

17-Mar-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. The weather is very good, but it has been getting hotter day by day. Everyone is looking well. Geeta is working hard, as usual, and I have had time to work on my website (which you can see by clicking on the following link: www.idealectic.com). Today is a day off for the festival of Holi, when people throw coloured powder and water over one another. This year we stayed in and avoided the fun and games.

...

All my love,

Roger xxxxx

25-Mar-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. I had a cold which turned into a (very mild) tonsillitis-like infection but with the aid of antibiotics that has gone away now. The weather has become hotter day-by-day, but last night there was a cracking thunderstorm which cleared the air a bit. Geeta and everyone else are well, all working away of course.

When not attending school functions (and there are many of them at this time of year) I have been keeping busy putting things on my website, www.idealectic.com. If you're interested then I expect that Richard will be able to show you how to see what I've done. Although I'm afraid it's not very entertaining, unless you like theories of turbulence and robots...

The other day our regular walking companion, Mr V N Garg, told us about a recent proposal to dredge the river Ganges at Benares (Varanasi), because the river was eroding the historic 'ghats' where people like to take their dead for riverside cremation. He explained to me that the erosion was only happening on the side of the ghats where the water was deep, and the authorities were proposing to dredge a big mud bank on the other side. However there is an environmental preservation order on that part of the river (for which VNG is responsible in upholding) because it is the home of a protected species of turtle. When he told me about this my reaction was to say that it sounded like the ghats had been built on the outside of a river bend, which was going to erode regardless of any dredging on the other side of the river. So it was a daft proposal. When I got home I looked up Benares on Google Earth (see attached) and sure enough the ghats are on the outside of a bend in the river. For your interest I have copied below my email to VNG

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Much love from Roger xxxxx

To: V N Garg
date: 22 March 2014 17:17
subject: Benares ghats and turtles

Dear VN,

I looked up Benares on Google Earth (where it is called Varanasi), see attached screenshot. I was right: the ghats have been built on the outside of a big bend in the river.

From my school geography I know that it is on the outside of a bend that the river is deep and erodes the banks, while on the inside of a bend the river is shallow and there is deposition. As I said on the walk, dredging the shallow side of the river will make no difference to the erosion on the other side. So just on hydrological grounds it is a nonsensical proposal. Add in the fact that the shallow water and mudflats on the inside of the bend are likely to be the preferred habitat of the turtles, and there is an unanswerable case against dredging the shallow side.

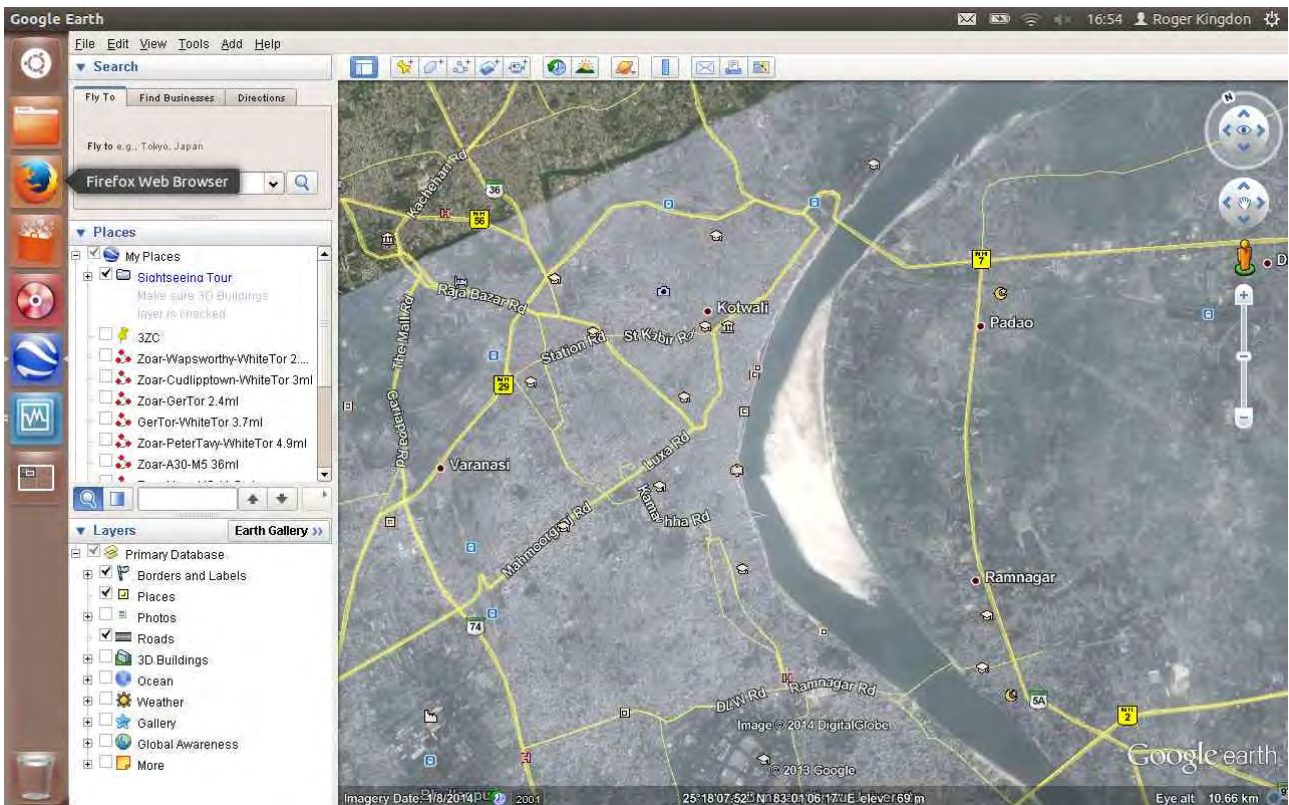
There may be a case for dredging the deep part of the river near to the ghats, to increase the capacity of the main watercourse, so that erosion is reduced at time of flood. However one would have to be careful not to overdo the dredging, as deepening the channel close to the ghats could lead to underwater mudslides which could further undermine the ghats.

