

India/Bhutan November-December 2007 - Part 2

November 28, 2007



After we arrived in New Delhi, we went for a bicycle rickshaw ride through the Old Town bazaar. As you see, the traffic is busy and the streets are congested with people and wares. After you make your purchase you need to get it home in this street which is too narrow for a truck.

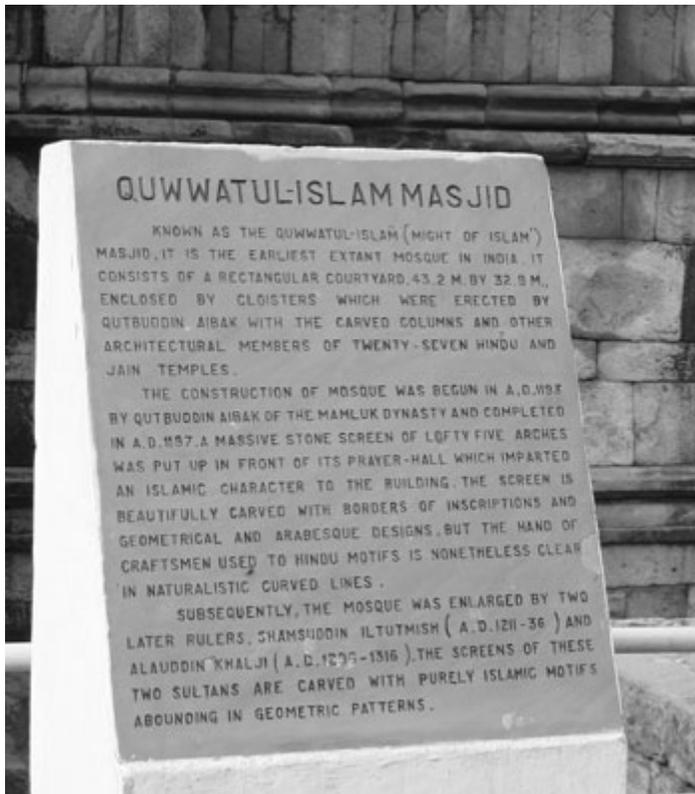


We then visited Jama Masjid, the largest mosque in India, designed to hold 25,000 worshipers. (PC7)



November 29, 2007 - The next day we visited the World War I monument, India Gate, much like the Arch of Triumph in Paris, India has its war memorial. Special for us, the Indian

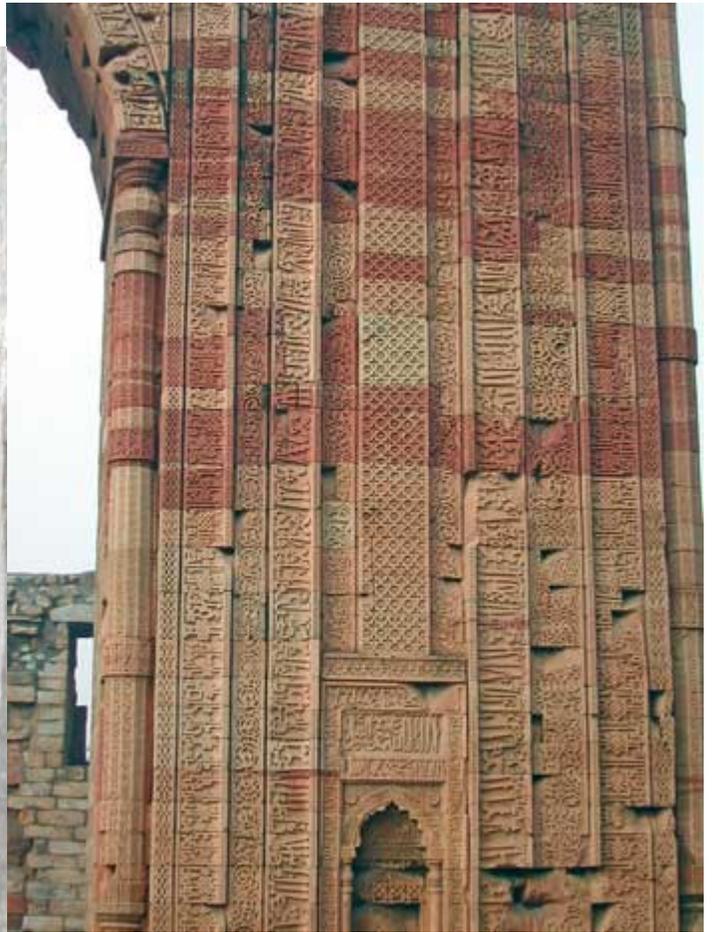
Navy was practicing for a future event.



