. . . so full of ginger and pepper and other spices. . .

By Andy Hodgins

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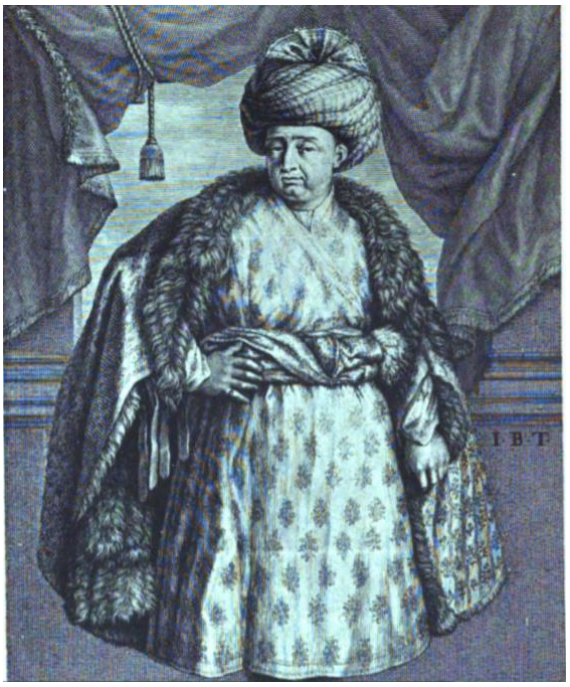
'If the first education is, as it were, a second birth, I am able to say that I came into the world with a desire to travel.' So wrote Parisian Jean Baptiste Tavernier who in the 1630s, by the time he was twenty five, had managed a grand tour of Europe. By his own account he managed to take in France, England, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Hungary and Italy, and picked up a healthy range of European languages. He thereafter had a desire to see Asia, so off he went. He made a total of six trips to the east, the first as far as Isfahan in Persia, the remaining five to India and beyond, his third journey taking him as far as Java.

He was a man willing to face the dangers of travel boarding a Dutch ship in which he knew there was a good chance it would be attacked by the English, 'This combat was not without my life having been in jeopardy, more particularly from a cannon shot which struck two Dutchmen who were close to me, and a splinter of the vessel cut open the head of another and carried away a part of my coat, so that I was covered with the blood of these Dutchmen who were slain at my side.'

He was a diamond merchant, the trade of his family and the income from which he used to afford his travels, this was also the profession which brought him into contact with the jewel loving Indian monarchs of the time. He is famed for returning to France and selling a 118 carat blue diamond to Louis XIV, which subsequently turned up in London as The Hope diamond. As a jewel merchant he was able to travel well; always with servants, minders of animals and cooks, his entourage often counting fifty people. With his valuable cargo he required the protection of armed horsemen, often provided by local governors for his wellbeing. He could afford to travel by animal, by carriage when the roads were so suited or to be carried in a *Pallankeen* by four or more persons. There is a portrait of him, done in Europe probably at the end of his Asian travels in which he is dressed in apparent Persian garb. He is a large man with a large girth and heavy jowls an image of a man who quite likely ate well and made little physical effort.



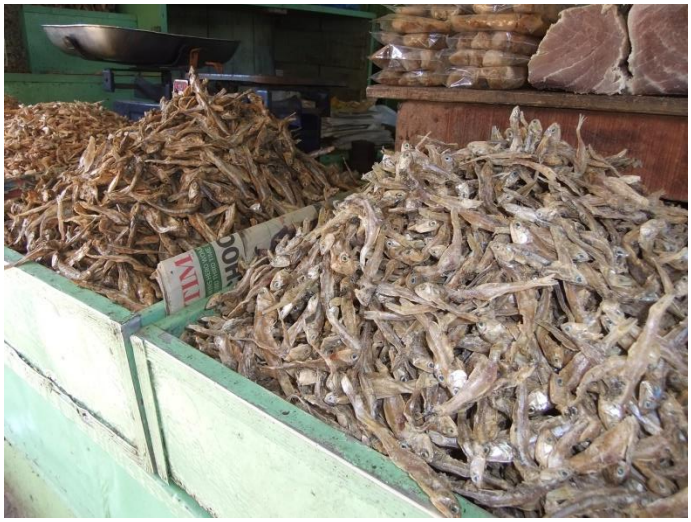
And he ate well, always having with him a cook 'who understood cooking better than the Dutch in India, and knew how to make good soup and to bake.' This was to help him while in India to eat as much as possible as a European. He carried with him always Spanish or Persian wines which were shared whenever the opportunity arose, usually in the company of other Europeans. 'Arriving in Patna with M. Bernier, we encountered some Dutchmen in the street who were returning to Chapa, but who halted their carriages in order to salute us. We did not separate before we had emptied together two bottles of Shiraz wine in the open street.' Similar episodes occurred while on his travels and not just with Europeans but with local travelling merchants or local Governors who, when they heard he was nearby, would seek him out to share in his spirits.

He did eat the food of India, for it would be unlikely that he could have spent that much time there without having to resort to the local fare. He did not bring food with him for his servants 'even in the smallest villages, they always found in abundance rice, flour, butter, milk, beans and other vegetables, sugar and other sweetmeats, dry and liquid.' His fame as a diamond merchant had the local governors send him gifts of rice pillaus, 'hams, ox tongues, sausages, fish, watermelons and other fruits of the country.' He would entertain others with pigeons with pistachios piled in pyramids.

There were the foods of the Moghuls, of north India, a food heavily influenced by Persia from where the ruling Moghuls drew much of their cultural influence. When he travelled further south, to the mines of Golconda, outside of modern day Hyderabad he encountered different foods and while entertained by local Princes found 'their rice and vegetables, which constitute...all their dishes, were so full of pepper, ginger and other spices that it was impossible for me to eat them, and I left the repast with a very good appetite.'

Tavernier found it impossible to eat food with pepper, ginger and other spices, this is where the man disappoints. Willing to leave his home time and again, travel to distant lands, entertaining and entertained in these lands, for the most part enjoying the foods and willingly sharing his wines of Spain and Persia, these pleasures are all part of what the travel experience should be. Except having my clothing covered with the blood of Dutchmen, this is the travelling that has always inspired me and the food, whether of China, Turkey, Italy or Mexico has always been a prime consideration. Indian food is high on my

list, even in England Indian food takes priority over the familiar and traditional fare of fish and chips.



But for a man to travel to India and balk at some ‘pepper, ginger and other spices’ is unacceptable. Indian food is often the bane of workplace lunchrooms when a ‘curried’ or ‘spiced’ dish comes out of the microwave and leaves the aroma to linger for the afternoon. Those who complain would not dare to venture across town let alone around the world. For those of us who meekly enjoy the lingering aroma of ‘pepper, ginger and other spices’ and who will travel around the world to experience them in the land of their origin, Tavernier’s objections are perplexing.