Basically the ghats have been built in the wrong place, if the object was to avoid having to rebuild over the timescale in which a river alters its course (100 - 10000 years). But man in his hubris thinks that he can plonk himself down wherever he likes and nature has to go around him. It isn't like that, though!

I should emphasise that I can be considered an expert in the physics of fluid flow. If anyone doubts it, get them to look at <http://www.idealistic.com/idealistic/TurbulentRankineVortices.pdf>. Just because this advice comes for free, that doesn't mean it's worthless.

All the best,

Roger.



1-Apr-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. The days have become pretty hot, max temperature 35 deg C, but the evenings and nights are reasonably cool and it's not humid yet. No illnesses to report.

A few weeks ago young Robert acquired a couple of guinea pigs that would be charming if they didn't squeak so. They are kept in a small cage on the floor of the 'hall', the main room in the old colonial mansion that is 12 Station Road. The hall serves as a dining room as well as being the only route from the Head Office at the front of the house to the family home at the back. Whenever anyone passes through the hall (and there is an almost unbroken procession to-and-fro) the guinea pigs set up a tinnitus-inducing racket in order to attract attention and food. They are clearly quick learners because they are able to hit the precise high pitch that Robert himself uses when demanding goods and services. In any case, when we returned from our walk last night and sat down to dinner we were surprised/delighted/appalled to see that the two guinea pigs have become five. Robert says he was sold two males, but clearly that was not the case. The three new arrivals are very small and very fluffy. Indeed they appear to be almost entirely made out of fur. All of which is very nice but Robert has been instructed to get another cage so that the proud father can enjoy a spell of splendid isolation, lest we bring upon ourselves a plague of fluff.

The newspapers are full of election politics, with lots of name-calling and scandal-mongering. There is little or no debate on the economy or international affairs or the environment. Very tedious I'm afraid.

The CMS "Divine Education Conferences" (at which students are given their annual report cards once their parents have sat through Mr Gandhi's speech) are nearly at an end, thank goodness. Each of the 20 CMS branches has two or three Divines and Mr G speaks at each. I went to one this morning and my head is still buzzing. Last night on our constitutional walk VNG and I came up with several innovative ideas for a conference gift pack to be given to each parent as they go in to their Divine. I suggested a can of petrol and a match. VNG suggested a pen and a proforma will, and the ready services of a roving lawyer and appropriate witnesses (cash terms only).

Much love from Roger xxxxx

7-Apr-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. The peak daytime temperature is now 39 deg C which is quite difficult to deal with. But we are all well and life is good.

