

RESEARCH AND INTERVIEWS
BY THREES ANNA
IN BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA
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25 November 1999

The fan is blowing above my head. And I am sitting at a very fussy desk that is made from carved out wood. And of course everything is very different from what I had thought or what I had expected.

I thought that I had rented a big luxurious flat, but now we suddenly are living in rooms with a lonely alcoholic man. I really was a bit of a disappointment. But, we'll see. It also has something. Although it will influence a lot of my thoughts, which is not so good. I have to think about it if I really want to stay here. I don't know yet.

Russy, the man with whom we are staying, has a large flat in the centre. Far away from where I stayed last time. In Bombay, or Mumbai as it is called nowadays, there is a very big housing problem. So living in with someone seems to be normal.

Besides, he also has two 'living in' servants. We don't get our own key because there is always staff around. So, all in all I do not have so much of the freedom that I am used to.

A cockroach is walking on my table, but that's the same in New York. And it is lovely and hot. Local time is 3.30 a.m. Time to go to sleep.

26 November 1999

Still suffering a bit from the jet lag. Nameeta my assistant is great. Yesterday she picked us up from the airport and brought us here. Today, we have discussed my ideas and possible strategies at length.

I am really very uncertain about where to start. My head is still so full of Southern Africa and my script, so I don't know where to start exactly. I don't feel in my heart yet what the basis of my research is. East and West. Poor and rich. Friendship and betrayal. At least it has something to do with that.

I asked Nameeta to arrange two interviews for tomorrow.

After that I walked around with Paolo. To feel where we landed. To feel that I am once more in this extreme world, called Bombay. Where every car is hooting without reason. Where people who are missing parts of their bodies are lying everywhere in the streets, begging. Where the women are walking around in the brightest colours of the world. Where every dog has scabies. Where you can hardly breath because the air is so polluted. And where you have to watch out, so you won't fall into some hole. And where I don't know where to start looking. I think I will need some more time before I will really have landed. And can start my new adventure.

Just now I have been looking for some email shop in the neighbourhood. But I have only found the remainders of what once was an email shop. It is on the way to the temple. Cyber City among incense, mud and a cow.

The telephone is ringing. An invitation for dinner tonight. That's a good start at least.

Back from dinner. It was all the way up in the north of the city. A 45 minutes drive. It was really nice, but the best part was that there was a young married couple. They got married only a month ago. A marriage that was arranged by their parents. And they had never seen each other before a month ago. And now they are sitting here. Very vulnerable. Obviously not used to each other yet. From time to time they touch each other for a moment, very carefully. And there is so much happening between them. Things that I have actually never seen in people's eyes before. They know that they will probably spend the rest of their lives together.

They will make love, laugh and fight. They will have children. And lots of other things. Just like that, with a stranger.

I am sitting at my desk again, the fan is blowing. What a day. My head is spinning because of all the impressions. And then there is my landlord, we call him the captain, who is bugging me because he wants me to come with him to a party at the horse-racing club. Of course not, but how can you get out of something like this without insulting someone.

27 November 1999

Today I did the first three interviews. As interviews they were not particularly world-shattering. I still have to find the atmosphere that I want. But what a world. Bombay is even more extreme than I have imagined it. So beautiful, so ugly. I always have a tendency to fall in love with those big metropolises. Well, this is going to be a great love. Tokyo, Mexico City or New York can't compete... Although, New York.

Nameeta has made an appointment with someone who lives in the fishing village. Originally Bombay consisted of seven islands where fishermen were living. They do not exist anymore. Nowadays it is one piece of land with a large hooting crowd. Except for a very small peninsula. We drive through the city, go to the right, through a sort of gate or access road and suddenly we are in a village. Everything smells like and is village. As if you have travelled for miles and miles. Tourists never come here, and so nobody bothers us. Because even in the Lonely Planet guidebook, which is a kind of a bible for alternative travellers, you can't find anything on this village in the city.

We find a guide through a man that Nameeta has brought along. He takes us to a little house. And there I have my first interview, with an old man of 78. He is the intellectual of this community. He has never worked as a fisherman and can read and write. Such people, sorry, are always a bit boring. They consider themselves as sage, and so they are. I feel more connected to the losers or the boasters in a group. This man is a bit of a toady. But perfect for a first interview.

I must make my questions more pointed and I also have to change many questions. I must find out again how I can make people tell things in images.

But the fishing village in itself is very special. Not poor, not rich. There is a big Portuguese influence in construction. I actually felt as if I was in a poor fishing village in Portugal. I have added a project to this interview project. I take a picture of each person before his or her front doors. This gives a nice picture of all these people. And of the differences between them.

After that an interview with a fisherman's wife. But there are too many members of the family present. She does not tell me what she wants or can tell. You can see it in her eyes when I ask her questions like: "Do you remember your first love?" (Of course you cannot ask questions like these here). "What is your most beautiful memory?" she does not have any. But of course she has them but she cannot tell this with the whole neighbourhood standing around her. Or: "If you would be of the opposite sex, what changes would there be in your life?" And more questions like these. The presence of her neighbours and family are a threat to her answers.

After that we go with another guide to a very small slum area that is enclosed by expensive blocks of flats. Our guide takes us first into the temple, where I as a foreigner wouldn't have dared to enter at all by myself. He does this to show us from here where and how the area is

situated. Around us the believing Hindus are lighting fires in the temple and are fidgeting with all kinds of flowers and little pieces of wood in small boxes. In the meantime they are singing and praying. I squeeze myself between them and look out of the window.

On the edge of a sort of a dug out ravine. The slums are built just on its edge, right up against each other. It feels as if they will be swept away with the first downpour.

We are walking along the edge of the ravine. Deep down they are building a block of flats. Some open sewers and big holes where you can sink in. And really on the edge are the little houses. Filled with children, old people and women. I don't see any young men here.

I have an interview with Liliandr, a woman of 30, who has lived on the edge for ten years already. Eleven years ago she was brought here from Nepal to become the wife of a Nepalese man who tried to find *happiness* here. Well, at least she did not find it. There she is. She is a beauty. Shy. It's touching when you look at her. With golden rings through her nose and ears. Here it doesn't go as I had hoped for either. The children want to be present during the interview. She cannot answer what she wants. And while we are sitting closer and closer on the clay soil between the cracked corrugated iron in this little dark house, the children are shouting through the cracks to the children outside. Everyone wants to know what is happening in the shack. A little mouse slips from under the jute sack where I am sitting on. And through every hole in the wall children's eyes are watching.

And then the guide wants to show us something else. We are driving through the city. There is activity everywhere because it's dark early. The streets are filled with people, shops and cars. And suddenly we are in a street that seems to be a bridge over the railway. It is completely built over with slums. And the next street and the next street. And floors are built on all these very small buildings. You can just look inside. Little rooms packed with mattresses, laundry, rags and children. It makes my stomach turn. It is too horrible, too much. Naked children are sleeping in the streets, cars are driving past at a distance of less than ten centimetres from their heads. Women are cooking. There are fires everywhere and families are sitting around them. And cars are still driving very close past. Not fast, because there is a traffic jam. Eating amidst the exhaust fumes. They don't have a choice because they are in Bombay. A city with 16 million people. And each year there are millions more.

We live in a part of the city with a population density of 30,000 per square kilometre. In the north where the real slums are, it is 60,000 per square kilometre. Bombay is one of the most overpopulated cities of the world. There are so many people as you have never seen before. They are everywhere. Always. You are never alone in Bombay. This does not mean that you cannot be lonely here. I really feel like crying. I feel like a thief. A thief of someone else's sorrow.

All the time I am thinking about the film I want to make here. But I don't want to think about that. I don't want to steer. I want to have a much more open view. Just see what they want to tell me, and do something with it only then.

But the first title comes to my mind already. "The rats and the gold".

And there is the Mafia that runs riot. Almost every hovel runs also a shop. In any case, every shop has to turn money over to the Mafia boss of that area. I see a young girl walking in a long colourful sari with a Reebok rucksack on her back. A little boy tries to sell books and pushes a book about Bill Gates against our car window. And those naked children everywhere. I almost feel guilty of what I put Paolo through. The trip to South Africa was his

first trip outside of Europe and that was already extreme. But this... and we are not even here for two days yet. I am scarcely able to grasp it myself.

We are driving through a street. Not a street in a township. Nothing is cut off or hidden. It is just a normal road with traffic all day, open for everyone. Here the slums consist only of a plastic canvas with some sticks. And again, families are sitting in front of them with their fires and their pans.

It is dark at 6 o'clock, but then life really starts. Many cars drive without lights. And there is a sort of a mysterious light that illuminates everything. What am I doing here, what am I looking for? I feel like a war tourist. And still I know that if I can make this into something beautiful, I will create something that no one has ever done before. And that's what I want. But how.

Our guide visibly enjoys my shocked reactions and decides to make also a tour in the red-light district. I cannot stand it anymore. Stunning women everywhere, amidst of the rubbish and the filth in their beautiful dresses. They are standing before small alcoves. It looks a lot like the red-light district in Amsterdam. Only much more harrowing. I ask him if he can bring us 'home'.

And now I am at home, in front of my computer. And I have tried to send this letter, but it doesn't work. When I think about the interviews and answers that I have had today, one thing keeps coming back. People's biggest worry and also their most important possession are their children. That applies everywhere and is very universal. Only I don't know this feeling myself. Maybe that's why I can see other things and maybe that's why I want to make something else.

28 November 1999

The captain, that's the name we have given to the man in whose house we are living, starts to make more and more advances to me. And I try to avoid him as politely as possible. He is not married and immensely rich, but absolutely not my type. Too old, addicted to gambling and an alcoholic. Sometimes I see things of Harry in him (one of the characters from my script). Only Harry is pennyless, and that's quite a big difference. But it is a kind of emptiness in his existence.

Today I have an interview with a gay. Being gay is illegal and a penal act. And where nobody talks about. He, on the contrary, is very open about it. He lives together with his boyfriend in a very big old house (sixty years is old here). He has a clothing business.

After the interview we talked for a long time about being gay in this world. And about religion (Hinduism) and sex. It is obvious that people here do not talk much about this. It is really nice that I can talk to him without an interpreter. You miss so much, all the subtleties are filtered out.

Then I have a meeting with Shadab, a man who had also offered to work for me. A tall, young Muslim with fiery eyes and a raw voice. And very hostile towards women. I want him to make a couple of appointments for interviews for me. The kind of appointments that Nameeta cannot make for me. Like talking to the Amman in the mosque, and with one of the completely in black veiled women (only their eyes are not covered), with shopkeepers in the Muslim shopping street, and one of the beggars who is lying limbless in front of the mosque. And with one of those men who are waiting in groups in front of Muslim restaurants the whole day, until someone gives them something to eat.

I also want to interview that beggar in his 'house', I mean in the place where he sleeps. That is the street, in dark holes where there is no light. And to bring a candle as lighting for the shot. And the men, who are sitting side by side, nicely in line, half-naked in front of the Muslim restaurants and are waiting for food, are usually living in the streets as well. Muslims are not allowed to eat, without also giving something to someone else. Well, very often this does not happen. The men are waiting and waiting.

I wanted to film them from the car and so I sat in front of Paolo, so they wouldn't see the camera. But I had just forgotten that now I was for one moment the pray they were looking at, the distraction from the filming. So horrible, all those hundreds of men undressing you with their hungry eyes.

At eleven o'clock at night we are driving downtown. Makrant, an old friend of me, plays in a movie, for which a dance and singing scene on the stairs before the central library will be shot tonight. Twenty young men are dancing on the stairs. I get an idea for a scene for my film. A dance scene with leprosy sufferers and other mutilated bodies that are crawling in the streets here.

Big lamps are burning and the audience (only men) is crowded round the set. From time to time a policeman hits them away with a stick if it gets too bad.

Makrant, one of the stars, receives us in his air-conditioned bus. Immediately we get a plate of food on our lap. After that the shooting.

It is the complete chaos and lack of safety regulations, in any case the lack of all regulations that I find so appealing here. Because amidst all the chaos they are making something and everyone just goes for it. Everywhere there are cables, lamps and very many people.

When we drive back, hours later, through the now empty streets I notice that they are not empty at all. Everywhere, on the pavements, under trees and on benches there are people sleeping under a piece of cloth or a blanket. On a piece of cardboard or without anything.

29 November 1999

Everything goes wrong. All the appointments for the morning are cancelled. We go out shopping, to do something at least. I want to have a bag from which I can secretly film. We buy a bag, the shoemaker (a man in the street with a knife, a needle and thread) makes a nice hole in it. Later I also sew an elastic system in it so that the camera cannot move. After that Paolo practises with it. Because I really want to go to places where we'd better not film.

We take the train to go to our appointment for the afternoon. I had forgotten how crowded they are. And it wasn't even rush hour. Everything presses and pushes in the women compartment. And all those women, how poorly dressed they may be, are wearing gold. Gold in their ears and their noses. Gold on their fingers and their toes. Gold around their necks and arms. Thousands of colours of waving pieces of cloth and gold. I look outside through the open windows and doors and see the slums, the garbage and the open sewer.

Fortunately Paolo also gets out from the men compartment when we arrive at the station. We take a rickshaw. We are sitting for half an hour in the exhaust fumes. But I am back in India. Finally landed.

Makrant has arranged an appointment with the vagrant at the temple for the afternoon. And it is a beautiful conversation. Suddenly I realise that we all can become vagrants. Once he had 'everything', a wife, a house and a good job.

He speaks English fluently, a Muslim from Kashmir. Once it went wrong in his life. And now he is here, he lives in a slum next to a school for vagrant children. He has not washed himself

in months or years. And then all of a sudden this beautiful man who is sitting next to me starts to cry and so do I. He really touches me deeply.

Later on he tells very shyly that he has read his horoscope this morning and he was going to have a visitor, something which has never happened before.

That evening we are having dinner with Govind Menon, the most recalcitrant director of the young generation. He comes directly from the edit room to the restaurant. He has just finished the final editing of his new film. He is so excited, so happy and hyper.

His most recent music clip is banned nation-wide, it is too extreme. I talk with him about transvestites and transsexuals in Bombay. There are many of them, but they are difficult to approach. I would like to do an interview with one of them. He tells about the hierarchy. About the customs and regulations. He has done research into this for years. He has penetrated quite far into this scene because his biggest dream is to make a documentary about this incredibly closed world. With its own police and own administration of justice. With its own queens and princesses. Own rituals, initiations, castrations and total emasculation.

30 November

We have been at a school that was started by a group of women for the children of their domestics. And which has grown into two classes with little children in the age of 4, 5 and 6 years. They are all volunteers, except for the teacher.

It is really downtown. In an expensive quarter with a lot of offices. The school is on a roof of a block of flats. A real space was too expensive. It is for one part in the open air and for another part in a sort of indistinct space between the elevators. But is wonderfully cool, although we have to bend down so we don't bump with our heads against the low beams. First I talk to a little boy (6 years). His clothes are his biggest possession. He sees his father two to three times a year. He still works in the village where they are coming from. He lives with his brother, sister and mother in a slum between the blocks of flats in this neighbourhood.

The teacher hasn't an easy life either. She has to travel for two hours to get to her class. She is living in council housing. Many people, everyone has a little room and they share one toilet with 50 people. Sadness radiates from her, but also the gold around her neck.

When we get outside, beggars are eating in front of the block of flats. Somewhere in the building someone has died or was born. In that case you feed the beggars. A respectable woman hands out food in the burning sun, standing at the side of the road.

I don't know why, but every day the conversations seem to come back in one way or another to sex and intimacy. Not during the interviews and not direct. But if you continue talking for a while with young people the issue comes always up. And it is also the biggest taboo here. You do not touch each other. No hand, no kiss on the cheek. Nothing. In the theatre and film world they are a bit more open. But not really. You do not show your feelings. For me this is quite difficult, and I constantly make mistakes.

The last interview of today is in a house with golden doorknobs and golden taps.

We ring the doorbell. We are shocked. Everything shines and glitters. It is a kitsch palace. I interview the lady of the house.

One of my questions is: "Tell me every thing you have to do when you want to have rice".

Her answer was of course, "I call the servant".

But what if there are no servants.

No servants.

No.

I will go to the kitchen and will try to cook it myself.

But there is no more rice. What do you do?

Wait until the servants are back.

Her bedroom is gigantic, just as those of her children. But the most extreme is her bathroom. A very large jacuzzi before a large window with draperies. Golden washbasins and taps. All the walls are painted with Roman ruins. The doors are surrounded by a sort of fake pillars. I ask her if she has ever seen the inside of a hovel. She replies "maybe". Because she always catches a glimpse of them when she is driving past in the car. I want to ask her to come with me tomorrow, but she is actually too stupid. You might just as well stay here, nice and comfortably in your golden cage.

Bombay is getting more beautiful and more ugly every day.

1 December 1999

Today we are going to the slums where we drove past earlier this week. We are going to look around and ask questions. I am a bit nervous. I feel like an intruder. And of course I am. I ask a lot of them, a conversation in their house and unprepared.

There we are, standing between a group of people who want or won't. An open sewer flows along the slums. A boy is sitting next to it. He takes his clothes off, pees before his door and starts to wash himself. Clean en dirty is being mixed up. But everything is being mixed up in every image that I see here in Bombay.

Lorries are driving through the narrow street. There are always thick diesel fumes. Imagine it; long streets, very lightly twisting, with a row of houses on both sides. All adjoining each other. Right up to each other. Just everywhere. Absolutely no space in between them. And, directly in front of them a trench with the breadth of around 20 centimetres, filled with pee, shit and water. You easily step over it. Now! But what about during the monsoon.

The first conversation that I have is with a man of around 25. We are sitting on the ground. Ants are walking all over the floor. In all sizes. The walls are made of board. Once they were whitewashed and decorated with blue spots. A television is standing on the only stool in the little room of 2 by 4. Now it appears that there is another road behind this house. Inside the house it is full of exhaust fumes. My throat is sore. My eyes are burning. In the little house next to it they are scrubbing the floor, but the water just flows into this house from under the partition wall. I move up a bit so that I won't get a wet bottom. At the top of the wall you can also look into the neighbour's room.

Not that you can hear anything. That's impossible because of the noise of the cars. In the room there is a wobbly ladder tied up against the wall to a hole in the ceiling. There is another room above it. The man was born here and he wants to die here. This is what he knows. At the end of our conversation a tipsy woman enters the little house.

The next little house we are going to is in a sidestreet. On my way over there I pass by a little house of 1 metre by 2 metres. A family is eating inside, sitting on the ground. There is not one, but there are many of these kind of houses. Mostly a part of the kitchen is in the street. Some buildings consist of four floors. But altogether their height is not more than 4 or 5 metres.

We enter a little house. 2 by 3 metres. A high bed has been built in it. And the kitchen is on a table. So empty as the other house was, so full is it here. Things and stuff everywhere. There is also a television here. Everything is shaking when the train thunders past. Not half a metre

from us. I feel the pull through the waving plastic. This woman only has lived here for 15 years. She sometimes wishes to live somewhere else, but knows that this is never going to happen.

I see a ladder going up and ask after our talk if Paolo may also see their upper floor. I wait downstairs and let the camera do its work. And while I am waiting I see someone sitting under the bed. I ask who it is. She brushes this aside as not important. I ask it again. I cannot see very well who it is. I call Nameeta and let her ask it. She does not want to say it, but after some insistence and the promise that she won't tell it to us, she tells that her husband's concubine lives there. When I hear this my heart stops beating for a moment. A house of 2 by 3 with a father, a mother, four children and under the bed lives the concubine. And when Paolo returns it appears that there are one or two families living above them. With television and kitchen fires. In a little room of 1.5 metre height. I get an idea for a scene. A little house where everywhere someone is living; in every cupboard, box or suitcase.

We go to the next house. At the end of the street. This time bigger than the other ones. 3 by 4. A stone wall from a building where it is built against functions as its back. It feels almost luxurious here. A curious little mouse is pacing forth and back on the edge of the wall. The woman has 8 children from 4 different men. Sometimes she became a widow and sometimes she divorced. It's not really clear to me. The television is on and there is a programme about Hollywood.

Most of the people who live here once came here from Bangladesh and Calcutta. All illegal. And there is not much future for them. The strange thing is that the weird wealth of yesterday gave me a much more oppressive feeling. An existence like that seems to be much more pointless.

I don't know what I want anymore and what must become of all this. Indians are no good talkers.

I don't get enough from the interviews. They talk round the answers. And they are not able to permit themselves the liberty to give their thoughts free play for just one second. Because in that case, yes, what... There are all these not told stories that I see passing me by under the heaps of scrap.

In the afternoon I try for the umpteenth time to send my letter about the last few days, but again it doesn't work. The only thing that I can do is retype it, I think. Somehow or other a computer error has crept in my document and I can't mail it because of this. I will see if I still have time this evening. I have already seen so much pointlessness today that I probably also will survive something as contemplative as retyping a letter.