Traders have been venturing to India for Millennia in search of spices. From the east the people of the Malay Archipelago arrived on the Malabar Coast to trade their own spices for pepper during the first century. The Chinese arrived shortly after using the same spices and incorporating pepper into their own recipes. Indian trade to the west took shape about the same time. To the same Indian ports sailed small ships by Indians, Persian, Arabs and Greeks from the shores of the Indian Ocean. In Rome these spices became much sought after and used, as they were quite pricy, in the wealthier kitchens of the land. The increased imports to Rome caught the attention of Pliny who complained that Roman trade with India drained the Empire of 550 million sesterces. I don’t know how to value a sesterces but 550 million is an amount that draws notice and undoubtedly was a substantial drain on the balance of trade. Long before any idea of free markets or protectionism were formed there were concerns over the unbounded purchase of seemingly frivolous foods.

The interest in pepper, ginger and other spices did not diminish after the fall of Rome and any European who happened by took note of pepper production or the markets. The Byzantine Cosmas Indicopleustas took note of pepper in the sixth century while checking out the churches of the Indian Ocean. Marco Polo made note of it late in the thirteenth century while returning from China on a Chinese vessel. Ibn Battuta also saw the pepper first hand early in the fourteenth century.

Despite the rise of Islam and the apparent wall that separated Europe from India, the Venetians and Genoans had no qualms in trading with the infidel. They came to control the gateways of pepper, ginger and other spices from the hands of Muslims and distributed it, at an impressive profit, to the rest of Europe. The two city states, as early as the ninth century, built their informal empires on the profits of trade from the Indian Ocean and occasionally squared off in wars over territory and trade routes. In fact we owe the story of Marco Polo to one of these wars. After his return from China he was captured by the Genoese in a naval battle and while languishing as a prisoner of war told his story to the Pisan Rustichello who wrote it down for posterity. Venice counted ninety three percent of its foreign trade in pepper.

Much of the rest of Europe was cut out of this profitable trade and were looking for means to take part in it or to take it over all together. On the far western periphery the Spaniards cautiously thought that if they continued to sail westward, the earth would take them in a circle and they would eventually reach India. It turns out they were right, however their plan was inconvenienced by the unexpected landmass of the Americas. This slowed them down by a few decades.

These few decades allowed another European Kingdom to become the first to enter the India trade routes and dominate them. Portugal was a small and poor kingdom but got the jump on Spain and others, on another hunch which proved to be correct, that if they sailed far enough south along the West African coast they would eventually round the continent, enter the Indian Ocean and sail direct to India. All this happened in the closing decades of the fifteenth century.

As discussed earlier, others had come to trade for pepper in the Indian Ocean, Arabs, Greeks, Persians, Javanese and Chinese. They had come, traded and returned home leaving the pepper trading kingdoms and routes pretty much untouched. The Portuguese came however to dominate, to bring the entire pepper trade under their control

and to cut others out. And they were brutal in their methods. They bombarded states that did not comply with their newly established rules and would sink ships, with hundreds of people on board, just to make a point. Their ruthlessness succeeded. For much of the sixteenth century they ran the pepper trade in the Indian Ocean, sending the European states of Venice and Genoa into decline as well as many of the ports on the Arabian coast and Red Sea.

The profit of the Portuguese was so great that others decided they could to the same. The English, French, Dutch and even the Danish had their eye on this trade and arrived with plans, not so much to dominate the trade, but to partake in it and to make a profit. And while they traded for many goods they had their eyes first and foremost set on the pepper, ginger and other spices.

But all these traders took back with them were the pepper, ginger and other spices, they did not carry with them the recipes of India. For the European cooking of the time, small amounts of the spices were added to enhance the flavor, not to transform it, or it was added to salted meat, to make it, according to Chris and Carolyn Caldicott, more palatable. To be fair to Tavernier he was not the only European to be ill disposed to Indian cooking and its use of spices and it would be another couple of centuries at least until the rest of the world would start to warm up to its flavors. Babur, upon conquering Delhi and establishing himself as the first Mogul Emperor in the sixteenth century lamented that 'there is no good meat, grape, melons or other fruit. There is no ice, cold water, good food or bread in the markets.' He did however, keep four cooks on his staff from the household of the ruler he deposed, they were indispensable. During one diner he became violently ill spilling his guts and his bowels until he purged himself of the malady and recovered. One of the four cooks was held to be the culprit, spurred into poisoning Babur by one of the wives of the previous ruler. The man was skinned alive. I suspect the cook prepared a meal with pepper, ginger and other spices which offended Babur's stomach. The man was tortured to death so that history would not be left with the image of Babur's weak disposition.

The Moghuls, in any case, took their food very seriously and Babur used a military designation placing a commander of 600 at the head of the royal kitchen. And in this kitchen were cooks not only from India, but Persia, Central Asia, south India and there was even influence from the Portuguese. One of the mainstays of Indian cooking, Biryani, had

its origin to the north, in Persia where Indian rice was mixed with nuts, fruits and other spices. As it moved about local variations were added and in the south curry leaves, chilies, tamarind and coconut were added to make the famed Hyderabadi Biryani.

But the foreigners who came to India did not readily adapt to the local Fare. In the late sixteenth century a Dutchman, Jan Huyghen van Linschoten *observed* the Portuguese women of Goa eating Indian food. It is important to note that he *observed* them eating food, but made no mention of himself having tried it, he and Tavernier would have gotten on well. The English were no different. If one reads through the various editions Murray's Handbooks for Travelers in India (the Lonely Planet or Fodors of the late nineteenth century) one is given a clear indication that 'as a rule, the food in India is not good.' Various comments throughout these editions reflect that; the meat 'lean and tough and the fowls are skinny and small,' 'milk is dangerous,' 'Biscuits are not so digestible.'

But these meals are English meals, what one would find at home in England. To a large degree the English, and others, did not arrive in India with the desire to try out the new cuisine, to experience the flavors of the land, they had the expectations that they could find in India, the same meals that dear old mom would have made back home, and there were efforts, unsuccessfully, to make mom's cooking available.

Tavernier liked to stay with the Dutch who did their best to bring the foods of home. At Hugli he was able to enjoy 'all the delicacies which are found in our European gardens, salads of several kinds, cabbages, asparagus, peas, and principally beans, of which the seed comes from Japan, the Dutch desiring to have all kinds of herbs and pulses in their gardens, which they are most careful to cultivate.' Tavernier must have missed his artichokes as he made note that they were unable to get them to grow.

The English too had their gardens with the vegetables of which they were familiar but they also made attempts to have the meats of home, turkey, beef, veal, steaks, pigeon pies, chicken drum sticks, quails, Yorkshire ham, coast mutton, and English cheese. Emily Eden, the sister of the English Governor General based in Calcutta, joined the Government of the English East India Company as it traveled up country to the hill station of Simla in order to escape the summer heats of the lower Ganges. The court in 1838 consisted of twelve thousand people, which included members of the government, administration, soldiers, servants and goto people who would make arrangements for the needs of those who traveled. There was also a small contingent of family members, which included Eden,

all English, who lived apart and above the mobile mass who made their way to the cooler hills. They traveled by horse, elephant, or *palanqueen*, they did occasionally walk, and the requisite people who cared for the animals or carried the *palanqueen*. They would find their tents ready for them when they stopped in the evening with furniture in place and their beds made up. When the opportunity arose they would go shooting and hunting or for something a little more tranquil they would do some sketching.