As ever, most of our time is taken up with the usual rounds of CMS school 'functions' (cultural events) and 'felicitation' (giving someone something they don't usually want). The 'Divines' (so-called Divine Education Conferences) finished last week. There were 64 of them, apparently, and Geeta's father spoke (on the same topic) at all of them. Today the 6th International Children's Film Festival began. Geeta and I were up early (for once) and arrived in good time to receive the VVIP guests. The Festival is held in the CMS 'Mahatma Gandhi' Conference Hall. I said to Geeta that they ought to call the cloakroom the Mahatma Coat Room, but she told me not to be silly because she was reciting her Vote of Thanks. In the end it all went very well, with both the chief guests (the Governor of Uttar Pradesh and an aged Bollywood film actor) saying how marvellous it all was. Indeed the Governor was so pleased by his reception (thousands of children having been coached to cheer his arrival, as if he had just returned from conquering Gaul) that he invited the aged Bollywood actor and Geeta back to his place (the very grand colonial Governor's Residence) for tea and cake. Geeta is there now, as I write. I expect they are singing old film songs and cracking nuts, like Timmy Tiptoes and Chippee Hackee.

Yesterday I attended Geeta's mother's 'sathsang' (prayer meeting). Whereas previously it was mainly talk (and, if I went, it would be up to me to do most of the talking), nowadays Mrs G gets a branch of the school to provide the entertainment. Yesterday it was utterly delightful, with pre-primary and Class I children (ages 4-6) putting on a huge range of very ambitious manoeuvres. There was a child dressed as a raindrop who made a little speech about her need to be saved, whereupon she stood in a large bucket; There was a troupe of dancing maidens (dressed as fondant fancies) with an action song demanding women's rights; there was a skit about four brahmins who misused their guru-given talents to bring a tiger back to life, whereupon it ate them up; but the highlight was a 'felicitation event' for four leading social campaigners - Barack Obama, Malala Yousafzai, Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalai Lama - complete with bouquets and speeches. Said social campaigners were all very small children dressed up to look (a bit) like them. 'Barack Obama' wore a very shiny suit that was at least two years too big. The best speech was by 'Malala Yousafzai': "I want to be educated and I don't mind sitting on the floor because I want to learn and I'm not afraid of ANYTHING!" (I admit I cheered at that point.) But they all spoke very well and in perfect english.

The national elections have begun in India, but they are doing them state-by-state, and they won't be held in Lucknow until 30 April. Then the counting is all done on one day in mid-May. So I'll miss it all, unfortunately. I was here for the state elections two years ago and I was very impressed by the universal high commitment to democracy.

Much love from Roger xxxxx

8-Apr-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

I thought you might be interested in the following couple of observations about the local fauna.

In our local street (which is off the main Station Road) there is a pack of feral dogs that is getting more and more numerous. Last year there were four or five of them, now there are ten or more. As one might expect they have been getting bolder and more assertive, and at night when there are fewer people about they chase everything that moves - cows, cars, motor-bikes, bicycles, and even pedestrians. They have also taken to howling all night, although they are not as well-coordinated as a proper wolf pack. So when we return from Head Office (12 Station Road) to the flat in 14 Station Road we are always accompanied by the guard, Maan Singh, who speaks softly and carries a big stick. The dogs always turn tail and run when they see the stick! Curiously none of the neighbours are particularly concerned about the dogs, indeed they feed them leftovers and other scraps. I suppose it's better than putting out milk for the rats (which has been known).

Currently there is a troop of bandar (rhesus monkeys) doing the rounds. The other day I looked up from my breakfast and on the windowsill there was a very small bandar looking at me inquisitively. He couldn't get in, because although the window was open it has bars and an inner frame with mosquito gauze, nevertheless it was quite a surprise. In a flash he was off, but not before (as I later discovered) severing the phone line. Mainly the bandar-log hang around looking for food and water. A couple of years ago they found the water tap on our balcony which they turned on so they could have a good drink. Of course they didn't turn it off again but it was several weeks before Geeta discovered where all the water was coming from. She solved the problem by removing the head from the tap. Yesterday we watched a big male bandar opening the top of our neighbours water-tank and poking his head in for a drink. We must remember to ask the guard to check our tanks. The schools deal with the bandar problem by hiring in a langur monkey. The langur is the jungle VIP and his presence makes the bandar-log scarp. It's very strange because although the langur is slightly bigger he is much more docile and relaxed than the bandar. Geeta says that the langur is so effective, he (or his keeper) commands a higher wage than a person waving a stick! For your interest I have attached pictures of the two types of monkey.

