

USSR Academy of Sciences

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**DONAT NAUMOV**

**ALEXEI YABLOKOV**

**20000 KILOMETRES  
ACROSS INDIA**

Central Editorial Board  
Eastern Literature

Moscow 1968

*Editor Incharge*

A. L. Batalov

*photographs by the authors*

**Naumov D.V., Yablokov A.V.**

20000 kilometres across India. Central editorial board for eastern literature at publishers “Nauka”, 1968

280 pages with illustrations (“Travels in Countries of the East”)

A book by D.V. Naumov and A.V. Yablokov — A vivid and entertaining tale about the journey of a delegation of Soviet zoologists inside India. The authors travelled to the Himalayas and the oceanic coast, and saw some noteworthy Indian temples in addition to passing through jungles on elephants. They brought back a few wonderful collections and the present book from their journey.

English translation of the first chapter by  
Manish Udar

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**To our Indian friends  
we dedicate**

The warning signal was late in arriving: a tribe of gibbons which had been lurking somewhere in the hilltops emerged leaping from the foliage above us in a veritable meteor shower of grey and black flashes, now skimming over trees, now flying, and disappeared into the foliage across. A multitude of long and rather sonorous shrieks continued to be heard for some time, as did their even more multitudinous echoes. The mixture of these sounds gave out the only clue to the subsequent path taken by the apes.

We had not been able to catch a good glimpse of the gibbons. But our excursion had only just begun. Encounters with jungle-fowl, and those with black pheasants, and with reddish-yellow larva-eaters awaited us further ahead in these jungles in the foothills of

the Khasi in Assam (the Khasi hills became a part of the newly created state of Meghalaya in 1972 –Translator) –one of the few places untouched by man in India.

## §

So this is what they look like, those mysterious ‘warm domains’ of childhood! Ducks from Ural lakes, geese from West Siberian lowlands, teals from the shores of Lake Baikal, and numerous small avian populations from Europe spend winter in this exact place. This is the Keoladeo Ghana bird sanctuary, in the vicinity of Bharatpur.

Our flat-bottomed boat glides slowly upon shallow waters, manoeuvring this way and that way between and around trees. These trees house nests of the comical adjutant storks (This species is no longer found in the said bird sanctuary –Translator), as also those of watchful



gannets and Asian darters –snake eating birds...

§

Reverberant corridors. Some large and ceremonial, rich with detailing. Others cosy, homelike halls. Intricate red brick masonry accentuates the refinement of arches and passageways, vaults and courtyards. The largest forest academy in the world. We are in Dehra-Doon. A dozen scientific institutions here are occupied in the study of all aspects of the life of one of the most marvellous biological communities of our planet, namely forests.

§

It is hot. Myriad sounds fill the air of an oriental bazaar with a rumbling polyphony. Enormous urns of honey are dangling on tautly quivering chains — chains of weighing scales which look as if they been borrowed from the pharmacy of the titans— near veritable mountains

of rice, legumes, and some other, unfamiliar to us varieties of grains. Our shirts are stuck to our bodies like second skins. It seems that there is no end to this heat which has engulfed the whole world.

Ten minutes' ride away from here is the desert, the Thar.

Small rodents and gerbils in the laboratories of the International Institute of Arid Zones do not drink water for years ...and look not a bit the worse for it. Flora representative of Central Asia and Atacama, as also of the deserts of Africa and Australia silently coexist and bear fruit on parcels of desert land set aside for experimental purposes.

Nearby in an urban dead end, a *swami* –a wandering minstrel. Surrounded by respectfully bowing spectators, he is shaking in a trance. And suddenly, in the middle of this monotone swaying and twitching –he throws a

sharp, curious, meaningful glance in our direction.

§

We took care to swathe ourselves in all available warm clothes, and now we are slowly trudging along a mountain road. We are carrying haversacks, field bags, cameras and nets. To hurry is out of the question —it appears highly unlikely that anyone out of us is expecting a second visit to this place in the Himalaya, at the border of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Everything is interesting including unusual varieties of oaks, and insects, and birds.

A woman emerges from behind a bend in our path, a large bundle of firewood projecting above her shoulders. She glances at us amiably at closer approach ...and sticks out the tip of her tongue. This is the local style of greeting. A short walk up the road and we hear faint, honeylike sounds of prayer drums.

They are emanating from a spot somewhere upon the nearest hill, and slowly becoming louder.