But Eden most of all looked forward to the balls that would happen in some of the towns they passed through and sometimes at camp. The native band, who at times played tolerably well, would stay during dinner. In Cawnpore, a couple of days prior to Christmas in 1838, the tents were pitched and two to three hundred turned out to the party. The food was, when possible, English. They enjoyed tea, English style, and sandwiches and complained of the availability of beef, 'we cannot kill a cow in the face of all these Sikhs, and at Simla the natives do not like it, so it is a long time since we have had the luxury of a beef steak or a veal cutlet.' But she did not go without local food and was at least willing to try for some 'of the dishes are very good, though too strongly spiced and perfumed for English tastes. They make up some dishes with assafoetida! But we stick to the rice and pilaus and curries.'

Richard Burton traveled through the Portuguese territory of Goa and Kerala a few years after Eden in 1838. He had a simpler mode of travel, either by river boat in Goa or by horse into the Blue Mountains of Kerala. He and a small group of British officers were pretty much on their own and had few, if any, servants traveling with them. He too found the English food wanting, the 'beer is sure to be lukewarm, your vegetables deficient, and your meat tough.' The food was redeemed while at Ooty, a hill station of Kerala, 'the mutton had a flavour which you did not recollect in India. Strange, yet true, the beef was tender, and even the 'unclean' was not too much for your robust digestion. You praised the vegetables, and fell into ecstasy at the sight of peaches, apples, strawberries, and raspberries, after years of plantains, guavas, and sweat limes.' But Burton too, succumbed to curry when the options were limited.

It seems odd that someone would journey so far for adventure and discovery and yet yearn for the familiarities of home. Emily Eden seems to have come to India looking for, well, all things English and while Burton may have been a bit more accommodating of the unfamiliar he was condescending to it, Eden merely lamented the differences. To be fair

Eden spent three years in India and Burton six so it is not unreasonable to desire the foods that good ole mum used to make, or at least what they served at boarding schools.

The Lonely Planets and Fodors of today will dedicate pages and whole sections to the food of the country, they celebrate it and encourage its discovery not only listing the restaurants that tourists may like to visit, but detailing the types of food available by region or type. North, south, vegetarian, seafood, spices, hot, mild, sweets, alcohol are all accounted for and the restaurants that serve them. We spent hours considering what and where to eat probably as much time as Tavernier and others spent in planning what not to eat.

I hesitate to confess that two weeks of curries and goshts, biryanis and tandoories, although not tedious, left me wishing for a change. Chinese and Italian were other options to accommodate tourists and provided a welcome alternative, but the next day we would return to pilaus and nan, our stomachs and constitutions be damned. Zachary and Zoey had few qualms about the food, sitting in front of a Biryani or curry, a glass of water and a tissue always close at hand. My most disappointing moment in India was our first meal, taken in a hurry while at the Delhi airport, at a Pizza Hut.

In Toronto our variety is almost endless, Chinese, Italian, Russian, Ethiopian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, French, North African and of course Indian, not only from the north and south, but from the Caribbean and Africa. Our familiarity with these foods have given my children an unfair advantage, these tastes were already familiar and they have had nine generations in which the tastes of the world have become imbued into their system. Those of the early nineteenth century had a shorter chain of ancestry accustomed to these spices.

I can find no reference to how the Chinese responded to these spices either while in India or at home. But I suspect there was little concern, for if the Chinese of hundreds of years ago are like the Chinese today they will approach any meal with enthusiasm and any spiciness or strangeness will not be worth mentioning.

But curry did take hold among the English and Portuguese and became a popular dish, not only among the Anglo-Indian, but with the population back home. Lizzie Collingham has related how curry and other Indian dishes were adapted to English tastes and recipes made their way home. It would not be uncommon in Asia, or Europe, for the

English to sit down to a meal of Yorkshire ham, coast mutton and cheese with curry. An English curry conformed to English tastes and was noticeably variable to an Indian curry. Indian curry was (this is no longer so) an English thing, quoting Collingham 'The idea of a curry is, in fact, a concept that the Europeans imposed on India's food culture. Indians referred to their different dishes by specific names and their servants would have served the British with dishes that they called, for example, rogan josh, dopiaza, or quarama. But the British lumped all these together under the heading of curry.'

The curries we enjoy today, whether in India or abroad, made by Indians or others, are not really authentic. The ingredients included in today's meals vary from those of hundreds of years ago. The one ingredient that we in the west associate with curry, the chili, comes from Central America, this spicy addition that at times replaces pepper, did not enter south Indian cooking until the sixteenth century with the arrival of the Portuguese.

But Tavernier travelled to India on five occasions, he had sufficient opportunity to become familiar and even enjoy the food of the country yet he did not. I don't know if I'll have the opportunity to return, there is much of India that is overwhelming and inconvenient, the crowds, the poor air, the superhuman efforts required to attain a visa and yet the food is a draw that will overcome these obstacles should the opportunity arise.

Airports really provide one with the worst of first impressions. I suppose this is true as I've never arrived in a country at a point other than an airport, Buffalo New York the exception. Airports, at least those that receive international flights are invariably clean, reasonably efficient and in an effort to outdo each other, are excessively glitzy. Whether in Singapore, London, Buenos Aires, Toronto, or Delhi, they are all staffed by the same dour, threatening or bored (universally you can pick two of these three traits) immigration and customs staff whose main goal is to let you know who is boss. Airports say nothing about the country in which you've just arrived, except perhaps some advertising which induces you to travel to a land in which you've just arrived. All buildings are square, glassy and long and it would not be difficult for a constant traveller to forget in which country they've arrived if they did not take an occasional glance at their boarding pass. There is one exception and that is the Tokyo airport for when you enter the washroom and are confronted by the plethora of gadgets, you know that you are in Japan.

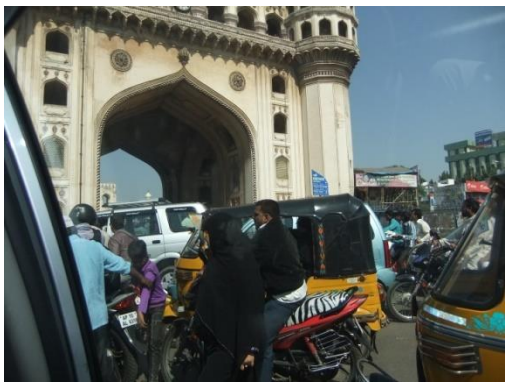
I had planned, once, to travel with my friend Taso to Iran. We would fly to Dubai and take the ferry to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas from which we'd make our way to Isfahan, Persepolis, Shiraz on our way to Tehran. Bandar Abbas is the port where Tavernier sailed from Persia to the Indian port of Surat. Our plans did not come to fruition and are still open for future consideration.

