

# Reminiscence

## India in My Soul by Musafir

I miss India. I have visited India at least 15 times since coming to the USA in 1974. Whenever I visited India, it was quick and short. A family wedding or ailing relatives were persuasive events. My two brothers (one passed away) and my sister in three different cities

added variation. I never stayed long enough to be intimate with them. A short visit, interspersed with calls on old friends were the routine.

I marveled when Indians in the US told me that they visited the homeland every year. Some did so to the exclusion of all other countries. They saw London or Dubai at most for a day on their way to Delhi, Patna or Lucknow. I wondered my links to India were weaker than theirs.

Of course, I missed my brothers, my cousins, my friends. I missed celestial Indian music and the baffling breadth of Indian cuisine. But, meanwhile, I got busy with new neighbors to know, new colleagues to cultivate,



(1970: Musafir, sister Minni, sis-in-law Madhu, elder brother Arun, cousin Chetan, younger brother Anup)

new friendships to develop. I cultivated interest in American music, baseball, football and basketball. Cricket became an odd sports for me and ultimately I lost interest in that.

Some things never left me though. I still like Ghalib's poetry, Premchand's stories, Indian classical music and old Bollywood songs. Maybe, these are the triggers that still draw me to India. I want to spend more time there and explore the places I have not visited. But my health won't allow me to do that anymore. It is not easy; it's too complicated to describe here.

Of the countries I have visited in the last 45 years, India's cities are certainly the most polluted. Every time I go there, I catch some kind of bug and I get sick. Transport is chaotic and bothersome. I spend an enormous amount of time sitting in cars that move in traffic at snail's pace or don't move at all for long periods. I enjoy the food, especially as it is quite different from what I normally eat, but the standard of hygiene is low, and I have to trust my luck to escape from intestinal trouble. The water

is murderous. When I was younger and healthier, those did not matter as much but now they do.

Then why do I crave going to India? I want to because it is there. India is in my blood and soul. It is with me every moment of my life, no matter where I am. It gave me the language I dream in. It gave me the community that nurtured me. It gave me my childhood memories, my adolescent dreams, my adult hopes and aspirations. It gave me my parents, my siblings, my wonderful set of caring, forgiving, generous friends.

Its land was my landing ground and my take-off point. Its grass, its mud, its very dirt and filth were my sandbox, its narrow streets and winding alleys my playpen. I learned here, laughed here, worked here, and lived here always earnestly. Wherever I am, India rests in my pores and in my heart. I have to go there. Yes, it is a pilgrimage, for pilgrimage is not just a visit to a shrine or a holy place, it is also a journey into one's innermost soul.