The intricate carvings on this site are incredible considering that the buildings were erected in 1187. The Qutub Minar tower is 73 meters high. (PC9)



At this tower we saw parakeets and chipmunks among the ruins.





This is the Lotus Bhai Temple, much like Sydney's Opera House.

November 30, 2007 - The government office buildings and Parliament House while visiting Mahatma Gandhi's cremation site [need photo], we saw a snake charmer [need photo].





That evening, we had dinner at this lady's home, it was a wonderful opportunity to meet a genuine Indian family. Though she, Jodie, is a widow, she has a son who is graduating high school this year and a son who is just finishing college.

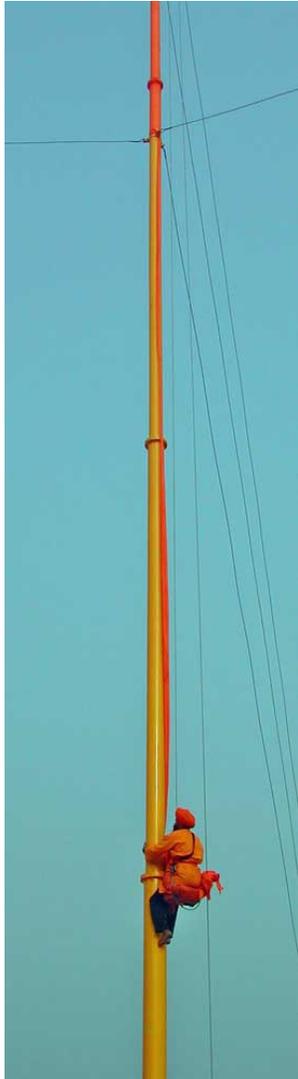
December 1, 2007 - Before flying to Varanasi, we visited the flower market that takes place on weekdays from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. It is completely gone by 10 because it is in front of various high class stores. The vendors sell wholesale to the various florists throughout the city who pick up their produce and supplies here. First we passed a Hindu temple, this one to the monkey god, who is in charge of health and fitness.



These ubiquitous little motorized rickshaws (Tuc-tuc) are found all over Delhi and are the chief taxi substitute. You will note that they have bicycle handlebars for steering and three wheels making them very maneuverable. Maximum speed is about 35 miles per hour.

As we prepare to visit the Sikh temple, Raj, our tour leader explains about the Sikh religion. All heads must be covered for our visit. He explained that the Sikhs developed from Hindu without the elaborate rituals, without the caste system and without the idols. The people are large, strong and fearless yet they disdain education so they are frequently seen as taxi drivers and truck drivers. (Lack of fear is very important on the roads of India.)





If your prayer is answered, this "flag pole" is wrapped with a new wrap. The Sikh shown climbs the pole by being lifted from a swing raised by a wench operated by two men from below. As he descends, he wraps the pole. All Sikhs wear turbans however not all turban wearers are Sikhs. Inside the temple, there are many praying and a holy area with men chanting and playing instruments. Outside the temple is a large pool used for ceremonial cleansing. It contains these huge catfish and goldfish.



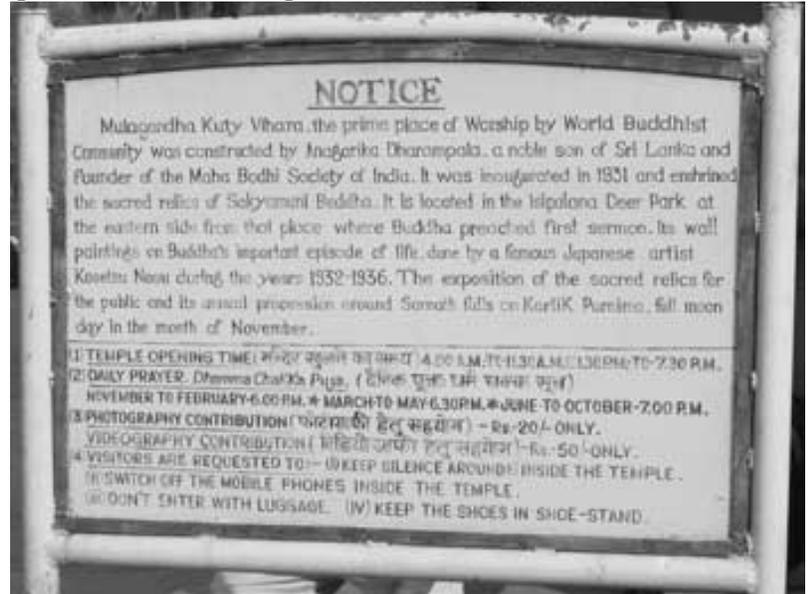
Sikhs never cut their hair and often have long beards. They are easily identified by their head gear.