We arrived at the Hyderabad airport, the Rajiv Ghandi international airport, after a two hour flight from Delhi. It is, as I have said a clean, orderly and somewhat glitzy airport that fits the mold that I have discussed. Priyanka, a Hyderabadi native who has adopted Toronto as home, met us and we set out on the one hour drive into Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The open road offered little to see of southern India in the twilight of the day, bypassing the towns that must have lain to the side of the modern highway. All was orderly until we entered Hyderabad proper when we were introduced to our first experience of urban Indian road traffic. There are police who impotently direct traffic for whatever laws or regulations may be on the books they produce no effective result. Buses, trucks, cars, tuktuks, bicycles, cattle, dogs and people all weave together, in and out, across the current and against it. The horn is in constant use to warn another vehicle that you are there, or that you are coming through, or that they are in your way or when these reasons fail, because the horn is an investment and it is best to strive for one hundred percent utilization, to leave it idle would be a waste. Despite the disorder, the lack of a system works with few accidents and only occasionally is anger exchanged. But progress is slow.

There is a photo from the early twentieth which shows the Charminar of Hyderabad from one of the market streets that leads to the monument. A few people straggle in the

street which is free of the motor car and even the bicycles which are now so ubiquitous. It offers a scene of tranquility and would be a comfortable stroll down the tame and quiet streets of the center of the city. All of the Hydrabadis and Secunderabadis I talked with avoid this area due to the traffic but someone must be lying for thousands clog the street and avenues beyond any crowded city that I have experienced. The lack of chaos in the photo must have been much of the way Tavernier experienced Hyderabad, the

Chaminar had been built 50 years earlier and he would have visited the markets. The markets of Tavernier's time would have dealt in the precious gems for which he came to the nearby mines of Golconda. But they now deal in the goods of day to day usage as well as the fashion of India, of note are saris and the famous Hyderabadi bangles which endlessly stock the shops of the market. Amenable to Zoey's budget these bangles are of glass and not the precious gems of which the region was famous. Tavernier found the roads of Golconda 'well built and well opened out, and there are many fine large streets in it, but not being paved – any more than those of all the other towns of Persia and India – they are full of sand and dust, this is very inconvenient in summer.' Today the wide streets are overwhelmed by sheer numbers and are congested and almost, but not quite, threatening to the point of near stasis requiring unaccustomed aggression to cross the road.



Tavernier never had to endure the convenience of an airport. He arrived in India from at the port of Surat and travelled 35 to 40 days to Golconda where he sought to engage the diamond trade. The 35 to 40 days were occupied in relative leisure for Tavernier, and those who could afford it, rode in a very comfortable *pallankeen*, 'a kind of bed, of 6 or 7 feet long and 3 feet wide, with a small rail all round. A sort of cane, called bamboo...sustains the cover of the pallankeen, which is of satin or brocade; and when the sun shines on one side, an attendant, who walks near the pallankeen, takes care to lower the covering. There is another, who carries at the end of a stick a kind of basket-work shield, covered with some kind of beautiful stuff, in order to promptly shelter the occupant of the pallankeen from the heat of the sun when it turns and strikes him on the face....Three men, at most, place themselves at each of these two ends, to carry the pallankeen on the shoulder, the one on the right and the other on the left, and they travel in this way faster than our chairmen in Paris, and with an easier pace, being trained to the trade from an early age. When you wish to make haste, and travel up to thirteen or fourteen leagues a day, you take twelve men to carry the pallankeen, so that they may relieve one another from time to time.'

Tavernier doesn't say how much of his travels were by *pallankeen* but this was likely his main source of transportation with six or more carriers depending on how quickly he

hoped to move about. He also travelled with servants, cooks and armed guides for if one wanted to travel with honor he would take with him twenty to thirty armed men, these 'attendants not only conduce to your honor, but they watch also for your protection, and act as sentinels in the night, relieving one another, and striving to give you no cause of complaint against them.'

Our travels were with significantly less honor. Throughout India we had a driver, prearranged, who performed small errands for us, buying from the rather dodgy liquor stores or snack foods, but we had no personal servants. We were disappointed that the car placed us in a bubble, removed from any contact with people that we could have encountered or befriended along the way. By train we would have had more contact with Indians and other tourists, but we were warned, not about the trains, but of the train stations and the mass of people passing through. With two children it would not have been a cute anecdote to our travels to have lost them in an Indian train station. Also we were limited to two weeks and had to make the best of our time.

While in Hyderabad Priyanka arranged a night out at a Christmas dance, an event held by the *All India Anglo-Indian Association, Hyderabad Chapter*. It was clearly an Indian affair with a band playing hits from the sixties through today and banned alcohol clearly available. There were a scattering of Chinese, who have had long standing in Hyderabad, and a few European expats. There were also a large number of Anglo-Indians, the descendants of English and other Europeans who had stayed on in India and through varying degrees had integrated into the Indian milieu. I chatted with Mike who could have stood up to the bar of Coronation Street in its earlier, whiter days. His accent mannerisms were undoubtedly Indian, however his face was not. He had left India at one time and had lived in Montreal until the rise of Rene Levesque at which time he fled to Vancouver. He still held his Canadian passport and his three children had remained but his pension went much further in India where he chose to spend his retirement.

There is a sizable contingent of Anglo-Indians in the country, but the title is a bit misleading as the descendants of the French, Dutch, Portuguese and other Europeans have blended together to form this community and through varying degrees have added Indian DNA to the mix. They are a prominent community and have made contributions to Indian politics, sports and entertainment and some families have returned to England to

contribute to the homeland. Sebastian Coe, former Olympian and organizer of the London Olympic games, is of Anglo-Indian descent, as is Ben Kingsley and others.

I wish I had thought to ask Mike about his background and when his family had come to India and where they had settled. It would be interesting to see how much he knew of these people and how long they had settled in India, and I would be curious to know what Mike thought of his ancestors, there is a good chance that his predecessors would not think much of him. Richard Burton, the epitome of the swashbuckling soldier of English Imperialism chided the Portuguese for having encouraged the intermarrying of Portuguese with Indians which resulted in 'her fall as rapid as her rise was sudden and prodigious. In less than a century and a half after Da Gama landed on the shore of India, the splendour of Goa had departed forever.' Nor would it do any good to keep the blood pure for even these offspring 'we must expect them to degenerate after the second generation.' I have wondered on occasion how I would have got along with my ancestors when they first arrived in Canada and I suspect changing times and points of view would have created a gulf.

The Qutb Shah dynasty were the rulers of Golconda when Tavernier and Bernier were travelling through in the mid seventeenth century. The ruler at the time, Abdullah Qutb Shah, was seventh in the lineage of the dynasty and was an ally of the Moghul Shah Jahan. The Qutb Shah dynasty was of Persian origin and Shi'a Moslem, ruling over a Hindu majority and came into power in 1518. The kingdom was famous for its wealth based in large part on the diamond trade which drew Tavernier. He was, he believed the first *Frank* or European to visit the diamond mines south of Golconda and as an outsider he must have been quite the object of curiosity. It seems that Golconda and its modern cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad have not had Europeans visitors since, for when we arrived we drew constant attention, my were children asked to pose in photographs amongst families on their weekend outings.