Much love from Roger xxxxx



Bandar



Langur

13-Apr-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. Tomorrow I fly to the UK so this is my last full day here. Time for a few random observations:

* The baby guinea-pigs are thriving. They are still fluff balls on legs but they have taken to bounding around energetically, harassing their mother for milk, and chewing anything that is lying on the floor of their cage. Robert has called them Snowy, Lightning and Zorro. Which is which I have no idea, and I doubt if Robert knows either.

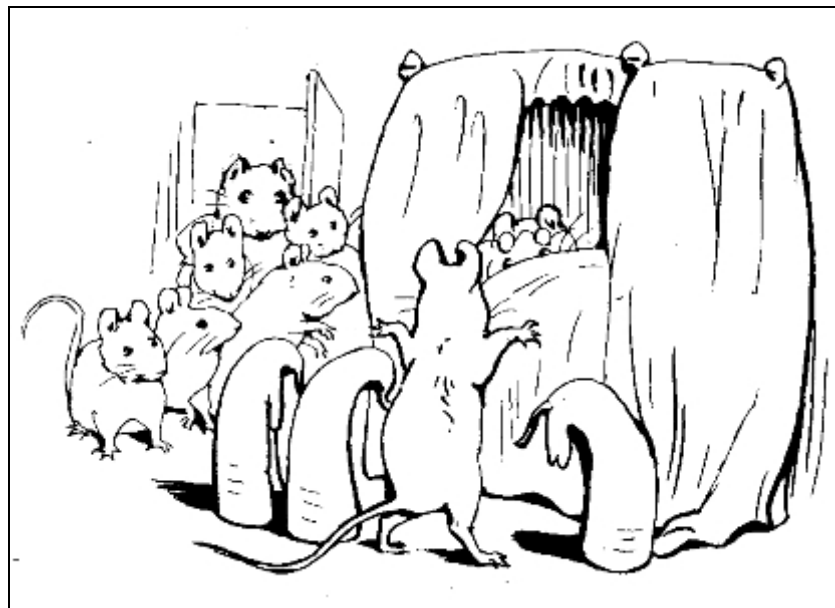
* As one enters 'Head Office' (12 Station Road) one goes through a narrow and chaotic passage to an open courtyard, where right in front of you there are a few steps up to a door with an impressive sign on it in big bold print, 'Only for Superior Staff'. This is the gents toilet.

* The UP Governor so enjoyed his reception at the Childrens Film Festival on Monday that he came back for more on Thursday. Again the children were coached to cheer him to the rafters, so he gave them a little wave and appeared very pleased with himself. Clearly he wasn't aware that the children would have cheered anything, they were so excited to have a day off school watching films. One of the things they are doing each day at the Festival is to get the children (all 3000+ of them) to recite a pledge to encourage their parents to vote in the general election. The only rather disconcerting part of this is that during the recitation they have to show they are making a pledge by holding out their right arm in a nazi-style salute. I did wonder whether they were going to start singing "Tomorrow belongs to me" (like the Hitler Youth in 'Cabaret').

* ... I am more comfortable here than before because Geeta has accepted that I can live the life of a gentleman of leisure. We agree that my situation is a bit like that of Mr John Dormouse in 'The Tale of Ginger and Pickles', who would stay in bed and say nothing but "very snug;" which is not the way to carry on a retail business (see attached picture).

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Much love from Roger xxxxx



1-Jun-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here, except it's very hot. This was especially trying yesterday because the big electricity transformer for our block of flats self-destructed and we had no power for 24 hours. We decamped to Head Office (12 Station Road) for the duration, where there was blessed air conditioning. For a day I was reminded how horrible it was when I first came here 31 years ago.

Geeta's father is looking younger than ever. Maybe he lives off the blood of his daughters? But Geeta herself is also on top form, quite honestly I don't know how she does it. Maybe it helps that the amendments to the CMS constitution have at last been approved and officially registered. In the amended constitution Geeta is unambiguously identified as her father's successor, and a number of dubious/unclear clauses have been straightened out, to forestall any future hassles.

Currently (11:30pm) I am in the flat in 14 Station Road, relaxing in a nicely cooled room, while Geeta is attending a havan across the way in the local CMS school branch. A havan is a Hindu puja (prayer) ceremony in which the local pandit lights a fire (as if it isn't hot enough already) and feeds it with combustible offerings for whichever god it is that favours new building works. (They are about to build an extension there.) It's a vital preparation for the works, apparently.

