

The Whole World Is a Single Flower: Reflections by Participants

No filters.

Getting off the plane at Indira Gandhi Airport, I was an urban sophisticate looking for new experiences. After living a sunrise on the River Ganges—serene and primal—and then riding the maelstrom through the streets of Varanasi on a bicycle rickshaw—all cacophony and wild contradictions—I feel like I was shaken awake. There are no filters here. All sensations are simple and direct. After a few days, it's beginning to make sense. Every horn beep, begging child, colorful costume—everything has a purpose and effect. It's all just like this. Welcome to India!

Paul Green, Canada



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Evening chanting in the bus. Everybody keeps hands in hapchang. Bus stops for a moment. A guy in the street stares at us, his mouth wide open: “This bus driver must be really crazy if all the passengers are praying so sincerely.”

Alvydas Turskis, Lithuania

One of our native Indian guides was asked, “Why are the cows so revered?” He said, “Oh, they are the holiest of animals. They give everything and ask for nothing. Their milk makes it possible for us to eat the most delicious and high protein foods. Their dung heats our homes and fuels our stoves. It fertilizes our fields. Ninety percent of our population is vegetarian. Nothing is wasted. We have more than enough because of the cows. It’s a perfect balance. We are very blessed.”

Zen Master Soeng Hyang, United States



The Plunge: Stepping off our safe bright tour buses into the dark early dawn of Varanasi and walking (singly, silently) through chants and bells and cries for alms from half-naked children, crippled limbs and bundles of rags curled coughing in doorways, starving dogs nosing piles of refuse, clay-coated fakirs and hawkers and dark-eyed women in bright saris selling flowers—to the crumbling steps of the ancient and holy Ganges—coated with filth, reeking of mud and excrement and the smoke of death—and alight with grace, crowded with reverence, bodies bathing and swimming and chanting and prostrate in prayer.

The Goat: Walking through a small village in Rajgir, children bringing us their newborn goat to admire—no begging, no photos, just humans together celebrating the joy of a new life.

Nancy Czarkowski, United States



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When I was small, I liked my grandmother or my mother to scratch my back before I would go to sleep. Now my granddaughter, Candice, likes me to scratch her back before she sleeps.

I saw a beggar woman sit on the floor outside Mahabodi Temple, her daughter, who is about four or five, lying at her feet. The beggar woman used one of her hands to scratch her daughter and stretched out another hand to beg for money. It was so touching and beautiful. The great Mother's love has no rich or poor, no high or low. Only don't know, just do it.

Wai Hing, Hong Kong