These rhesus monkeys are found throughout Delhi.

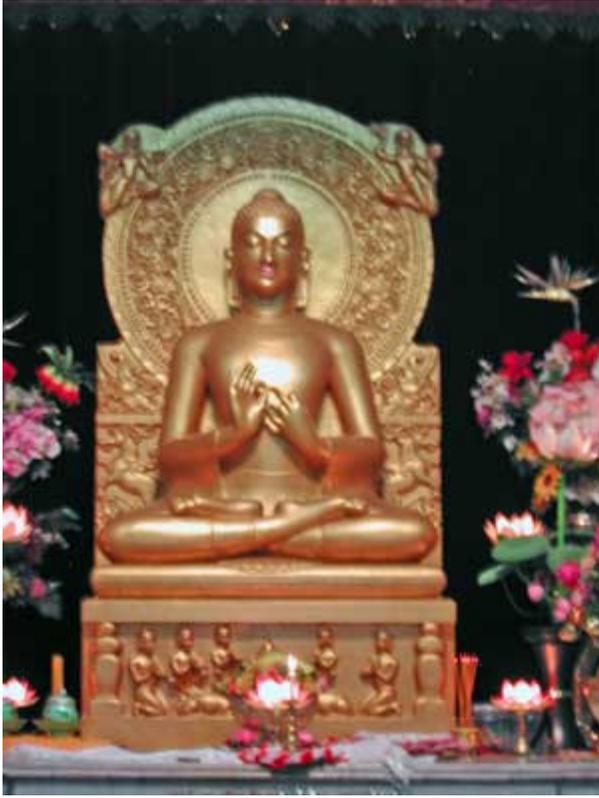


December 2, 2007 - Varanasi - Hindu paradise and the place where Buddha preached his first sermon.



This temple to Buddha commemorates his first sermon and has a mural depicting his life story.