§

We, five Soviet zoologists from Leningrad and Moscow —the now departed Professor Nikolai Sergeyeovich Borkhsenius, Konstantin Aleksandrovich Breyev, Yevgeny Vitaliyevich Zhukov, Donat Vladimirovich Naumov and Alexei Vladimirovich Yablokov— visited India in consonance with the programme of cultural and scientific cooperation between our countries. Field diaries have long been shut, all reports have been written, all films developed, but what we saw continues to now and again come alive in our minds.

India is the country of one of the most ancient civilizations of the world, the country of a brave and hardworking people. It is a land, the animal world of

which helps us in understanding the evolution of all animal life on our planet.

Every newcomer to this country views her with his own eyes. We had been mandated to get acquainted with the work of our colleagues —Indian zoologists— and the amazing animal world of India. But by driving through, flying through, swimming through and walking through a distance of 20 thousand kilometres across India, we were able to get acquainted to some degree with the whole country; with a country, which in the words of Iliya Ehrenburg, enchanted by her, “lives simultaneously in the past, and in the present, and in the future.”

The reader may forgive us for having been unable to maintain a strict travel record tone everywhere. To talk about India, about her present and past, about her animal world unemotionally is impossible for us. The authors will

consider their task fulfilled if this modest book promotes a future increase in curiosity about this country and fondness for the people of India.



## CHAPTER I

### Moscow – Delhi

*Across the Pamir in an  
aeroplane – New Delhi –  
Discussing the travel plan –  
Tibetan bazaar – The  
capital's university –  
“Liquor permit” – The zoo*

Late in the evening on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1963, all the members of a Soviet zoological expedition to India have gathered in a crowded room of the old academic hotel *Yakor* on Gorki Street. We are carrying out the last check of the most essential equipment. Passports, tickets, medical certificates (certifying that each one of us has been vaccinated with all compulsory preventive vaccinations against cholera and smallpox), certificates for customs

clearances, recommendation letters and addresses, blank field diaries, still and movie cameras.

What has already been forwarded to the airport includes guns, nets, traps for small beasts, film rolls, tapes, ammunition, high boots (for protection from snakes!) and tens, hundreds of other absolutely essential from our point of view items. It appears that everything has been taken care of, and yes, we are going to be guests of Indian zoologists, so if it turns out that there is some deficiency in our equipment then our colleagues will not leave us in the lurch.

Our last impressions as we leave Moscow— the muffled susurrations of unrelenting wheels as our Volgas make their way through the night, veritably flying us over deserted streets. The odd pedestrian strolling on Leningrad Avenue. The sound of our own breathing.



An endless mist of snowflakes, swirling down upon the windscreen...

A Tu-114 taxis to the starting spot exactly according to schedule— at 00:20. Our fellow travellers— several Indians, a group of English tourists, some employees of our embassy. The Indians lead by example. In very short order they raise whole clusters of armrests to free up several rows of seats and then stretch over, bare heels jutting into the aisle. For some reason they do not feel cold, while we are freezing in spite of having kept our suits on *and* having covered ourselves with the woollen blankets provided for the purpose.

Unpassable deserts, bottomless gorges, and the highest mountains in the world kept the Indian subcontinent all but inaccessible to outsiders for thousands of years. As a matter of fact, even till date most Europeans arrive in India by the sea route –from the south, or

by aeroplane from the west. But the Moscow–Delhi air route, leading to India from the North, is becoming livelier with every passing year. And so the northern road to India has transformed from an arduous mountain crossing into a fairy-tale journey over what continues to remain one of the most inaccessible regions of the world.

It starts getting brighter three hours into the flight, but this is experienced only where we are cruising, high up above at a height of 9000 metres. The land below remains shrouded in a dark mist. Below us lies the Fergana Valley, and presently several cities can be identified amongst the myriad shimmering lights moving into and out of our view, all contained within one frame: Leninabad (Khudjand –Translator) lies a bit to one side, and then we are guessing there are Andijan, Fergana, Namangan, and Jalalabad.

Our aeroplane is bathing in the sun's rays by this time. There is a pre-dawn haze on land. Mountains are beginning to silhouette into view –glimmering figures that wobble and flicker. Now they start crystallizing, dramatically approaching ahead of us. This means that we have turned East in order to bypass the Pamir –the roof of the world– and will soon fly over China.

And that is how it is: a short hop over a few spurs of the Tien Shan –and a huge valley has started, flat as a table.