At the end of the afternoon we visit one of the best-known photographers in Bombay. His name is Shilvasa. He has a fantastic studio by the sea. On the third floor of an old building. Here I would like to live. He has a large line of a red powder on his forehead. It's quite difficult to keep the conversation going. He speaks very softly and answers every question with another question. Or he does as if he does not understand it. After the interview I ask him if I may see his photographs. Most of them with big Bollywood stars. Slowly he relaxes. We are now talking with each other as artists. He shows also his more recent work, very spiritual graphic work. I discover that he is a sort of a new guru. Who is publishing a book for his followers. Finally the conversation is getting exciting. We are squatting on the ground and are whispering with each other. No one is able to hear us anymore. We are talking about his work and about my work. About the similarities and about making use of nicking. What I am doing

now. Nicking images and impressions that I don't understand at all. But of which I feel that they are going to bring me somewhere.

And now at home again, it is evening. The captain is getting drunk slowly in his own room, Paolo has gone for a walk and I try to adjust my tactics. India is India. I don't get it. Memories of the time that I lived in Japan come back to me. Africa and Europe are much closer to each other. Look much more like each other. But here. I feel as if I am stuck in a tangle of wool trying to find the beginning of the thread. Or not? Should I just look at the tangle of wool from different sides!

But, through all of this I am beginning to fall in love with Bombay. The city with thousand and one faces.

2 December 1999

How should I describe today? Too big, too much.

Let's start at the beginning.

I am here for a week now. The weather is great, it is winter. During the day it is 32 C degrees, blue skies and everything is still green because of the monsoon. During the night 26. It could not be better.

We are driving to a quarter with only council housing. Called the 'chawls'. In the time of the English they were also used as a prison. And as a sort of relic of that time there are still bars in all the rooms. And no windows.

On the first floor we have an appointment with one of the residents. A woman of 61. It is a small room. 4 by 5. There is a very large bed on high legs. We are sitting on this bed.

Nameeta, the woman and I. There is a spotless kitchen and a sort of a water place in a corner behind a cupboard. During the interview I find out that the bed is never used. The bed is for the eldest son of the house. He works in a factory a bit further down and he seldomly comes home. No one uses the bed. Even not to sit on it during the day. It is just like the best room in old Dutch farms. Rarely being used.

But where are you sleeping?

On the ground!

What are you sleeping on?

On a plastic woven mat.

And with how many are you sleeping there?

With six of us.

I look at the little plastic mat on the floor. If we go inside somewhere we always take our shoes off. But only now I understand why. I thought it was because it is so terribly dirty outside. But no. We are walking half of the time right on their place to sleep.

They are living in a corridor with around 20 small rooms. In fact it is a sort of student flats. At the end of the corridor there are three toilets for men and three for women. In the morning and at night they have to stand in line for at least 15 minutes to go to the loo. And for 50 years already. Because that's how long she has lived here. Her parents have lived here and so will her children.

We are driving a few streets further down, past buildings that look like barracks. 4 floors. The cleaning woman of Nameeta's family lives here. She is a disfigured woman. Her face is completely crooked. Her mouth is on one side of her face and on the other side she does not have an ear, except for a sort of indistinct lobe that grows out of her head.

Her story is a completion to the story of the woman with whom we have talked just before. The building is exactly the same. They have lived her for generations too. And it passes from parents to children. She was born here. In the room next to the communal toilets. It smells indoors. But I don't think she smells it.

Nameeta's mother has told us that it is very difficult to get personnel from this area after 4 o'clock in the afternoon. She thought this was because they all wanted to watch soaps on the television. But no. There is only water between 4 and 7 here. And they need almost these whole three hours to gather enough of the slowly trickling water to be able to wash and give food to the 6 people of the family who are also living in this tiny room.

There is no bed at all here. And no mat either. They are sleeping on a piece of cloth on the floor. She, her brother and his wife and their children. And when they have guests they are sleeping on the roof of the house. A flat roof covered with tar.

It doesn't matter where we come. In every hovel there is always a television. Here also.

We are driving and walking a bit through the quarter. It is dirty. Really dirty. Everywhere there are high layers of filth. Not really open sewers here, but deep, filthy gutters with waste water. Chickens and goats and very many children are walking around. And actually, also very many adults.

I want to talk to a shopkeeper who lives in his shop. Very often I see shopkeepers who are closing up their shops and shove the merchandise aside so that their family can eat and sleep there, in the shop.

We arrive at a very small candy store. One meter depth, two width. Completely filled with tins with candy and salty biscuits. There is a hole in the wall to the back. There he lives. I already want to bend down, but we can also walk round the back. Before the door there are at least twenty pairs of shoes. We enter into a sort of a long narrow room. Two width. Just as the shop. And a room with a length of a meter or 7 that is constructed from corrugated iron. There are two rooms. The first room is the kitchen. On the floor there are 4 people sleeping on jute sacks. We go through an opening and arrive in the space behind the shop. Here there are also all sorts of people on pieces of cloth. Everyone wakes up and they look up startled. Whites in their house.

The owner has to support these twenty fellow-villagers, partly family, with his little shop. And then there are still his wife and children who live at home in the village, thousands of kilometres away. But how, for heaven's sake. What are they eating, what does he earn. Such a shop can only hardly keep one family alive. How this crowd.

I get a bit confused because of all the impressions. It is so much. So incredible. I am looking for a clue to understand it.

After the lunch in Nameeta's house she shows us a couple of music video's she has directed and produced.

And for the people who have never seen anything from India before. It is a mixture of styles. Also called 'masala'. The word 'masala' means mix or mixture. Someone sings. Then suddenly follows a shot in a merry-go-round in Moscow. Then again a dancing couple of the Bolstoi ballet that dances next to the singer in the park. And then the singer completely alone in the snow. And he sings while the grass around him stays green.

They also use the term 'masala' for their food. An always changing stew in which you can always find back a number of fixed ingredients. Namely 5 spices. Pepper, cardamon, cummin and two other spices of which I don't know the European name. Fried in oil. Besides meat, chicken or whatever they often also add garlic, onions and ginger.

The popular Indian film is also called 'masala'. And again, this is also a mixture. And also according to a fixed receipt. Some fighting, some romance, tears, a bad guy, a hero, 8 songs, some humour, a little bit of God and religion and family, some more humour and a lot of melodrama.

Suddenly I see a little clue for my ignorance and lack of understanding. Bombay is also 'masala', the same kind of mixture as their food and their films.

A mix of religions, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains (a sort of Hindus), Buddhists, Zoroastrians or also called Parsis (our landlord is a Parsi), Sikhs and Jews.

A mixture of cultures from all states. Mainly people from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Kerala, Punjab, Sind, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. But also from Iran, China and Africa. All with their own rituals and habits with regard to food, clothing, celebrations, marriages and funerals, et cetera.

A mixture of languages. Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Konkani, Malayalam, Punjabi and English. The first two languages are spoken the most. And among the intellectuals and in the film world it is English.

Suddenly I understand something from the abundance of images and impressions that I have got. Bombay is a mixture. A complete mixture. But how can this go so well. Okay, there have been riots between the Muslims and the Hindus in the beginning of the nineties. But most of the time everything goes quite well.

Until now I have not seen any accident in this chaos while we already have been driving for six days now, back and forth in our car in the completely congested streets. Of course accidents do happen. But in Harare I saw accidents all the time. Everybody seems so relaxed. Everything seems safe. There are hardly any murders or violent crimes.

The next conversation is with one of the most popular female soap stars of this moment. The heroine of many female residents in the slums. She lives in a very small house. She has not been a star long enough to be able to afford a big house in Bombay. It is just as expensive here as it is in New York or Tokyo. Food costs nothing but the prices of houses are astronomical.

It's a very western interior. It could have been a house in Italy. With people like her, who do a lot of interviews, it is difficult to have an interesting conversation. Very superficial.

We drive to the north. To the next conversation. An hour and a half in a traffic-jam.

Everybody is hooting, but at the same time they are all staring resignedly.

We talk to an emancipated female writer of film scripts. Very western. Very independent.

Someone who could easily be a friend. I ask her why she thinks everyone can live here. It is the Hindi religion with the theory of the karma. Your fate is destined by God. And you reconcile yourself to this fate. That fate is reserved for you in this life. Maybe it will be better in your next life. But maybe not. You live with what you have got. I feel very far from this. Really very far to be honest.

We take the elevator down, she lives on the sixth floor. The people who are working in the road construction are cooking outside in the street. They do not have houses. They are 'living' on a piece of plastic by the roadside. In this case, the big motorway from Bombay to Poona. Cars and lorries are thundering past. I have a sore throat from the exhaust fumes. Suddenly I decide that I want to interview one of these people. Nameeta does not know if she will understand their language, but there is a woman who speaks Marathi. We turn our car around and use the headlamps of the car for light during the interview. It is a very short conversation. There is an aggressive atmosphere around these men. It is the first time I experience

something like this here. The tension and the very tense atmosphere of Johannesburg come back to me. They want money from us so they can go drinking. What a terrible miserable life these people lead. Twice a year they hitchhike to Bombay, which takes them two weeks. Because they have been recruited for the road construction. They are carrying stones and buckets filled with mud the whole day long. The men and the women. And after three months they have 50 guilders left, of which they have to feed the rest of the family when they are back home. And here they have nothing on them but their sari and a little pan.

We drive home. Overwhelmed by impressions and questions. More and more questions. How does everything work here. How is it organised? Who takes care of the water, the roads, how are the houses planned. How, what and why.

It is late already. I am going to sleep. Tomorrow there is another really busy day. As long as I don't get immune to the images.

3 December 1999

Early in the morning I send a fax to Amitabh Bachchan with a request for an interview. The biggest superstar from India. He is end fifty now. Ten Marlon Brando's and John Travolta's together can't compete with his popularity. He is the hero of everyone above 35. Wherever we come, in the slums or with the higher class. Amitabh is the hero.

Nameeta is ill. She thought she had a malaria attack last night, but it appears to be a serious laryngitis. So, she stays in bed and her colleague Anirban accompanies us to film city. He has a guest, a female friend from Germany. A cultural anthropologist who has just done research in the South on women's rituals for two months. As from the first moment we don't get along. She is angry because I don't give money to the poor people in the slums when I interview them. She does not understand at all what I am doing in her India. I let her blow off steam a bit.

We are driving to film city in one of the northern suburbs of the city. And I have a conversation with a cameraman.

Film City is a gigantic park area on the outskirts of Bombay with studio's and outdoor sets everywhere. He gives me some very interesting addresses of people in Calcutta who I would like to meet. Among others Mr. Mrinal Sen. I don't know him. I've insulted the German woman again because he appears to be one of the most important side streams directors of India.

Now we are even further away from the centre. It already will be at least an hour back by train. And by car at least two hours. And we are still in Bombay.

I arrive in a modern council housing complex. Here I am going to meet two men who are living here. In small single-room flats. They are both the same age. Both from one of the northern states. They both came to Bombay with one big dream, getting famous. One wanted to become a singer, the other an actor. They are both still single although they are already 35 (men marry here around the age of 25). The singer has just got his breakthrough, but the actor has become a fat alcoholic wreck after years of trying. Nobody gets a longer tenancy than one for 11 months in their complex. After that you have to leave. So the owner can do whatever he wants. And every time they move to another flat in the same complex and get a new 11-months tenancy. So the rooms really look shabby and bare. Nobody feels like doing anything to make the rooms look better.

After that a conversation with a rickshaw driver. Again a very tiny house. Filled with children and mosquitoes. It strikes me again that the people here do not have any real sense of time. He quietly says: I came to live in Bombay 30 years ago. And then after two other questions it appears that he is 25-years-old and that he came here with his parents when he was 8-years-old. I never know exactly what is true. Time is especially related to events. The independence from the British in 1947, the big strikes in the textile industry in 1982/83 and the riots between the Hindus and Muslims in the beginning of the nineties.

Then the most beautiful interview of the day. It is around the corner from the rickshaw man. A very small alley. One meter width. A ditch in the middle, the open sewer. Little stone houses and businesses on both sides. And suddenly my pen falls out of my hand. Right into the ditch. I have no other pen with me, and since I am writing things down all the time, I decide to grab in the ditch to save my pen. The shivers run down my spine. But damned, I can't write with the pen anymore because it got wet. And then it appears that I can buy a new pen just around the corner. If I only had known that.

We visit an 'ironer'. Someone who does other people's ironing. It smells deliciously of ironing. A space of 3 by 5, with a partition wall in the middle. The front part is completely filled with piles of coloured laundry and a table on which he does his ironing. The back part is a sort of a little kitchen. It is the first man I meet who has dreams. And desires. Who has ambitions. I already started to think that the lower class didn't have any dreams or ambitions. That everyone had given themselves over into the hands of Shiva or another God. But he has built his house of his dreams here. A house with four real walls of stone. Something he had always wanted to have. He is the first person I meet who has no television and he goes to school in the evening. He wants to become a teacher. He is also the first person who gives another answer to the question: "How do you put out a fire in your house" than "I throw some water on it". He has a bucket with a mixture of sand and ash. Just in case. He also wants to save the clothes of his customers when there will be a big fire. For the first time not that resignation, that indifference towards everything in life. It really cheers me up.

After having tried to interview a Hindu priest, which didn't work, we are going home by train. It is 7 o'clock, dark and the rush hour in the direction of the centre will be over by now. Already one kilometre before we reach the station we have to wriggle our way through the enormous crowd that is coming out of the station. All just back from their jobs in the city. We are going to the centre so the train will be not so full. Well, we're wrong. Everything is people. The whole station. Each platform. Even on the rails. People everywhere. Thousands, thousands of people. I am tall here and that's why I still can breathe a bit. When the train comes, I enter the women's compartment and Paolo the men's compartment. I really have to fight my way in. While other women are fighting to get out. It is quite hard. And the train starts to ride again long before everyone has got in. I am completely stuck between hundreds of brightly coloured sarees. Loud purple, pink, blue, yellow, all colours. And everyone has gold around their necks, in their ears, their arms and in their noses.

How will I ever be able to make meaningful images of these enormous crowds. How am I going to tell a story with this. There are so many things. So horribly many things. And I still can't look at it in the abstract. But it will come. First I have to drown into this image.

4 December 1999

This should have been a very busy day, but everything went different. Actually, I was quite okay with this.

I only did one interview. With Aziz Mirza. One of the most important 'masala' kitsch directors of this moment. I knew him from the last time. It was a very nice conversation. But actually mostly because until now he is the first man I have met here who really loves his wife. He is Muslim, she is Hindu. When they got married forty years ago this was absolutely not accepted. A marriage out of love as well as between different religions. All those marriages here seem so practical, so calculating. There is no romance and not much eroticism. But Aziz is different. He radiates when he is talking about his wife. I think that's beautiful. And I also think it's beautiful when someone who has made commercial films for years, he is almost 60 now, still wants to make a creative and alternative film. And he wants to make films that are more daring. It's only a pity that he has not done this before.

After that Paolo and I have prepared a gigantic Italian meal for 12 people. I felt like cooking and doing something else, so I threw my whole 'cookery heart' into it. And for dessert we are going to a nightclub. Where I saw and heard the worst DJ of all times.

5 December

We are going to Dharavi, the biggest slum area in Asia, for a whole day. There are living more than one million people here. But through the years it has got a sort of a permanent character. There are shopping streets. And everywhere there are small occupations and businesses in the little houses.

Almost every house has an extra floor built on it. Not only because of the lack of space, but also because the water is 1.5 metre higher during the monsoon. And this means that all houses are under water for a couple of weeks each year.

I have three guides with me. The first one, a friend of Nameeta, brings me to the second one, an acquaintance of him. And he takes us to his cousin who lives here.

The first conversation is in a very small house, again with too many people. And I hear that they also have a tenancy for 11 months. And then they also have to move to another flat. For years and years already. And that's why I see a few suitcases standing in almost every house (here 3). And if I wanted to buy their house it would cost me \$ 15,000. One room of 2.5 by 3.5. No windows, an open sewer in front of the door. No toilet or water supplies. And there is only one sheet of corrugated iron as a wall between the neighbours and me. This is Bombay.

I ask who is the most important man in their quarter. It appears to be a priest or prayer in the same street. We are allowed to talk to him. His community, around a hundred families has chosen him as a representative of this little area. He has an altar in his house. Here he prays and worships the gods. But he also does this at people's houses by appointment.

The area is very large. But except for the fact that there is an open sewer in every street, and for the fact that the electricity cables are hanging in big bundles of loose wires, and that the infrastructure has been installed years later and that's why the water pipes are lying on the street in stead of under the ground, I still think it is a pleasant place to be. It reminds me of the little fishing villages in Italy and Spain. Very small streets. But most of them are smaller than in Europe. Usually only 50 centimetres to one metre wide.

We are wondering about endlessly through this area with our guides. We talk a bit here and there. There is one communal toilet block for about 80 houses. But for many people this is too far. So people often crap on the streets or in the ditch in front of the door. But this does not happen only here. Everywhere in the city people are crapping. It's really filthy.

Between all these little houses that have been built right next to each other, they are building blocks of flats. And everybody wants to live there.

We climb up in a block of flats under construction. Parts of it are already occupied. And from the roof we can see the whole area. Very gloomy and grey.

We pass by an open shop where some meat is hanging. I ask if Paolo may film here. And they immediately slaughter a goat for us. From a room in the back they fetch a goat. They cut its neck. It is a bit strange to see life flowing from something. Something becomes dead.

They butcher it very carefully and 15 minutes later someone comes in to buy that meat.

And if the money disappears in the drawer and the buyer walks away with his plastic bag with meat, the goat has suddenly become money. And just a while ago it was still alive.

We continue on our way. It is a very large area. We have to cross a small part of rubbish dump and when I walk through it in my sandals I feel how the stinking moisture is coming up. The shopping streets are very wide. The streets with the houses are very small. But every once in a while you arrive at a little square. Where it is suddenly very bright after all those dark alleys. And here there are all kinds of people busy with their activities. Bakers, hairdressers, leather-workers, metalworkers et cetera.

Sometimes very clean and sometimes terribly dirty. On one of those squares in between the houses they are drying a sort of cakes in the sun on some wicker baskets that are standing in between the stinking mud and open sewers. You can only get sick of this, you think. But well. And of course people everywhere. Time and time again, so many people.

We are driving to a very special interview. The usual images in the streets. Hunchbacks and transvestites, naked children and cows, colourful saris and men with turbans. And this time also a funeral. An open stretcher. The body covered in a piece of cloth, with flowers on it.

We arrive at one of the eldest and biggest colonial villas of the city. The official residence of the municipal commissioner, someone more important than the mayor. We talk for a long time because apart from the usual questions I want to learn how the water system works, the roads, and what they are planning to do about air pollution. And the street refuse. And overpopulation. All the things of which you do not understand how it works and can work. His greatest worry is the overpopulation. The city can't handle it anymore.

Everything comes apart at the seams. And when you say come apart here that really means come apart. Everything cracks and is on the verge of total breaking down. And still everyone wants to live here because you can become rich here.

The city of dreams. The golden city.

I ask if I may see his gigantic house. He leads us around. Most of the rooms are 60 square metres or more. But he is also here temporarily. His tenancy can even be shorter than 11 months. As long as he will keep it up in politics. And so he also has his suitcases here. Only in his case it is a whole room filled with suitcases.

6 December 1999

And today it was such an extreme day again that I sometimes start to doubt myself.

Early in the morning I went for a swim in the Breach Candy Club, 5 minutes from my home. Because the whole time I am sitting in cars and cabs. From one place to another. I have to move a bit.

Then the first conversation of the day. With the celebrity bimbo of the city. She has three weekly columns on food in several newspapers.

Her tactics, according to Nameeta. She enters a restaurant and orders everything on the menu. Then she takes one bite of every dish and her guests have to eat the rest.

When I talk to her she is wearing very short pants; she has just finished her aerobics for the day. She lives with her man and son with her mother-in-law. It appears that nothing in this house is hers. While she has already lived here for eighteen years. "No, if I would decorate the house myself I would do it completely different, I think it's all very ugly". But she lives here. So, she doesn't seem to mind.

The more I talk, the more people I meet, and the more incomprehensible I think the Indians are. With all the interviews that I did in Africa I could identify myself with them. People talked about their feelings; at least I understood a little bit what was going on. But here my question marks become bigger and bigger. In the east everything is so different from the west. And if you realise that Bombay, Singapore and Hongkong are the most product orientated and goal orientated cities of the east.

What I don't understand is everyone's constant concern about what one person thinks of the other. This determines more than half of most lives. Many people and a gigantic social control.