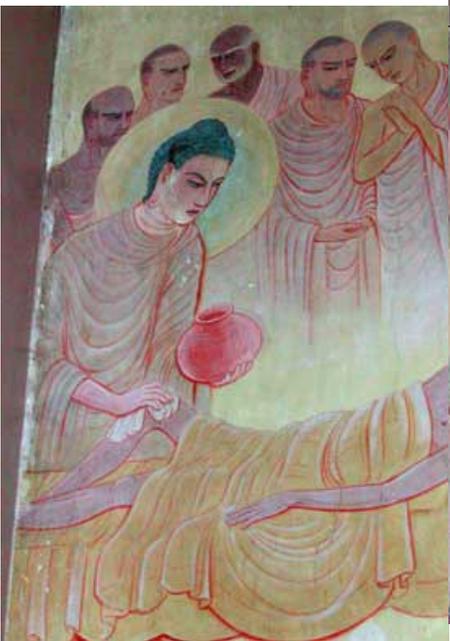
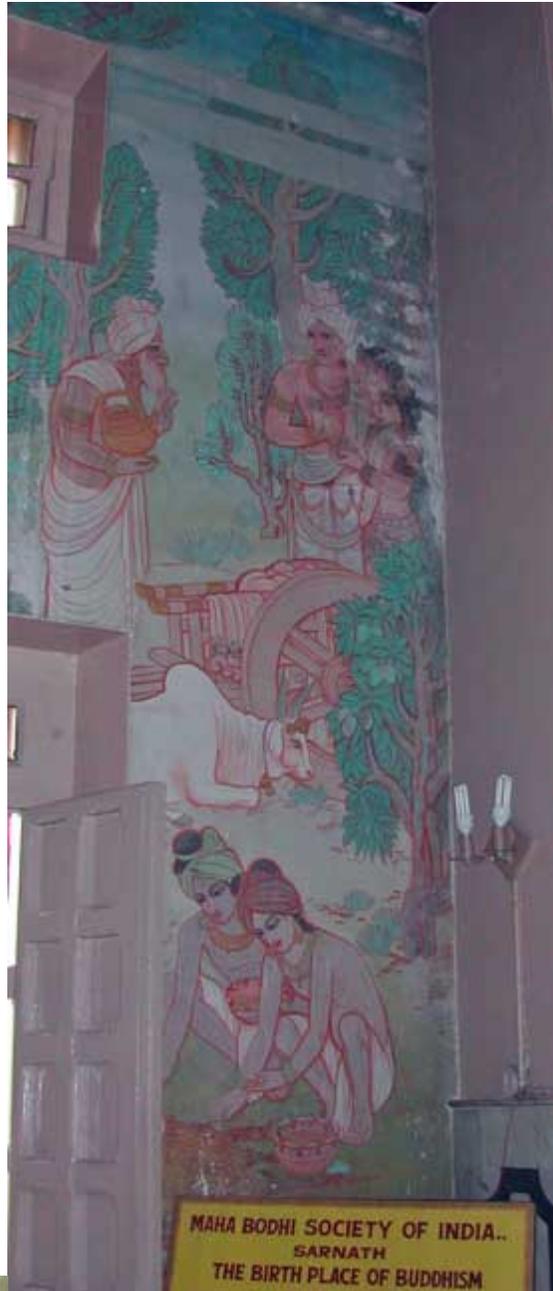


The statue of Buddha and the accompanying mural inside the temple.





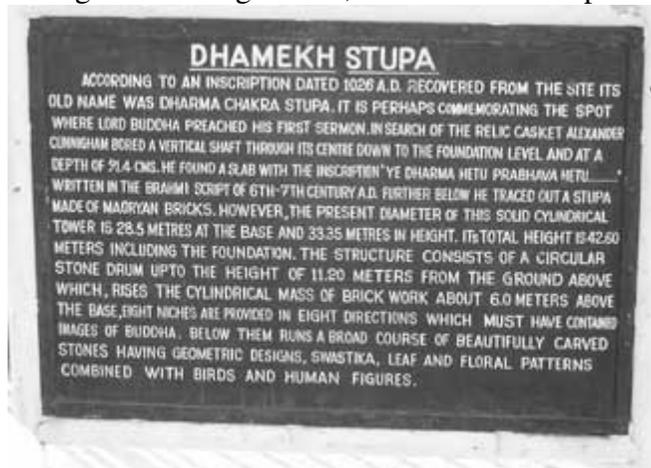






The life story of Buddha: (Note the similarities to Judeo-Christian theology.) He was born in a garden in Lumbinia. His mother had a dream that she was carried by four angels and bathed in a lake and a white elephant entered her body. She narrated the dream to her husband who called the soothsayers to interpret the dream. The soothsayers said that she was going to give birth to a child who would be a great king. When she was traveling to her parent's place, she gave birth to a child who was born out of her right hip. As soon as he was born, he walked seven steps and seven lotus flowers came out and he said, "This is my last birth." The queen and her servants were amazed and they bowed down in front of the small child. She came back home and narrated this to the king. The king called a holy man and asked him to see the child. The holy man said that he would be a world-renowned king or a world-renowned monk. He said that the child should never come face to face with any kind of suffering. The king had high walls built around the palace and never allowed Siddhartha to go out of the palace. The child grew into a young man and started taking interest in the affairs of the state and got married and had a small child named, Rahul. The king thought that now he was a family man and was taking interest in the affairs of the state that he would not leave his family. He allowed him to go out of the palace. On one of his excursions, he saw an old man, a sick man and a dead body. He asked himself the question, why there was so much suffering. Then as he was thinking about this, he saw a monk who had a serene look on his face and he decided to renounce the materialistic world and become a monk. One night when every one was asleep, he rode out of the palace with his charioteer into the jungle where he met his five friends. He learned from them about meditation and sat under a tree for a long time without eating or drinking. One day, a lady passing by saw this weak and haggard man and decided to offer him some food. He took the food from the lady from a lower caste. On seeing this his friends asked him to leave them. Siddhartha wandered off in the jungle until he found this holy man who showed him the right path for meditation. Siddhartha sat under a bodhi tree and meditated for 40 days. There were lots of temptations and evil spirits trying to distract him from his meditation but of no avail. After 40 days, he received enlightenment and came to