We can see many roads on this plateau, and many small villages. Individual buildings stand on peripheries of isolated fields which look as if they have been sprinkled here and there over the landscape. And now patches of desert start to appear between these fields. Now the fields disappear altogether, and a desert sprawls endlessly as far and as wide as the eye can see. We fly over

Kashgar— China's western outpost, and over the Taklamakan desert, the largest reservoir of desert sand on the planet.

The Pamir remains a continuously visible prominence to the right of our aeroplane all this time. It is so unnaturally high that its height is felt even by us from inside our aeroplane—we are viewing it not from above looking below but somewhat from the side. This is unlike everything else that we have become used to seeing during the three hours of this flight. Spurs of the Kunlun protrude in the foreground with their famous Seven Thousanders, screening the whole western horizon. We see Kongur (7719 m) and Muztagh Ata (7546 m). Further ahead, there is an outright cascade of snowy peaks of the Pamir behind the Sary Kol ridge. We fly along the Pamir for probably one hour—that is how great this mountain country is.

Newer mountain chains —big and small, steep and gently sloping— are now visible and fast approaching. They appear to be quite similar to the spurs of the Tien Shan which we have passed not long ago but they are all the same not quite the same. Now we see blue lakes which have been sculpted, as it were, between mountain ridges. Yonder lake shines like a glacier from afar, but fly nearer and said lake starts turning first light blue and then dark blue. Even the ripples are visible on the surface of one such lake, a rather large one. Fantastic gorges are cleaving apart colossal mountain ridges at the other extreme of the spectrum of scales. Soon enough certain rivers start to become distinguishable on the floors of these gorges. Going by the map this should be the upper Indus.

From our height it is strikingly visible how vegetation at first starts crawling up mountain sides and how it then congeals into a dark mould at a later

stage –not succeeding in reaching the peaks. Most peaks are snow-laden, but the slopes of the mountains, especially the southern ones, are dark, without snow. And the mountains themselves have become somewhat different –they are now almost touching the aeroplane, and it does not feel at all like we are flying at a height greater than 8 thousand metres. This is Karakoram –black scree— with its five-kilometre-high passes. This here then is the final, most formidable, steepest and craggiest chain of gigantic mountains –and we are now over Kashmir. Below us is India.\* And as if to confirm this we are handed small forms, from which Indian customs can learn who we are, where each one of us

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*\* Translator's note: The learned writers appear to have confused the northern boundary of Kashmir Valley with the northern boundary of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. All of Karakoram is a part of India.*

lives, and from where and for what purpose we are flying to Delhi.

We head for the windows after filling out our forms. A densely populated green plain lies beneath us. It is generously peppered with patchwork collages of fields. We are not yet done trying to comprehend this new picture when lo and behold, under our wings appears a great green city with straight roads radiating from central plazas and mansions enveloped by foliage –New Delhi.

What follows is identical to a landing at one of our aerodromes somewhere in Novosibirsk or Krasnoyarsk: the same concrete surfaces of landing strips, the same signal lights and guidance stations with locators. The only novelty here is the sight of a jet-propelled “Boeing” with markings of the USA’s air force. It is faintly glistening at the parking area for aeroplanes. Some

soldiers have gathered under its wing and they are looking at our TU-114 with curiosity. A petrol tanker with the blood red letters “Esso” on its potbellied flank comes into view and races past.<sup>1</sup>

We are the last ones to exit the aeroplane, in our heavy tweed overcoats with pockets into which we have stuffed our woollen mufflers. An acquainted diplomat who was running hither and thither in the Moscow frost wearing a single coat is feeling at home here. We watch enviously as he walks jauntily towards the airport building.

We are met by several persons led by Prof. Mani –deputy director of the Indian zoological service, famous specialist of *Acrididae* biology (*Acrididae* is a family of grasshoppers –Translator), and the

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<sup>1</sup> *The American company “Esso” fuels aeroplanes at many aerodromes of India.*



head of a delegation of Indian zoologists which had visited our country six months ago. We are introduced to Dr. A. Menon, ichthyologist and specialist in the field of mountain river fishes of the Himalaya. He has been given the formidable task of chaperoning us during our time in India. Very dark, having prominent facial features, calm and energetic, he endears himself to one immediately.

It is said that first impressions are the strongest. Maybe this is true after all. On the road from Palam Airport to New Delhi <sup>2</sup> there are tonnes of advertisement billboards, donkeys and cows by the roadside, humped bullocks pulling carts and wagons, and very many bicycles and

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<sup>2</sup> *Many Indians say Del-hee instead of Delly, pronouncing the English spelling to the letter. In sum, one often comes across incorrect pronunciation of English words in India.*

scooters which are being calmly driven by Sikhs.<sup>3</sup> Barefoot, thin people wearing gaudy clothes are common here.