We are going to Kamathipura, Bombay's red-light district. Everyone is a bit worried about us. Nameeta's father asks his chauffeur to go with us. Who refuses to leave because we do not have any protection with us.

Kamathipura is the most dangerous quarter in the city. 14 streets numbered from one to fourteen. There is a lot of police, almost on every street corner. The busiest police station of Bombay gives us the protection of a personal policeman. It appears that last year a film crew of the BBC went into the district without protection and they were completely beaten up, camera with accessories included. And they could just run to the police station to bring themselves into safety.

Our agent obviously enjoys his guide tour. He walks in front of us with his bamboo truncheon (no one has a revolver here). I have to say in which street I want to enter. I say, just hoping for the best. Street number 12.

The streets are filthy. The slums we saw yesterday were a paradise compared to this. No pavement, a lot of goats and very many stinking heaps of garbage on the streets. Young women everywhere, in colourful saris. Some of them are lying a bit lazy on a sort of stretchers in front of the brothels. All houses are brothels. Mostly with 4 or 5 women. And in front of every so many houses there are men playing cards or talking.

The policeman pushes away a curtain. And walks inside. A woman is sleeping. It appears to be the madam. She is overwhelmed, just like us. She shows her brothel.

Behind the curtain there is a sort of waiting room with formica green marble walls and a pink ceiling (2 by 2). Besides her, also an old woman and a young man are sleeping here. At the same time it's a sort of kitchen. And behind it there are two little rooms. Only a single bed fits in here. The cribs. In between the waiting room and these small rooms there is a small open grating. There is no ventilator or something like that. And now, in the winter, it is already 35 degrees during the day.

The policeman does not make it very easy to have a real conversation. And it's even more difficult because there is also a translator. The madam keeps repeating that she wants to stop with the business and wants to return to her children and husband who live in the country.

I ask the policeman to bring us to whores who are proud of their job. He brings us to a brothel filled with whores from Nepal. They are proud women. But we are absolutely not allowed to

film. No photographs or sound recording. Our secret camera needs more time to focus. So I write everything down. But after the fifth question they get angry. How on earth do I dare to ask them questions about their dreams. They do not have any dreams. It's horrible here. They do not have any memories because they want to forget everything. There is no tomorrow because there is even no today. A very hectic discussion starts that I miss completely. We are leaving again.

We walk along the only brothel with air conditioning.

The aids percentage in this district is one out of two, and there are working around 4000 women and children here. Mostly bought from their parents with the idea that they were going to become housemaids in the city. And everybody is illiterate.

The policeman takes us to the biggest brothel. We climb two very narrow stairs to the second floor. Everything is gray marble. We wake the manager from his afternoon nap. We are sitting in a room of 5 by 5, completely gray marble. With on one side a gigantic red couch. It looks like a mortuary. The door opens and one by one the girls shuffle in, still half asleep. They are standing in line against the cold gray wall. Nine girls in a row. We may choose. What do you mean, choose! It is horrible to see this.

The owner comes in. A young guy of 30. We are allowed to interview him and one of his girls. But no shooting and photographs. He describes his profession as 'working in service'. His wife does not know that this is his job.

He picks one of the women. Probably one of whom he does not expect any problems. She whispers. She is afraid. The boss is sitting out of earshot. And she tells a lot. A horrible story about how she started to work in this district as a child of eleven years old. Bought from her parents. Her parents who still believe that she is a housemaid. She has got married in the meantime to a husband who has beaten her up for years and she has fled from him. But where could she go. She stayed in the district. So she came to work here for this man in the hope of a sort of security. But her husband found her again and comes every day to get her money and beats her up according to his state of drunkenness. On average she has 5 customers per day. And never uses a condom. But when I ask here what the biggest difference in her life would have been if she would have been born as a man, she says. I would like to have studied.

We all feel a bit sick when we leave, except for the policeman. He thinks he is the ideal guide. And in fact, he is.

We are going to street one. The street with the transsexuals, also called 'you-no's'. A broader street than the others. Here there are houses with a sort of walkway on the upper floor. But apart from that just a dirty, paintless, completely run-down, busted and degenerated as the rest of the quarter. On the street there are only men, and on the walkways the 'women'. Terribly prissy and very hysterical. We try to get an interview, but they are known to do only things for money. And I do not feel like paying \$100 for his/her answers. We negotiate with her in a house. Where the cribs are only separated by some pieces of cloth. And where one by one the made-up beauties are turning up. The madam herself is sitting on a bed next to the entrance as a kind of watchdog. A hard, black layer of henna covers her hairs. We are negotiating for a very long time, but are not able to reach a deal.

A bit further down we try it again. But here the MAMA as she is called is not at home and they are not allowed to do anything.

We are going back to the police station. A 70-years-old colonial building with a lot of small rooms. I have an interview here with the police commissioner and after that I get a whole

guided tour, but when I ask if I may also see the prisoners and interview them I have reached the limits of what is allowed.

The problems here are so different from our problems. There are hardly any firearms or drugs. Again the biggest problem is the overpopulation and the fact that all those people are doing something (anything) to get a plate of food.

I read in today's paper the week report on crime in the city when I am back at home that night.

Two murders. One solved.

One attempted murder.

Six cases of extortion, 3 solved.

60 motor thefts, one solved.

One rape, solved.

Nine robberies, none solved.

Five cases of housebreaking during the day, none solved.

42 cases of housebreaking at night, six solved.

Four cases of pickpocketing, none solved.

124 other cases of theft, 15 solved.

71 wounded, 39 cases solved.

Then another 162 cases of crime.

And I have to laugh. This is all for 16 millions of people packed together into 65 square kilometres.

7 December 1999

We have to leave early. To visit an English lady who has already lived in Bombay for 35 years. I also still have to pay my rent, plane tickets and train tickets and I am walking around with more than an average yearly salary.

The English woman is married to an Indian. They live in one of those big, almost palace like old colonial houses. Surrounded by gigantic contemporary tower blocks.

She has demanded two things: that we have to be exactly on time because her time is very valuable and that we will talk about her charitable work in the slums.

The elevator up leads to a living room. We are walking from one room to another, accompanied by a butler. All rooms are completely filled with beautiful statues, paintings, Persian carpets, antiques and I don't know what. We are dropped off in a sort of study. And are exactly on time, on the dot. After ten minutes madam walks past, but waves that she is still busy for a while. A bit later once more. A sort of game of who is the most important, or so. I could not care less. Everything goes slowly here. Nothing is on time and I just remain calm. We looking a bit at her things and enjoy ourselves.

The conversation is nice. Except for the fact that her charitable work only consists of a sort of an honorary membership of a society for poor and indigent children. In fact, she has never been in the slums. She is lying about the water supply in her house. She says that this quarter only has water for two hours a day. But we live in the same quarter and we have water the whole day. So, we think it's a fishy story. But it colours nice.

Then to the very edge of downtown. Here works the most well-known and famous chef of Bombay in a hotel. A great conversation because he answers each question with a reply that is referring to food or cooking. He is a very successful, passionate workaholic. He has one Thai restaurant, one Mexican restaurant, one Italian and one West-Indian restaurant. Where he

changes the menu's every three months. He is always looking for new dishes. He travels to all these countries to learn the secrets of their cooking and goes to the women at their homes to learn their recipes. He says about his own wife. "I am no romantic, but we were classmates and we like each other". He hardly sees her ever.

He is from a very high caste, although officially that does not stand for something anymore. In former years they had a staff of more than 100 people at home. I think he now has around the same amount of people working in his restaurants. There is only one thing that is very strange about him. And that is that he uses perfume himself. How can you taste food well, when you always have another scent around you. A perfumed chef!!!!

We drive past the Tower of Silence, the place where the Parsies give their deceased back to nature. As far as I know, they are the only ones who let their people be eaten up by the vultures. Nobody is allowed to be present during this.

And you can only suspect the presence of the tower; you cannot really see it.

The corpses first have to rot inside the tower for a few days and then are put on the platform of the tower, where they are eaten up by the vultures and return like this in the quickest way to the cycle of nature.

On the way back to the next conversation I check my email. I have got a rejection for the CineMart. I am angry. During the whole drive to the next conversation I am distracted by my own troubles. I must get it out of my head before I can begin with a new interview. I am glad it is a long drive. But only when I see the man, I forget my disappointment.

He is a very well-known guru. Very many people from throughout the whole country consult him about decisions and other problems. He prays and dances and meditates for you. For one moment I think about it to ask him to do a dance for, I mean against, my refusal for the CineMart. But I let it go.

It is a wonderful conversation. He thinks that I am deaf because I don't understand all his English. He starts to speak louder and louder to me and almost starts to shout. And his father and mother are sitting in the background. His father, who speaks English, makes comments to his son with almost every question that I ask. In Hindi of course. "No, you must say this or that". It is a very funny looking little man. And the fact that he is constantly asking for attention is just as funny.

We are not even finished yet, when father and son takes us to the temple. And you may film everything. "Yes, there is really so much to see. Our festivals are the most beautiful of the world. You have never seen something like this before, et cetera." We go with them to the temple and promise to come back on Sunday, when there will be a big festival. We will be their guests for the whole day.

We exchange cards. I have so much fun when I read his card. Besides a whole list of other interesting things for which you can approach him, he also is 'adviser for mythological t.v.serials'. And I also must note down his portable phone number in case we might get lost on Sunday. It's great this mixture of west and east. Until now I have rarely met someone that commercial here.

At the beginning of the evening we have an appointment with last time's guru. The photographer who invited us to come to dinner. Well, not much food, but a lot of talking. And again I am surprised about this man. He is so narcissistic.

There he stands before me, making big gestures while he is talking about the film he wants to make. He throws his hands higher and higher in the sky. "I only want to make one film in my life" he says, "one film that equals the qualities of the Bible, the Koran, or the holy book of

the Hindus (?). Well, that sounds promising. I ask him how he sees the God figure in the story. A God figure in a film becomes very easily too artificial, I say. He looks surprised at me. And says "I play the God of course". He wants to play that role because he feels it. Because he thinks he knows how a God feels.

I listen attentively and my stomach's rumbling because I am hungry.
There are so many beautiful people in the world.

8 December 1999

My days are starting to get a sort of rhythm. The whole day we are racing back and forth, meeting people. And then we come home at eight o'clock, half past eight, exhausted. First a long shower. Eat something and reflect on the day with Paolo. And then until midnight in front of the computer. After that I read Greek myths and legends in bed. At least they beat each other up. And they kill without mercy. And at least there is jealousy and conflict. Till I fall asleep, exhausted.

My diary is mainly for myself. I don't want to forget anything of what I experience here. Later on I will need everything of it to make my story.

I can't help it, but today was a great day again.

Today I have rented a car because we are going to New Bombay. A new city that has been built around 20 kilometres away from Bombay. To relieve the city. And to create houses with a little more space and a little more green. Green! Even in New Bombay no one really has a garden. A shared garden in an inner courtyard if they are lucky. But there are more trees along the streets and it is more spacious. And no slums yet.

The middle class lives here. With their ordinary dreams. A little house, a little garden and a play area for the children. And father travels for one and a half-hour back and forth in the traffic jam every day. If you spend a lot of time in traffic-jams, with an open window because of the heat, this is the same as smoking 6 packs of cigarettes in one day.

Nameeta will go to America the day after tomorrow and she still has to make a lot of preparations. Ishaan is the new man who will work with us. And so, also today. He is a colleague of Nameeta, I will miss her. Ishaan is not so sharp, but for the rest very nice. And together with him we pick up our guide for today. An accountant who lives in New Bombay. He has taken the day off to show us around his quarter.

He lives in a "shared family". Something that is very normal here. Living together with your father, mother, brother and his wife and their children and your wife and children. All together in one house. One household. No privacy. Eating together. Praying together. The incomes put together. And when there are any decisions to be made, they are doing this by table conversations. The most difficult decision in their whole life was the decision to move from Bombay to here. They have talked about it for 15 days. Usually it goes faster.

It is a very traditional Hindu family. One of the rooms is the room where they pray. Many people have such a room. Or at least an altar somewhere. Every day before dinner they are praying together in this small prayer room for 20 minutes. Unless you have a very good excuse.

What surprised me the most was that the children do not have their own bedroom. The daughter of 14 still sleeps with her parents in bed. The girl was already fairly mature and I could hardly imagine this situation. But she also told herself that she likes it best to sleep with her father. I got unpleasant thoughts. Her cousin from 13 sleeps also still with his parents and always next to his mother! His brother from 17 just got his first own room. And he is almost an adult.

The marriages of these brothers were both arranged marriages. And the mother-in-law seems to be an absolute tyrant (according to her own son). Now she was just out of town for a couple of days. So the women could wear ankle-length dresses. Because when their mother-in-law is there they have to wear saris, the classical costume for women, which they really hate. His wife, he says, is the ideal woman. She does not complain, she puts everything aside to please him, she accepts her life the way his mother wants it to be and she always is smiling. There is only one thing; she can't cook very well. But anyway, he only likes his mother's cooking. When she would have been my wife, she already would have been out yesterday. And he too. But I also keep smiling while I hear all their stories. I avoid confrontations. And I let the people just tell their stories, I want to hear, hear a lot, that's all.

After that an interview with a young entrepreneur of 24. He also still lives with his parents. Everyone here lives with their parents until they get married, and the eldest son usually for his whole life. He takes over the family. His wife joins the family. This man talks already a bit more easily about his private life than the older people that I have interviewed until now. His mother enters the room during our conversation because she wants to ask something, but he snaps that he is busy now (in Hindi) and she, she waits as a dog against the wall until her dear son is ready. When she finally can say something it appears that she only wanted to ask if we wanted something to drink.

We are going to the central auction halls in Bombay. These halls have been moved one by one from the heart of the city, at the lowest point of the peninsula, to here during the last ten years. Potatoes and onions, grain, vegetables and fruit and spices and sugar.

Bombay is a peninsula, a narrow, small triangle that lies in the sea. There is no ring road around it. All the traffic goes down into the city in the morning and goes back up again to the suburbs at night. All over one narrow piece of land.

We are going to the part with the rice and grains. Between the big buildings there is a very broad passage onto which all the sheds open out. The merchandise is displayed in front of the entrance. Various boxes filled with all sorts of rice and grains are standing on the tables. Behind the tables you can look into the rest of the shed, and there are the high, piled up towers with the merchandise, bags of rice or grain.

From time to time I see a dead rat lying in the corridor. Damn. Not really hygienic with all that food, I think.

I talk to a man whose family has been in the grain trade for 4 generations already. He tells that his son will succeed him. And when your son does not want to do this, I ask him. My guide looks at me as if I am crazy. The only reason why he is working in this trade and where he works for is his eldest son. For no one else.

Yes, yes, I know it. The eldest son gets the bed while the others lie on the ground. The eldest son gets the food while the others watch. The son, the son, the son. It's really sad for that son. And also for his brothers and sisters.

In the shed there are at least 12 women who sieve the grain and the beans. They remove the little stones and the other dirt. Behind that the sacks. Piled up very high. The porters are working here. Also the umpteenth generation. Because even in modern India the castes often remain unchanged.

These men are carrying bags of 100 kg on their heads and build in this way the high towers of sacks. Week after week, year after year. None of these men is really old. I think they must have children at a very young age to keep this up for generations.

We are walking back to the table at the entrance.
There is a bucket filled with water. For the rats, they tell me.
What, for the rats?
Yes, the rats want to drink water, after dinner.
Drinking water after dinner?
Yes, because otherwise they get angry and tear the place completely apart.

But why don't you lay traps in between all those sacks of rice!
No, we are not allowed to kill anyone because of our religion. We consider rats as our partners in business.
I don't understand it at all. And then suddenly I see one of those pearls that I have been looking for. So beautiful that I can hardly believe it. Once more I remember the first days when I already had thought up the title of the film. "Rats and gold".
Here the rats may not die. And of course the rats gnaw through the sacks and eat the rice. They make everything filthy, and I don't know what else. And of course they do not like this. But the rats also have a right to live. And that life just happens to be here. Sometimes it happens that one of the high towers that the porters are building is undermined because the rats have been gnawing. The towers fall over, and it often happens that porters die because a tower falls on them. But this is life. The rat has just as much right on the grain as they have. So if they find a rat's nest between the sacks, and this happens regularly, than the nest is carefully moved. I say, certainly outside? No, to a place, in between their own sacks of rice, a bit further down. I ask and I ask.
But they are all really convinced that it has to happen this way. They take me to a little altar in a room above the shed. And there stands, next to the very well known statue of Ganesa, the god with the elephant's head, this time in silver. A golden statue of a rat. Because they are praying every day. All of them. That the rat will not cause them too much suffering. As it happens the rat is also the official porter of Ganesa. Another reason why you absolutely must not kill a rat.
I know that I will come back here. One way or the other. This story tells me more about India than any other story until now.

We go to the spice market. Everything smells. With every step another scent. Scents that I have never smelled before. Or herbs that I have never seen before and I only recognise because of their scent. Thousands of diverse scents. Divine.
My nose starts to itch because of the peppers and the chillies. I sneeze. And suddenly I notice that everyone around me is sneezing. Sneezing men everywhere. The scents are so heavy and overwhelming. You just cannot stop the tickling in your nose.

After that an interview with the director of the auction. Very quickly because the minister will arrive in fifteen minutes. But they couldn't pass over such a visit from a Dutch filmmaker either. Who knows, maybe their whole auction will appear in the film.
Half the board of directors, who are there anyway, are also present during the conversation with the director. Everyone thinks it is very interesting and they all step in. But I don't write anything down of what they are saying. In my notebook I describe their clothing and how they are sitting and watching. One man looks terribly like a dead pope; I don't know his name. He wears his traditional suit, because of the visit of the minister. But he has put on weight through the years and so his suit has become much too tight. He can hardly breathe. And so more and more buttons open.

After that we go to a complex where old Indians live. They have lived abroad for many years, but they wanted to return to Bombay to spend their old age here. And because they can't live with their children anymore, they have come together in a building. Oh dear, I think.

We drive for a long time. It is in a new quarter in New Bombay. And there it is on the horizon. A gigantic complex. We drive into it, dozens of high, brand new blocks of flats with everywhere classical Greek columns and now still little palms, walled by a high classic fence. Everywhere there are guards in beautiful uniforms. But it looks very empty.

We are looking for the manager. We ask if we can interview someone. A returned Indian. It appears that only 59 of the 1556 flats are occupied. The rest is empty. Once people bought them, but they never really came to live here.

After calling for three quarters of an hour it appears that no one of those 59 is at home. But there are 1200 people working here. Cleaners, gardeners etcetera. And 600 guards. What are they guarding?

It is a ghost town. And then it suddenly appears that all the flats on our way here are also ghost blocks of flats. Air India has already bought 2000 flats for their employees in view of the relocation of the international airport to here. Those are empty now. The same applies to a couple of other companies and to the government. And speculators. And? And so, this is all there, just on 20 kilometres of the biggest housing problem that I have ever seen in my whole life. Where everywhere in the streets people are sleeping under pieces of cloth. Where everywhere little huts are built from plastic bags, where there is no empty square metre. And where the prices of the houses are astronomical. A whole empty quarter. For miles and miles, thousands of empty flats.

Everything is new and beautiful. For the first time since we have been here I see well-painted buildings. Bright colours. Yes, now they are still bright, but maybe if there are people living here in 5 or 10 years everything will be run-down again just like everything else is run-down here. And everything is broke and bare. Except for the people, they bring the colour.

We drive back. For two hours in a traffic-jam. It feels like at least 3 packets of cigarettes.

9 December 1999

What is so beautiful about the senses is that when you go deeply into something you will experience more and more things. At the moment I have this with looking. Every day I move my limits a bit and every day I see something new in exactly the same part of the street where I have walked for two weeks now. Your senses also get used to something and you don't experience it as that extreme anymore. For example, I hardly smell the stench anymore, unless of course I step in a turd.

This morning I suddenly saw a man with a red scarf around his head. He was picking someone's ear. Around the corner I saw another one, and a bit further down again another one. All picking in someone's ear and all with a red scarf around the head. One man poured oil in an ear, another one was busy with a pair of tweezers. Those red rough turbans seemed to be a sort of indication for the profession of 'ear cleaner'. Later that day I also saw them in the city. And each time they had a red scarf on their heads.

It was a very quiet day. Only two conversations. The first one with the court photographer of the film stars. It is a bit of a gay type, who suddenly tells me at the end of the interview that at the age of 50 he is still a virgin. That is very strange, Indians are not that open. I don't know if I must believe it. Many people are making things up or are evasive in the conversations I have with them. They make themselves look better than they really are. That's not bad. I really

don't want to discover something so that it can be put in the gossip papers. I try to look at the whole and I try to look at where it is different.

