

valley opinion

New Delhi visit reveals cultural flavors

Five days after arriving in New Delhi, I obtained room and board with a punjabi speaking family. The house where I was to live for the next 2½ months was on a cul-de-sac just two blocks from the main road to the airport. It was a three-storey house constructed of bricks and cement, and although the weather during January and February was warm and pleasant during the day it became bitter cold at night.

The houses in India have no heaters but usually retain some of the afternoon's heat from the sun. As my room was at the back of the house where the sun never reached, I spent some very cold nights and early mornings.

The bathing facilities were a bucket and a cup under a tap which was about 2½ feet above the marble floor. There was a small plastic stool to sit on while bathing, but the room, floor and stool were so cold I'm sure I set a track record for completing the fastest bath each morning, and as I slept with most of my warm clothes on, I had to force myself to take them off to bath.

Meal times too were different from those I was accustomed to. Tea and biscuits were served in bed at 7 a.m., a luxury I never tired of. Then breakfast was served outside on their small lawn around 10 a.m., just as the sun was warming up. Lunch, again on the lawn, was served at 2 and dinner at 8:45 p.m.

Indo Canadian

Joan Mayo



By dinner time it was bitter cold again so we ate indoors, wrapped in warm woolen shawls.

My borrowed family consisted of an elderly father, his son and wife, and their two small children. There were two servants in the house. A boy of 16 who did all the cooking,

and a girl of 15 from Nepal, who cared for the two small children.

The lady of the house operated a small boutique on the second floor next to my room, where a tailor sat cross legged on the floor all day long sewing garments for her many customers. The Indian

women are very clothes conscious, and although the style is simple, the fabrics and colour combinations are many. People were coming and going all day discussing and designing costumes. He used no pattern, he would just take three measurements, then fold the fabric in two lengthwise, mark the three measurements on the cloth with a pencil, then cut out a perfectly fitting garment.

As amazing as it sounds, he completed three a day. When I showed him pictures of simple dresses I would like, and asked him if he could do it, he nodded and said, "As you like." So I hurried off to the bazaar to buy several pieces of polycotton for when the weather

turned hot.

As my new home was in a busy residential area, and with the com-

ings and goings of the family and their friends, I was constantly seeing and learning new things.