be known as, Buddha, the enlightened one. As he wandered off from there, he met his five friends who realized that he had attained enlightenment, begged him for forgiveness and they became his disciples. From there he wandered to Sarnadh, where he preached his first sermon and set the wheel of teaching in motion. He wandered far and wide to teach the people about his self-realization and about Buddhism. He would travel and preach to show the people to right path in life. He became very popular and respected, and took care of the sick friends and all. In Kushnager, his soul left his body to be free. In the third century B.C., Ashokh the Great, adopted Buddhism as his state religion and spread the teachings of Buddha in the four geographical directions. He sent his sister and daughter to Sri Lanka. He had wells dug, rest houses constructed, planted trees on both sides of the road and had the teachings of Buddha carved out on rocks and pillars. Buddhism spread far and wide in India and neighboring countries. It was only in the eight century A.D., that Buddhism spread to Tibet and southeast Asia where it was strongly influenced by Tantrism, a different form of Buddhism. The last picture shows only Unglimaal, a bandit who used to cut the little finger of the people he robbed and killed. One day, Buddha came through the jungle and this bandit tried to rob him but could not reach him. As he was out of bread, he screamed, "Stop!" and Buddha said that he is not moving at all. That he has to stop with all of this killing and robbing. Later, he became a disciple of Buddha. (Rajesh Shivhare)



This stupa contains Buddha relics and may commemorate the place where Buddha preached his first sermon. This lama is attending to his chanting disciples.





Next to our hotel we saw Indian textiles being made. This product is made on a loom by craftsmen. Some looms have two workers, one of whom lifts the various threads based on a pattern he has in his memory, the other wraps the proper colored silk threads around the respective vertical threads. They also have semi-automatic looms where the first craftsman is replaced by a series of punched cards and a system that selects the vertical threads however this is limited to four colors. The salesman demonstrated the use of these machines and holds the produce from his factory. Judy purchased a table runner for \$100 here.



City wildlife

We went to the ghats by Tuc-tuc, a motorized rickshaw.



In Varinasi, there are monkeys, horses and cows. The man is selling these sticks that when chewed are like a toothbrush.





At the bazaar, one can buy chestnuts. Mohammed stops to check out the ladies. Sweets are sold also.



No well-dressed woman should be without bangles. These young ladies prepare floating marigold and candle bouquets with which we commemorate the dead on our rowboat in the Ganges River. Varanasi is the best place to die because you will go to Nirvana and not be reincarnated. We set out bouquets for our deceased parents.



The town is alive with animals and musicians as multitudes come to Varanasi in pilgrimage or to die.



This is a praying ghat. Ghat refers to steps or a river bank. In this case steps. A boat like ours with tourists or worshipers. At day break, I collect some water from the Ganges River to bring to Mr. & Mrs. Roshan Desai, our Indian dry cleaner. Good Hindus start their worship with a ceremonial cleansing with Ganges water.



Under the umbrellas, Brahmans sit praying and presiding over ceremonies for a small fee. Nearby, people of the clothes washing caste, soap, beat on the rocks and rinse the clothes. Next, ruins of a temple.



Our crew includes these young men who row and a helmsman at the other end who controls the tiller. Sunrise over the Ganges. An untouchable fireman provides wood for the funeral pyre. There were a few dead bodies covered by cloths on the shore awaiting their cremation. The ashes are then sprinkled in the Ganges, the family shaves their head in mourning and two weeks later business goes on as usual.



A holy man with painted face prays for a fee.



December 4, 2007 - We travel by train on the Taj Express to Agra, the home of the Taj Mahal.

Our first stop is the "Baby Taj," Itmad-ud-daula, a tomb built before the Taj and which offered inspiration for the ultimate Taj. This was the first building of its kind to use white marble and inlays.



It took six years to build and was finished in 1628.

The Taj at sunset from across the river. It goes without saying that photos cannot do this wonder of the world justice as the perspective is lost and its perspective, color and symmetry are its finest attributes. Upon arrival you see this gate in front of you. When standing directly in front of the center opening, the Taj appears veiled in its majesty. Truly, this is THE most beautiful building in the world and the highlight of our trip to India.



