

KALI BHARAT YATRA SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY TOUR

A Landmark for the Indo-Caribbean Community

BY DR. TARA SINGH

The Silver Jubilee Anniversary Kali Bharat Yatra Tour of India returned to New York on November 2nd, after having tasted the rich cultural diversity of India and becoming intoxicated with the nectar of its fascinating history, religious tolerance, vibrant art forms, architectural splendor, and the fortitude of its people. "It was a fabulous experience; the extra-religious ceremonials of Deepavali was awesome," says an invigorated Krishna Ramdeen. "It was fascinating, intriguing; you just have to see it to experience its full impact; words are inadequate to describe its architectural beauty," notes Tony Shafiek. "It was very good, good, good," emphasizes Ursula Surjnarine who also observes "it was a dream come though."

These are just a sample of views expressed by members of the 2008 Kali Bharat Yatra tour party who visited such diverse historic places as Rishikesh, Mathura, Jaipur, Delhi, Aggra, Mumbai, Haridwar, among others. In Rishikesh, the tour party (TP) was greeted by the world renowned Swami Pujya Chidanand Saraswati, Leader and Founder of the Parmarth Niketan, and who it may be recalled, was commissioned by the then BJP government to produce a Hindi encyclopedia. In Delhi, the Jama Masjid, built by Shah Jahan, with a capacity of 25,000 worshippers, and reputed to be one of the largest mosques in the world, seemed to overwhelm the TP members. It was another architectural masterpiece.

The breath-taking grandeur of the Taj Mahal, built by Shah Jahan, in honor of his undying love for his wife, Mumtaz, captivated their hearts and minds, as no other monument had done to them before. And visiting the birth place of Lord Krishna in Mathura was an unforgettable moment. Having seen films, heard and read stories about the birth, life, and teachings of Lord Krishna, they never



Travel from Vrindaban to Mathura



Vrindaban



Catching Train from Haridwar to Delhi



India Gate

believed that they will, one day, visit the place of the birth of their Lord. That was indeed an incredible moment when emotions not only ran high but these also became uncontrollable.

In Delhi, the TP visited the Raj Ghat, Mahtama Gandhi's Memorial, as well as, the famous Birla Laxmi Narayan Temple built by Raja Baldev Birla in 1938. In the Pink City, Jaipur, they rode on elephants' backs to reach the stupendous Amber Fort and Palace, a mixture of Mughal and Rajput architecture, that was constructed by Raja Jai Singh and Sawai Jai Singh between the 16th and the 18th centuries. "All members of the tour party (TP) were extremely happy with the tour, including the logistical arrangements. Their praise of the pioneer and tour director, Ramesh D Kalicharran, was lavish. They even vowed that when they return to India in the near future, they will once again, travel with the Kali Bharat Yatra Tour. But why would one want to return to a land, despite its diversity and rich cultural history, that is still afflicted with widespread poverty and improper standards of hygiene?

"People are poor but they are content" observes Krishna Ramdeen, a sentiment shared by all members of the tour party. That state of affairs they found to be remarkable. One visit of two weeks' duration is, however, not enough to learn and experience India, the land that has given birth to our fore-parents, our history, our culture, our religion, our philosophy, our music, and our work ethic. Two examples help to elucidate this question.

A married couple in the tour party had gone to India 25 years ago, and they felt that they could have not waited any longer to make another trip. That blended nicely with Kali's 25th Bharat Yatra tour. Another married couple had gone to India ten years ago. They wanted to refresh their knowledge and keep abreast with some of the new developments.

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