The local dog pack has been depleted, I think Geeta took the initiative and asked the Mayor to do something about them. The bandar-log are elsewhere. Robert's guinea-pigs (Tintin, Po, and their offspring Lightning, Zorro and Snowy) are in a bigger cage and are all looking very healthy, bouncing around all over the place and setting up a dreadful squealing at the slightest provocation. Robert doesn't want to separate the adult male (Tintin or Po) so I fully expect another litter in due course.

It's the school holidays so there are no 'functions', thank goodness. I have taken the opportunity to start writing my book, 'How to Make a Mind'. In five days I've done half the first chapter (of nine) and I'm very pleased with it so far. There's a long way to go, though.

Much love from Roger xxxxx

8-Jun-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here, except it's very very VERY hot. The peak daytime temperature has exceeded 46 degrees Centigrade and there's no let-up in sight. The monsoon rains are at least a couple of weeks away.

I have been staying inside most of the time, writing my book in a nice air conditioned room. I am really enjoying writing and the book is coming along a treat.

This morning I attended Mrs Gandhi's sathsang (prayer meeting) and spoke for 50 minutes on the history of world governance since 1815. Mrs G translated for me, and at the end she gave her own (Bahai) spin on the topic in hindi for another 20 minutes. The reason why there was so much talk is that it's the school holidays and there are no children to entertain us. Instead there was just me speaking to an audience of 20 in a big hall, most of whom were the bhajan (classical singing) troupe, film crew and assorted flunkies that always attend. Plus Robert cycled round and round inside the hall, wearing big headphones and listening to music on his iPod (portable music player). So he didn't get to hear about the Congress of Vienna or the League of Nations.

Geeta has a lady who comes to sleep here overnight, her job is to massage Geeta's limbs first thing in the morning and last thing at night. She is just like a fat little house-elf, indeed her little squeaky voice is similar to Dobby's (in the Harry Potter films). She calls me 'Sir-ji' i.e. respected Sir.

Much love from Roger xxxxx

8-Jun-14

Dear Roger,

Just read your email. This talk you gave; I expect it was well received. Please would you send me a draft of what you said? Also did you invite questions afterwards? If so, please would you list them with your replies?

Love from Mum and Dad xxx

9-Jun-14

Oh gosh, I just spoke from memory, having read 'Governing the World' by Mark Mazower last October. But my main points were:

(1) In 1815 the Napoleonic wars ended and the European powers came together in the Congress of Vienna and agreed a system for the maintenance of peace on the continent (and, in effect, the rest of the world as well). Essentially this 'Congress System' enforced 1815 national boundaries. On the one hand this kept the peace, sort-of, for 99 years. On the other hand it denied and suppressed feelings of local cultural/linguistic identity and self-determination, which built up all sorts of pressure for the future, particularly in Eastern Europe. In 1914 these pressures turned a relatively minor event (the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo) into the First World War. I compared the Congress System to India under the British.

(2) After the First World War the League of Nations was set up, with the purpose to prevent further war. It had two major flaws, however: (a) It still endorsed the great empires (Britain, France,

Russia), so only partially relieving the nationalistic pressures and creating a lot of envy elsewhere (Germany and Italy); (b) It was set up like a gentleman's club, where nations were members because they wanted to talk about peace, not because they felt it was in their fundamental national self-interest. There was no mechanism preventing nations leaving the club when they didn't like what the other members were saying. Hence Germany left, and hence the start of the Second World War in 1939. I compared this period to independent India, where until recently the various different peoples (the Muslims in Kashmir, the Sikhs in Punjab, the Tamils in the South, the Assamese in the North-East, etc) have not felt any advantage in being a part of India, so there have been separatist movements and inter-communal rivalries.

(3) After the Second World War the United Nations was set up. It did three things (in particular) to address the previous problems: (a) It endorsed the principle of national self-determination. This led to the breakup of the empires and the creation of a huge number of independent nation-states, particularly in Africa and Asia, starting, notably, with India. (b) It agreed to the terms of the great powers (USA, USSR, China, Britain, France) that they would stay in the UN just as long as they were permanent members of the Security Council with veto power. In this context I criticised the Indian fixation with the veto, which I called 'veto-envy', associating it with 'nuclear-bomb-envy', their equally strong fixation on getting their own nuclear weapons. I said that the veto was the necessary price for ensuring membership of all countries. But under the UN the world has had 69 years of relative peace, during which time all the nations have become tied to one another through trade. So no nation sees it in their national interest to leave the UN. So the veto is much less relevant than it was, likewise India's veto-envy is, frankly, a throwback to the politics of the 1950s. (c) In 1948 it created a common set of values through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I pointed out that these are not 'Western values' as some people (mainly in Muslim countries) claim. And I said that when the nations (including India) signed the Human Rights Charter they agreed to teach it in their schools, but there's precious little evidence of this happening, except maybe in Scandanavia. Human Rights should be taught in all schools so that people don't reject them as alien values. And until we remove this plank from our eyes we shouldn't remark on the speck in the eyes of others. In particular we should not criticise the UN system so much, it has kept the peace, hasn't it?

