

# FIRST NIGHT IN SHIVPURI

Sept. 23, 1971

Late this afternoon I arrived at my posting as a Fisheries Technician - well, Shivpuri is the town nearest my work site. Bhagora Fish Farm is 7 miles to the East on the road to Jhansi. I left Bhopal, capital of Madhya Pradesh, by bus this morning following send-off meetings with Dr. Dubey, Director of the M.P. Fisheries Dept., and J.G. Sinclair, Director of M.P. Peace Corps.

The scene at the Shivpuri bus station: having climbed up the ladder on bus's backside, I'm tossing my duffle bag of clothes and bag of gill-nets down to the ground. As I grab my only suitcase I hear a greeting from below, "Hello Mister Vatsin. I am coming to meet you. Please, please I am helping you. Give me your kit." Looking down I spot a very fit young man with a handsome smiling face displaying, however, the ravages of a past smallpox encounter. Halfway down the ladder I hand him my case and we shake hands.

"Namaste," I say

"Namaste Mister Vatsin. I am Kabir D\_\_\_\_\_. I am Fisheries Inspector sent to meet you. I am just coming to my posting here yesterday. This is first posting for me. I am just now graduate from fisheries school. You also have first posting, perhaps? We will be very very best friends. Let us go to hotel with your kit. I also have room at hotel."

Walking to the hotel, I am wondering if I heard his name correctly. But the clerk at the hotel has confirmed it and I begin speculating that, given the thousands of languages and dialects in the world, my name probably also has some unfortunate meaning somewhere.

We leave the hotel and nearby purchase samosas and pakoras from a fast-food stall. My new friend now suggests, "Mister Lauren, let us buy liquor-- I am knowing where." I don't disagree and we walk to the outskirts of town and find a ramshackle low-slung building. He rattles off a command to the proprietor and a clear, previously used whiskey bottle is produced containing a clear liquid with anisette swirling around at the bottom. It is inserted in a paper bag and Mr. D\_\_\_\_\_ prompts me to pay for it, which I do. I assume he is almost broke or, as a Brahmin, is too respectable to be seen actually buying it.

We walk back to the hotel and he takes my hand. We walk hand-in-hand. I know that in India men friends will do this with no connotation of homosexuality. I am thinking: if only Karen Wilke, my Peace Corps cross-cultural teacher, could see me now!! She would say, "Mr. Lauren, on your first day you are walking hand-in-hand with a man named D\_\_\_\_\_ back to your hotel room with a bottle of hard liquor and you're not freaking out.

You're a model student. I'm so proud of you!" (laughter trailing off).

Up in my room the bottle is hastily opened by my new friend and glasses poured. Immediately I'm wary of this concoction, this "desi" (country) liquor. I drink a little and pretend to drink more.

Now, the scene is: I'm staring at a mess on the floor of my room. Mr. D\_\_\_\_\_ had thrown all caution to the wind and enthusiastically consumed half the bottle. It resided only temporarily within him as did some of the samosas and pakoras. He has retired to his room. I am wondering what tomorrow will bring.

Sept. 24, 1971

This morning I went straight-away to the Fisheries Department office and no-one was there yet except Mr. Shrivastava who lives above the office and is to be my "co-worker." Immediately he invited me upstairs for breakfast. As we sat to a sumptuous meal served by his daughters, I found I liked him very much and know we will get along well. He said to me with a twinkle in his eye, "I understand yesterday you met Mr. Dikshit."

**Dikshit or Dikshitar** (Hindi: दीक्षित) is a Hindu family name. The word is an adjective form of the Sanskrit word *diksha*, meaning provider of knowledge. *Dikshit* in Sanskrit derives itself as a person involved in scientific studies, and literally translates as "one who has received initiation or one who is initiated". The surname is usually associated with people from the Brahmin