Later on I have a conversation with a Muslim woman of 60 who is an interior designer. Who runs her own agency. She is very beautiful. She got divorced when she was 29, she is still alone and since then she has mainly worked at her career. She is a rarity. Very independent and strong. She travels a lot. Her house is decorated with furniture she has designed twenty years ago. A sixties style. And completely adjusted to her cats.

There is imitation leather against cat's hairs, imitation leather chairs that have the fluent shape of waves. But all the edges are worn away.

One of my questions is; are you sometimes physically alone. Usually this question is answered in the negative. There is always some staff around or relatives. People are seldom alone here. When I ask it to her, she says, "o yes, very often", "but really alone" I ask her "without any other people in the house?" "There are no other people here. Only the staff." During the whole conversation she says at least thirty times that she is very happy and especially being alone!

We have nothing to do for a few hours because the last interview is cancelled. Paolo and I are going for a swim. The weather is getting colder; it is suddenly becoming winter. In one week the temperature in the daytime has dropped from 35 to 29. And at night even only 22. It's a pity, I love the heat.

Very slowly I am starting to see what I can do. I adjust the questions because I have to formulate things differently. The strange thing is that before I came here I wanted to make a kind of a war film here. And that there is nothing here, really nothing that gives us any reason to want this. But it's still on my mind. A population that is so tolerant and so patient. A population that is so flexible and just accepts and accepts.

In my eyes such a population asks for the opposite. Or am I seduced by the Greek myths now.

I thought we had found a sort of rhythm in our days. But just as always it is immediately broken again.

Tonight we are eating in the Thai restaurant of the chef because Nameeta is going to America and Ishaan will succeed her. We will have to get used to each other and we will have to build up a new sort of rhythm. I am going to miss her.

10 December 1999

It feels as if today was a complete attack on all my senses. I am finished. I feel absolutely crushed.

After the past two weeks and the change of assistant it seemed like a good idea to take a day off. Finally time to change my ticket. And I know from experience that I can do this better at the office of the airline company than by phone.

After that I wanted to show the Crawford Market to Paolo. One of city's the biggest markets. It is 12.30 and we are walking around. It does not look very lively. It is Friday and the big mosque is right next to it. The Muslims are praying at one o'clock. I think that's why it is so quiet. At a quarter to one the shouting from the mosque starts and men come flocking in from every nook and cranny. They quickly cover their heads and when they have nothing with them, there are enough stands with all kinds of caps.

In front of the mosque there are, besides at least a thousand pairs of shoes, also once more the most extravagant creatures of people. Most of the time half-naked, so you can see the deformations better. Lumps everywhere, half limbs or no limbs at all, scales and wounds, without eyes and open harelips.

We are in an area of around one square kilometre. That is completely made up of bazaars, small shops and markets. With in between a few mosques and temples. There are thousands of narrow and wider streets. Partly covered and partly open. And in between there are vendors, handcarts with merchandise, cyclists and motorbikes, also some cars, but not many, and very, very many people. All kinds of different people. You recognise their religion, caste or profession by their clothing.

We arrive at a covered market where they sell fabrics. Terribly big. Each merchant has a sort of stand of 2 by 3 with a raised floor with a mattress on it. The boss sits on it (who is usually the eldest and has always a fatter belly than the others) and his son (younger and so he has a bit lesser fat belly) and the assistants (of all ages but no belly at all, because they do all the physical work). The walls are covered with rolls and piles of fabric. In accordance with the merchandise. Corridor after corridor with fabric shops.

We are outside again and arrive in the Hindu area. The atmosphere changes immediately. Outside of the temple you can buy all kinds of things. Coloured powders for the dots and signs they put on their faces and on their hairs, all sorts of devotional pictures and beads and strings and rings and sticks and flowers and boxes and I don't know what else.

We walk along the front of the temple, and here again also all the shoes.

Next to the temple is a small living room that looks out on the street, but than without façade. A "saint" sits eating here, watching television. And from time to time someone gives him some money. A bit further down an old man is massaged by a couple of other old men. And there are groups of men or women sitting everywhere. On the ground, sitting closely to each other.

We walk on and pass through an area with only kitchenware. All stainless steel stuff, with which all kitchens - from the rich as well as the poor people - are equipped here. Then in a small alley a bit out of the way, and immediately there is the open sewer or actually it's more a clogged gutter. Here there are suddenly hundreds of scooters parked throughout the street. Must be of the people who work in the bazaar. And in between people are sleeping. Because there are always and everywhere people sleeping. The water from the gutter is sometimes very wide and you have to jump when you don't want to get wet feet. A bit further down there is a woman sitting who is scrubbing her saris and her other laundry. Just on the street. A child is peeing. A man sleeps closely snuggled up against his wife in an alcove. Halfway, all the filth has been swept from the street on a big stinking pile. In an alley three rats enjoy drinking from an indistinct puddle.

In the pastry shops they have a sort of small silver 'one bite' cakes. Paolo, he's the son of a baker, wants to buy this leaf silver for cakes. But he can't get it.

We are walking through a street with only chains of flowers. Offers for again another temple. We go around the corner. I am looking again in a small alley. And again I see the dirt from I don't know how long. You cannot describe it. And in fact, I really don't want to describe it. It has no use to start about it over and over again. Visually it is very uninteresting. It has no shape. Dramatically it is not really exciting. And it is also something that I don't want to put in

my film just like that. But it is there all the time. I can't get around it. And I see rats again. They are calmly sniffing between the garbage. On the corner of the alley there is a litter of pups. They are still completely flesh-coloured. Just above it a collection of golden and silver statues of the gods.

From that moment on I look into every small alley and I try to count the number of rats. Sometimes one or three, sometimes eight or more. And since I see already so many rats during the day I wonder how many rats there really are. And everywhere in between there are handcarts with the most delicious food.

Sometimes I suddenly know which way I want to go with the film, but very often I don't know it at all. I know that I certainly don't want to make a documentary, but a feature film. The assignment that I gave myself is not an easy one. Because either you deny what is happening here and you make an exciting or dramatic story in an oriental setting. Or you use the setting, so that you stay close to reality and the reality is dirty, filthy and nasty. But then you will easily end up with a sort of documentary style.

I won't neither. The whole time I am looking for something else. I want to make a film where you can look at and where you can recognise yourself in, but without a forced oriental mysticism with a didactic overtone. I want to show life. Life with its raw and its beautiful side. I only don't know how yet.

We go through a street with only paint sellers.

We arrive at another market. This time only with incense and other scents. At each stand something is burning. I start to feel a bit dizzy. Again around a corner, now suddenly a complete white street. Here you can see men peeling and selling garlic. The skins make a white carpet on the street. My nose hurts because of the quick change of odours.

Around a corner again there is a chicken section. They are slaughtered and plucked. Feathers and blood everywhere. Further down again is the fish market. Covered and slippery from the water and the scales.

Next to it is a meat section. Here the goat's lungs and goat's livers are all hanging neatly on hooks in a row. And below them the heads. The shelves are a deep red because of all the blood.

Around another corner again. Vegetables, fruit and daylight. A policeman walks with a stick to make space for his boss who wants to get through with a police car. The carts and sellers have to move everything to make this possible. And a moment later they have to move again when a much broader lorry wants to get through.

We are finished. We haven't filmed or photographed anything today. And Paolo says he feels completely bewildered. I can't focus anymore. There is so much to see. I start to feel as if I am getting a bit crazy, just like him. To turn. The odours, the colours, the noise.

We are now walking for more than four hours and still have not once seen the same street scene. There's no end to it. I can't take it anymore. We try to reach a bigger road so we can take a taxi and go home. But we first have to go through a whole area with second-hand stuff and begging eunuchs.

We are feeling completely numb when we are sitting in the car. I keep my eyes closed during the whole drive. And I keep a piece of cloth before my nose and my mouth. I need to cut myself off for a while. But around me everything is hooting. You are never alone in Bombay.

11 December

Now I have really taken a day off. And for most of the day with a fever in bed while the world outside keeps on hooting.

12 December 1999

I get off the train too early, and notice that I've made a mistake. But after looking and asking around for a bit I am still in time on the agreed place.

I still have to get used to Ishaan, my new assistant. It starts with it that he arrives three quarters of an hour too late at the agreed place and has some terribly stupid excuse. I have got a sore throat, I still feel feverish, I also got lost myself and I also had to get up early to be in time. All in all, I am in a bad mood.

We take a taxi. Ishaan tells me that he suddenly has also a lot of other work this week, so that he actually can't work for me. But he does not really say it; I sort of have to guess it. Then the taxi gets lost and nobody knows the right way. A transvestite is so impudent to open the car door and starts to pull at us because he wants money. On the other side a leper knocks hard with his stumps against the window.

When I suddenly recognise the way, they do not believe me. I stop the taxi, I have had enough of it and we change over in a rickshaw. Now we are driving in the direction that I want, but when I tell him he has to turn off at an indistinct sandy track, they don't believe me again. I start to feel as if I could explode. After having smiled friendly for days when things went wrong. When things sometimes happened hours later than planned or sometimes not at all. And that I didn't take notice of anything. My patience has run out for a while. Today I don't feel like being nice. I demand that the fucking stink rickshaw turns around and does what I want. And finally we arrive at the temple and I have spent a fortune (according to local standards) for the much too long trip.

We are invited to be present at a big festival of this Hindu temple. A hall the size of a spacious gymnasium with a low ceiling. It is the festival of the light. In the middle there is a whole row of, increasingly smaller, candlesticks with a sort of oil lamps on them. On both sides of this row, that starts at the altar with the statue of Ajapa and goes in a straight line to the entrance, are sitting 108 men and boys. 54 on each side. They are repeating prayers in a very monotone way after the person who leads in the prayer and throw rose petals and later on also other petals against the sticks. So that each fire slowly comes to stand in a whole pile of petals. On the left are the men, on the right the women.

I am still very grouchy. I see all those ugly men stripped to the waist and with orange pieces of cloth around their much too fat stomachs. I see that just as in the Catholic Church the rich people are sitting in front and the common people behind them. I try to submit myself to the monotonous chanting of the prayers.

And I try to take up the positive energy. It works a bit. I see people kissing the floor and I see their completely sore feet and think of a TV commercial I saw last night, with salve for sore soles of the feet. I see all the funny walking and the organising of the praying people. And I see the banners on the walls with all the sponsors of this temple festival. The local contractor, a transport business, a travel agency et cetera.

Suddenly someone pats me on the shoulder and tells me that I can do an interview. It appears to be with the president of this temple. Who is elected once a year. Now it is a businessman. There is something that intrigues me the whole time, but annoys me today and that is the conjured up tolerance. It's the same with this man again. "We Indians never get angry and we have learnt this through our faith." I can't help it, but I just do not believe it. It is just one big façade that is put on before me.

Back in the temple. The prayers go on monotonously. Ishaan is yawning and obviously does not feel like being here. After hours in one rhythm the prayers and the chanting reach a climax. Suddenly it is over. Then we get a full hour a speech of thanks in English from the president for the honorary members of the temple. The Chief of Police, the contractor, the owner of the transport business, the man of the travel agency et cetera!!!!

The whole hall, with a bit over thousand closely packed together believers who are sitting on the ground. Most of them slowly fall asleep during the speech. It ends with it that after the next part we are all invited for the lunch. But that we must not push and that there is food enough for everyone. The women upstairs. And the men outside, on the left side of the building.

All incense is lighted and the chanting starts again. Plates with fire go through the hall. One of the elder porters falls and the plate is taken over by a young man. There is smoke everywhere. It is oppressive. Everyone wants to touch the fire and crowds round and over the plates. The music becomes more inflaming and reaches a climax again. Suddenly very close to me a man starts to roar and to scream. And falls with the shaking movements of an epileptic on the floor. A number of men rush forward and pull him to the front. I cannot see him very well anymore, but Paolo, on the men's side, has him before the camera lens.

He is covered with wreaths of flowers, while he is still shaking a bit. Apparently he has seen the light of the Lord.

Suddenly another man just next to Paolo also starts to scream and gets a fit. The Lord has also descended on him. There is no wreath for him. They probably didn't count on two enlightened men in one time. Suddenly the music stops and everyone leaves the hall. Stuffing themselves!!!

I wait; I don't feel like ending up in a jostling crowd. But it appears that for the Chief of Police, the contractor, the owner of the transport business, the man of the travel agency and some other notables they have set a table behind the temple. With two free chairs on a place of honour. For Paolo and me. Ishaan also gets something to eat a bit later.

I want to, if I will manage it, concentrate myself mainly on conversations with young people the coming week. The new generation. And I have an interview here with a teenager who has prayed with her family, but is and thinks in a very Western manner.

We leave after we have thanked them for everything.

A fast taxi brings us back to the centre. We drive again past Dharavi, the biggest slum area of Asia. Somewhere on one side there are a lot of people who are looking at something. I cannot see what it is. Further down there are hundreds of people before a police station, crowding to get in. We ask the driver what has happened. Last night 4000 houses in the slums burned down and now all those people are without a house. 4000 times 6 (average) per house. 24000 people are homeless now.

These are the things that make me waver. That faith and the lies next to that terrible poverty and at the same time incredible wealth.

I have an interview with a 19-year-old boy who is street barber and has no house.

We walk around for a bit. I see young boys playing cricket and try to seduce them to a conversation but the game comes first. Ishaan will bring us to a place where the youth meet each other. And when we are waiting for a taxi I suddenly see a dead person wrapped up in a

sheet with some flowers on it, less than two metres away from me, lying on the pavement. I am shocked. Next to it sits a man.

Ishaan wants to cross the street immediately. I don't. I look at the man. He is obviously drunk and is crying. I want to go to him. Ishaan drags me across the street. I am angry again. Why does he do that. He wants to have nothing to do with this. Again we have a disagreement. What has as a result that we go to another place and that we still have to cross the street again. Now the crying man has gone away. And the corpse is lying alone on the street. There is a policeman with it. Who looks at it for a while and then sits down and waits a bit further on. According to Ishaan they will pick the body up soon and it will be buried somewhere.

Thing like this. This is so hard to understand. So difficult to get all of this in your head. And to think again and again about where we live and our houses and our things and our I don't know what. How can I make something beautiful here when everything is ugly.

Ishaan brings us to a place, but there aren't any young people here. I have enough of him for today. And I say that he has to make a good plan for the day after tomorrow. I call another friend who lives in this neighbourhood to ask if we can drop by. This is okay.

After we get lost once more, half an hour in the exhaust fumes and a real search. We are there. We get tea with a snack; they will only eat in half an hour. It is Ramadan.

I'm having an off-day.

13 December 1999

My life changes all the time. Just when I think I start to understand it and found a sort of peace or rhythm. Then everything is kicked over again and everything changes. And this happens more and more often. Especially since Marco is dead.

This does not apply directly to the rest of the day, but it is a thought about the whole.

Today nothing seemed to work out again. And so I just went with Nameeta's mother to her yoga class. Chatting ladies surround me in the car on the way there. Because one is married with that one and her son seems to want to get married with a Muslim and her daughter is probably with so and so. And they are probably breaking up. So, just gossiping. Is this everything about which they can get so excited. What everyone thinks of each other or is it the pressure this gives.

The yoga class is wonderful.

Here I meet someone who invites me for a lecture afterwards in the Indian Merchant's Chambers.

I read in the newspapers that yesterday still many more huts burnt down. And I talk about it with others. It appears to be started deliberately. This is the easiest way to get rid of 4000 illegal houses.

We are downtown. On our way to the meeting. And when we leave the station we are surrounded by the people whose work it is to take away lunches. I don't know how they do it. But there is a transport system in which the wife prepares at home a lunch for her husband. This lunch is picked up. And brought somewhere, where it is picked up again and handed over to someone else and it finally ends up at a sort of assembly point and is divided between the thousands of offices downtown. All men with big boards on their heads covered with little pans that now go back to the houses in the reverse direction.

We arrive at the lecture. The women's department of the Chamber of Commerce is just a glorified women's club with lectures about beauty, ailments and gardening. But who has a garden here in Bombay! ½ % of the population, if there are even that many. At this moment 70 rich ladies in beautiful saris are listening to a lecture about yoga. By a doctor who actually only tries to promote his book. I make an appointment with the chairwoman of the club for an interview next week.

The plan was to film the overcrowded trains. Looking for images that can evoke something. But although it is busy, it is still not overcrowded. We travel for a few more stations. Mumbai Central. This is a station where many people first arrive when they enter the city. Dazed small groups of people are sitting on the ground here. Still a bit afraid by all the impressions they get. A little group is praying together. All hands in the air. Another little group is sitting very closely to each other. And in a corner stands a grandmother with in one hand a suitcase and in the other her grandchild. It is a little beautiful looking boy. With very big eyes he looks at the gigantic hall. At all those people in ready-to-wear suits and red uniforms (the porters). What must that hall be big for him.

But also the trains here are not yet crowded enough.

We take the train again in the direction of the suburbs where we have a dinner appointment. I jump in the women's compartment.

When I arrive at the right station the light's gone out at the platform when we enter the station. And there I am standing in the midst of thousands of people who are waiting for their train. I try to find Paolo. But it is so dark.

The light goes on again. But I can't find Paolo anywhere. I call to the appointment and hear that he has also just called. And I wait on the platform. But I don't see him here either. But before my eyes there are the most incredible fights to get on the train. I just hope that Paolo sees it too and films it.

It is so full and crowded. The men are hanging on and from the trains. Young boys in a kind of acrobatic positions. With their fingertips around a very small edge and one leg twisted around another edge of the window. The doors of these trains are never closed. And the trains only stop for ten seconds. In that short time a crowd fights to get out while another crowd fights to get in. When the train starts to ride there are still people who try to get on it. A much too full bunch of grapes.

I only see Paolo again at our appointment. It appears that the train we took was a whole train only for women. And that he had to take the next one that arrived at another platform. We have dinner with Anirban, Nameeta's colleague, and discuss the rest of the period. Today he has found a new assistant for me in Calcutta. She sounds okay.

In the evening in the train back home. I sit with Paolo (women are allowed to sit in the men's compartment, but men not in the women's). It feels uncomfortable. All those eyes staring at me. And I say in dutch very loud. You are all very ugly. A bit corny because I know they cannot understand me.

14 December 1999

I got up early this morning because there are difficulties with my work in February. And when I wake up I know the solution, I think. So, I sit immediately in front of my computer to work out the alternative idea because today Ishaan has prepared a whole day, and since everything is not running really smoothly with him I don't want him to wait for me.

But at 9 o'clock no call from Ishaan. I call him at half past nine. He is not at home; he spends the night at the house of a friend without a phone. At ten o'clock he finally calls with the question. "And what are we going to do today". I explode. And fight with him over the phone. Again he has a lot of bad excuses and he tries to wriggle himself out of everything. I agree with him that he has three hours time to arrange a number of interviews with young people between one and five o'clock. Because after that we are going to a play. I finish my letters and mail them. Usually I do this in Nameeta's office. But today the connection falls away the whole time.

We are driving to our one o'clock appointment. Next to the traffic light stands a little boy with a very big flabby lump on his chest, the size of a big aubergine. And it shrinks and expands when he breathes. He pushes it against the window. I give him some money. It is something difficult, the beggars. Do you give them something or not, or do you give something sometimes. Last time with Ada we only gave money to the people who missed at least two limbs. But now I usually don't give anything. The Mafia controls all the begging. The city is divided between the Dons, the leaders of the diverse Mafia groups and families. Each Don has a part that is divided again in districts, et cetera. So each crossing and traffic light has its own beggars that work in shifts and have to hand over their money to their protectors. There are all kinds of stories, probably true, that the limbs of children are broken to mutilate them even more because this brings in more money. But such a moving lump!

Ishaan is actually on time. A conversation with a boy that goes to the secondary school (college) and later also with his cousin. They are both a bit boring grey boys with only their dreams about a lot of money and a detached house with a swimming pool in Bombay. But no dreams about how to get there. You feel already that they will become just as grey as their parents are.

The two interviews with the girls are suddenly cancelled. But the girl next door of the cousin is alone at home. 14-years-old. A very nice interview. Very open and honest and very pure.

The theatre show that I want to see is suddenly postponed for three days. So, we still have a couple of hours left. I call some old friends that I have not seen yet and make an appointment with one of them, Sunil. He is a producer and is busy shooting. We can drop by in the studio where he will still be busy for half an hour.

We race with a rickshaw to the station. Shit, it is rush hour. We only have to be at the next stop, but we have to get off at the other side of the train. Without thinking long or making good appointments we both plunge into the crowd. I between the women. Paolo between the men.