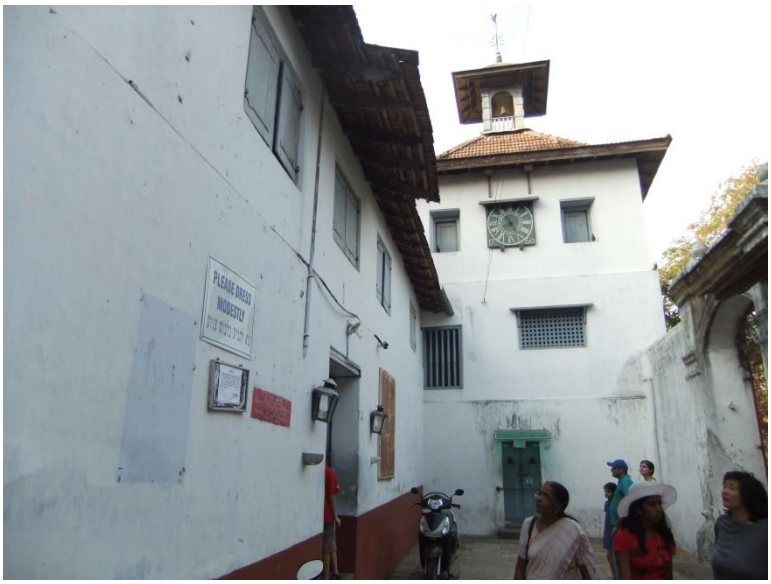
Tavernier dealt with servants and those involved with the diamond trade and did not, it seems, get to meet up with the King, although he came close. He had wanted to display his wares and went through the proper channels dealing with Mir Jumla, a general in the army, and a gatekeeper for anything that was presented to the king. But Tavernier was above all a business man and when accused of pricing his goods well above their value he packed up and departed for north India where he was more confident he could get his

price. About twenty years after Tavernier and Bernier had visited Golconda and returned to settle and remain in Europe, Aurengzeb, in the years 1687 to 1689 defeated and put an end to the dynasty absorbing it and the surrounding kingdoms into the Moghul Empire. But the glory days of the powerful Moghul Empire were waning and after the death of Aurengzeb the Empire began to crumble with parts breaking off, including Golconda in 1724. The Shahi dynasty emerged from the confusion to rule Golconda for the next two hundred and twenty four years.

It was to Kerala that travellers came, Persians, Arabs, Chinese, Africans, Greeks from the Red Sea, Romans perhaps and of course the Portuguese followed by a gaggle of other Europeans. When the Portuguese arrived they found most of the smaller kingdoms of the coast ruled by *Idolators*, Hindus as we now call them. It seems that anyone outside of the Jewish, Christian and Molsem chain of history was an *Idolator*. They also found Muslims, some native who had converted and some from Arabia who had settled there. There were also found, not real Christians mind you, but the pretend Christians of the Syrian or Nestorian persuasion who later had to be coaxed into Catholicism by the Indian inquisition. There were Jews as well, not many, descendants of those who had settled centuries earlier and had lived there, probably undisturbed, for centuries. Ibn Battuta, out of curiosity, took note of the Jews a hundred and fifty years before the arrival of the Portuguese.

In Cochi, in Jew Town, at the end of Jew Street past the spice shops and boutiques that cater to the tourists there is a synagogue, not quite from Ibn Battuta's time, but from around the fifteenth century. There is nothing about the building which impresses; if one were not told its function they would think it is perhaps another shop or private residence. The clock on the top of the building, added after the original construction, has numerals in Hebrew, but for the unobservant tourist this could easily go unnoticed as an *exotic* Indian script. But this has been the synagogue for Cochin Jews for five hundred years and still continues to function. There are few Jews left, only five families according to our driver, the others having gone farther afield, to Calicut, Mumbai or across the sea to Israel. We could not enter the Synagogue, an appointment was required and we had none, and I'm not sure what we would have done once inside for, unless they're hiding it from me, none of my family is Jewish and the spiritual connection would have been lost. But I had sought out this synagogue with a desire to see this Jewish site in such a seemingly out of

the way place of Jewish history. A European family, German or Dutch I believe, arrived and knocked on the door and easily gained entry, Jews I suppose, someone who could gain more from a visit than could I.



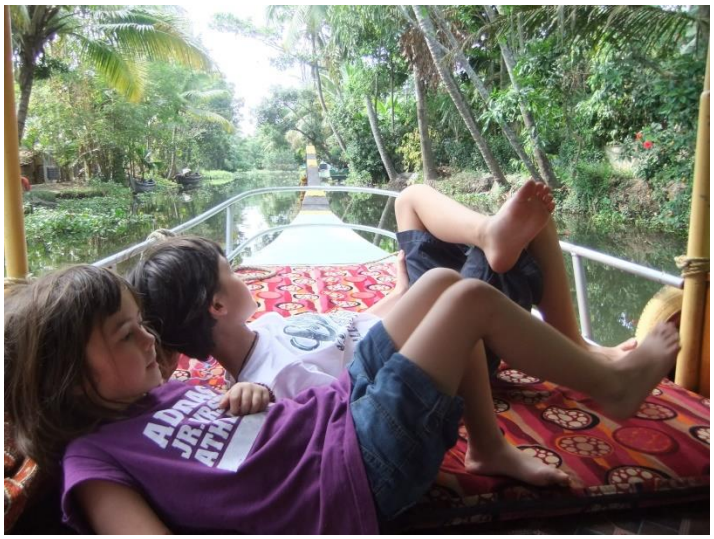
The Jews, Christians and Moslems and perhaps a few others came, mostly, for pepper, that spice that could be found nowhere else and for which they had an insatiable appetite. They were traders who settled to support the arrival of the ships that came from the Arabian Sea after a crossing from the east coast of Africa, the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea, from further east after rounding Sri Lanka or Cape Cormorin. They settled in Cochi, Calicut and a dozen other cities along the coast and brought with them their food, language and religion all of which still maintain a presence on the coast. Islam thrives as does Christianity and as we have seen Judaism hangs precariously on. There is little that is seen of the arrival of the Chinese, no temples and other than tourists we saw no Chinese. On the main beach in Cochi, where the ships perhaps anchored on their arrival, there were a few of the Chinese Fishing nets which the guide books draw attention to. Chinese in origin perhaps, but they were no longer operated by Chinese, the Indians had taken over.

Unlike much of the rest of India, Kerala, and a few other southern provinces, remained somewhat free of the frequent incursions from Delhi. Penned in against the ocean by a chain of mountains, the land of pepper was more accessible by sea than by land, so the powers in Delhi never could get around to making a full scale effort to absorb the coast into their realms. If they made the effort another part of the Empire would have taken the opportunity to throw off the yoke while attention was focused on the new acquisition.

