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April 2000

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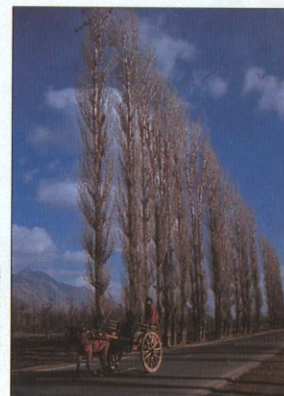
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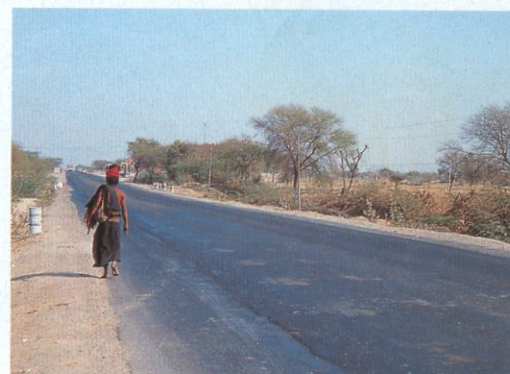
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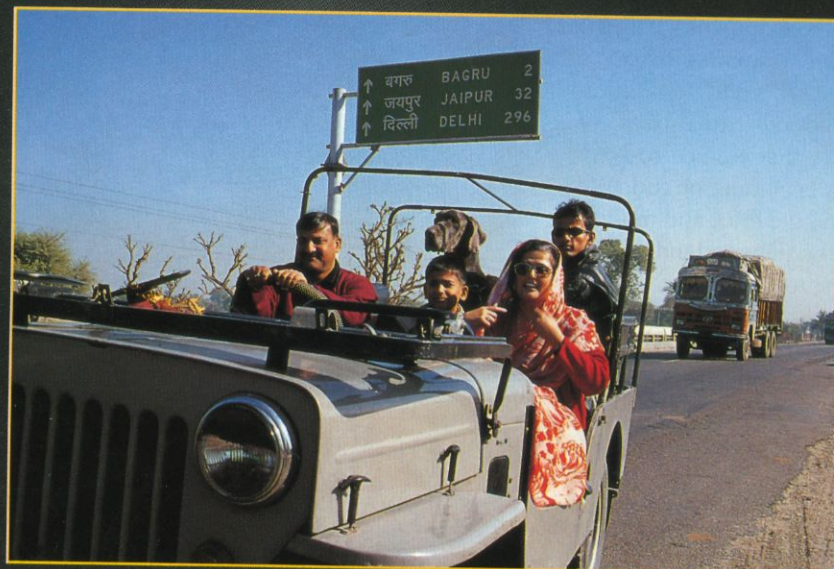
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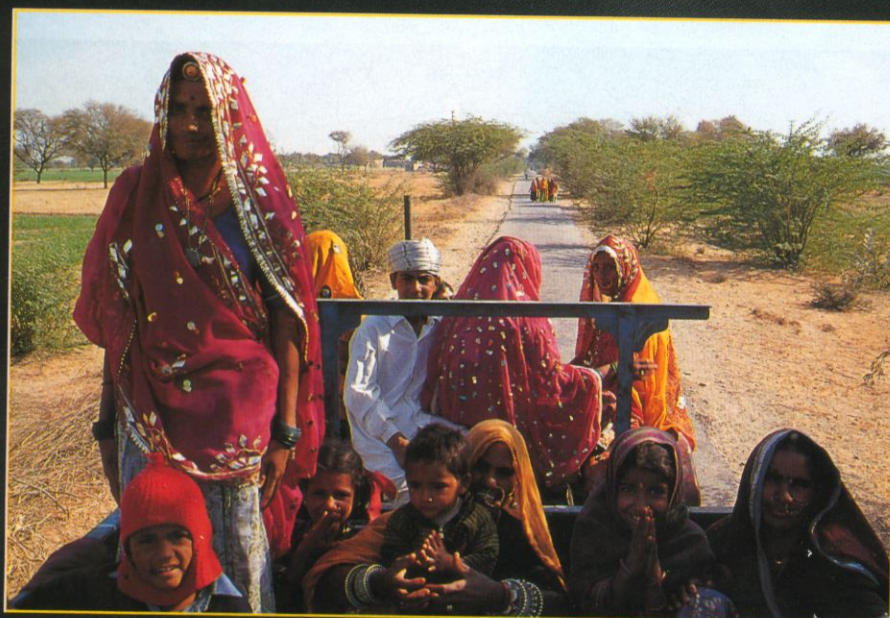
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HEADING
ON THE HIGHWAY