There was one question, my mother-in-law asked whether I would describe the world today as peaceful. I said that it was important to stand back and take the long view. Global history requires banishing today's headlines from one's memory. That's why I have just described the history of the last 200 years. Think what it was like in 1945, 69 years ago. Anyone at that time would look at the world now and say that today we are living in paradise, nirvana. She seemed content with that answer (but nevertheless then gave a 20 minute spiel in hindi which sounded to me like an Indian/Bahai reinterpretation of the same history). After the talk two people came forward and appreciated my words. An old friend, Vandana Gaur, who understands english, said she really appreciated what I said and had learned a lot. Another bloke, with limited english, said I was great but could I talk about the unity of religions next time. So it goes.

Much love from Roger xxxxx

15-Jun-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. It has become relatively cooler in the last few days, and yesterday there was the odd drop of rain. Still very hot by UK standards, though. I have just got back from the sathsang where I had been asked to speak on 'unity'. So I quoted the following from a talk given by Abdul Baha in Paris in 1911: "Religion should unite all hearts and cause wars and disputes to vanish from the face of the earth, give birth to spirituality, and bring life and light to each heart. If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act. For it is clear that the purpose of a remedy is to cure; but if the remedy should only aggravate the complaint it had better be left alone. Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion. All the holy prophets were as doctors to the soul; they gave prescriptions for the healing of mankind; thus any remedy that causes disease does not come from the great and supreme Physician." I said this meant two things: (1) It effectively defines religion as a group of people bound together in unity (the Latin root 'religare' means 'to bind') for the purpose of common worship; (2) It effectively defines a true religion (i.e. one from God) as one which binds together ALL mankind, not just a small exclusive group. I went on to talk about what is meant by 'unity', saying it referred to unity in diversity, giving the usual Bahai example of the flowers in a garden – it's nice if they're not all the same. I pointed out that this isn't just an aesthetic preference, it's essential for the survival of a species that it can differentiate itself (so that there can be preferential pollination by insects, i.e. natural selection). Then I talked about how in a society we also have differentiation of roles, and what this meant if one is in a team. Simply, do your job as society demands, and don't interfere with other people's jobs. I gave as a counter-example a line in 'The Italian Job' when Michael Caine says to the other thieves, "We work in a team, that means you do what I say." (I had to explain that 'The Italian Job' is a 'crime caper', and did this by reference to an old Bollywood movie, 'Amar, Akbar, Anthony' which according to Geeta has a plot-line also based on the allegedly hilarious antics of loveable rogues.) Finally I said that as far as I was concerned I could be united with anyone as long as they got along with their job and I got along with mine, without interference. Similarly for religion, I won't force my views on others and I expect them to reciprocate. This last comment was a rather pointed reference to the fact that over the last few days Mr G has been asking me repeatedly to attend the so-called annual function of his yoga class that happened this morning at 6am. This was to be presided over by this old, old man who can hardly move or talk because he is either brain-dead or very holy (you may remember I've mentioned him before), and I knew very well that if I went then sooner or later I would have to go up and touch his feet. I was damned if I was going to do that, and I certainly didn't want to be photographed in the act (I can just imagine the headlines, "Stupid white sahib promises life savings to Guruji"), so I didn't go. Geeta went and she had to do the whole obsequious thing. She got less than 3 hours sleep last night, having worked till 2am then getting up before 5am, so when she got back from the yoga annual function at 10am I made sure she slept. Hopefully she will rest until nearly 4pm when the next event or meeting happens.

Other things this week:

I have finished chapter 1 of 'How to Make a Mind' and sent it to Francesca, my agent. I'll take another couple of days off before starting chapter 2.