Streets in New Delhi are wide and very green. A considerable number of houses here are set inside the depths of not very large private yards, in the shade of huge, well-branched Ficuses and Acacias (*Pipal* and *Banyan* are Ficuses. *Babool* / *Keekar* is an Acacia – Translator).

Most buildings in the new city are not too big –not more than three floors high, like villas. We were able eventually to get the opportunity to view the city from above –as if in plan– after taking off from the city aerodrome Safdarjung, whereupon we marvelled at the harmony and the beauty of the city's layout.

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<sup>3</sup> *Sikhs are one of the religious groups of India. Religion ordains them to not shave and to not cut their hair.*

Straight roads connect circular, semi-circular, and polygonal commons. The width of asphalted thoroughfares, the intensity of traffic, the sharp work of policemen who man crowded intersections, everything makes you conclude that you have come upon a big city, even though the city itself can barely be seen because of the green canopies which cover its roads.

At several very large crossings there are platforms on top of which statues stand. Statues of generals, dames, and soldiers with rifles. All of them appear to be very similar to each other in some way.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Recently we learned that it has been declared in a decision of the government of India that all statues erected by the English colonial administration outdoors, on squares and on roads will be removed.*

Traffic on the roads is heavy, especially on central arteries. The stream of automobiles of various makes flows fast. Unbelievably brisk motor rickshaws—small semi-covered vehicles for two passengers and a driver, built on a scooter's base—stand out for their decisiveness and manoeuvrability within this stream. Taxis are recognizable from a distance. They are painted alike in all of India: bright yellow roofs with black lower portions. Once in a rare while one can't help but notice the familiar outline of our own Volga in a line of cars. However the general impression is created most definitely by Ambassadors—the first Indian made light automobiles to be mass produced.

Another inseparable part of the image of the capital, and incidentally of other large cities of India—cinema advertisements. Drawn snazzily, colourfully, they stretch out along roads on giant canvases. Almost exclusively

only Indian films are advertised, and this is not surprising –India’s film industry occupies a leading rank amongst the film industries of the world in terms of film production.

Thus, we are in Delhi. It is said that this word means “threshold” in Hindi. And this is not coincidental. Delhi stands –as is figuratively expressed by the well-known geographer O. H. K. Speight– at the great crossroads of the Indian subcontinent: to its north lies the mighty Himalaya, to the south –the Thar desert, to the west –the fertile valley of the Indus, to the east –the immense expanse of the Gangetic Plain.

Modern day New Delhi is to all accounts at least the eighth capital built over the last three thousand years in a territory with a radius of approximately 10 kilometres.

A coruscant capital of the Great Mogols existed here in the medieval era. To this day one of the districts of Old Delhi retains the name Shahjahanabad. This name was given to it by its builder, the Padishah Shah Jahan, who among other things was the fifth Great Mogol.

The old capitals exist not just in the names of various parts of the city, like Firozabad (Ferozeshah Kotla – Translator), Tughlaqabad and Mehrauli to name merely three. Parts of these cities have survived till date –with magnificent palaces, temples, mausoleums in a number of cases.

Ruins of the Old Fort (Purana Qila) –built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Sultans Humayun and Sher Shah– rise at the edge of Delhi. Indraprastha –that most ancient of capitals of Northern India– was located here somewhere. Indeed, it was but one out of five semi-legendary

cities mentioned in the Indian epic, the Mahabharat.

The fate of India was determined more than once in the area surrounding Delhi. Around the end of the XII century an Islamic army defeated the Hindu king Prithvi Raj. In 1398 Timur's raging host overran a flowering city and ransacked it to its foundations, leaving smouldering ruins and mounds of skulls behind itself. In 1857 the city of Delhi was one of the main centres of the Indian national uprising against English colonizers.

We are staying in the Hotel Janpath —people's path— on the street of the same name. Owned by the state, this large six storeyed hotel delights with its very comfortable rooms, in which an almost complete absence of windows catches the eye before anything else. Small window openings exist to be sure. However each one of them is shuttered with a wooden latticework —composed of flat planks

placed one over the other— which is sufficiently dense to not permit even a single ray of sunlight to get past itself and reach the inside of the room. Bladed fans—very large in size— hang from the ceilings.

It is straightaway discernible that people here try to shelter themselves from the sun, to save themselves from its hot rays. In addition to being a fact, this idea manages to encapsulate the architectural style of any modern building in the tropics—windows are either set deep inside thick walls, or shaded by outstretched sunshades, or reduced to narrow slots in walls.