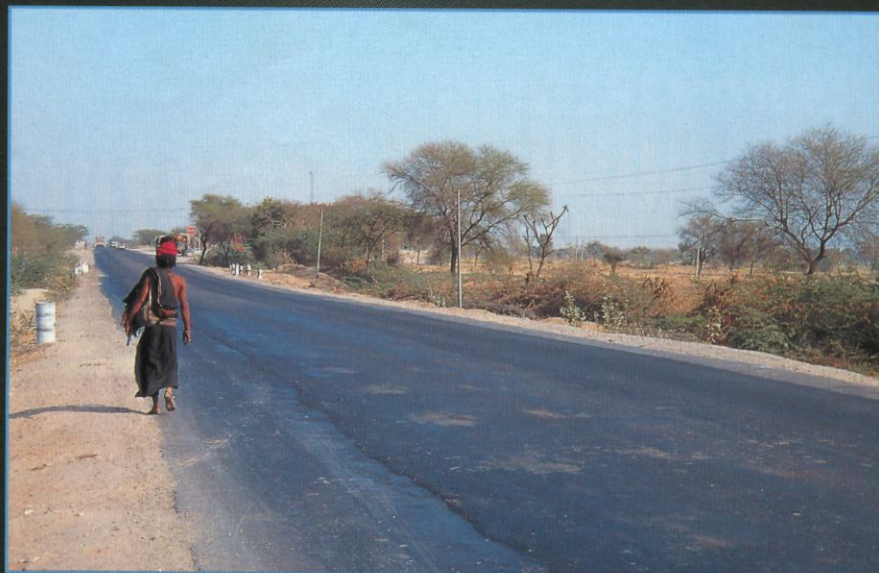
Text & Pictures by Nihal Mathur

THE TRAVELLERS



Once upon a time, travellers were intrepid people with a zest for life. Travellers were adventurers who had interesting tales to tell of great cities, dangerous people and strange wild animals in their long journeys. But today, it seems that the advent of motorised highway and mass transportation with its concomitant midway motels and eating joints have made both travelling and the traveler into something quite prosaic! Not quite! There is still some colour and character out there on the road! Heading on the highway towards Ajmer to participate in a dog show, the Rajawats present a pretty picture in their open jeep, with their two sons and two dogs Sandro, the Great Dane & Bugs, the Doberman. Although quite bumpy, it is great fun for the Kumawat family from Devpura to be out in an open trolley ride to their cousin's for a feast, 9 kms away on the Jaipur highway. But when the traveller becomes a trucker, like Ram Karan, who takes rice from Punjab to Gujarat and brings back groundnut, there is loveliness of sunsets and sunrises and loneliness of long distances before the lorry reaches home!