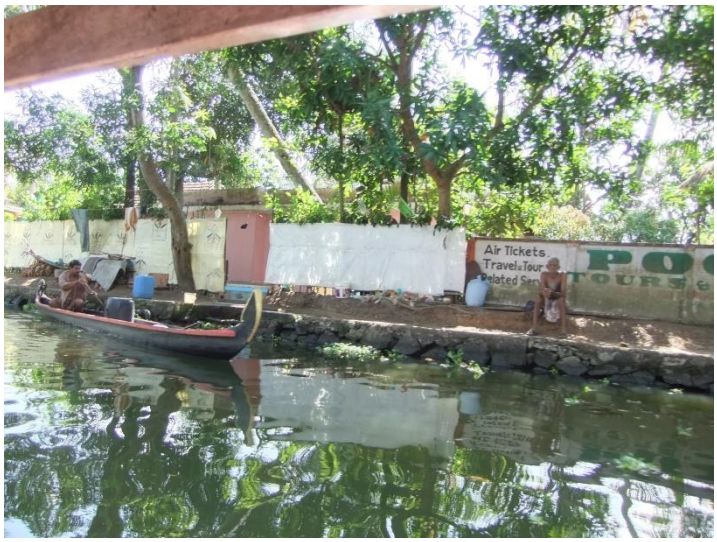
Compared to Hyderabad, Cochi is a tame city, less crowded, less polluted, and with more tourists. The environs of Cochi offer a world far removed from any sense of chaos, the backwaters are famous for their tranquility and lush greenery. A series of inland

waterways that support fishing, rice fields and villages are accessible only by water, tourists come here to escape the rush so familiar at home and in the large Indian cities and some have apparently come here to settle and to opt out. The area has been compared to Venice but the similarities are fleeting, beyond the canals there is nothing familiar. The tourists make minimal impact on the scene in Kerala and if they were to disappear it is unlikely that much would change, whereas Venice would sink into irrecoverable depression. Venice is grey and Kerala green.

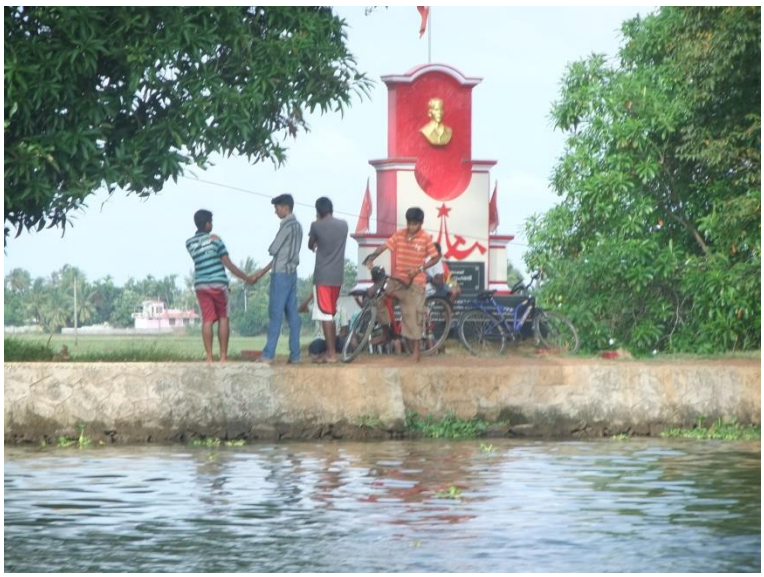
Ibn Battuta passed through the area in the fourteenth century travelling by boat through the canals from north to south, he must have dawdled for it took him ten days when



it could have taken much less. But Kerala is a place to hesitate and meander and stop. We didn't have that opportunity for we spent three days in the area and only five hours, in the backwaters, a few moments to slow down but definitely no time to dawdle. The backwater offers a life which many westerners dream about but few could ever adapt to. We stopped by a family farm in which the family had a hand in anything that came to mind, they raised puppies as pets, rabbits for meat, chickens for eggs, made cast cement garden ornaments, and a few other enterprises which escape my memory. We had coconut fresh from the tree. They proudly showed us their local church which had been built and blessed only a few months previous. The occasional shop, restaurant and police station line the canals and there is at least one out of place Air Travel Agent, a shirtless man waiting patiently for the throngs of tourists that are unlikely to ever show up.



The state government at the time of our visit was the Congress party, the local representatives of the Ghandi dynasty, propped up with support by the Muslim brotherhood and a slew of smaller parties. The largest single party were the Communists who have been voted in and out of office on a number of occasions. The presence of the Communist Party in Kerala is evident as the hammer and sickle is seen on posters, painted onto the road or in monuments throughout. It's hard to equate the Communist Party of Kerala with the bogey-man that I grew up to believe that communists represented, this was not the gray lifelessness that the Eastern Bloc countries had to offer twenty five years ago. Kerala has apparently the best educational system and the best health care in all of India. Both the Communists and the Congress were corrupt, we were told, however the Communists slightly less so.



Tavernier gleaned some information from a Frenchman who had been to Kerala, a renegade from the Dutch forces in the area, but there were no diamonds, only spices, including pepper and ginger and since these did not appeal to Tavernier, he had no good reason to visit.

We left Kerala for the faceless airport for Delhi where we encountered the last of our air terminuses of India. For more than one thousand years Delhi has been the center from where the events on the subcontinent revolved. When Delhi was weak the Kingdoms on the periphery could exert their independence and follow their own policy of Empire building

with their smaller neighbors. When Delhi was strong the those on the periphery set upon defending themselves from the encroaches of the capital. Often they were consumed into the greater empire only to reassert themselves at a later date. Over the centuries many of the resources from the outlying area have come to Delhi to enhance that capital and evidence of this has been left to us in the vast ornate memorials that are spread throughout what is known as the Golden Triangle, consisting of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur as apexes.

The greatest builders of these monuments were the Moghuls who ruled the north, and at times greater parts of India, from the early sixteenth century to late in the eighteenth, finally expiring after the uprising in 1857. There were six rulers of note, always sons of the previous ruler, and each did their best to outdo the building endeavors of their predecessors. Babur, the founder of the Moghul Empire is interred in Kandahar in Afghanistan from where he originally ruled. His successors are all interred in India, from Hanuman to Aurengzeb, in spectacular tombs unique and significant architecturally and aesthetically. Inspired by the architecture of Central Asian Islam these monuments are adorned with domes and arches, Arabic calligraphy, detailed inlay within vast grounds surrounded by fountains, greenery and peacocks and deer.