A couple of days ago Geeta said that a publisher had approached her and asked for the names of a couple of CMS science teachers that he could add to the list of authors for a new textbook that he was about to produce. He wanted any old names, as long as they were from CMS, so that it would make the book seem more authoritative. When Geeta remonstrated that this was highly unethical and deceitful, and what was that teaching the children?, he agreed entirely, but still wanted the

names. So Geeta then said that putting the names of CMS teachers on the book would create a conflict of interest and mean that the book couldn't be sold in CMS. Then he got the point and withdrew his request and buzzed off in a hurry. Sometimes one just has to appeal to people's self-interest...

Geeta has a sign on her desk proclaiming "It can be done!" Irritated by this meaningless nonsense I appended a post-it note saying: "But not by me, And not for you, And not today, And not your way, SO GO AWAY!". Regretfully the note didn't stay there for very long.

Fauna watch: We have a lizard that frequents the kitchen who is very good at keeping the insects at bay. Recently he or she has produced babies and there are now quite a number of them of all sizes scurrying around like quicksilver. They are harmless as long as they don't lose their grip and drop down the back of your neck (as happened once to Geeta as a child, apparently).

I hope you're both well,

Much love from Roger xxxxx

22-Jun-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. I have just returned from the sathsang where, on demand, I talked about 'How To Get World Peace'. As usual I had five main points:

- (1) 'Oppose a thought of war with a stronger thought of peace' (Abdul Baha). That is, don't meet violence with violence, but with non-violence. I related this to the non-violence movement of M K Gandhi (and, subsequently, Nelson Mandela), popular culture (The Beatles' song 'Revolution' with the line, "You'd better free your minds instead"), and ancient tradition (Christ, Buddha).
- (2) OK but what can we DO about world peace? Firstly we can talk about it, raise awareness. But, again, we should be focused on PEACE, not war or violence. I don't like talk of nuclear bombs or intercommunal violence. Let's talk practical solutions.
- (3) In schools we should teach Human Rights from the earliest age, as I said two weeks ago. If everyone knows their rights then they are empowered and there is a collective response whenever anyone's rights are violated, and this would nip in the bud the vast majority of incidents of small-scale violence.
- (4) On the national level, tie states together through trade, so that they each have an interest in the welfare of the other. I gave the example of the European Union which used to be called the Common Market, because that's what it was.
- (5) Finally I described the (well-understood) 'peace process' that was pioneered 15 years ago for the Middle East (the Oslo peace process) and Northern Ireland. I described how Rev Ian Paisley used to say that he would never talk to terrorists, and how in the end he ended up sitting on the same sofa as Martin McGuinness and sharing a joke which they both thought was hilarious. And it was all done by NOT focusing on the ancient grievances that divided them but rather by working together on solving a succession of specific small-scale local problems.

Last Thursday there was great excitement just outside my window where a large mobile crane arrived and swapped over the old dud transformer with a new one for our block of flats. It was amazing how the crane operator threaded the enormous boom and its load through the web of wires that festoon the roadside. And all the time there was a game of cricket going on in the lane behind the crane, and vehicles and animals and fruitsellers were threading their way through. The crane operator worked all alone and as per usual his workplace was also his living quarters – inside his glass cab there was a very comfortable-looking mattress and pillow. In a similar way even the rickshaw-wallahs sleep on their vehicles. But it was a very clean spanking new crane and totally incongruous in our neighbourhood. For some time I stopped writing my book (which is going well), went out on the balcony (we are on the first floor, with a grandstand view) and followed the proceedings. Great fun.

In the state government there has been a reshuffle of ministers and senior civil servants. Our friend and walking companion Mr V N Garg has been promoted to Agricultural Production Commissioner which is the number 2 post in the state civil service. But he is probably the only one to have been appointed/promoted because of his honesty and ability to get things done. Most of the appointees are well-known criminals who are simply out to steal from the public purse for their own gain. For example the new minister for secondary education has several charges against his name for serious crime (attempted murder, bribery, the usual stuff). Despite his notoriety he was thought to be one of the big winners in the reshuffle, because secondary education has a huge budget with plenty of potential to make money on the side. (The newspapers said that this was 'the plum job', but they didn't say why, so I asked VNG, and he gave this explanation.)

Fauna watch: On our regular evening walk we have to watch out for the little frogs that hop around in abundance. Also there are plenty of bats in the park, swooping around noiselessly and with incredible agility. More noisy are the cicadas (and/or crickets) which can be deafening. Last night one got into the airspace above the false ceiling in our bathroom and it kept up a fearful racket all night, drowning out even the noise of the air conditioner and the trumpeting from the road. It set off my tinnitus something rotten.

