

West Bengal #3
August 2008

We have been out of 'Net' contact for quite a few days. Our ministry directors kept us busy traveling around Calcutta and out to villages hours from the city. 'Travel in Calcutta' rolls off the tongue, but what an ordeal. 5 km can easily take 45 minutes of bumper brushing, start and stop. The nose and lungs are black with the soot of traffic and fires everywhere in the city. The city honouring Kali, the god of Destruction, continues to destroy human life. Everyone is protesting something and we were caught in a 'Wheel Stop'. A group of political protestors meet in the centre of the main highway for 1 hour to make a statement.

Today (Saturday) is different. Imagine a clean city without beggars; no visible homeless and with churches the most dominate buildings in and out of the city. Did we land in New England? No. The churches are full! We have flown to Aizawl, Mizoram (N 23° 45.238 E 092° 43.467) in North East India. The soot and endless humanity of Calcutta have become the lush mountains and incredible green forests. There are NO flat areas in this state of India sandwiched between Bangladesh and Myanmar.



The Mizos have an unusual history to say the least. Many of you have heard the Mizo choir Partners regularly brought to Canada. They are three generations removed from a head-hunting society. Not cannibals,.... head-hunters. The distinction is similar to that of 'collectors' versus 'gourmets'. The society is essentially 100% Christian and in fact, sends 1000's of missionaries all over India.

The flight itself was a thrill. We flew through thick clouds. Most flights here had been canceled over the past couple of days. I was aware of the topography. Andrew was blissfully unaware. When we finally broke through the cloud cover, the plane was flying up a narrow valley with mountains on both sides. We were just a few hundred feet above unique bamboo farm houses perched on steep sided hills in the forest. Our host was surprised we able to land. This was not at all comforting.

We are visiting a ministry Partners International has assisted for almost 3 decades. Unlike many trips I make, this visit was to plan a 'graduation' of a ministry to independence from outside support. This happens regularly, but is never easy. I expect some hard meetings but this is a positive development.

Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram is an amazing place on Sunday. The city is built on the top edges of a mountain range. No buses run on Sunday; no businesses are open; the streets are quiet except for the thousands upon thousands making their way to local churches by foot and by taxi; kids with Bibles and study books in hand. Christian music is heard from every direction and choirs singing from the churches which seem to sit on every street corner. Churches occupy every prominent spot in the city. Some have thousands attending. It is almost surreal to see such a vast majority participating in worship in every corner of the city.

Lest you get the impression Mizoram is heaven on earth, we were taken to the City Jail today, Sunday afternoon. It may surprise some that it was not for anything we had done, but to preach to the inmates. The City Jail Evangelical Church. Even the jail was unique. It was an experience to communicate through a translator to these 440 guys, incarcerated for everything from thievery to murder. They asked us why we would come all the way from Canada and spend an afternoon with them. It was an amazing time together. The meeting went well especially because they let Andrew and I leave!



There is much more we could report but we can share with you when we return this week, perhaps over a Tim Hortons. (coffee shop, for you non-Canadians)

Phil & Andrew