We saw fewer monuments than would most tourists, our driver Narinder thought this odd, but we knew from past travels that overwhelming ourselves with endless sites only confuses the memory later on, it is also unfair to children whose memories would blend the various sites into one. So we concentrated on a few. We arrived at the tomb of Akbar, the most liberal of the Moghuls, late in the day. The touts of tourist schlock were willing to unload their wares and aggressively offered discounts for what would have been bric a brac quickly forgotten at home. The vast grounds were filled with dear and peacocks and the distance from the gatehouse (which itself would have pleasantly served as my monument) to the tomb itself was half a kilometre and Zachary questioned why such a large grave was required for one dead guy. We were lucky

to arrive late for as the security urged us to exit I was able to snap a rare photo of Pat, Zoey and Zachary in front of a monument uncluttered with innumerable tourists.

The focus of our visit, and of virtually all other visitors to north India, was the Taj Mahal. I've had my breath taken away on three occasions, one was the Ngorongoro gorge in Tanzania, the statue of David in Florence (in a heterosexual sort of way) and St Peter's Square (in a non Catholic sort of way) and I had hoped that the Taj Mahal would do the same. Perhaps I've seen too many sites and have had enough of being overwhelmed but I did not get what I'd hoped for. That is not to say that I was disappointed for the monument is a magnificent with white stone and details situated next to the Jumna River on vast grounds. Perhaps the volume of tourists took something away for they are not part of the promotional photos that the world knows.

Tavernier gave the west the first detailed description of the Taj Mahal. He was there during its construction and provided details from which our knowledge today is drawn, our guide must have read Tavernier for he dispassionately repeated the information verbatim. Its construction lasted twenty two years and involved twenty thousand workers and was of an enormous cost. Considering worker health and safety I asked our guide how many workers perished during its construction and he quickly confirmed one thousand. Tavernier did not mention death and I suspect this number was drawn from the air. It was built, according to Tavernier, where foreigners come 'so that the whole world should see and admire its magnificence.'

Bernier was awed by the monument 'Nothing offends the eye; on the contrary it is delighted with every part, and never tired with looking....It is possible I may have imbibed an

Indian taste; but I decidedly think that this monument deserves much more to be numbered among the wonders of the world than the pyramids of Egypt, those unshapen masses which, when I had seen them twice, yielded me no satisfaction; and which are nothing on the outside but heaps of large stones piled in the form of steps one upon another, while within there is very little that it is creditable either to human skill or to human invention.' Emily Eden on her journey 'Up Country' lamented that her party would not have the opportunity to stop by Agra to see the Taj Mahal, she also had concern that English interests were planning to turn the monument into a Hotel, we are fortunate that this never came to fruition.

The story of the Taj Mahal is vaguely familiar to most of us. The emperor Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal in honor of his favorite wife Mumtaz Mahal, renowned for her beauty, upon her death. It is held as a monument to true and everlasting love and have drawn people for centuries to honor it as such. But there are cracks in the legend. Bernier, a physician in the court of Shah Jahan who witnessed some of the happenings within the royal family noted that Mumtaz possibly was a mere trophy bride as 'her husband abandoned himself to drunkenness and dissipation'. I have to wonder on the truth of this, Mumtaz bore a total of twelve children for her husband not all of who lived to adulthood and she probably died from bearing too many babies for her body to handle. The poor women spent one quarter of her thirty six years pregnant or one half of her adult life. It seems to me that if Shah Jahan truly loved Mumtaz he could have shown a little more restraint during her life and enjoying her company rather than building a monument after her death.

And a costly monument it was. This monument to love, and other monuments of which the Moghuls were so fond, sapped the Empire of much of its wealth, placed pressures on the need for goods and raised taxes which could not be supported. There was opposition to Shah Jahan which broke into open war as the four sons of the Emperor battled it out for control before their father had died. The eventual victor was Aurengzeb, son number three, whose sentiments of fatherly neglect led him to imprison his high spending father in the Amber Fort, within site of the Taj Mahal, for the last eight years of his life.

Monument building under Aurengzeb was curtailed, a planned Memorial that Shah Jahan had planned for himself opposite the Taj Mahal on Jumna River was shelved and upon his death he was placed awkwardly alongside Mumtaz. Aurengzeb realized that such lavish spending was not for the health of the Empire and sought to bring expenses under control, alternatively he spent his revenue on wars, expanding the empire to the greatest ever extent. Aurengzeb enjoyed a lengthy reign dying at the age of eighty seven after forty nine years. His successor, Bahadur Shah I, is not a familiar name for by that time the English had made greater inroads to India which challenged and put the Moghul Empire into terminal decline. The family line continued as impotent rulers, puppets often of the English, who maintained the splendor and magnificence of their court with none of the power or influence.

It is a bit of a wonder that we have any of the accounts that I have referred to. Emily Eden is the possible exception as she travelled in relative security with an entourage of twelve thousand people at a point it time when the north of India was relatively secure. Ibn Battuta engaged the southern enemies of Muhammed Tuglug on his journey from Delhi to Calicut with the intention of going to China. He and a small group were separated from his party and later he was separated from this band of stragglers without his horse wandering alone in hostile central India, obviously a foreigner and unfamiliar with the language. He was chased by enemy troops and captured by bandits but in both cases managed to make his escape. He again escaped death on the coast of Kerala as a storm came up and dashed one ship on the shore with a complete loss of people on board, another ship suffered the same fate with a few survivors and yet another was swept out to sea. Ibn Battuta had decided to remain on shore. Bernier found himself in the midst of the battles between brothers Aurengzeb and Dara Shah as they scrambled over the empire that they expected would become available upon the death of their father. Bernier had been a physician in Dara's camp and departed his employer through roads of destruction and death when the situation was lost. He later found that his skills were of use to Aurengzeb when he assumed the throne. Tavernier seemed to come out of all his situations well despite the risks he encountered. As a trader, there was always the risk of robbery, or of the wealthy and influential defrauding him of his goods. He also was threatened by war and came close to death on a Dutch ship as it battled with English forces, but always Tavernier came out unscathed and ready to move on to his trading profession.

His brother did not far so well for while stationed in Batavia in the employ of the Dutch on Java, he succumbed to illness and perished so far from home. This is not an unusual story for many of those who came to India for opportunities did not leave. Illness and death were a common part of travel and affected many who arrived on these shores. William Sleeman, the prosecutor of the Thuggee sect died before he could return home, as did Reginald Heber, a Christian proselytizer who is famous for a number of hymns commonly sung in Protestant Church services. Emily Eden, who did return home healthy and lived a reasonably prosperous life noticed the gravestones in Simla the summer capital of the East India Company. So many had died so young, a familiar end for so many of the English, and others, who had come to make their fortune.

India could prove a harsh environment for those who did not take care and Murray's Handbook was quite clear on this. Had any of these travellers succumbed to the conditions of India, we would have missed out on their accounts, we are often without the stories of those who did not survive.

I'm still searching for a means of travel in which someone else foots the bill and provides me with the freedom to roam as I please. Emily Eden was fortunate to have a brother in the Honourable East India Company with whom she could tag along. I know of no one in this situation and I've tried to write the foreign service exam but they've never called me back. Eden was able to come along and seemingly had no responsibility as she followed the camp, her tent prepared for her daily, meals provided, receptions with local petty royalty, balls, concerts and dances, of varying quality, put on on a regular basis.