When the train arrives the struggle begins. On life and death. A part of the women fights hard to get out and the other part to get in. The train does not stop for longer than ten seconds. Everyone screams and pulls and pushes and squeezes in. Fortunately I am bigger and much stronger. I grab the post in the middle and pull myself in. With all my force. I am in. But now I have to push my way through for 2.5 metres to get off again at the other side in a couple of minutes. I wriggle and push. And I manage to get a bit further. Someone starts to scream very loud to me. But when I say sorry, sorry, we both have to laugh. Our clothes get completely caught to each other. She lets me pass by. But then I push against a woman who pushes her elbow very hard in my stomach. It hurts. And I can't go any further. Slowly she pushes her elbow deeper into my stomach. I tense my stomach muscles and try not to falter. There is the station. I grab the post with my hand over her head. I know that I only have a few seconds. And I pull myself out. I am being pushed out just as with a birth and suddenly there is air and space again. I am standing on the platform.

I look for Paolo, but I don't see him. Then suddenly he is there. His story appears to be much more extreme than mine. He also tried to fight himself in, but he didn't manage. He could only just grab the post while the train pulled out. And could only place one small part of his foot on the step. Then the train pulled out. His arm started to get contorted. The train drives fast, at least 50 per hour. He could just grab the belt from the trousers of the man standing next to him while his arm was trembling. You are afraid because you know that every day at least three people die in this way. Or they fall against a post because they are leaning out too far or they cannot hold any longer and have to let go. When he arrived at the station he heard that he had to get out at the other side and then jumped off and he waited between two trains until one drove away. And there he suddenly stood on the rails and the whole platform started to wave at him.

But we are both there and try to get a rickshaw to the studio. But whites have to pay more, so it takes us quite long until we find a driver that wants to bring us for the usual amount.

They are shooting a dance scene for a 'masala'. The budget is 5 million guilders. A big film here.

Again the excess of colours, noise and chaos. They are creating the lie here. The distraction from the poverty. The glitter and the gold for the people. Actually as a whole this is the décor for a film.

Back on the platform we discover that above every stand at the station – and there are always a couple of them where they sell snacks and drinks – that above all those little shops there are houses built behind the bill boards.

Paolo's arm still hurts from the tension of before.

Tonight we are going to the dancing bars. It is still unclear to me what they really are, but we only can go there with someone who comes here more often. The boy that will go with us keeps us waiting for hours. But finally we leave. I have four men to escort me.

What I see and experience is difficult to describe. But within a space of 8 by 6 meter men are sitting on benches at the side. They are drinking.

In front of them, around a pillar that stands in the middle, there are girls who are wiggling their hips a bit. In their hands they all hold a roll of banknotes. There are also piles of money lying in front of the men. All notes of 10 rupees. And once in a while a pile of money is scattered over one of the girls. Which is picked up by a little man who gives it to the girl. Sometimes a note is directly thrust into her hands. Some of them have a whole pile and others have nothing. Sometimes a customer throws a whole pile of money over a girl. And the girls are just turning around a bit. Not really dancing. I don't get it. Nothing happens, except for a bit of indistinct turning with their bottoms. Some of them are only standing there, being beautiful. But the men are excited and terribly macho. I think it's disgusting and humiliating. When we drive away into the night after two o'clock Paolo appears to be just as shocked and confused as I am.

I want to sleep, have to get up very early tomorrow to catch the plane.

15 December 1999

The city still sleeps when I drive through it. In the streets the first people crawl from under their pieces of cloth. Now, by this early morning light I only see how many people are lying there.

I fly 1500 kilometres to the north and talk with Sehjo Singh, a documentary maker I want to invite for Dasarts. She picks me up from the airport and has prepared a delicious lunch. It is a very nice woman and we talk the whole afternoon about our professions and documentaries. New Delhi is cold. Everyone wears jumpers and caps. It is 17 degrees. The city, which only passes me by very quickly when I look out of the taxi window, seems to be much cleaner and emptier than Bombay. I notice that we are bidding against each other who lives in the dirtiest city. And where it is the worst. But the houses here have walls and guards. And there is a lot more unorganised crime. That frightens the people.

I spend the night at the house of Robert Aarsse, first secretary and cultural attaché of the embassy. I have known him for years through the Dogtroep. He has a wonderful house and for the first time in weeks I drink a glass of red wine at the fireside and eat a mixed salad with French vinaigrette.

16 December 1999

I sleep late. I only have to be at the airport at 12 o'clock. And after breakfast I get a massage. Because today is precisely the day that the masseur comes round. Wonderful. It feels like a short holiday between the chaos and the rush.

But when I land and feel the heat, today it is 30 degrees in Bombay.

My heart started to beat faster again when I drive through the city.

I feel at home again. I am glad to back in Bombay with its organised crime, its pollution and its chaos.

To feel at home somewhere has for a large part to do with knowing the rules. And I know the laws of this jungle.

17 December 1999

I wake up because of a hell of a row on the street. Finally I see cracks in the so carefully kept up tolerant world. But probably they were already there the whole time, but I was not able to see them yet. We are so much more aggressive and assertive. Now after four weeks of listening and looking, I see a bit of the next layer of this world.

Today and tomorrow I work with a new assistant, Shadab Khan, a Muslim man who will take me more into the Muslim world. It is Ramadan and Friday.

We begin late because we want to work until late tonight. The weather is breaking and it is 35 degrees again. Muslims are not allowed to eat and to drink the whole day. We try to show as much solidarity as possible. But when we meet each other we have already had lunch.

The first interviews are with two brothers. Children of one of the best editors from Bombay. They live in a very small apartment. With a tenancy which means that they also move every 11 months. And that with 4 children between 15 and 22 years old. Now they live under the runway of the international airport. And the aeroplanes fly very low and with a deafening noise over the apartment. Both boys want to become film director. But the boy of 18 is the most ambitious one. He has written a script and wants to direct it together with his brother and also wants to play the leading part in it. And all this before he will be twenty. His father will produce it.

Such ambitious conversations are always the most pleasant ones.

When I talk to his 22-year-old brother he appears to consider an arranged marriage as a failure. Because than you were not able to do it yourself. He is convinced that he will manage it himself. Before he will be 27.

Back by train. An albino child enters with a harmonium and plays music. Outside there is the blazing sun that shines upon the drying saris along the railway. The cool wind blows through the compartment. The singing and music-making child is inside. Although it is all misery, it is beautiful. At the next stop another child gets in, this one sells fruit. At the next stop there is another child with a very heavy bag with tobacco leaves on much too big slippers. For a moment I had forgotten it, but it is all child labour.

I have a conversation with an 18-year-old girl with a harelip. She absolutely doesn't want an arranged wedding either. And absolutely not with a dowry. She wants a marriage out of love. But when I talk about it with Shadab later, he says she has no chance with that lip unless another handicapped person falls in love with her.

We jump in a taxi because it is half past five and at seven minutes after six the day of fasting is over and then we want to be in the Muslim quarter. But we get stuck in traffic. And are all poisoned by the exhaust fumes. We walk for a while, take another taxi until that one gets completely stuck. We change again. We are almost there. Shadab gets restless. It is six after six. We are still not at the place, but along the side of the road there are men sitting around a couple of newspapers on which they have displayed food. He jumps out of the taxi. I want to pay the taxi, but the taxi driver has no change. Shadab sits down with the men; I change money in a shop. From the mosque in the neighbourhood resounds the call. As from this moment people are allowed to eat.

I sit with the men on the street and together with them I break the end of a day of fasting. It is a very spiritual moment. They share their food in complete silence. And in silence they say their prayers. Everyone who joins them also eats with them. There are all sorts of indistinct pieces of paper with food that they have probably carried with them all day. I get a piece of indistinct meat and think about the diarrhoea that I will have tomorrow.

We walk on. Everywhere there are sitting small groups of people who are eating. This moment lasts only very short because directly after this everyone will go praying in the temple. And while I am sitting outside with the women who are keeping an eye on the piles of shoes, Paolo goes inside with Shadab.

Muslims live by five rules: believe in one god, do your prayers every day, the fasting, the obligation to donate one third of what you have got and the journey to Mecca.

We are going for dinner somewhere. I talk to a restaurant owner. Now, during the Ramadan they are closed the whole day and only open after sunset until the sun rises again the next morning. They have a quarter less earnings during this period.

In the next restaurant we eat delicious desserts.

Then we arrive at one of those restaurants where - in front of it - the beggars are already sitting. We go inside. We are not hungry anymore and we order tea. The restaurants are all completely open on the street side. Here it is the same and so all those pairs of hungry eyes of the beggars are looking inside. About 25 or so.

We ask how expensive it is to give them something to eat. Ten rupees per person for a plate of rice, sauce and chicken. We give money for 25 meals. There is also a man sitting next to us. It appears that he has just paid for ten meals.

I think still naïve; o now there is too much. But that is not the way the system works. Because when the first number of meals has not been distributed yet, the next group of beggars is already waiting. It's a system of first come, first served. Some people are waiting and eating for five rounds.

I have a interview with the owner. And again I experience how my feelings and perspectives are changing.

These restaurants are only in the Muslim districts, because Muslims must give gifts. It started as a restaurant where the owner gave the leftovers to the beggars. There came more and more of them. He started to cook more and also other people gave money to serve meals to the beggars. So it has grown into a sort of system over the years. There are about eight of these places in this quarter. And the same applies to a couple of other Muslim districts. There are no beggars who have been coming for years and years. The longest customers he has had came for one year at the most. He has never had a white one, but if there would be one, he or she would also get food. There are sometimes very respectable people among them. They have lost their money or have another reason. And I see that he is right because among the half-naked bodies of the men there is a man sitting in a smart shirt and with a briefcase. The women are not sitting here. Usually they are standing on the side and get the food with them in a plastic bag.

We start walking again. The shops and the market are open all night long. It seems as if there are parties all over the place. The streets are full of stands filled with delicious snacks. Everyone is eating. Fasting during the day, eating and partying at night. Once more the colours, scents and images are overwhelming. I cannot describe this. Because everything that you see is so unusual, so extreme and exotic. So infinite in quantity. We are on our way to an interview with a man who works at a petrol station. But on my way there I suddenly see an open door, and there the sewing machines are buzzing in a very small space. And people are working very hard.

We go inside and ask if we may interview someone. This is okay. 18 men behind sewing machines in a space of 8 by 3 meters. It all just fits in. They have started working already at half past eight in the morning. It is now after nine o'clock in the evening. They make clothes for the American market here. Per piece they get 8 to 12 rupees, what is about \$0.25. They sleep in a room next to it, where the clothes are piled up. It is always the same story. About loneliness, about being cheated by the employer, fear for the future and the day of tomorrow. Young men that are working under very bad conditions and send the money home. To their families. And hope to return one day.

The petrol station caught fire completely unexpected three days ago, but the fire was put out in time. And everything still smells of new paint. The manager of the station lives in it. The owner is a rich divorced woman. The other employees sleep outside around the station. Here the story of the failed dream repeats itself also. This man was an actor in the north of the country. And came here eight years ago to become an actor. But it did not work out. He did not have connections. His world collapsed, but by luck he ended up here and gave up his dream and is now running this station. He sees his wife once a year; he has written her a letter every day for all those years. And he sends the money he earns home. The first months here, sleeping on the floor of the office, were difficult. But now he has difficulties sleeping on a bed. And so when he meets his wife, who sleeps on a mattress, he cannot sleep well during the weeks that they are together.

Then the search for a leprosy sufferer starts. There are enough of them, but no one wants to talk. We send people off to find one. But one leprosy sufferer starts to fight with the other one because he also wants to do an interview. The police intervene and our middleman almost gets arrested.

We leave it for tonight. I am tired. But we decide to film some street scenes. The sleeping people, there are so many of them now.

Street after street we film wretched little creatures, who are lying between the parked cars, on handcarts, on a raised ledge or as the most of them, just in the gutter. We are walking and walking. Children are walking with us.

People are playing cards; others are still chatting a bit. Everything is very homey only than without a house. This is their home. They were born here. I let it come over me. I don't know what to feel. Am I starting to get blunt. Or do I see it differently and is that why I can feel it differently. I feel like crying again, but the tears are different tears. I feel and also see something beautiful.

And the whole time my future story is present in the back of my mind. How will I ever be able to translate this without insulting one community with the other. How can I ever make a film that will pass the Indian censure. How can I make it recognisable for here and Europe. Don't I want too much?

When we come home the captain is drunk. And he chatters away about his faith. And he also has plenty other things that he wants to tell us. About that in his faith hygiene is the same as worshipping god, that he has to greet the east, every time after he has been to the toilet, that women are absolutely nothing in his faith, and that he also has known difficult times, when the house was not full off delft ware and antiques yet. I listen and write everything down, but it goes in at one end and out at the other.

18 December 1999

I also start to notice a repetition in the sort of people I meet. But it is a very useful repetition. My story starts to develop in a certain direction.

I have an appointment with an actor. He has no house of his own, but he lives with one of his students. He also came to Bombay together with his wife, with the dream of becoming a great actor. She manages to get a small part in a television series, but he does not manage to get a job. It goes wrong between the two and his wife starts an affair with someone from the series (screw your way up?). He starts drinking. Runs up debts. And the circle, where he can't escape from, is round.

Then a conversation with a seventy-year-old man, a great tabla player (Indian percussion instrument). He is the seventh generation, from father to son, who follows this profession. His son plays it too. The old man travelled throughout the world, won prizes everywhere. And now he lives with two sons and a daughter in a little cabin from two by three. He has tuberculosis and both his legs are paralysed.

He lies half-naked on a mat on the floor. When we arrive they are just starting to get the old man into a beautiful shirt. White satin. And he is put upright. His paralysed, thin legs show from under his beautiful shirt. On every shelf in the house there are prizes and memorials from the time that he was famous. Once he even got a prize from the president of India, as the best tabla player ever. But now everyone has forgotten him. This is really hard for him. Because how talented you may be. When you were born in the wrong family it is very difficult to reach the top, let alone stay there.

While we are talking, they are making tea for us. They don't have tea, they are fasting. Beautiful teacups are borrowed from the neighbours. They buy one tea bag. And everything is arranged over our heads, because we are sitting on the floor with the man.

With one of the sons of the musician we are looking for a leprosy sufferer. Yesterday evening we did not find one. And now it seems to be impossible again. I don't understand what is the

matter. Yesterday I didn't, today neither. We are walking from street to street. I cannot figure out if they don't want us to talk with them or if there is another reason.

A leprosy sufferer is leaning against a lorry. But she is blind too and raving by the look of it. It's not really possible to do an interview with her.

Finally we find someone. Usually you see them on every street corner.

She is about 40. She does not have hands anymore. A sort of stumps with open wounds. She has a very dirty bandage around her arms. She sits begging on the street. Everything is dirty. She, her bag, some cans and her surroundings. We ask if we may interview her. And we ask if we can talk with her on the pavement by the side of the street. She struggles to get into her shoes and tries to grab her things together. No one of us helps her. Everything is so dirty. And I know nothing of this disease either. She looks really very repugnant.

In no time a whole group of people is standing around us. A real private conversation is just not possible on the street. In every sentence she asks for money. I do understand that. It is more difficult to get something more out of her, but we manage.

She has begged since her childhood. But in former years she lived in a little cabin somewhere. 12 years ago she got leprosy. Since that moment she did not have a house anymore. She married to another leprosy sufferer. That costed a few rupees in the temple. And together they were begging at festivals. Her husband died five years ago. She has been alone since then. She is still begging at festivals. She travels from the north to the south of Central India. Leprosy sufferers are allowed to travel free on the trains. Sometimes she is knocked away somewhere by the police, but usually everything goes well. Leprosy sufferers help each other when they have to. But most of the time you're alone.

There are many flies around us and next to her lies a dead cat on the floor. The crowd that is standing around us, makes it even a bit scary. And when we are ready I pay her of course.

It is almost six o'clock again. We are going back to the mosque, to be present again at the moment on which the Muslims stop their day of fast (break the fast). I haven't eaten all day yet. More unplanned than planned. And I am hungry.

Around the corner there is a long row of women sitting on the floor. Other women are distributing food. But there is not enough. Some women are standing up and try to grab food from the plate. Now the others also get up. The women who distributed the food start to scream and get a bit into a panic. Dozens of hands plunder the plate in one second. And all those begging women are immediately gone, except for those women who were distributing the food.

It appear to be rich women who distribute homemade food.

We are breaking the fast with a couple of street vendors that sell bread and tea.

That short moment when the loudspeakers from the mosque are quiet and everyone is eating. That is so beautiful and so impressive. There is noise the whole day and for a moment it is quiet. Very quiet. Men are eating and praying. All those beggars, young vagrants, vendors and others. Everyone is silent and is praying. The streets brim with a very special energy.

We have eaten a bit, there is food left. One of the men, a very impressive man with a red painted beard, picks 5 street kids that may eat the leftovers.

I ask if I may interview this man. He is very charismatic.

He is also old, 74. And has sold bread on the corner of the mosque for 52 years now. He is a sort of leader of this small community. He has a whistle in his till. When someone brings

something for the poor, than he is the one who distributes it. He blows very hard on his whistle and people line up in a long row. Waiting for what they will get. There is actually a complete sort of second economy of distribution from one group to the other group.

The man used to be a mobster, a gang leader. Trafficked in alcohol and drugs. But after a fight with one of his own men – who tried to kill him and stabbed a knife in his side, which broke off - he has decided to lead a different life. And became bread vendor next to the mosque. But here he is also a leader. Unmistakably. Handsome, tall and preponderant he is standing there. With his old weather-beaten face. Everyone does exactly what he says. But he never got rich. He lives with his wife and children in a thatched hut a bit further down.

When you talk to richer people here you notice they have a completely different picture of poverty. Namely the poverty that you see from your car. This is a completely different poverty from the one you see when you are walking. With my new assistant we are walking a lot. We are always on the streets. So, you don't only see the ugly things, but also the beautiful things. The ordinary life in houses without walls.

We are travelling downtown. Do our first tourist outing. Namely the drinking of a beer in the famous Tai Mahal Hotel. Well, famous, but it is actually just the same as all those other big expensive hotels.

Tonight I want to visit the only gay bar in the city. The Voodoo Bar. We are too early, and see mainly hookers! They are picking up men. Shadab, my assistant does the honours and has a interview with one of those girls. He is very rude. He wants to know the ins and outs of everything. A student of 23, who quit her studies. Because this pays much better. She lives with a couple of girls in a hotel around the corner. She mainly picks up foreigners and she earns an average taxi driver's month salary per day.

Slowly more and more gay couples arrive. The night begins.

I have a conversation with the owner and pose as a lesbian who is looking for other lesbians. But it appears that there is no place where gay women meet each other. I don't feel like having a conversation at the bar. I am tired and want to go to sleep.

19 December 1999

Today to the horseraces with the captain, our wealthy landlord. He is very happy that we finally want to come along with him. We drive the 5 minutes distance from his house to the racecourse. That is also all that he usually drives. To the horseraces or to his club that is right next to it.

The area is immensely big. A haven of peace and green in the middle of this hectic city. I feel as if I have completely returned in colonial surroundings. Tall, rustling trees, shadow everywhere and no dirt. All rich men in smart suits and women in western clothing or expensive saris. The paintwork of all the white buildings is still very good. And a lot of staff in white uniforms. You hardly can imagine that the English are already gone for 50 years.

I don't understand anything of the rules, but see a game of rituals. A bell is rung, the nervous horses are shown to the people, the jockeys climb on them in the presence of their owners. When the horses are walking to the start the gambling begins. It goes very fast. The eyes of the gamblers are just as tense as those of the horses and their riders. Everything is snorting. Gigantic sums of money are spent in a few minutes. There rings another bell. We go to our box. The captain has his own box on the seats of honour. The race starts. It lasts no longer

than one minute. The last second there is some emotional screaming. And of course the scream of the winner.

We are looking smart. Paolo had to buy new clothes for today and he borrowed a jacket from the captain. In our part of the racecourse there is a dress code.

What restfulness, the lovely green just mowed grass smells really nice. For the first time I don't hear any cars and smell no exhaust fumes.

There are 14 races today. We cross to another stand. The atmosphere is completely different here. Here the common people gamble. And immediately it is dirtier, no dress code, a lot more people and policemen with sticks, just in case. But the look in the eyes of the people is just as stressed. The noses are trembling in exactly the same way. Everyone is tense. Everyone is there only for himself or herself. Winning or losing. It is a matter of winning or losing by a nostril. That is to say a horse's nostril.

And when another race is over a group of poor women in colourful saris appears on the racecourse and they tamp down the whole track again.

We don't see all the races. Actually I think it is quite boring. And at three o'clock we have our next appointment. With a Muslim father of seven daughters and with one of those seven daughters. It is the future father-in-law of Shadab, my assistant.

He seems to be a very niggardly or economical man. But I like him. They are now in their tenth day of the Ramadan.

In this family the generation conflict is very clear. Father wants to protect his daughters. The daughters want freedom.