We pay a formal visit to our embassy and our consul immediately after lunch. All embassies and missions are located in an area which has been specifically set aside for the purpose not far from the parliament building and the villas of the president and the prime minister. The



English embassy is a self-contained township. The American embassy is a massive rectangle. The national flag of the United States is at half-mast: a month has not yet elapsed since the day of President Kennedy's murder. Nearby and on the same side of a wide street is the Soviet Embassy: trellis, flower beds, fountains, large double height hall, enclosed garden. The building of the embassy of Pakistan —with bright blue cupolas and four slender minarets— is on the other side.

Follows a visit to our Indian hosts — in the department of Science in the ministry of education. We are met by deputy minister M. M. Das and the secretary in charge of the ministry A.K. Ghosh. Spacious shaded rooms without any decoration, simple white clothes. Pleasantries are accompanied by the strongest of teas. Both sides express wishes for development of broad and

fruitful contacts. Great general goodwill and professionalism are palpable.

Finally we return to the hotel and assemble to review a detailed plan of travel. All the members of the delegation are seated on wicker chairs which are arranged atop an English lawn. The lawn is turfed with felt, making it possible to walk upon it without fear of crushing grass. A. Menon and S. K. Sanyal — secretary in the ministry of education— are here with us.

A large map of India is lying open on the tables. Everybody is holding a cyclostyled copy of a detailed itinerary proposed by our hosts. Everything has been provided for here, and our three month long stay in India has been planned literally down to the hour. The route has been planned, all institutions which we need to visit have been listed, addresses of hotels where we can stay have been specified.

The program is rich and interesting, but it does not completely coincide with the desires of each one of us. It has been mentioned above that we are all zoologists, but we are zoologists belonging to various specialities: a desire for staying longer at the sea affects one, another is attracted towards mountain forests, for a third it is more important to get acquainted with parasites of agricultural beasts, or fishes. Each one of us had prepared individual programmes before the journey to India. We are holding those programmes also.

Now we are faced with the challenge of combining all these proposals into a programme which is simultaneously unified, condensed, feasible, and acceptable to all. Nonetheless mutual understanding is easily arrived at, the map is put to good use, and we prompt each other whenever the need to do so arises.

Night falls quickly, bright lights light up. Eventually all issues are settled, all ideas examined, and feasible ones included in the programme. A copy of the same, thoroughly speckled with insertions, options and question marks is carefully deposited into a folder by S.K. Sanyal. It will come into force after being confirmed by the minister of education tomorrow.

Looking back now, we remember with gratitude the people who organized our trip –the secretary of the ministry of education Dr. Sanyal, and the heads of the zoological service of India, professors Runwall and Mani. The programme planned by them enabled us to gain a multidimensional understanding of the zoological and allied research which is being carried out in India, to make visits to laboratories as also to the field, and to acquire delightful collections in very little time. Apart from all of this we saw many

cities and villages, visited the most interesting architectural and historical sights, and saw the life of the people of India.

A warm southern night has fallen – our first night in India.

– “I cannot wait till morning” – confesses the leader of our group Nikolai Sergejevich Borkhsenius.

– Let’s go!...

And so we are on the streets of nighttime Delhi. Before long our eyes encounter a fascinating sight: many varieties of handcrafted items made of wood, bronze, copper and stones are arrayed before us on carpets and mats – all under tents. Scores, maybe hundreds of colourful bunches of bright stone necklaces have been hung out on display. Ornate brass vessels, neatly arranged in rank after tasteful rank are having a

magnetic effect. Innumerable metallic and wooden figurines of animals, people and gods are laid out. This is the famous Tibetan bazaar, which is open throughout the year from early in the morning till late at night.

We are probably recognized as being novices, therefore an impromptu competition breaks out to invite us inside tents. The most "precious" items are pulled out from "reserves" for us. It takes only one minute of stopping for a crowd of curious boys to gather behind us. The salespersons try to evict them in vain. This visit to the bazaar is not any less entertaining than a visit to a museum for us. We remain browsers, not becoming buyers on this particular evening.

We returned to the hotel and dispersed to our respective rooms, tired due to a night without sleep and a flood of impressions. But none of us was able to fall asleep immediately. Everybody was

apprehensive about the endorsement of the programme, since modifications of an undeniably material magnitude in the original proposal had been requested by us.