Bernier was a physician. As a European his skills were much sought after in the courts of India and he had little problem in finding employ in the houses of the most powerful in the land. There was no difficulty, once the fortunes of an employer declined, to find employ in an up and coming figure. I could, I suppose become a doctor, but at my age I'm not willing to devote a large part of the remainder of my life to study the sciences, an area in which I've never excelled.

Tavernier was a diamond merchant and by his account it seems he was quite adept at it. It seems to me that the diamond trade was just a means to accommodate his addiction to travel, yet it was a lucrative trade and Tavernier travelled well. I'm

not particularly astute when it comes to trading and markets and I know nothing of diamonds so I don't see a whole lot of opportunity on this avenue.

I think Ibn Battuta had it right. Tim MacIntosh-Smith, I believe, referred to the Moroccan as an 'inveterate freeloader' and this is a title that I could comfortably take on. Ibn Battuta was a *Qadi* or Islamic judge who knew the laws of Islam and how to apply them, certainly a useful tool in the Dar al Islam or world of Islam. Somehow this entitled him to show up at the courts of Spain, Mali, Persia and India and inveigle himself into a position where he could be rewarded or enumerated handsomely with horses, slaves, Robes of Honour, gold currency and in India he was paid with the possession entire villages in which to reap the revenues and spend as his personal income. When he arrived in Mali after crossing the Sahara from Morocco he was met with no such respect and had the nerve to embarrass the local ruler into honoring him with gifts. But India was his most profitable inveigling, until he lost it on the coast of Kerala.

This is the tactic that I've decided upon. I will find and inveigle myself into one of the Royal Houses of India and have them foot the bill while I remain in their service and perform my agreed upon duties. Perhaps, as Mohammed Taghluk had sent Ibn Battuta to China, I could also act as a roving ambassador. Mohammed Taghluk had a particular habit of employing foreigners for many reasons and nearly bankrupted his Empire in doing so. This is not so farfetched as it may seem. Despite being a Republic India is littered with Royal lineages of impressive titles but little political influence. From the early days of the English East India Company, and before, defeated or allied princes, Kings and Sultans were effectively removed from power but allowed to retain their titles with some type of pension or means of maintaining their wealth and ostentatious lifestyles. I thought it best if I sought out one of these families and offer them my services for a salary, nothing outrageous mind you, but something to allow me to ramble about, study history and explore the scenery that foreigners came to see hundreds of years previous. I need to be selective in my choice.

The houses of Jaipur and Namreena are still extant but I have managed to find little information on them and am not sure they could support me in my endeavor. Tim MacKintosh-Smith visited the Zamorin Raja of Calicut in the early 2000s who maintained his title and his pension first offered by the East India Company and after independence taken up by the Republic. The East India Company set the pension at five thousand rupees a month in 1806, an impressive amount no doubt, but it has not been adjusted to inflation so

that five thousand rupees a month works out to about a hundred Canadian dollars, or twelve hundred dollars a year. Not really something I could live on, let alone share it with the existing Zamorin. Although I could settle comfortably in Kerala I'm in search of bigger pickings.

I've decided to focus my energies on the descendants of the Nizam of Hyderabad. After the death of Aurengzeb in 1707, Hyderabad, the city surrounding the fort of Golconda, gained degrees of independence until 1724 when it separated itself fully from Delhi. This was the inauguration of the Qutb Shahi dynasty which remained an independent country until after Indian independence in 1947. There was a line of seven Nizams who ruled with complete authority and with the benefit of the diamond mines, visited by Tavernier, were able to amass an enormous wealth such that the seventh Nizan, in the 1930s, has been declared one of the richest men, not only of his time, but in all of history. Most of this wealth was based on a collection of diamonds from the local mines and also of precious stones and jewelry from around the globe. With the rise of the British East India Company in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and its subsuming much of the subcontinent under its control, Hyderabad was able to maintain, not complete, but a significant degree of independence. The country was not a puppet but did what it could to favor the East India Company, when the 1857 mutiny broke out, the Nizam supported the Honourable Company supplying troops to put down the insurrection. This was an action which modern Indian nationalists lament as it is felt that had Hyderabad supported the rebellion, India would have been freed of Company and English control. As a result the Nizams were given the titles of *His Exalted Highness* and *Faithful Ally of the British Government*, the only state in India to receive both of these statuses. During the First World War the Nizam donated twenty five million pounds to Britain earning the title of *Exalted Highness*.

Things were going well for the Nizams of Hyderabad until the winds of Indian Independence began to stir. The Nizam had hoped to remain independent from both Pakistan and India, but being that the Nizam was Muslim and his lands completely surrounded by the new India, the Indian government felt unease that this potential ally of Pakistan remained prominently within its borders. Hyderabad's appeals to the United Nations and its former patron and ally England, were unheeded. Following tensions and excuses offered by both sides, India invaded the state of Hyderabad and after a brief war

the country was annexed into the Republic of India in September 1948 barely more than a year after India had gained its own independence.

The Nizam was allowed to keep his title and his wealth but otherwise was excluded from the politics of India. He passed away in 1967 and his crown was given to his grandson Mukarram Jah. This current Nizam on the benefit of his marriage to the granddaughter of the long ago deposed Ottomans of Turkey has the rather overwhelming title of *His Exalted and Imperial highness Rustam-i-Dauran, Arustu-i-Zaman, Wal Mamaluk, Nizam ud-Daula, Nawab Mir Barakat 'Ali Khan Bahadur, Sipah Salar, Fatah Jang, Nizam of Hyderabad and Berar, Imperial Prince of the Ottoman Empire and Honorable Lieutenant-General*. The fortunes of the Nizam of Hyderabad have declined since he has taken on the title, in 1974 India abolished any privileges that this and other princely rulers had held, taking away any pensions and forcing them to pay taxes. The year prior to this the Nizam bailed on India and moved to an Australian sheep farm, currently he is apparently destitute and resides near Instanbul in Turkey perhaps looking to reclaim the Ottoman crown. Much of the wealth of the Qutb Shah dynasty is tied up in litigation as several marriages and resulting divorce settlements have drained the funds and hundreds of claimants to descendancy of the previous Nizam have come forward to make their claims.

Although fortunes have declined millions are still available and there is freeloading to be had, all I need is a way in. I thought perhaps food could somehow get me involved in the kitchen, I can read a cookbook as well as anyone. But when I recall the fate of Babur's unfortunate cook upon displeasing the Emperor, I think it best that I keep my culinary skills to myself. I'm left with my witty humor and sparkling personality to get me in, I can attend all functions and mingle with guests regaling them cynical witticisms and criticisms of their lifestyles but I think this is only slightly less risky than entering the kitchen. Unless I can come up with another option I am left, as I always have been, with my brief tours, a week or two at a time in which to explore without patronage.

Andy Hodgins January, 2012