They live in a very small apartment. A living room, a little kitchen and a bedroom, where the five daughters that still live at home are sleeping. There are no tables in the house. Everything happens on the floor. In the kitchen there is a fridge, but it has been out of order for years, has no door and is used as a cupboard. He tells that he is going to buy a new one next week, but I know that's not true. All his money goes to his daughters' studies. That is also the cause that they are emancipated to a certain extent. And I think that this also adds to the conflicts.

When I interview the girl I first think I have to do with a very modest, gentle student. Until she tells me about the most beautiful moment of her life. Very feminine in her sari she tells me about the day that she became the "All Indian Best Cadet". This is a sort of officer from the youth army. First she was the best of Bombay, later of the state Maharashtra and finally of whole India. In the giving of commands to the troops. The shooting at the shooting range.

And the marching in a group.

During the conversation the father checks in at least 6 times to see if we are still talking, or so?

It is six o'clock and a few minutes later we break the fast again. But now with a family.

Tablecloth on the floor, everyone sits around it. Except for the mother who keeps on working in the kitchen.

We causes a lot of giggling, foreigners eating with them. They are whispering to each other and are looking at us. Because what we think is very rude - talking about your guests without they can hear it - seems to bother no one here. So, I cheerfully return their smiles and eat a bit.

We invited Shadab for dinner, with his girlfriend (one of the seven daughters) and another friend. It is the last day that I work with him. Tomorrow he has to go to New Delhi. And so I have another assistant again for the last few days.

Paolo and I want to cook today. After our cooks have cooked for us for almost four weeks we want to eat something else. We bought fish and vegetables. And enter the sanctuary of the attendants. They find it quite difficult to watch us cooking and take over everything that we are doing. They cut, we mix. They stir, we taste. It tastes good.

During dinner we talk about arranged marriages. The men feel it is a horrible system.

Suddenly the captain enters. Completely happy. He has won a lot of money today.

“And”, he says “I had to think of you at the last race, do you remember what you said this morning?” “Yes”, I said, “number seven”. He nods and beams, “I won a lot with it”. Half a million rupees. All the same, a handsome \$12,500. I ask for my percentage. But Parsees stay Parsees. He laughs and offers me a glass of whisky.

20 December 1999

More and more conversations become personal. Probably I finally start to find the right tone in which people want to be addressed here. But that not alone. The culture shock is over. I can move more and more easily. And understand more and more what is being said. I can interpret it differently. The overwhelming poverty has found a place in my daily way of watching and listening. The world in which I find myself is not so strange anymore. Sometimes I forget to write down large parts of my impressions because I am starting to become part of them.

That is a pity because that is not my intention. I want to stay an outsider. Because I think that the only way in which I can tell a story here is through the eyes of an outsider.

I also see more and more of the ordinary life. The struggle, the sorrow and the anger. In the beginning I only saw besides a lot of poverty, the extreme wealth of a small group of people. But people get more colour and dimensions because I also watch less one dimensionally.

I get up early because I want to send a few e-mails before yoga class. But I get disconnected from the net constantly. So, without breakfast and without mail, I race to the yoga class. A very difficult class. The ladies are going to try me out today. Last week I was a guest, but now they want more. Before the lesson I must show them all kinds of positions. I feel just like a new student in a school. Fortunately I have practised yoga for some time and I know all positions. They are really surprised.

After class I race with a taxi to the station, and pick up Paolo on my way. On the train, to an interview with the sound technician that took me to that dancing bar last week.

We have a wonderful conversation. Very emotional and vulnerable. Actually these are the moments on which I am on my best. I don't like that detached attitude. He tells me about his failed love affair. The struggle with her parents. The difference in caste. Not being allowed marrying each other. The struggle with his own parents. His ways of release are dancing bars and alcohol.

The conversation overruns its time. Then I get acquainted with new assistant Siddharth. He's a young guy who has been an assistant to the director several times. He is sharp and fast. And we still have an empty stomach, and it is afternoon already. We are driving once more in a rickshaw through the exhaust fumes to the next interview.

A director of horror films. One of the two biggest in Bombay. He is a bit dirty, wrinkled man. We talk to him in his tiny editing studio because he is very busy. But finally he takes all his time. And again a very beautiful conversation. About hope and disappointments. About the struggle he has put up. About loneliness. About his youth. When he was too shy to even dare to look at a girl. And that he never had spoken with a girl until he fell terribly in love with the girl next door. He married her despite their different caste. About the fact that he has always

been very afraid. And that he started to make horror films to overcome his fear. His first five movies are set in cemeteries and are shot at night.

I have wanted to interview someone on the wash place for a long time now. For there is one place in Bombay where companies and private individuals have their laundry done. Everywhere there are standing open bathtubs with a stone in it, where the men hit the laundry clean. But when we enter the grounds it appears that we need permission, unless we pay 200 rupees to a bunch of vague boys, and I don't want to do that.

We go to the manager's office. We are absolutely not allowed to enter the grounds without permission of some local official. I watch and enjoy the scheming. Because if we pay something we can get in just like that. But I don't feel like paying. I enjoy it much more to watch this. Because for me it is the first time that I see someone fighting with an authority here. A reality that everyone has to face here. But where I, because of all the help I have got the whole time, still haven't had anything to do with.

Whatever Siddharth tries, sweet, angry, arguing, we are not allowed in. And by means of an obscure address we must try to find the appropriate public servant.

We have only 20 minutes left because then it will be five o'clock already. We race away in a taxi. We actually manage to find the department after a quarter of an hour. We run upstairs. But of course the man we are looking for is in a meeting. The clock keeps on ticking and everyone will have gone home after five o'clock. So I boldly open the door and I put on my most slimy smile.

Behind the desk sits a fat man, stuffed with food, in a brown grey shirt. He smiles at me. We get coffee and the permission to interview someone, but he explicitly tells us that we are absolutely not allowed to film.

When I walk outside I see a very fat grey brown rat sitting next to the building. He also looks at me, stuffed with food. So, I also laugh at this rat, because there is not much difference

21 December 1999

And again the sky is bright blue when I open the curtains. Since I came here, I have only once seen a cloud.

After the usual rushing with taxis, buses, rickshaws and trains the first interview of today is with a painter. In this country that is so crazy about film, there are men who have been painting the big film posters for generations. Often from father to son. But because of the new techniques in the field of photocopying, this profession is dying out.

I would like to see a workplace before they won't exist anymore.

We are going to the man's house. My new assistant has already been here this morning at 7 o'clock to make sure that the man would be at home. But I want to see his workplace. I don't notice the misunderstanding. And I stay outside, waiting until we will go to the workplace. I look a bit at the children who are playing marbles by using their middle finger as a sort of catapult. I notice that behind me there is some uncertainty. And finally we are leaving. After a few minutes Siddharth asks a bit unsure, "but you wanted to do these interviews in the houses?" I think I haven't been clear. Stupid of me.

A half-open workplace on an inner court, where very big paintings are standing against each other. Most of them are painted with politicians for the coming local election and with announcements for a boxing match. Film posters are not made anymore already, unless with a very low budget. Because the customer has to pay 1500 rupees (is about \$30) for a painting,

hand painted in oils, of 2 by 4 meters. The painter gets 150 rupees of this. This is not exactly a fortune for someone who has to support a family of ten.

I talk with him about his dream house, but again I get an answer that I get very often. I never dream about anything. I ask him to dream all the same. And to take his time. And then he tells me that he would like to have an apartment with two rooms for him and his family of ten.

Because everyone, well almost everyone that I talk to, the poor as well as the rich, love it to share rooms. Sleeping is something you do together and with a lot of persons. But now something annoying happens in the conversation every time when I ask him something about his future or something like that. Every time he comes back to the dream house in his answers. Does he do this because he wants to be nice to me or is this the power of advertising. To make you long for something for which you have never longed for before.

I really want to see a mill. At least, this is the word that I hear the whole time. I have understood that these are the weaving mills that came here at the beginning of the century and that made sure that Bombay has exploded to such a big city.

We arrive at a sort of small coconut oil factory! Mill appears to be m.i.l. and to stand for manufacture industry and something. So, each small factory is a m.i.l. I talk to one of the owners. But it is a very boring conversation. The man is too religious, for him god predestines everything. His future, past and present. And he is only god's workhorse. Oh, this type really lacks initiative.

Yesterday we got permission to go to the wash place. Today back to the office. Again the explicit demand that filming is not allowed. I have to show my notebook. He is reading - very interested - my in Dutch written notes for at least five minutes. Then we may go to the wash place, but we are accompanied by a security officer and by a controller from the office. The camera is safe in the bag, but with the lens before the hole. Because of course we are going to film.

This place is so beautiful, so shining, so clean and wet with water. It smells of soap and bleaching powder. Of ironing and clean clothes. It is wonderful to be here. An oasis in the urban jungle.

It is very hard to describe what it looks like here. A wash place is a sort of inner court with long rows of big concrete bathtubs, and in every bathtub stands a concrete wash stone. The laundry is hit clean on these stones. There are 650 of these stones. There are standing big wooden washtubs around them, in which the laundry is soaked or rinsed. In between there are centrifuges that work on manual power, scrubbing tables where the laundry is scrubbed, and there is laundry hanging every where. Lots and lots of laundry.

Here there is also a complete little economy with its own different ranks. The man I am talking to rents 3 stones, this means three of the bathtubs with a stone in them and three beds that belong to them. They are somewhere in one of the little cabins along the side. Per stone he pays 1500 rupees a month. He employs two people. They both wash on average 200 pieces of clothing per day. The money he has left goes of course to his family. They live far away in a completely different part of the country.

He shows us round. I enjoy the glittering of the water, the dazzling white wash and the dark men that are bathing in between with buckets of cool water. Paolo and I are looking jealous at them.

Unlike most of the people that I speak, I do have dreams and desires. I would like to speak with an engine driver. These are the people who transport every day those millions of people over the railways along which whole slums have been built. And where children are playing

everywhere. The rail is often also the place where everyone is crapping. And where all dirt is dumped.

But talking just like that to an engine driver (here he is called a motor man) is of course not possible. We first have to go through loads of bureaucracy.

On the third floor upstairs of the central station, Churchgate, is the public relations department. We walk past another department. A very big room with at least 150 desks covered with yellowed piles of paper. All desks are looking at the same side. And there are people sitting everywhere here, who are staring aimlessly. It is a frightening sight of yellowed and dried out humanity.

I am being referred and referred. From office to office, until I finally find the right person. The whole time it is their shock that a white woman enters their office just like that, which makes that I get things done that usually take weeks or months. But I also say that I just don't have time and that I want it now. NOW????

Of course I have to play the game along. Because bureaucracy is hierarchy. And when this man can't give me a little bit the feeling that he is the boss, it will not work. I ask and bow and scrape. I demand and give in. I must write an official appeal, which I do immediately. And one hour later I am talking to an engine driver.

Because it is just as I thought. A very hard profession. He gets very emotional when we talk about his job. His whole body changes from a confident and laughing man into a bit trembling and almost crying man.

I don't ask too much. I don't want to open up this man too much; otherwise he will get upset. I will go away in a while, but he still has to work.

It is the pressure, always the very high pressure under which he works. The fear to run over and kill someone again. When I ask how many people he has run over and killed, he says over hundred. But he does not want to count them, he does not want to remember, otherwise he will get crazy. Human lives have not much value in this society. They don't count, there are enough of them, there are too many. But he realises that they have families. He realises the sorrow. He has saved thousands by stepping full on the brake or by blowing the loud horn in front of the train. He hates that horn. It is so loud that he almost gets blown himself from the train driver's cabin each time. But he has to blow this horn almost hundred times a day. And the tone to warn the people screams over the rail. And when it goes wrong, he stops the train. This is that bit of respect they can give to the deceased. There is no radio contact in the train, but there is a little bell from the front to the back of the train. He then rigs the bell and gives a signal to the man who is sitting in the back of the train. The guard. So that he knows that there is a dead person again. Then it is the guard's task to take the body, when it is still in one piece, to his cabin until they arrive at the next station. When it is in pieces it takes more time because than someone has to come from the nearest station to pick it up.

Every day there are 5 to 7 persons dying in this way in this city. And these are not the people who die because they are hanging on the train. Because they are often found by others.

He livens up again when he talks about his family or about his childhood. He was twenty when he was selected at his college, somewhere in the north of the country, to become an engine driver. A big honour. He has dreamed of a big house of his own. But the two-room flat with communal toilet he got in a building for railway personnel at that time, is still his home. How hard he may laugh, this man is not happy.

For the last conversation of today we have to go to completely the other side of the city. It is rush hour, the trains are overcrowded. Paolo could not even get his hand down to protect his balls that got stuck between someone else's bag. He gets off the train with a blue face.

The last conversation is with a man who did make it. He came here to become a director, but is now one of the most famous art directors of the film industry in Bombay. We meet him in his office.

I am tired. It has been a long day. And we start the conversation while there are still two servicemen present, who are repairing the television. One of the speakers does not work. The whole time they are turning up and turning down the volume. The air-conditioner blows ice-cold air in my face, Paolo is fiddling with some art object and I get angry. I can't concentrate and I don't have the energy or flexibility to take no notice of it. Later in that conversation he has a go at me over this.

He spreads himself on the couch. He is an attractive man who likes to talk a lot and loves partying a lot. It is going to be the longest interview until now. He talks about society. About the people here that he characterises as innocent and tolerant. About the growing unrest. About the changes and the growing crime. About the difference between Europe and India. About his liberal marriage and this office that I think is obviously his pied-à-terre.

The rest of the stories come when the interview is finished and we are drinking a whisky. About his frustration with regard to the whites. And the dominance of the American and the European film industry. The rules that make it impossible for them to work there, while it is possible for us to work here. About the arrogant attitudes of the whites with regard to the makers here. About the difference in approach. The makers here work on twenty films at the same time while we usually concentrate on only one film. About the conflicts between European makers and the people here. I listen and try to learn something from it.

And when we leave this party animal, he gives me a whole list with phone numbers from the film scene in Calcutta. Including the old and the new rich.

I could not have wished for a better contrast for the coming weeks, now that I go to one of the poorest cities of the world.

22 December 1999

I planned three interviews for today and all with rich ladies. These interviews are postponed time and time again. Also today. I leave it like this. I am writing the whole morning and in the afternoon we are hanging out in the swimming pool of an expensive club. Pleasantly dreaming in the sunshine.

Being far away for a moment from the continuous air pollution and sound pollution in which we live whole day. Because there is always noise. The whole time and everywhere.

I did 62 interviews till now. And when I try to make a comparison between the interviews in South Africa and the ones I did here, I feel that the interviews here are much better. They hardly ever or maybe even never bored me. The surroundings were also much more extreme here. While in South Africa the differences between the people were much bigger and there were many, many more emotions. I think this is what I miss the most here.

23 December 1999

Packing and saying good-bye. Then get on the train to Calcutta, one of the poorest cities in the world, where we will arrive in two days, on Christmas morning.

24 December 1999

I wake up in the train and for the first time I hear no cars and see no people, but I only see the countryside. Reasonably dry with a low cover, a sort of savannah. And every now and then a little hut.

We travel in a reserved first-class sleeping compartment, with air conditioner. And as a result of that we are surrounded by businessmen for the coming days. We share one compartment

with four persons. Two big bunk beds and two very small windows with dark glass. The compartment next to us (there is no door between them and us) is the not reserved second-class compartment. Hands and legs are put out of the open windows. And when I have a look from time to time, when we are stopping at a station, I realise that they also have to travel for 33 hours. But also the third class at the back of the train.

Our travelling companions all wear white trousers and a sort of big white shirt. This is only worn by the better classes. They enjoy hanging out together and they want to be served for everything. They call when they want sugar in their tea, when a bag has to be moved or a coat must be hung up. And when the servants do not come, they prefer the uncomfortable situation above just doing it themselves. And in between they are hawking up and spitting whenever they feel like it. But I make it abundantly clear that I find this disgusting, and that's why the men in my compartment at least know that they better not do this in front of me.

There is actually a very English colonial mentality in our train. Although there are no Englishmen living anymore in this country that became independent 50 years ago, the middle class has taken on all their customs.

25 December 1999

I wake up in a different landscape. Much more jungle with palms.

At 7 o'clock we drive into Calcutta.

Jhuma my new (and probably last assistant) picks us up from the station. A nice woman who used to be a dancer and studies psychoanalysis now. She has rented a fantastic and spacious apartment for me. With a kitchen of my own, and without cook. In a very quiet street in a busy quarter, on the third floor.

I see trees and hear birds! And bicycle bells. Finally no hooting all the time.

The rest of the day she has another job, so we explore the surroundings. We call on the centre of Mother Teresa. But the nuns are free because it is Christmas, and so we can't get in.

The reason that I wanted to go to Calcutta was to be sure that it is really Bombay where I want to work. Because although Calcutta is known for its more artistic and more intelligent films, I think I can do much more in Bombay.

I will have to find it out in the next two weeks.

But the first impression is that the trip of 2,100 km eastwards, is about the same difference as when we would have made it from the Netherlands ten years ago. I mean, we would have arrived somewhere in the former USSR.

Everything is more old-fashioned and more socialist here. There has been a communist municipality for 40 years already. There are hardly any modern cars. Wallposters and many hammers and sickles on the walls. No gigantic film posters, which are hanging all over Bombay, and no screaming signboards. A lot less hooting. Everything seems more pleasant so far.

It is Christmas Eve and we have actually managed to get hold of a bottle of wine.

26 December 1999

Everything is slower in Calcutta. So, also the start of our series of interviews here. Only one today.

A conversation with an older writer and feminist. She appears to be very spirited and assertive. The whole house is filled with art. When we enter we hear opera from her husband's study. Everything is covered with a very thick layer of dust. Everything. The

tables, the paintings, the chairs. Calcutta is very dusty; the cloudless sky is more grey than blue because of all the dust.

But also her appearance has something perished. She has only a couple of thick teeth in her mouth. She wears a dirty old dress, with a tear on the side. And it is a mess everywhere. It is a beautiful sight to see her bright eyes shining between all that junk.

The city is much more cinematic than Bombay. Dilapidated colonial villas with big gardens and high trees. Not much modern buildings. No tower blocks.

And also no dirt and not that eternal piss smell. And not so many people. And fewer cars. And also less light in the streets. In the evening the city makes you think of pictures of a hundred years ago. A man on a bicycle presses the buttons with a long stick, so that one by one the street lamps begin to work. We are drinking tea from disposable cups of unbaked clay at a kiosk. Someone who irons clothes for a living is ironing in an alcove, and his irons are lying on the fire in the street. Through the street drives a rickshaw with a fat lady with two children. A man is pulling the rickshaw. Many of the rickshaws here drive on manpower.

But I think of Bombay. It is not dirty here, not full, not extreme. The people are missing something too. Do they have desires and dreams here? Have I ended up in just an ordinary city? Well, ordinary, it is one of the poorest cities in the world. But I hardly see any beggars and leprosy sufferers.

If Mother Teresa would live now, she would set up her empire in Bombay.

Everyone warned me for a culture shock. But the opposite seems to happen. The antique almost Anton Pieck-like image does not appeal to me. It does appeal to Paolo. He thinks it is much more inspiring than that dirty, filthy metropolis.

But I miss Bombay, where everywhere, really everywhere hangs laundry. On every fence. Almost on every lamppost. Where you can't breathe because of the air pollution. Where there is not even one free square meter of ground.

I miss the vibrations, the energy and the horror of the city that seems to explode. Because Bombay gets out of hand. No one has a grip on it anymore. Not now at least. In a few years perhaps. But now, at this moment, everything shakes to its foundations. There is a water shortage. A shortage of ground. A shortage of air. Everyone knows that it can't go on like this much longer. But Indians have very thick masks behind which they hide themselves. And they nod and smile.

Oh, if I only could represent this! The bomb that would explode! The pustule that would burst open! It must be horrible. One big massacre. The images of the war film come back to my retina. An explosion caused by the inhabitants themselves.

Bombay the city of dreams. The city of gold. The city of stars. The city of horror. The city of loneliness. The city where you can never, never, ever be alone.

No one goes to Bombay without reason. You always go with a purpose.

Okay Calcutta, proof that you've got it. I will try to listen.

27 December 1999

Yesterday evening the owner of our flat asked if I wanted to give a lecture for his Rotary club on 3 January. I agreed under the condition that he would arrange a couple of interviews for me with rich people.

Sometimes you forget that starting in a new city takes some time again. That you actually have to build up everything again. How do you travel. Where do you eat. How does the telephone that constantly breaks down work and how do the electricians work. And where I can send e-mails.

Sending an e-mail almost seems a day's work here. But, I did it.

Again I only have one conversation today. With an industrialist. He has a big office in the centre and lives in the flat above it.

There is something that intrigues me the whole time, and that is the lies, the disguising of the truth. And our self-image. The faith we have in ourselves, and the fact that other people believe these lies.