The biggest question marks were on the points “Assam” and “Darjeeling”. Visits to these places had not even been considered in the Indian programme, while they meant a lot to us: Assam in north-eastern India is home to very special fauna, and a visit to Darjeeling is the only chance to see the genuine Himalaya. (It was perhaps not mere coincidence that both Assam tea and Darjeeling tea had become well-known among better educated people in the USSR by the time of Nehru’s final years as prime minister (which is the period which is being described here by the writers). They remain so in all countries which used to be part of the USSR. –Translator)

Early in the morning all of us run into each other on the lower floor, at the newspaper kiosk situated there. Fresh newspapers and small, very useful English to Russian and Russian to English pocket dictionaries are purchased. Now everyone is walking around with bulging, slightly unbuttoned coat pockets.

Dr. Menon appears and leads us to the restaurant. We enjoy the relaxed morning ambience. The cuisine here is English: porridge, half-fried eggs with bacon, coffee, and grilled slices of white bread –toasts. The musicians' platform opposite our table is empty. The atmosphere here was lively yesterday when we first came to this hall and dined. Three musicians had been performing some modern melody. The oldest of them—the violinist— cheerfully winked at us and teased a few impromptu bars. The band, following his lead, started playing *Podmoskovnikh Veчерov*.



Dr. Menon tells us during breakfast that a visit to Delhi University awaits us today. Our full programme, meanwhile, is yet to be approved. We head for the university in two automobiles right after breakfast. The university of the capital is situated at the periphery of Old Delhi in a designated township, which can be more correctly described as a splendid park.

The park simultaneously serves as a botanical garden –yellow plaques with Latin and Indian names are visible on many trees. There is a thought behind this. There are hundreds of species of trees which commonly grow in India. It is difficult to quickly comprehend the whole gamut, and it is this very arrangement which makes it easy for students –who walk through this park everyday– to learn the names of various species.

We are surrounded by small double and triple storeyed buildings. Every

building is surrounded by many groups of trees, and flower beds ring every individual tree. Every department is housed in its own exclusive building. We of course head straight for the building occupied by the department of zoology.

20 zoology specialists work here under the guidance of Prof. B.R. Sishahar. Most of them are concurrently teaching. B.R. Sishahar himself —along with his closest colleagues— is engaged in the study of the morphology of the most simple organisms. We are extremely pleased to learn that he holds the work of the school of Prof. Y.I. Polyansky in high regard. Polyansky heads the department of invertebrate zoology at Leningrad University, as also the cytology laboratory at the USSR Academy of Sciences.

Three workers of the department study the biology of fishes. One is a specialist in Herpetology —the study of reptiles. This speciality is of tremendous

practical significance for India, home as it is to immense masses of snakes – including many very dangerous species. A large group of department staff consists of entomologists. They are occupied in the study of the physiology of insects.

“Do you know that every single hair on the antennae of this charming louse,” Dr. K.N. Saxena expounds, inviting one to look into a microscope, “recognises either mechanical, or chemical stimuli, or is highly responsive to changes in moisturization?”

“The thing is that the bug *Dysdericus* damages cotton seeds, but it cannot feed on dry seeds, the low moisture content of which it establishes very easily and accurately.

“Measuring the moisture content of seeds”, K.N. Saxena continues, “enables us to predict if they are liable to be attacked by bugs and to prevent losses if

need be. If moisture content is low then there is no need to worry –bugs will not disturb dry seeds.”

In another room there is a chart with drawings of pigs, a sad semi-naked man, and a water chestnut. All of them are connected by arrows with the image of a parasitic Giant Intestinal Fluke (*Fasciolopsis buski*). Research conducted by L.N. Johri —a faculty member of the department— has shown that infection by this parasite occurs when teeth cut the water chestnut fruit. Microscopic larvae of the fluke get transferred from the shell of the said fruit to the mouth of the mammal at that very time.

Lunchtime has arrived unnoticed while we have been engrossed in our exchanges. We do not want to return to the hotel since our survey of the university is incomplete. Our gracious hosts invite us to snack with them. Tables are promptly carried to the lawn in the

internal yard. Sandwiches appear, as do fruit juices, salted cashews, and bananas.

Having taken leave of our zoologist colleagues, we head for the university library, which occupies a large independent building.