The illusions seen are that the Taj is moving away from you as you go through the gate, that it is flat and has no sides, that the minarets are smaller in the back. They are actually made at a two degree angle so that in the event of earthquake they would fall away from the building. Monkeys are indigenous to the area and a sign on our hotel balcony warns about leaving the doors open or placing clothes on the balcony as the monkeys will take them away.

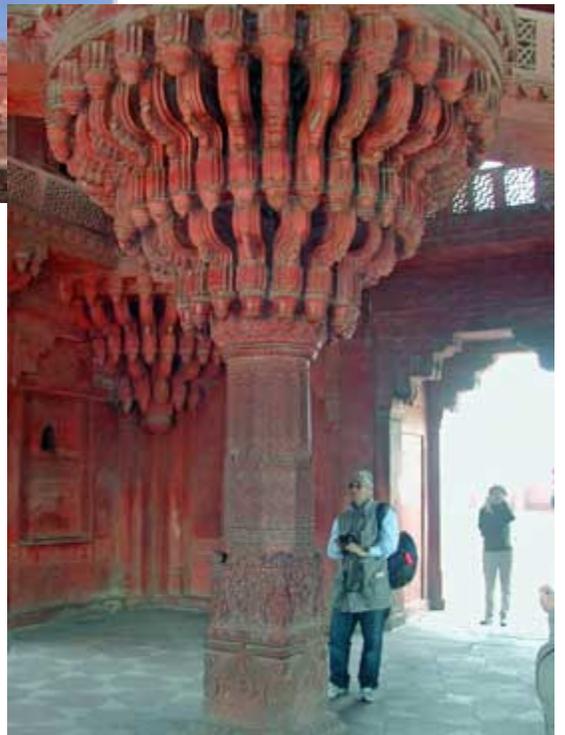




Agra Fort



Agra Fort is really a fortified palace rather than a fortress.



December 6, 2007 - We travel from Agra through Rajasthan to our camp in the country. It is a sign of a good tour that you experience both city life and country life. On the way we stop at Fatehpur Sikri, the mysterious ghost city founded by the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great in the late 16th century and capital of the Mughal Empire from 1571 o 1585.



After the city, we stopped along the way to buy vegetables for the evening meal. This was a really good idea. Raj gave each of us 30 rupees (about 90 cents) to buy whatever we wanted, bargaining and all. Judy and I bought tangerines from this man, roasted peanuts from another and potatoes from a third. At 20 rupees per kilo, the tangerines were about 25 cents per pound.

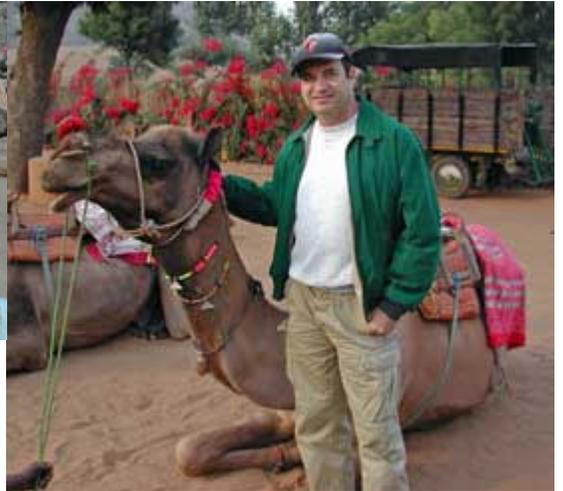
When we got near the camp, we exchanged our bus for this hybrid vehicles for the final leg of the journey.



Views of the Rajasthan countryside. They have these hillocks which rise suddenly from the plains. Our safari camp cabin.



That evening we took camel rides around the camp for about an hour, it was really neat! Camels walk with three legs on the ground at all times and they have wide, flat feet, both facilitate walking in sand. Camels are used frequently in this area to pull carts and carry things on their back. The camels in this area are dromedaries, that is they have one hump.



That evening at the campfire, we had heritage dancers. After they finished their repertoire, they invited us to join them.



Raj makes naam, a bread cooked in a pan, then everyone tried their hand in the kitchen. The naam was served at dinner that night.

