



InterPlay
unlock the wisdom of your body

InterPlay in India

Reflections by Gary Field

Gary Field, originally from Adelaide, Australia, has trained as an actor, a clown and an InterPlayer and has a deep affinity for play. Gary went to India with the soul intention of meditating and studying at Bodhi Zendo, a Zen Buddhist retreat center in the hills of Tamil Nadu, South India. On Easter, Gary read the April 2007 edition of Life Positive: Your Complete Guide to



Personal Growth, an Indian magazine. There, on page 34, was an article, “The Dance of Life.” It told the story of Prashant Olalekar, a Jesuit priest, based in Vasai, India, who learned InterPlay while studying Integrated Spirituality in Berkeley, CA.

Gary and Prashant communicated over email to co-lead InterPlay workshops in Mumbai. They met each other on the day of the first InterPlay workshop and together they led five InterPlay workshops in four days.

Here are some reflections from Gary about his experience:

The poverty in India is overwhelming, the slums far reaching, the environmental problems mind boggling. It's a democracy that functions somehow with corruption rife. Through all of this, there is beauty and soul, resilience and warmth, humility and joy.

My arrival in Bombay had been delayed by a “flash” plane strike. Flash? I was flying from Madras in the South. I first met Prashant, four hours before our first workshop. We clicked. We had to!

Picture twenty women in saris who only speak Marathi, the local language, and nine men who speak English, all Catholic environmental activists, on a roof top terrace in Vasai, Prashant's village, north of Bombay. The start was delayed and participants began to arrive sporadically. Warm up. Walk stop run. Solo hand dance. Partnered hand to hand dance. Following and leading. A Big Body Story. People enjoyed themselves with a lot of positive feed back and wanted more.

We traveled south, 50 km on a train to Bombay, for the second workshop. I was carried on to the train by the mass. Once on, I could only push, shove, and surrender, just like InterPlay. I made friends with the man's face in my face, the one who was spooning me, the armpits in my ear. The other who offered me food and the one who offered water. They could see I was considering fainting. There's more male to male contact than the back room at a Gay Pride kite fly. The women travel in a separate carriage. Some people bring musical instruments and sing "bajans," prayers. We didn't have them in our carriage but heard them as they flew by on other trains.

It was the first day of the school year at St Joseph's and our second workshop. The new principal wanted to try something new. Sixty female teachers and one man. Some of the women were in western style dress. All of my time in India has been spent in the south where the women are generally invisible.

The hall was huge and the fans whirred overhead. It was very, very hot. Again we did movement forms. People in Bombay seem to be freer. Less conservative. Is it the laughter clubs? There are ninety laughter clubs in "Maximum City," Bombay.

That evening we got back on the train to Varsai and the Bishop's house. We arrived at 5pm. The next workshop was supposed to begin at 5:30 pm. At 5:45 pm no one had arrived. Events never start on time in India. At 6:10 pm we had seven men and we began. After we began, a man all in white joined us. Thomas was his name. The Bishop. When Prashant asked him for his intention for one exercise he said, "I thought to myself, do I need to do this? (InterPlay workshop). Do I need to learn something new? My intention is that we, the clergy are open to new things." After the workshop we all went upstairs for dinner. The bishop shook my hand, "You're a good man," he said. "Are you a priest?"

Saturday, again in Varsai, 43 men and women at St Andrew's, mostly speaking Marathi. There was a man with mental problems who walked around the hall. I held his hand and we did a hand to hand dance with the other men while the women witnessed. Then the women did the same while the men witnessed. In India, the men and women rarely pair up. When asked to form a circle, all the women stand together, the men the same. More so in Varsai than in Bombay.

Afterwards, we were invited to a nearby house for tea. The father, Zoran, shared some of his street theatre songs. "We don't need a new church," he sang. "We need a community centre." And, "There is Pepsi and there is Coca Cola, where is the clean drinking water?" And, "The sun has set before it has risen, light the flame in your heart." The whole family

joined in. His daughter did some classical Indian dance. Amazing, powerful and inspiring.

The fifth and final workshop happened on Sunday, again in Bombay. “The trains won’t be so crowded, it’s Sunday,” Prashant said. But yes they were! At St Joseph’s, about thirty people took part, even with the monsoon rains arriving. Some spunky, feisty nuns, a ‘hack’ (her words) from a newspaper and Alan, the biggest Indian man I have met and the one of the most gentle. (I stayed this night at his home with him and his tiny 93 year old mum who sipped rum from bottles the size of her thumb and complained that the baker hadn't come). Prashant’s Provincial was there, taking photos, and I remember him moving his hips as though the Father, Son and Holy Ghost depended on it. He was all smiles!

Five workshops in four days! Ahhhhhhhhhh whooshhhhhhhhhhhh.

The monsoon is arriving. It’s a relief after the high temperatures. People die in the heat waves and their bodies can’t be identified. I'm in Delhi now, the capital, about to return to the Buddhist retreat centre in the south, to embrace (embarrass?) some demons, the father, the son and the holy ghost.

Much love, Gary Field