



InterPlay
unlock the wisdom of your body

“How was India?”

Reflections by Cathy Chang

Cathy Chang danced Korean traditional dance and ballet as a little girl, but had to give up her lessons due to her family’s financial hardship. On her 30th birthday, long after she graduated with degrees in Physics and Engineering, it dawned on her that she should really live the rest of her life doing what she really enjoyed. And thus started her soul-searching and re-immersion into dance. Cathy participated in the Interplay Leadership Program several years ago where she met Prashant Olalekar.



Cathy and Prashant conducted several Interplay/Movement Meditation Workshops in Southern California. Originally Cathy had no real desire to visit India; however, one thing led to another, and she accepted Prashant’s invitation to help out with the Intercultural Exchange for Global Peace Project in January 2008.

“What has Interplay been for me? Well, Interplay has definitely opened new doors, especially into the Unknown, and has proven to be a valuable discernment tool for me when I’m at crossroads in my life.” ---Cathy Chang

“How was India?” many asked upon my return. With each question came a flood of images, feelings, and smells encountered during my 2 weeks in India. My cells well remember the depth, texture, and the richness of my experiences; however, my words, well, they don’t come so easy.

I pause a bit and reply —knowing my somewhat abstract words will no doubt solicit quizzical expressions from some— “I found the people of India... *beautiful*, they were very *human*. ummm, I have a feeling I will definitely return.” Understandably, the most frequent responses to my reply included, “But wasn’t it dirty, polluted, crowded, and corrupt?” And my response, “yes, and there was *so much* more...”

I dare not say I know India. Upon urging from my friend, Prashant, I will share some personal stories of India, as experienced through the lens of a Korean-American, introverted and enthusiastic idealist who loves traveling, creative movement, people-watching and introspection.

Yes, there were the cold showers at the orphanage, bathroom mishaps (no toilet paper or not being able to find the toilet flush handle), mosquito bites, crowded jeeps, and polluted air. And then there were the lush greens of the garden next to Marie’s house, the Arabian sea and the fish monger village, and the abandoned Portuguese fort, just like in an old romance novel. However, what led me to my strawberry meditations and to overlook or shrug off some of the small and big ordeals of daily life, such as riding on the stinky, crowded blue Metro line in downtown LA, are the images of the people of India that I remember:

- Right outside of the customs at the Mumbai airport, a little boy standing in between the legs of a seated grandfather, repeatedly and playfully kissing his grandpa’s index finger (he reminded me of a little woodpecker!).
- Older men lounging and telling stories, reclined on a cloth spread on the airport grounds.
- Prashant and Sr. Margaret who woke up 3AM to greet me at the airport, showing up bundled up in blankets.
- The shy, innocent smiles of the well-behaved tribal students at the Jesuit school who knew how to open their hearts, thank the guests, and offer to carry the equipment for us after the workshops.
- The hot sun beating down on the backs of the malnourished children who worked long hours in the construction field.
- A rich Christian family who generously shared their western-style house with our team, and on the same property, a hut occupied by the servant family living in abject poverty.
- The seemingly endless generosity of almost everyone that I and my companions came in contact with, juxtaposed against the stories of bride-burning by the greedy in-laws and of a woman who lost her mind after being sold into prostitution by her husband.
- While suffering from a hugely swollen finger, Prashant cheerfully volunteering to sit at the back of the jeep, crammed in with everyone’s luggage.

- The humility, overwhelming generosity, and friendship shown by the Gonsalves family, inviting me, a stranger, into not only their homes, but also into their lives, and also cooked up a storm (my very first time tasting Indian seafood! They were heavenly!!).
- Sr. Santana, apologizing for her sweaty palms while clasping my hands with hers, as we ventured through the busy market streets, fishing for last-minute souvenirs for my trip back home—I know I now have a sister in India.
- The Canossian sisters, who were picking a curious Indian fruit (the name escapes me at the moment), invited me, a stranger on a stroll, into their convent to share tea, snack, and their stories, and more snacks to take back with me...
- Such openness and a sense of dignity among the slum women who greeted us right back with their own version of creative movement that we had shared with them just moments ago...
- The people of Vasai who, upon being asked to share one or two songs or dance for the American guests, put on a full 1-1/2 hour energetic and heart-felt performances that drew in everyone— old, young, men, women, residents, and guests— into a wild frenzy of dance and music!
- The dedication of the volunteers working at the Center for children of HIV-positive sex-workers at the Red Light District in Mumbai.
- Unequivocal demand for mid-morning and afternoon tea breaks by the workshop participants, which helped to maintain a healthy balance of learning and leisure.
- Such open and rich expressions on the faces of the pedestrians and the streets that were full of people, cars, cows, stray dogs and goats.

On my last day in India, I got really sick and was sick for about 2 weeks straight upon my return. It had somewhat to do with my body caving in after a couple of weeks of breathing in highly polluted air, but more so, it was my psyche's attempt to allow the fullness and the weight of all my experiences be integrated into my being by having my body shut down for a while.

After my return, I started a new job, had my car stolen, experienced a really crazy schedule with extensive traveling; however, I realized I am not as easily fazed or perturbed as before. At least once a day, it dawns on me that I am truly happy, and that each occasion holds its own gift.

I had a dream several weeks after my return from India. In my dream, I was about to leave India and realized that I had left behind something very important. I was conflicted as to whether I should go back for my belongings or just get on the plane and leave. Then my logical side kicked in and I decided it was more economical to fly and ask whatever stuff I left behind to be shipped later. Then I woke up from my dream. What was it that I

had behind that made me panic so? Was it a piece of my soul that I left behind? Did it have anything to do with the feeling of “Ahhhhh... I’ve been here before!” that penetrated my being when our crowded jeep zigzagged through the bustling streets of Mumbai on the 2nd day of our trip?

My earlier attempts at trying to practice the Indian way of breaking for tea lasted only several days at home, and at work, only one day. However, I know that in a way that words cannot describe, my fundamental stance towards life has forever changed. And the boundary between the rich and the poor, clean and dirty, privileged and underprivileged, right and wrong, spiritual and materialistic has become blurred. India has taught me rich can be poor and the poor can be rich; the privileged can be those who are unfortunate and vice-a-versa, what’s right by the western standards can be absolutely wrong, and the spiritual and material realms can embrace each other.

Will I return to India? I don’t know for certain. But in my heart, I return every day.

For now, it’s time to break for tea.