The standard of work in any research institution, or teaching in any university, can always be correctly gauged by reviewing its library. To make information available, and to make sure that it is quickly available, and to make sure that it is accurate –these are weighty challenges which are commonly encountered in our era. All of this is unthinkable without organising complex bibliographical collections.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Indian researchers are thoroughly familiar with all the literature which comes out in English. Many times subsequently we found it useful to visit the libraries of even small specialized*

The issue desk is located on the first storey of the university's common library (DU Central Library –Translator). Space is set aside on the same storey for collections too, and for several small halls which are used by readers for the purpose of browsing new literature. The second storey is occupied by a number of theatres. They are utilized for the purpose of lectures, debates and symposia. The third storey is divided into many small cubicles, which provide altogether a total of around 500 desks for study.

The reading rooms are empty. However, many students have transplanted themselves in the park outside, in the comfortable shade of trees. Young men in white shirts and girls in bright sarees are sitting in groups on the

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*institutes, which very often subscribe to 300-400 titles of journals and other periodicals.*

grass here, books and notebooks in hand. Finding out that we are from the Soviet Union, students of a group studying botany swamp us with questions about the system of teaching in Soviet Universities.

We wait for the evening impatiently: S.K. Sanyal has promised to come with the approved programme for the tour of the country. He appears with a voluminous portfolio, from which he pulls out and hands each one of us one fairly thick notebook –the programme in its entirety. Hurrah, everything is approved! Here onwards our life in India was strictly regimented, tickets for trains and aeroplanes were always ordered in advance, places in hotels reserved.

Dr. Menon had informed us during the course of the day that everybody was required to drive to the tourist office for some minor formalities which would make travelling less strenuous. A

gracious functionary in the office tells us *inter alia* that a dry law is in force in many states of India, and that government departments therefore give out special permissions —liquor permits— to foreigners for the consumption of strong beverages in any and every state.

We look at each other sheepishly —it seems that none of us is desirous of drinking “strong beverages” in such heat. Maybe there is no need for us to obtain this “liquor permit” after all? But Dr. Menon gently counsels us to submit applications for permission all the same. Oh well, the good doctor knows best. But hold on, hold on a minute... ..now what are you doing, why put such huge stamps on our new passports for heaven’s sake!? But the deed is done. All the passports to our collective mortification are now decorated with stamps of an impressive size which testify that we are from now onwards up until the end of our stay in



India permitted to consume spirits on the whole of its territory without any limitation whatsoever.

In certain states (which are in a minority) the sale of spirits is totally forbidden. In others they are freely sold at all times of the year. Umpteen minutely differentiable variations exist between these two extremes. We were never able to gain a complete understanding of the somewhat complex body of law governing this subject on the territories of all the different states of India. We did however manage to commit the laws of a few states to memory. As a result we know that in Delhi, for example, the embargo on consumption of spirits does not extend to private residences, designated halls inside restaurants, and to members of clubs.

Wine shops are required to remain closed on Tuesdays and Fridays, and likewise on all festivals. This rule is

carefully followed in all public dining establishments also, and from time-to-time signboards stating “dry day” appear on restaurant doors. Maybe it was due to such detailed laws, or maybe there were some other reasons, but we never saw even a single drunk person either outdoors or in restaurants.

According to our travel plan we were supposed to spend several days in Delhi, to not only get acquainted with the University of Delhi —the largest in the country— but also to visit the Indian Agricultural Institute (IARI –Translator), to meet zoologists in the institute’s branch of the entomological society, and lastly but not unimportantly, to prepare for an extensive tour of the southern states –Maharashtra, Mysore, Madras, and Kerala.

In addition, we made it a point to set apart some time for the purpose of visiting the zoo.

It is well known that local animals are always the best represented wildlife in zoos. This is because they are relatively easy to obtain and also because they flourish in conditions which are to be found in what is after all their own native climate.

It was also known to us that almost all large tropical animals are habituated to a nocturnal way of life. It is not possible to see them in a natural setting even in those places where they are plentiful, except by means of special safaris or nocturnal vigils.

These were the reasons because of which we considered our zoo visits to be atypical excursions, enabling us to learn about those representatives of India's animal kingdom whom we otherwise would simply not have been able to see. A visit to the zoo is serious business for

zoologists because it interests them primarily at a professional level.

The Delhi Zoo surprised us with its proportions. It is a real park with spacious enclosures. Living conditions for animals are in most cases a replication of complete freedom. Great attention is devoted to the maintenance of tigers in this as well as in other zoos of the country. Five or six common tigers live here, as do two tigers who are almost stark white with dark stripes. Tiger enclosures, as also most enclosures with other animals, are separated from visitors by means of deep moats and steep walls instead of nets or hedges.