There are three questions that I always ask right after each other.

The first one is. What is the worst quality of man?

The answers are almost always something like, greed, selfishness and egoism.

The second one is. Do you know someone like this personally?

Of course they always know someone like that. But I don't continue to ask more questions.

Then the third question is, what is your worst vice?

And in reply to this question, with only a few exceptions, people always say very positive things. Things like, I am too nice, I have too much patience, I am too open, etc. I always nod and agree completely with what they tell me.

In South Africa I asked a similar question. I asked; what do you think that people will say about you after your death. There I also seemed to meet only the saints on earth.

And today it is the same. In the conversation with this important industrialist. He is a self-made man with a big industrial empire. And a hard-boiled businessman. And of course his worst vice is his endless patience and his need to do everything in a democratic way.

For a long time I have searched for another way to make them say something else. And so since two weeks I have asked three new questions at a completely different moment in the interview.

Namely, do you have children? Where were you when they were born? And what is it that your children don't like about you? Or with young people I ask, what is it that your parents don't like about you?

To this question I get much more honest answers because it reminds them of everyday life.

I do some shopping in the neighbourhood, still nattily dressed because of the interview. I am taller than most people here, and completely dressed in black. Here there are no white persons walking around on their own, let alone white women. And the women from here all wear bright colours. People are nudging each other in the streets. This is something I just can't get used to.

We are going to the movies. The biggest hit of last year. Hum saath saath hain "we are joined together". It is not a 'masala' film, with a bit of everything, but it is a family drama about a joint family of which three sons are getting married.

The theatre is big, the music is loud. I feel like going to the cinema. Until now I did not have time to go.

Yes, it was a drama. It really made me sick. Watching to a sort of propaganda film about the norms and values of the joint family life for three hours. How can this be the hit of the year. Something without tension, without a story.

The first one and a half hour, a happy family. Smiling and being sweet, until I get sick of it. Everyone is slimmer than the sweetest honey.

The women in the film are so submissive to their men as stupid dogs to their bosses. They never look up. Say nothing. Eat nothing, but serve their husbands and they often put the food in their husband's mouths.

One of the sons has a paralysed arm. Of course a marriage is arranged for him. The other two, oh how modern, have a marriage out of love.

But the seduction scenes consist of hanging around each other a bit and the moment you think that they will finally kiss each other. Then there is suddenly a bouquet between the two faces.

You never see a touch. Except of course between the mother and the sons. Because the mother is the star of the film. She and her sons. That's what it is about. That's what counts.

Even when one of the sons gets a baby, he does not look at his wife, but stands filled with pride next to his mother who has the new-born child in her arms. It is as if she has given birth. For the rest all women are of course gorgeous, it is not for nothing that Miss India has become Miss world this year. And their skin is milky white. Because only then you will make a chance to become an actor in India. Except of course the villain. But in this film there is even no villain.

And late in the evening I watch television for the first time. After 4 weeks finally CNN. But everything seems far away. Here in the newspapers there is no news about the world, except of course about which Indian film star does it with another film star. Oh no, they don't DO it here. I mean which film star has maybe looked for one moment at another film star.

28 December 1999

Today is an overfull day. Mainly interviews that my landlord here in Calcutta has arranged.

I planned to meet a lot of people from the upper class here. I thought that might give a beautiful contrast. But Calcutta seems to be not so degenerated and poor as Bombay. And Jhuma's network is not suited for this either.

But the network of the landlord is. He is one of the important state agents of the city. And so thanks to him a day of 'upper classing'.

Our first interview is with a property developer who lives in a very large flat in the centre. We have the interview in his salon. Completely of glass and on beautiful silver chairs from Rajasthan. He is a very sympathetic man. And we are talking while the complete joint family (grandfather, grandmother, great-grandmother, children and wife) is happily eating together at the breakfast table. A house with seven occupants and the same number of living-in staff.

After that we go to one of those rare gigantic houses with a very big garden, in the middle of the centre. Something which no one can pay anymore and which you only can own when it is a family estate from other times.

We talk to an old aristocratic lady. She lives alone with her husband and her adopted son in this overwhelming house. But it is a very sad story from a bitter woman. Who would like to relive her life. Because her life finished when she got married. She had to exchange her "freedom" as only daughter for a life in a joint family from one day to the next. Her husband was the eldest son and so he was responsible for the future of everyone and for all possessions. And so she ended up in a family of 14 persons.

And the more I know how to ask questions, the more horror stories I hear about joint families. Constantly living under an enormous social control. To have to justify for everything. To have to share all decisions. There is no possibility of ever being alone. The inferior position of the

woman. The fixed hierarchy. The gossiping. The demanding nature of the mother-in-law and the other brothers. The absolute lack of freedom. The constant act she has to play. Always serving the men. She has always hated it and she still does. And although the family is now reduced to a small family she can only be bitter. And dream about how she would like to live if she could relive her life. And around her shines a house and a very big garden of wealth and abundance.

Our next conversation is also with a man from a very old aristocratic family. He takes us with him to his family estate. Where he was born, but he does not live there anymore. His uncle still does.

We cross the bridge. Calcutta consists of two cities. Calcutta on one side of the river and Haora on the other side. Haora is the much older city and is now a part of Greater Calcutta. But Calcutta city that's where it happens.

Haora seems to be more industrial, poorer and more chaotic. When we drive there I see the enormous air pollution for the first time. The sun is brownish, the sky is brownish. There is a complete brown mist of dust over the city. You absolutely cannot see the blue sky and you also cannot see much further than one kilometre. A very thick smog hangs over the city. But the air in Bombay still hurt my lungs much more. I don't understand exactly how this is possible. And whoever I ask it, I don't seem to get a satisfactory answer. In Bombay there are twice as many cars!! The ground should be more loose here!! The sea wind in Bombay cleans the sky!! The streets are more broken here!! Oh well, it doesn't matter, the air is very dirty.

And everything is indeed poorer on this side of the city. But the chaos has something provincial. As if there has been a sort of 'farmer chaos' here for centuries now. Nothing but bicycle rickshaws and lorries. And we are driving through it in a luxurious big Ford.... Until we arrive at a small side street. The street has the name of the grandfather of my host. Five names and after that road. Unpronounceable.

A little street as there are so many, but then suddenly there is a very big house. The paintwork is good. Beautiful dark red.

The whole trip here he talked about the change in values of people. And he idealises the joint family. That is where we have learned to share. They made us not so selfish. Once more that story about the new Indian. The egoist Indian.

We enter the house. A house of my dreams. So beautiful. So old. So diverse. So incredibly fantastic. With two beautiful inner courts and a big garden.

One part is the outside part. The women were never allowed to come there. Here there is a sort of temple that looks more like a theatre. And all kinds of vague rooms around it.

With a salon so beautiful, so full of stories and with so much history. Everywhere little balconies and a sort of verandas. A terrace covers the whole building. Because the building has only grown through the centuries.

On the terrace is the temple room for the daily prayers. And a room for musicians during parties.

Then we go to the inner part. The part where they live. Room after room. Filled with the most beautiful antiques and with beautiful floors. Everything is so refined. The light so unexpected. Each corner seems to have its own story.

I cannot really describe it. I don't know how to catch the atmosphere. It is different from everything that I have ever seen before. It has something Chinese, something Italian. It is beautiful.

And when I look out of the windows, I see the rickshaw cyclist pedalling again with a heavy cart filled with human flesh. And filth and trash everywhere. Here I am in a picture book from the past.

We interview him in the salon. He has lived here when he was a young, 35 people with a staff of 35 people. When he was 20 he got married to a woman of 15. And now there only live 2 people in this house with a staff of 10 people.

Apart from that there is of course the usual crap about how happy we all were back then. But when I catch him out on a small contradiction in his story, I ask him - after having made my excuses - for an explanation.

The eldest brother of the father still lives in this house. And in the car on the way here he praised the joint family to the sky. But now he tells us that he has left this house where he lived with his father, mother and brother and family. To live his wife and two daughters, in a flat of his own. Because his daughters can educate themselves better there.

I ask him very politely and in a very careful indirect manner, why he first praises the joint family to the skies and now says that living apart gives his daughters the possibility to educate themselves better.

He feels caught. And he is. And the shield breaks for just one moment. That bloody thick fucking shield. And in one sentence he talks in very guarded terms about the conflicts between his father and his uncle, and that the family had to leave. And later on conflicts arose between his own family and the rest of his family, and he moved again. But not more than just this one sentence.

But thank you sir. Because I am one step further again.

Our last interview is with a researcher and his equally scientific wife. Both over 65 and both still working in their profession.

I talk to the woman.

She is completely lost in her own world. Most of the time she talks with her eyes closed. And very unclear. Until we are talking again about that terrible joint family. Then her eyes open. The horror and the grief. The frustration. The humiliations. She is very open. She does not care. She only has one love and that is her research on ulcers.

Because of her open way of talking I dare to go further than usual and ask her about the hierarchy of the joint family. I find out that the first and the last son come first in the hierarchy. Of course the eldest one first. But the Benjamin is also very important. Everyone in between is of minor importance. And the same goes for their wives. She was the wife of number two, and so not important. She hated, really hated the time that they have lived there. And still enjoys it when she thinks of the day they came to live here. A much too small flat in an ordinary neighbourhood.

I don't know what to think anymore. The dirty blanket of India opens itself bit by bit. I know increasingly better how I to uncover ugliness.

And there is also Jhuma, my assistant, 30-years-old. An adorable woman. But also one bundle of pain. Divorced last year. Completely frustrated and a man-hater at this moment. And in each conversation we have more and more ugliness comes up.

What will it be like here in Calcutta, the time of truth. The time of pain.

I suddenly don't know anymore what I want to hear. I surely can imagine that pain. But when I am really honest, I believe that I am looking for a completely different pain. And so for another story. A story with more passion and desire.

Paolo calls that dinner is ready. Lucky me, because while I was writing, he has cooked again.

29 December 1999

What is so nice about life is that everything can suddenly change. Today I have had a day like this.

We are going to a temple complex in the north of the city. It seems to be dangerous, so Jhuma's brother comes along. I am already looking forward to something dangerous. Until now everything has been covered with a blanket of friendly nodding people. I am curious what they call dangerous here.

The road there has a provincial feeling to it. No slums but bamboo huts that obviously have been there for a long time already. Filled with cows, goats and people. There are little fires everywhere and on the road mainly bicycle rickshaws and lorries. The lorries spread a horrible thick awful diesel smell. The road surface has a lot of holes in it. And there is much more aggression and irritation between people.

The temple complex lies on the holy river, the Ganges. There are a lot of people and it gives me the feeling of a sort of amusement park. Everywhere there are vendors selling junk and religious knickknacks. In between there are sort of fast-food restaurants. No Macdonald's, but half open huts with long tables where you can eat a quick greasy hot snack.

In the main temple we are being pushed ahead as a sort of cows. Everyone screams and tears at each other's arms as if they will be slaughtered.

People are washing themselves in and along the Ganges. And further down in the temple complex we visit the phallic symbols of the god Shiva. This statue, there is one in every little temple, is officially called the prick of Shiva. But because it has become one single word, it has partially lost its meaning. There are images of the size of a metre. And it is embraced by men and women, kissed and watered with water from the river. Jhuma hates this statue. The more often we see it and the more people worship it, the angrier she gets.

And among all those people there is one very religious woman who attracts our attention. She says her prayers much louder than the others. She embraces the statue with a fanaticism that you would not expect of such an old woman.

When she finishes her rounds past all the statues we talk to her. I have an interview with her somewhere in a quiet place of the complex, surrounded by thousands of fat flies. Jhuma interprets.

But out of her mouth comes nothing but sorrow and misery. She got married when she was 13 years old. About the humiliations by her in-laws and her husband. She starts to cry. About the first five years of her marriage when she couldn't get children and when she was almost repudiated. About that she got nothing to eat. About the ten children that she then got, one after the other. She starts to cry louder. About the loneliness and the lack of money. About that she started to make religious statues of river mud to earn some money. In between every sentence she says to me, Jhuma starts to throw in other sentences. It comes all down to it that she thinks that the woman is becoming hysterical and that I have to stop. It starts to get out of hand, who is getting hysterical here! I see a woman who cries and Jhuma who is in a panic. I finish the interview early.

To cool down I try to start a conversation with the head of the temple. But it doesn't work out. And so we take a boat to another much larger temple, half an hour's sail back in the direction of the city. But today there is a big festival and so the head of the temple has no time. Here there are thousands, thousands of people. It is choc-a-bloc with people. People are praying everywhere, and they are playing religious music at full blast. You have to stand in

line for hours to get a small tray with sacred food. And everywhere there are people eating this food. It is one big colourful picnic. Monks are walking around in orange clothes; I get bad memories of the period that half of the Dutch population was suddenly into Bhagwan. And when everyone was walking in orange, and suddenly had different names.

One of the monks comes up towards us. I ask him some things but he actually knows nothing about anything. And he asks if I want to have a tray of sacred food. No, I say to him, I don't feel like standing in line for hours. O, but you don't have (!!??) to do that. A moment later he is back with a small tray filled with a yellow stew of lentils and rice.

Jhuma and her brother are arguing in their own language, Bengali. It has something to do with the return trip. Finally we take the same boat back and arrive at the first temple again. But what was now so dangerous? Why did that brother have to come along?

Jhuma has her peculiarities. And the longer I have to tag along with her, the more I start to see her as one of my study objects. Usually I try not to use the people with whom I work the whole day in my imagination. But she is such a pool of garbage that I really want to know more.

Until now she has not really arranged something for me except for my fantastic house and this tourist trip of watching temples for one whole day, which I frankly don't like at all. It is difficult to make a plan with her for tomorrow. Because with every interview that I want to do, she says that it is not possible for one reason or another. Yeah, this does not really get me anywhere. I am fed up with it and I don't know how I can make it clear to her that I am here to work.

In the beginning of the evening I have an appointment with a man I know through the Dutch embassy in New Delhi. He did also help me last year, although we have never really met each other.

According to Robert Aarsse, of the embassy, he is a very spoilt child from a very rich family.

We have arranged to meet in one of the few five-star hotels. And before I know it he takes everything over. I really enjoy it. He can arrange meetings with everyone I want to talk to. He immediately calls the most famous actress. The most important director. And makes appointments for tomorrow. He will accompany us.

Tonight he will call one of the star actresses of the country who will come back from her honeymoon today (the newspapers here were full of her marriage pictures). Then the Minister for Housing, Police and Culture. The highest general of the navy. The highest Chief of Police. And many more, but I have forgotten who. I really have to laugh. Yes, it is a spoilt child. And very powerful, that is obvious.

And if I want a car for the rest of the period. And if I want something else. No, I don't want anything. I want to meet special people. People with a story, poor or rich. Beautiful or ugly. But that is something that he doesn't understand.

If I really don't need anything else, he asks one more time. And then I tell him about the only problem that I have. My visa expires two hours before my return flight to the Netherlands. That is no problem in itself because I can make sure that I am through customs at midnight. But because I also have to make a domestic flight back to Bombay. And then have to go from one airport to the other, in this rather chaotic country. And such a transfer will take at least 4 to 5 hours. I am afraid that I won't make it. Mainly because I will have problems with my luggage. Because I have to be out of the country before midnight. Unless I get hijacked of course.

No problem, no problem, he knows the director of my company. What is my ticket number, he will make sure that everything will be ok!!!!

I will see. First the turn of the millennium. See if the nuclear plant a bit further down does not explode. And if I can still withdraw money. If my plane will go anyway.

I have no idea if I will be able to e-mail tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I cannot find out what people are going to do here. And how they party here.

30 December 1999

Rajat Dalmia has arranged an interview with a famous actress, Moon Moon, who has never had problems with showing “sexy” parts and is therefore not respected by everyone. Certainly not by my landlord. He looks really shocked for a moment when I tell him that I just have met her.

After I did some shopping this morning - I bought delicious fish for tonight and I went to a tailor – Rajat comes to pick us up with his limo and chauffeur. He has made an appointment for tomorrow, at exactly the same time that Jhuma already has made another appointment for me. I ask him if we can change his appointment. He looks at me, really shocked. I ask him, with whom did you say the appointment was. Then it appears to be one of the biggest and most popular star actresses from India. The idol of millions. I may praise myself lucky that she wants to see me anyway.

I already know that Jhuma will be angry.

We drive to Moon Moon’s house, it appears to be next to the very big house of the old aristocratic woman, who lived there alone with her husband and son. I tell him enthusiastically that I have had an interview there. He looks a bit icy at me. I never know if it is appreciated when I blurt out something. Is that woman on the wrong side? Is she too poor or maybe even richer than he is? I don’t know. Suddenly he gives me very quickly a complete explanation of how I should behave in front of the stars. A whole set of rules. And all very toady. Then we enter the flat.

Actually it is just a big luxurious flat, without history. And completely filled with stuff, two barking dogs and a lot of staff.

She has just woke up from an afternoon nap, and gives me a kiss to welcome me. And although she bleats some social talk like, have you met so and so already, I immediately think she is really nice. She asks if she has to wear a sari for the interview. I tell her that for my part she also may come in pyjamas. Rajat looks startled, but between us the ice is broken.

There is still some business that has to be done and her husband shows a video with the film of his 18-years-old daughter, who I will also interview. A gorgeous girl, who meets her lover (in the film); this film was shot three years ago.

Moon Moon’s mother is the Greta Garbo from India. She was the most famous, the most beautiful, the most mysterious film actress and she has decided to stop on the peak of her career. Then she suddenly completely retired from the world, and never came outside again and is still unapproachable for everyone.

She appears to live in the flat next to Moon Moon. I don’t even ask it. I know that I will never get a chance to talk to her.

Moon Moon is 46 and she still works. She has two daughters, the daughter of 20 is model and the one of 18 is actress. What I like so much of this interview is that this free wild woman, who has lived so little by the values and norms of the Indian society, is just as concerned as

every other mother about her daughters. They are both wild party animals. She wants to protect them, very motherly, with her whole body.

When I later interview her daughter in her bedroom, I see a schoolgirl who pretends to be shy. And she has still not finished her secondary school because she has a lot of work. We talk about the advantages and disadvantages of her profession, that she has experienced because of her famous grandmother and mother. She works with important directors, in major movies. Plays major roles. But no one sees her for herself. No one wants her for herself. They all want to see the grandmother or the mother.

I call Jhuma to tell her that we have to cancel one of the interviews for tomorrow. But of course I first beat around the bush. And when I tell her that I have just talked to Moon Moon she says. "O, that fat piece of meat". Okay, we obviously have different tastes and preferences.

I miss Bombay. Where everything trembled. There I met people with dreams. Every image there was in contradiction with the next image around the corner. People seemed to be limitless. Well, of course I exaggerate now. But Bombay is the New York of Asia.

31 December 1999

It's going to be a long day. Because the first interview is at 9.00 a.m. With a film director from the alternative movement in Calcutta.

We only have one hour for him, because of the important actress later that morning. The hour is too short for me to really go deep. From time to time I steal a glance at my watch, without him noticing it.

He is frustrated about the kind of films that foreign film festivals want from Indian filmmakers. Or rather, what they want to see. They don't want to see urban life, but the mysterious India. The villages, the temples, the fakirs and yogis.

When he hears that these are just the things that I am not interested in, he looks a bit surprised at me.

I look at this man with his greasy hair from the coconut oil and the sleep still in his eyes, who talks to me about literature, art and all kinds of things with which you usually don't begin the day. I look at the white cat that comes in and is completely grey of the dirty Calcutta dust. I listen to his story and his vision on his life. And his longing for the protest generation from the sixties.

In the taxi to the next interview Jhuma tells me that she also longs for that period. No one revolts anymore. Everyone is so lax and people just let everything happen. She feels very alone in this society.

We also have a small hour for the interview with Katayun, an artist and gallery owner. Again I have to hurry.

She is of a very rich Parsi family and is unmarried. When I ask her why she is not married is she tells the story again. About the role of the woman in India. The career impossibilities. That her life is better unmarried than married.

The people who think like her are often people who have got an education in Europe. But thinking it and doing it are two different things. That is not easy in this country where getting married is one of the most important things in life.

Jhuma does not want to come with me to the next conversation. I don't know why, but I leave it like this. It must be because there will be a lot of talking about marriage again. Because the actress that we are going to meet has just returned from her honeymoon two days ago. We hurry to get there, I have promised Rajat to be exactly on time. We get lost, and we arrive a bit too late at the appointment.

