees, a sari clad woman sat polishing one of the dinner trays with sand.

The next morning our driver took us to Udaipur, "the city of white marble palaces," through gates studded with iron spikes once used as protection against enemy elephants. We toured the White Marble palace that hung over the edge of Lake Picohola, saw the Peacock courtyard, many pavilions, & a 3rd floor outdoor garden with huge old trees, made possible because rooms had been added later.

Our room that night was in the Lake Palace Hotel, accessible only by boat. This beautifully appointed summer palace resembled a white floating jewel, another legacy of the maharani, the ruler who claimed they descended from the Sun. To complete a perfect weekend we saw the world renowned puppet show. Ford for souvenirs we had our pictures taken in regal Rajasthan costumes...