And now we come to the monkeys. More than 15 types are housed here and, which is more, their number includes specimens of not just Asian varieties but also of South American ones.

The completely black tame hoolock gibbon (*Hylobates hoolock*) is unforgettable. An astonishingly adorable creature, it is not more than 60-70 cm in height. It has long silky hair, an intelligent face, and hands with long, long fingers. Bands of dense white fur on both of its eyebrow bones constitute the only light area on its body. Advancing eagerly on the arm of its keeper, it catches hold of the nape of his neck with supple, slender arms and shouts “hoo-hoo”.

If the span of a human being's arms is roughly equal to its height, then that of a gibbon's is twice as great as the length of its body. But these great, disproportionately developed arms are ungainly only when the gibbon is on the ground. The gibbons' long frontal extremities are a leading factor amongst factors contributory to their ability to locomote from treetop to treetop with great agility.

We were fated to later on encounter a tribe of gibbons in the jungles of Assam and to marvel at their gracefulness and mastery. Gibbons dash about on trees like grey (females turn a lighter colour in the fifth years of their lives) shadows. They 'fly' in the air for almost the whole time during which they are in motion, touching any given branch only for the split second required to push away from it.

A small langur (*Semnopithecus entellus*) is sitting in his spacious enclosure. It reaches behind the cheek of its keeper—who has his face pressed to the mesh—with a memorized movement of its nimble black fingers. Now it cajoles a chunk of banana from the latter and pops it into his mouth. It is possible to appreciate a langur from close quarters in the zoo, but not on the roof of some house or behind the signboard of some shop in the city, where also langurs are often found. A funny black face and hairless

black hands stand out from a yellowish-grey coat which covers the rest of its head and body.

According to myth the langur stole the mango from a magical garden which was owned by a *rakshas* <sup>6</sup> in order to pass it on to humans. The *rakshas* discovered the theft and ordered in anger that the langur be burnt on a bonfire. The quick and cunning langur managed to extinguish the bonfire, but not before getting its face and hands burnt, which remain black to this day.

A pair of young chimpanzees clad in trousers and warm jackets strut self-importantly on a small paved area. And nearby amidst some lawns it is possible to ride an elephant free of cost. A not yet fully-grown elephant obediently steps up to a mounting platform which is reachable by a ladder. A dozen children

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<sup>6</sup> *A mythical semi-divine creature.*

climb up to the *machan* which is tied to his back, and he starts his solo parade over the park pathways amid their merry shrieking.

It is also possible here itself to play with a baby elephant who is merry, hairy, and very funny. His keeper holds him firmly by a soft hairy ear lest he get into too much mischief.

Scientific workers of the zoo show us two male panther cubs who were born recently and are as yet not able to stand on their legs. Their eyes are barely open, like narrow slits. The cubs are quite phlegmatic and they allow themselves to be picked up by hand without complaint.

The zoo has existed for six years only. A small research team is employed in it, working on problems of maintaining and raising rare animals. Information services are well-executed. There are lots of signboards with detailed plans of the



park. Directional arrows are also plentiful. They point out various pathways to the enclosures of the most interesting animals – tigers, rhinoceroses, monkeys.

There are signs declaring “A gift from Moscow Zoo” on the cages of the large steppe eagle, the fox, and the arctic fox. Likewise the cage of the white-nosed coati bears the sign “A gift from Washington Zoo”. A large letter box is conveniently placed near the exit. There is a sign next to it which declares, “You may leave here any question about the animals in the zoo, and the zoo will send a reply to you by post.”

Our passive English language started activating in a miraculous way within merely a few days of being in India. And there were weighty reasons behind that fact. One evening the Indian Entomological Society organized a rendezvous with zoologists of Delhi for

us. We were in the university park once again, a large auditorium was full, scientific workers of various zoological specialities were present, as were students and newspaper correspondents.

The gathering is opened by Prof. Mani. He speaks about the strengthening friendship between the peoples of the USSR and India, and about the growing scientific and cultural exchanges between our countries in his short opening remarks. Having spoken thereafter about the programme of our stay in India, the professor proposes to each one of us to speak a few words about himself. It is of course difficult for us to speak in English, but all the same we stand turn by turn and speak about our work and about the results which we would like to see from our stay in India. Strange as it may seem, everyone understands us, and zoologists and correspondents ask us many questions. The next day summary reviews

of the symposium are published in almost all capital newspapers.

Necessity for regular conversations is the best language teacher. This golden rule is fully confirmed by our experience also. We were speaking in English quite freely at the end of our work in India.

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