

## Chennai Journal 1-1-16

Happy New Year!! Sending best wishes to all for peace and fulfillment in the year to come.

I've been thinking about the sounds of Chennai and wish I had the technical skill to put together a sound montage. When we leave for the beach in the early morning it is still dark and usually the first thing we hear is the call to prayer from the mosque in the next street – so pure and beautiful in the morning air. Sometimes we can also hear cymbals and chanting from the small Ganesha temple at the end of our street. On the 2-3 mile drive to the beach we pass the Ramakrishna Temple, the Kapali Temple (largest Shiva temple in Chennai), a Jain temple, and San Tome Cathedral (built by Portugese in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. over the tomb of St. Thomas the apostle who spent many years in India). We may hear music or prayers from any of those. On the way back from the beach near the Kapali temple we daily see a chanting Hare Krishna group and two other groups chanting vedas (devotional songs). We often hear a loudspeaker playing Suprabatham (chanting that I associate with my first trip to India when Ravi, his mother Mythili and I went on a seven-day bus tour to the temples of the south. Every morning Suprabatham was played as the bus started out at 5:30 a.m. so it is forever fixed in my mind.)



(Kapali Temple on top, Ramakrishna Temple, San Tome Cathedral on bottom)

By the time we are heading home at 6:30, the sun is beginning to come up and the volume of this city of 4.8 million is tuning up into full force – incessantly honking horns of all kinds, the putt-putt of three wheelers and roar of motor cycles, the grinding gears of buses and trucks.

Once we get back to the house and have coffee, the sounds of the household gear up – chopping vegetables, hissing pressure cooker, whisk-whisk of broom, grinding of dhosa batter, stirring of pots, patting of chapatis...The filter plays a tune as it fills pails for cooking water. Birds are cawing, singing, chirping, keening. There is a bird that sounds like a cuckoo that I always associate with India. It starts low and then rises on a whup-whup-WHUP-WHUP. I love that sound.

After about 8 am we start hearing vendors coming around calling out their wares – the man who sells coconuts, vegetable vendors, the fruit vendor, a man who collects paper for recycling, sometimes a man selling brooms or pots and pans and other wares. A cacophany of sounds and colors!



Our street  
In Tamil and  
English

Last night was New Year's Eve and fire works were going off all over the city (not as much as at Divali, but still making a big racket). Spooky certainly fits his name – he totally freaks out at the sound of firecrackers, shaking like a leaf and trying to crawl into everyone's lap for safety! He actually climbed into Appa's chair and cowered behind him. Poor thing. Appa said he climbs into bed with him, getting as close as he can and putting his head under the same pillow. Rama gives him ayurvedic anti-anxiety pills during these times!



Tonight we are having New Year's Day dinner with Raghu and Vasu, our friends from New York who are from India – she is from Mylapore, the area where Ravi grew up. Vasu and I spent a day of shopping and lunch this past week. We are often together when Ravi and Raghu have conferences, so she and I have spent time shopping and sightseeing in Paris, Rome, and Florence as well as India. We always have a good time.

Thanks to everyone who wrote, texted, called, FaceBooked greetings. Your words and thoughts mean a lot.

Sending love, Lee

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