It is a nice old house in a quiet street. After that we have first met the usual servants, her man comes to tell us that she is still is dressing "for a moment". He works mainly in America and is rarely in Calcutta. This is the house of his family. This means, his house. And so also the new house of his new wife. He makes some jokes about the fact that she needs really a lot of time to put on her make-up. Rituparna Sengupta (26) enters in a beautiful sari. I tell her that she should not have made herself so beautiful for us. But she tells us that her mother-in-law really appreciates it when she wears a sari. I think that she would rather wear something else. We have a conversation of two hours. Of course a lot of empty talk, but also some beautiful moments about loneliness and the toll of her fame. About her desire to be just as well-beloved (read worshipped) by the audience as the mother of Moon Moon. I ask her nothing about her marriage and about her husband. But I do not have the feeling that a just married woman is sitting opposite to me. Her eyes don't shine with happiness. Every time when I ask a difficult question or when her husband walks past her, her right eye starts to tremble. And while she gives me an example of something and tells me something about her new husband, it does not sound very enthusiastic. Later on she tells me that she longs for her parental home. When her husband comes to sit with us after the interview they are arguing in Bengali within 5 minutes. Fortunately for her I am not from the scandal papers. I feel sorry for her. I am glad it is not my life.

We actually find a bottle of champagne in a liquor store. That the owner takes out from somewhere under the dust.

It is five o'clock when we are walking through a Muslim street on our way to the last interview. From the mosque we hear the call that the fasting is over for that day. And the fast is broken everywhere again, in each little shop and in each market stall. I keep finding this so beautiful, so fascinating. It is that spiritual silence of the little groups of people, bent together over their dinner, in prayer, between the chaos of the traffic which does not seem to bother them.

We talk to Jhuma's father. A retired lawyer. He is a communist and the first thing he says to me is, you must not interview me. You must go to the slums. We talk about his life, he is sad, everything he fought for was a failure. He has been in prison for years during his fight for a better world. But now he lives in the centre, surrounded by poverty and dirt. It is very bad indeed in his neighbourhood. Here are again slum houses, built against the original houses and dirt everywhere.

It is New Year's Eve. No one talks about it, from time to time you see a hand painted banner with for example the text, "the new dresses for 2000 have arrived". It is very busy in the streets; it is the end of a day of fasting. I buy 21 glass bracelets, one for every century. They are very tight and the vendor is busy for a long time to get them around my hand without breaking them.

When we are in the neighbourhood of the big hotels we notice more of the coming millennium feeling. This is the place where the parties are. You can buy a ticket for \$250 and

you can have dinner and amusement in a big hotel. But I don't want to be in a big hotel. I want to feel the city when the New Year starts. I want to hear the fireworks. I want to be in the streets and embrace other people.

We walk on and arrive in very small, dark little streets. And Paolo and I recall 2000 years. Each bracelet represents one century. We start with the birth of Jesus and the Roman Empire. And so we try to invent something for every century. The East Indian Company, Marco Polo, Columbus, the beginning of the slave trade, the French revolution, the foundation of Vlaardingen and the invention of printing.

It is ten o'clock. People are working just as they always do. The sweets maker sits on his heels, rolling out the sweets and he is cutting them with a knife into little bonbons. A bit further down, three men are sitting in a little shop, by candlelight, squatting around a basket with tobacco. And they are rolling cigarettes in a high tempo.

I feel as if I am in the Middle Ages. And in two hours it will be 2000.

Suddenly we see an illuminated street. There is a street party. A stage with dancers on it. Very loud whining Indian music. We find two empty chairs and look at the local dance club.

It is five minutes before twelve; in the meantime there are some musicians playing and a sort of stand-up comedian. And still no one has looked at his watch. There is no excitement at all. Suddenly I see a little rocket in the air. And another one and another one. It's going to happen! The party will break out any moment.

Two minutes before midnight, the singer (who does not sing for a moment) looks at his watch. He gets his portable phone from his pocket, talks and looks again at his watch.

At twelve o'clock the band suddenly plays a little part of the American national anthem, and people are throwing pink petals from the balconies on the stage. He says happy New Year. And goes on with his song. Paolo lets the cork pop; we pour champagne into our glasses. People are looking surprised for a moment, but then listen again to the band. We toast and kiss on the New Year. I am in 2000.

No one congratulates each other, and there is no firework. I make my own ritual and break a bracelet for every century that is over. And of course I cut myself to the glass and start to bleed.

There is no hysteria here, no stashing away of water and food. At one o'clock we see an ATM machine and withdraw cash. It works. Next to it lies a mother sleeping with her three very small children. Further down another couple of sleeping people under a piece of cloth. One of them has under his a radio that is playing under his jute piece of cloth. I am in the year 2000.

Back at home we watch CNN for a while. And for the first time in my life I really understand what becoming westernised means.

1 January 2000

For the first time the sky is a little bit blue here. The city is asleep. Because although they do not celebrate New Year's Eve, it is also a free day here today. The factories are closed and there is hardly any traffic in the streets and so.... we can see the sky and it is actually blue. Clouds do not seem to exist in this part of the world.

I only have one appointment at the end of the afternoon and we are going to do something you usually do on Sundays. Walking in the park.

Because next to the park is a railway that I want to see. It was full of people when I drove past it in a taxi a couple of days ago. What are they doing there?

We are standing on the level crossing and there are indeed thousands of people on the track! Why! We start to walk.

A row of slums has been built next to the rails. The laundry lies drying between the rails. Women are doing each other's hair. Men are playing cards. And just as in Bombay, the railway is also a public toilet here. We are walking through it. And there is something which is odd. It is difficult to describe, but it looks mostly like an absence of hatred.

When I am walking in a township in South Africa I can always feel the hatred. I also feel the hatred when I am walking in the streets of the centre of Johannesburg. But I don't feel it here. Does this mean that the Indians are less hurt? Or is it because the English have already gone away for a much longer time? Or is the damage that has been caused here not so great as in South Africa? Or is it because there are no more white people living in this country anyway? I don't know, but it is strange. I don't know if I should be alert or not. I don't know if I can expect a knife in my back or not.

I am also confused about the concept slum. What are slums. Are all these little houses next to the railway slums? Was Dharavi in Bombay a slum area. Yeah, but this means that there can also be a whole level of difference in a slum area. Little houses with stone walls and tiles can also be called slums.

Only now I slowly start to understand something of these differences between the castes and the people.

Because although the caste system is still very alive here, although it officially does not exist anymore here. And no one from the higher middle class will ever stand up for someone of the middle class. Or someone who is called Dalmia (upper class) does not talk to someone who is called Banerjee (middle class).

Sometimes this is difficult to understand, mainly because I am, for everyone, on the outside of this system.

We are still walking on the railway. A train comes in. And everybody just does one little step aside. And when the train has passed, a little step back. And the playing of cards or the combing of one's hair just goes on. It actually feels more or less as if a train is riding through the back garden.

The railroad lies next to one of the few parks of Calcutta, but people only go there to take a bath in the ponds.

Women at different places as the men.

We walk past a place for men. A man pees in the water and next to him someone is brushing his teeth. I don't get it. It is so bloody filthy.

I constantly experience that contradiction. People are frantically about food. You never touch something edible with your left hand, because you only use that hand to clean your bottom.

You never take a bite of someone else's plate. And you absolutely do not take a bite out of something that someone else has already taken a bite of. But peeing next to someone who is brushing his teeth or crapping just next to where your children are playing is okay!

The only interview of today is with a medical student of the university. A boring conversation.

2 January 2000

Still a few days to go in Calcutta. But I have had it here. I think it is just not exciting here. It is a conservative, poor city with complaining people. I really like to do the interviews, but the

people and their answers do not surprise me. The contrasts are not big enough. Everything is fussy, proper and bourgeois.

Tomorrow I am going to try to change my ticket. I want to go to Bombay for a while.

The first interview of today is with a film theorist. He is the Indian contact for all European/Indian co-productions in the field of film. I suspect he will be someone with whom I will keep in touch regularly.

He is a very nice romantic man who has never been able to marry his great love. And he has often taken a real nose-dive in his struggle against bureaucracy.

After that a young, gay guy who tutors mathematics at home. He lives in an old house with his alcoholic father.

And finally an owner of a discotheque. It is in the late afternoon, he has just woke up. His long hairs are still wet from the shower.

It takes a while before we get the conversation going, but when I learn that he is a Sikh it becomes interesting for me. Sikhs are not allowed to cut their hair and have their hair in a sort of knot under their turban. I ask him if he wants to show me how he puts his turban on. The piece of cloth of around six meters is first pulled until it becomes a sort of rope, and is then very precisely wrapped around the head.

It is the combination of the disco and the turban where east and west meet each other. When we meet him in the disco later he unfortunately just wears a baseball cap.

The rules are strict here. Lovers have hardly any possibilities to meet each other somewhere, except for a few places.

Next to the theatre there is a little park with a fountain. A lot of young couples are sitting here holding hands. There is a lot of police around because they are not allowed to kiss each other, because that's an offence.

And the disco. The disco opens on Sunday at four o'clock. The youth goes here to flirt. At home they tell they are going to the movies. A little plastic bag with western clothes. They change in the toilet. And there they are dancing, the teenagers in miniskirts with their young boyfriends.

The whole game of rejection and attraction. Being shy and being provocative. Shame and nerves. When I go to the toilet, it feels as if I am back at secondary school.

3 January 2000

I've changed tickets. I will go to Bombay late in the evening the day after tomorrow. So I can enjoy the chaos over there for one more day before I go back to the Netherlands where everything is regulated very well.

A young fashion designer takes us to the vendors at the bazaar.

The bazaar is the old centre of Calcutta. And in the middle of this maze of hundreds of small streets stands the palace of the maharaja. The now totally impoverished aristocracy still lives there. And when you pay for it you are allowed to see it.

Once this was the most powerful family of Calcutta. Now there is nothing left for them but a palace with marble statues, antiques and seventeenth century European paintings that are in a very bad state. Rubens is from that period, isn't he? The residents do not have much to do.

And that's why we see the residents scolding at the staff twice during our tour through the palace.

At the bazaar we are talking to some vendors in their tiny little shops. The fabric vendor (4 generations) will be succeeded by his son. The incense vendor (5 generations), the mattress maker (3 generations) are less optimistic about their future. Their sons are going to do something else.

The lasi maker (a sort of drink) also for 4 generations in the meantime. He has built a phone booth and a photocopier in his tiny shop as a solution to the changing market.

I neither can imagine that the hand rickshaws will still ride in a few years, that the disposable cups will still be made of unbaked clay and that the knife grinder will still walk with his bicycle wheel. You can feel the strength of the West pushing really hard.

We are going to the flower market on the bank of the Ganges. Here we are back again in the poverty. In the dung and the dirt. The masseurs from Bihar (a federal state) are working and living under the bridge here. In the morning the men are still wrestling next to the temple as their training, in stead of going to a health club.

And it is busy on the banks of the Ganges. A man without arms runs naked out of the water and skilfully dries himself off. People are washing, crapping and peeing here.

And when it is evening I give my lecture for the Rotary. I am not used to do something in a club and enjoy the customs and habits.

It is the first meeting of the New Year and so there are chocolate cakes. Not on plates, but everyone gets his own box. Imagine that someone would take more than someone else would. Then they sing the club song together and the meeting starts. There is some bickering. You immediately feel the roles. Who is always the boss. He is the clown and he always falls asleep. It reminds me of a lovely bad play from some local theatre company.

Then I have my lecture. About making side specific film and theatre. I tell them how I work and what I am doing now. And then comes the question, "which city do you love more, Bombay or Calcutta". I say Bombay. From that moment on I can forget everything that I want to tell about my work. In front of me is a room filled with jealous men who don't understand that I go for Bombay. All sorts of arguments are produced, but I stick to my guns.

But finally I see passion here. Finally something is burning. A room filled with old men with the chocolate stains still in the corners of their mouth, who are screaming like jealous children who are shouting at the top of their voices who is the best.

Better this than nothing.

And actually there is something for dessert tonight.

I hear some screaming and the breaking of glass. I go to our balcony and I see people walking away. Opposite our house is a community hospital. And someone comes outside.

And very slowly it happens. The thick Indian blanket of doing nothing breaks. More and more people are coming outside. The nurses like chattering chicks in their long, white saris, blue cardigans and white caps. The men are shouting and screaming like super machos that they will beat those scoundrels up. A bit further down the street it comes to blows. Beautiful this super macho behaviour. Well, finally something happens. It's a pity that it ended with just some fighting. I feel like explosions.

It is still my biggest wish to make a war film here. And I am still reading the Greek myths and legends. Because under this thick blanket of politeness lies something completely different. Namely firework.

4 January 2000

Today was going to be a very busy day with four very interesting interviews. But it became a bloody awful day.

It already started early in the morning with the man who owns a lighting company. He was supposed to be the perfect person to go the slums with since he was born there. Jhuma said that she could not come along (Jhuma is a very special girl, but not the ideal assistant). When we arrive it appears that the man does not speak English at all. I damn Jhuma. No one in the neighbourhood speaks one word English. And the only thing I can do is drink a cup of tea and leave again.

Pretty frustrated I take the tube. There goes my planned morning in the slums. I only see very rich people here. But I don't get to see the other side. It seems as if it is held back from me. When we get off the tube I arrive in an atmosphere where I have never been in before. We have to climb a very long stairs to get outside again. No one talks. You can only hear the monotonous rhythm of the footsteps of all those hundreds of people. I feel like screaming really loud. It looks like a column of zombies on their way to the gas chambers. Outside we pass by the office of the airline company. Spontaneously I walk in and try to advance my ticket even more. I really want to leave this city as quickly as possible. But all the flights are full.

I don't know it anymore. Is it really true that there is a change of tone in the way I write? Pepijn and my mother are saying this. A nasty smell has become a disgusting smoulder, funny little things are garbage and knickknacks, a tray of food is now called stew. Does this mean that I don't want to and can't see it anymore? Is this the moment that India has become ordinary? Pepijn writes about his time in India, "...and after a time it changes. You eat nice food, you avoid the bad smell, you start to live in a way in which you have the least problems with all the misery and dirtiness around you. And you only go into it when it is necessary or when you are open to it." I don't know. I am not here to just live here. I am looking. Looking for authenticity and contrast between the people here.

When we have left the underground station, I make up a complete theory about the conservative thinking of people and start to tell it to Paolo. I think that I have to give vent to all my frustrations to everyone I know.

We fill our time by going back again to the bazaar. But get lost. Finally we arrive at the Haora bridge. The busiest bridge of the world. Well, this is indeed no lie. Paolo starts to film, but a policeman immediately approaches us to tell us that this is forbidden. So we have to use the old trick again. I distract the attention and Paolo films. This time I am reading the map like a confused tourist, while he films from under a sweater.

At three o'clock we have an appointment with the secretary of the federal state government and at four o'clock with the minister of Police and Culture (strange combination). Rajat, the rich "friend", will take us there. But when we arrive at his office the excuses are sweet as sugar. The interviews are cancelled. A whole story about the inflow of illegal aliens. An emergency meeting. Yes, kiss my ass. He has probably never called. What do you do on a moment like that? Get angry or laugh. I laugh. Very sour. I am disappointed and angry. I think, Jesus what am I doing here. Who is cheating whom. A waste of my time. And now he comes up with complete stories about the minister who thinks it is fantastic that I came here to film and that I can count on all his support. And that he would like to become a financier of my film. I believe nothing of it. I also start to make up a story. That I am making a film that will be more expensive than any other film that has ever been made in India. I only say that I

want to work with the biggest star of this moment. Shah Rukh Khan (which is the truth). Et cetera, et cetera. And he offers me all kinds of things. Life is air. Very polluted air.

We are going to meet Mrinal Sen, the most wellknown director from India at an international level. Again the tube. Paolo pays with a big note. But the person who sells the tickets refuses it. In the meantime I feel so mangled by all this crap that I start to make a drama. I sit down on my knees, and scream through the little hole for the tickets, "Help us! Help us!", and in the meantime I wink to the people who are standing behind us in the queue. They have to laugh. Finally he accepts it. To save his name he gets a pile of papers filled with numbers, to check the money to see if it is real. When I get my change, I also get a paper with numbers out of my bag and do the same as he did. Very precisely I check every note that he gives to me on its authenticity.

We arrive with Mrinal Sen exactly on time. But it is going to be a failure. He is 75 and an old intellectual, communist director. His friend, M.F. Hussain (the famous painter) pops in (84). On bare feet and using a paintbrush as walking stick. He is a bit a caricature of himself. We are back in the times that artistic Europe met each other in Paris. These men are so far from the real world and so terribly busy with themselves, their rules and their past. He refuses to do the interview that he had promised at first. He says that he did not understand it.

Well, I leave it like that. For a moment I don't know it anymore. Paolo says, "maybe we are tired".

Or are we full? I don't know. But when we are walking in the streets later on, even the peace-loving Paolo feels like hitting someone in the face.

5 January 2000

Now the planned interviews are cancelled too.

As an alternative we rent a boat and go sailing with Jhuma on the Ganges. The whole time we are on the water she tells about the hypocrisy, the favouritism, the corruption, the castes and the division of roles. I am lying comfortably on deck and listen. Very calmly a lot of images start to fall into place. This did not work for this reasons and that did not work for those reasons. This went like this because of this and that went differently because of that.

Everything falls or stands with whom you are introduced to, and with whom they introduce you. If you are making a mistake in this and it is very difficult to judge the situation here as a foreigner, you can forget it in Calcutta.

Fortunately Bombay is a bit less hypocrite and conservative. More orientated towards the west and so with other rules of the game again.

After that, pack up and go. And of course Calcutta hits us when we are down. There has been a hijacking and the control at the airport is stricter than usual. And you only may take one piece of hand luggage on board. Now I have three very small bags, together they easily fit in one bigger bag but I don't have one. I am not allowed to go on board before I have reduced my hand luggage to one bag.

There has been a total taxi and rickshaw strike in Bombay for two days now. Anirban, the friend with whom we are staying tonight, has rented a car. When we leave the airport, the police stop us. They have some kind of stupid excuse, but mainly want to see money. And we first have to call Nameeta's father, who has a very important position in the government, before we can drive on.

Back in Bombay where the streets are empty because of the big strike. Here we have one day left, and then back to Holland. Once more I have the idea that I have to search for the beginning of the thread, so that I can start to wind the thread into a ball.

6 January 2000

The last day.

I can't help it, but I am so happy to be in Bombay for a while again. The sky is blue and it is 33 degrees.

I try to make an appointment for one more interview, but I don't manage to get one. Furthermore we have to take a picture of one of the people we have interviewed, because his picture went wrong. And buy a bigger bag so that I will not have any problems with my hand luggage tonight.

A part of the strike is over, so we take a rickshaw to the station. Again in the train. The whole time I am checking if I was right. Was Calcutta stupid or not.

But I was right. I see image after image in the streets. Images that do not surprise me anymore. But these are the images that I was looking for, and I have found them here. I am not shocked anymore by the poverty and the dirtiness, but I am still surprised when I see it. I try to imagine how this will be in my film in a few years.

How will it be, to be back home in the Netherlands tomorrow? Where everything happens according to fixed rules. Where every hole in the streets is secured by a fence. Where the cars are shining and are driving between lines. Where the shops close exactly on time. Where household rubbish is picked up at the door twice a week. Where we have vacuum cleaners for dog dirt. Where everyone has a roof over his or her head. Where the food lies on the shelves so that you can fetch it yourself. Where you hardly ever hear anyone hooting. Where every car has its APK M.o.T. test yearly. Where all pipes are hidden under the ground or in the walls. Where the houses look freshly painted. Where we sleep in beds with thick mattresses. Where we wear dark colours. Where almost everyone has short hair. Where we cook in pans with handles and where gas cookers usually have four rings. Where we can drink the water from the tap. Where it takes two times fifteen minutes and eighty guilders to get a passport. Where we can say what we want. Where we ride in mixed trains. Where not everyone has servants or is a servant. And where we think that the country is full.

I am going back to that country. And now I am at the airport. I have checked in and have passed the customs. But when I am honest I would like to stay. I have just started to discover a river and I want to get to the source. Everything else is far away. I would like to make the next step now.

We walk around for the rest of the day. Make the picture of Tarik, someone who hangs around near the Krishna temple. We walk along the beach for the first time in six weeks (there is a palm beach along one third of Bombay). With my feet through the water, my face in the sun. I think of all those people I have talked to. Of all their stories. In my head I am already writing the script. A complete different story, but I know where it happens. Here.

We have tea with Makrant, it is such a pity that I have hardly had time to talk with him the past few weeks. Then a short visit to Anirban, who is working with a couple of other people we know and then "home". To pick up our luggage and then to the airport.

It appears that just at that moment the taxi and rickshaw strike has started again. How do we get to the airport now? A nice neighbour of someone we don't know, but he knows someone who knows someone that I know, takes us to the airport.

I wait for my plane. I am surrounded by big white people for the first time in weeks. My visa will expire in one hour.

Goodbye Bombay, city of rats and gold. I'll be back.