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# Kolkata, Winter 2009

Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), January 31 - February 14

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Dispatch from Kolkata

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View from the car, en route downtown from the southern suburbs

## HISTORY

This was my fourth short visit to Kolkata, dispatches from one month in 2006 and three weeks in 2008 have been posted previously. This time I stayed only two weeks, with support (in India) from the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI). Frequent flyer miles paid for my airfare. My host and coauthor, Professor Sisir Roy of the Physics and Applied Math Unit (PAMU) of ISI had kindly made all arrangements for this stay. My accommodation, as in 2006 and 2008, was in the guest house of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture (RMIC), which I love. Not only is it a safe, clean, quiet, and aesthetic home base with excellent food in central Kolkata, but also it functions as a university and Research Center for Indology, with excellent libraries, professors, and graduate students.

## OUR BOOK PROJECT

My goal for this visit was to advance my current book project, *The Digital Akasha: Consciousness and the Quantum Vacuum*, joint with Sisir Roy. This book is an explanation of our agent-based model for consciousness, coordinated with classical Indian philosophy. The RMIC has been very generous, giving me access to its Research Center for Indology, and thus providing the support I very much need for our book project. Professor Debabrata SenSharma of the Research Center for Indology has been crucially helpful for this work right from the beginning in 2006. During this stay I experienced an epiphany, in which the features of our digital model for consciousness zipped together with corresponding features of medieval Kashmiri Shaivism, a high-point of Sanskrit philosophy. Preliminary results of our project have been posted on my website,

<http://www.ralph-abraham.org/articles/titles.shtml>

as MS#118, 119, 122, and 128.

## ARRIVAL IN KOLKATA

Arriving at Kolkata airport after some 30 hours of travel, it was great to be met by Sisir outside customs at 3 am local time. We drove through the city to the RMIC as the bypass road is considered dangerous at night. Wiped-out as I was, it was still a thrill to be back in Kolkata. I feel a great kinship with this city, and with Bengali culture, and even now I am counting the days until my next return.

## AT HOME AT THE RMIC

My room in the RMIC guest house, nearly identical to those of 2006 and 2008, was a spacious (but sparsely furnished) suite with bath (and even a hot shower). Typically, I would stay inside the RMIC all day, going to the dining room at the prescribed times, talking briefly with my fellow guests, climbing to the fourth floor to visit Professos SenSharma in his office in the Indology library, and working on my MacBook in my room. Daily I would go outside for a short walk to shop for water or extra internet air time, and join in the constant melee and din. I would venture out further, to give a lecture for example, only if someone came to fetch me in a trustworthy car.

## DRIVING MISS DAISY

So in fact, I had on the typical day two hours outside in the backseat of a rented car with professional driver (costing less than one dollar per hour I believe, others always paid), and half an hour walking about downtown on my own. Most of my impressions of Kolkata were from this backseat vantage point. Thus, I became expert on the frequency of fender-benders vs head-on collisions, and the unwritten code of horn blasting. Among my deeper insights: this year there are many more new cars, usually with first-time drivers, than past year. The global economic crisis is, in fact, not global.

## MY LECTURES

During this stay I gave only two lectures. At the Calcutta Math Society I spoke on generic properties of dynamical systems with application to pattern formation in cellular systems, and at ISI, on agent-based models for the quantum vacuum. A third lecture, at the RMIC, was planned but my stay was too short to make the arrangements. Besides the two lectures, I went several times to ISI to work with Sisir.

## THE CELL MODEM SAGA

On each visit, I struggled to obtain internet access from my room at the RMIC guest house. This is, in my view, its only lack. In 2006, my smart phone could only be used on the AT&T cell network, which costs \$3 per minute. So I did not use it much. By 2008, I had had the smart phone unlocked, so I could buy a prepaid local cell phone card, only to find that there was no cell coverage at the RMIC. But this year, the broken cell tower had been repaired so I could call home for

\$0.10 per minute, and also gain unlimited internet access for less than one dollar per day. With the aid of an inexpensive app, I achieved internet access from my MacBook, through my cell phone, for the last few days of my stay. As the bandwidth is somewhat limited in this setup, I came to realize why social networking (FaceBook, MySpace, etc) came along when it did, and not earlier: a certain bandwidth is required for them to work conveniently. So I had web browsing, but not FaceBook, in my room at the guest house.

## SOCIAL LIFE

Other outings: once to visit Sisir's wonderful home in the southern suburbs, another time for lunch and a tour of bookstores downtown with Sisir and his wife Mala. I also was invited for dinner by Prodyot Roy (physics professor at Presidency College) and his wife Sarmila, who figured prominently in my dispatch from Kolkata in 2008. The RMIC guest house is also a pleasant place to invite people to visit me at home, and I enjoyed visits from Professor Ashoke Thakur, Vice-Chancellor of the West Bengal State University at Barasat (formerly of the West Bengal University of Technology, my host on prior visits), from Atin Das (Physics PhD, chaos theory) who is an active contributor to the Complexity Digest (along with his wife Pritha) , and from Somdatta Bhattacharya (Physics PhD, unified fields). From Atin I learned that my old friend, Gottfried Mayer-Kress, had recently died.

## AFTERWORDS

Before leaving for Kolkata I found myself wondering why I was going. I travel too much, and need reasons. Of course, the book project on the digital akasha was the prime reason, but I was not sure if the book might not profit more if I stayed at home working on it. However, I returned so very excited by the newfound concordance with Kashmiri Shaivism that I cannot stop working on the book, hence the delay in posting this dispatch.

## THE END