Much love from Roger xxxxx

29-Jun-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. In the family, anyway: not so good in the school, where this morning's news is that one workman has died and two others are injured, having been electrocuted while doing a painting job in one of the CMS branches. So it's action stations for Geeta and her parents, something which I'm glad to stay away from. Apparently the branch building has been sealed off by the police – about time they did something to justify their wages – last weekend a very smart policeman was visiting Head Office, I asked Geeta whether he was enquiring about a crime or something, but no, he was only there to ask for a fee concession for his children. Geeta says that's the only reason they visit Head Office. In any case, the force are now out in force which I guess is a good thing. But it certainly behoves me to keep my head down. I have no intention of being hung from the nearest lamppost for revenge.

Talking about revenge, last night we had our walking companion Mr V N Garg and his wife over and we watched 'The Godfather' together. I'd brought the film on DVD and I've been wanting to show it to this audience for a long time. My 'agenda' is that I want to persuade VNG to become Geeta's *consigliere* (like Tom Hagen in the movie) when he retires at age 60 next March. There are some other striking parallels in the film: Michael Corleone (= Geeta) is the third child of his parents, the first being the charismatic and impulsive Sonny (= Sunita), and the second being the weak and ineffectual Fredo (= Vinay). And now VNG knows the origin of the tune that I always start humming whenever the names of certain senior Head Office staff are mentioned.

I have just come back from the sathsang where I talked about 'One God'. Basically I gave the audience a university-level introduction to theology, saying that the word 'monotheism' could refer to 'one god' or '*oneness* of god', and giving my reasons for preferring the latter. I argued that the latter definition could include (at a stretch) what theologians call polytheism, pantheism, and even atheism. I also argued that all these other 'theisms' were probably defined by Western (Christian) theologians who were just trying to establish an otherness, i.e. to be used as pejorative labels for religions they didn't like. But to me, a true understanding of 'one god' is not exclusive (i.e. my god is true and right and every other god is false and wrong) but inclusive (i.e. "god is everywhere, god is in everything, and there is nothing except god," as one of the audience succinctly put it). All this was pretty abstract but I was pleasantly surprised that my mother-in-law had no difficulty translating, and the audience, while few in number, had no difficulty in staying awake or contributing to the general discussion. Indians like this kind of thing, I think.

I get back in eight days! I am looking forward to it. It is very hot here still, the monsoon rains having been postponed by at least a fortnight on account of El Nino, or the gods being propitiated in the wrong way, or something. Apparently the government is going to Do Something about the situation.

Much love from Roger xxxxx

1-Jul-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

A brief one this time, coming so soon after the last.

The two injured workers are in a stable condition and are being given good care at CMS's expense. The families are being consulted. Of course there are many lessons to be learned.

Yesterday there was a big CMS function attended by the number two in the new central government, Rajnath Singh (MP for Lucknow and Home Minister). He was very impressed with Mr G's vision and said he would discuss with Prime Minister Narendra Modi Mr G's request that the Indian government convenes a meeting of all the world leaders to talk about setting up a world government. In practice Rajnath Singh may prefer to convey Geeta's more practical and realistic suggestion that just South Asian leaders are called, in order to set up the equivalent of the EU. We shall see what happens.

Fauna watch: As predicted the guinea pigs have multiplied again. Now there are seven in total. I don't know the names of the new arrivals. Maybe Harry and Krishna, or Batman and Robin. Take your bets!

Much love from Roger xxxxx

3-Jul-14

Dear Mum and Dad,

All's well here. Roshan and the rest of Out Of The Blue (the University of Oxford *a capella* singing troupe) arrived yesterday. They will be here for the next couple of weeks, doing singing workshops with the CMS students and performing in a couple of concerts. Roshan has just finished his first year at Oxford, and one of the first things he did was join OOTB. They are highly-renowned, having got to the semi-finals of 'Britain's Got Talent' in 2011, and they appear each year in the Edinburgh Festival.

For your interest I attach a clipping from the front page of the Hindustan Times of 1 July. It shows a couple of BJP (national government ruling party) workers smashing up a car (a classic Ambassador, based on the Morris Oxford design of the 1950s). According to the caption, "They were protesting against law and order situation in the state." So it goes.

Much love from Roger.xxxxx