HEADING
ON THE HIGHWAY



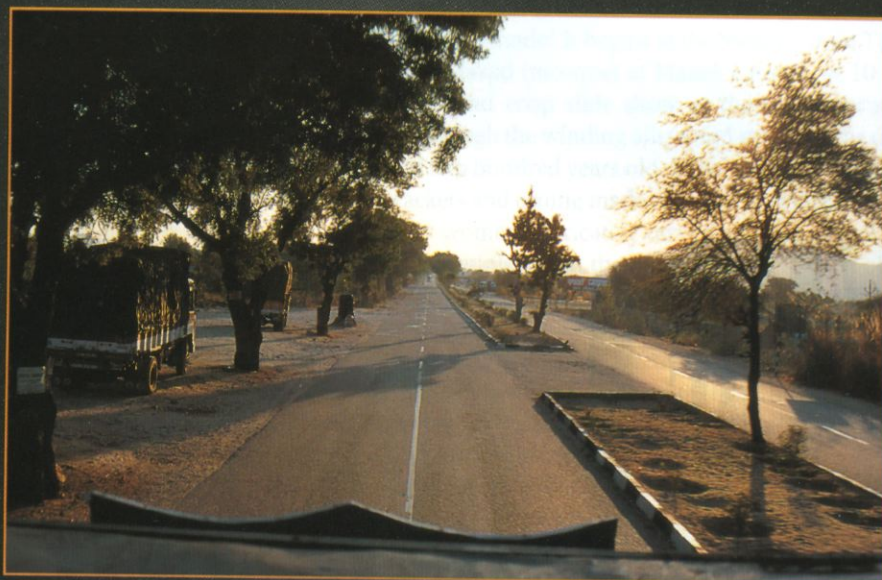
Text & Photographs: Nihal Mathur

A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS



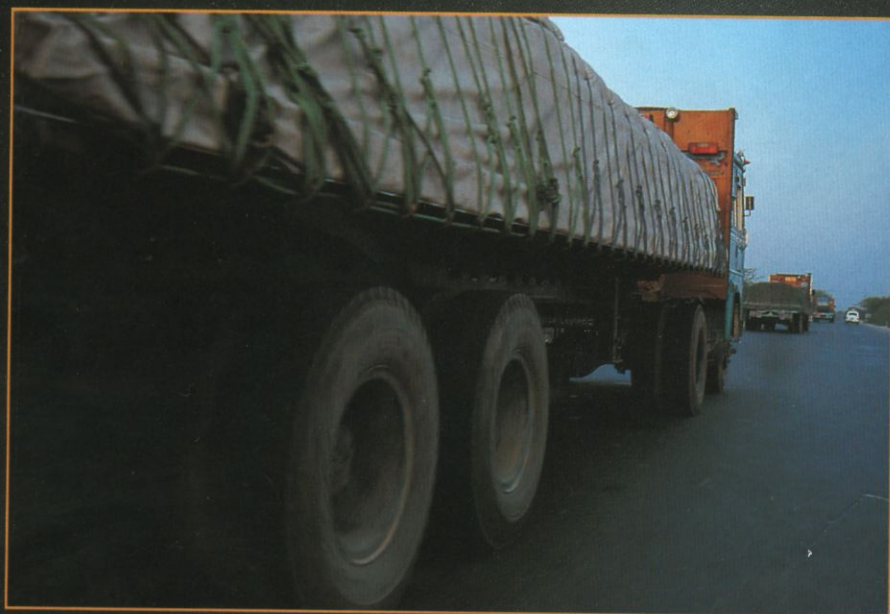
India is a sacred land of Saints & Sadhus, Fakirs & Babas. Besides major pilgrimage centres in all Four Corners of India, there are temples and mosques, shrines and monuments in almost every part of the country. Very often one sees a group of people or even sometimes, a single man walking alone along the highway. From their dress and demeanour one can clearly make out that they are not going to the next village to meet friends or relatives. Instead, they are heading on the highway to keep their date with their Gods. Robed in black, the mystic mendicant (picture number 01) was reticent about his own self and his itinerary. In comparison, Satish Chandra Sharma and his two other cyclist friends (picture number 02) were more than eager to tell their story. Hailing from Badayun district in Uttar Pradesh, they had cycled to the principle places of pilgrimages in Rajasthan that included Khatu Shyamji, Salasar, Baba Ramdevra, Pushkar and on their 31st day were still on the road, pedaling their way to the Mehndipur kay Balaji near Bharatpur their final destination before returning home.

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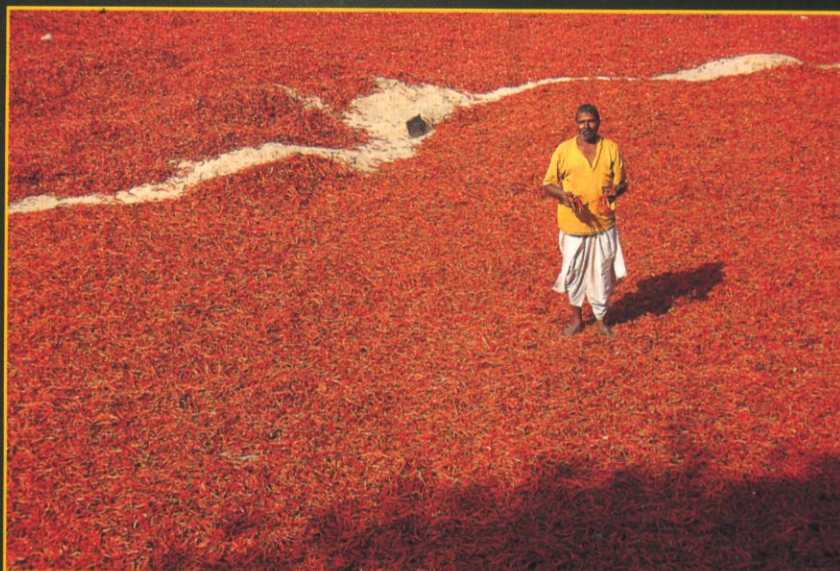


Text & Photographs: Nihal Mathur

HAVE TRUCK WILL TRAVEL



If there is a road, a truck is not very far behind. Never mind the buses that are almost always few & far between or the local jeep-taxis that are often packed and not inexpensive either. If one is lucky, all that one can hopefully get is a bumpy ride on the tractor! But hey! There is always a truck coming down the road that you could flag down! For a few rupees, you can trust a trucker to give you a ride to your destination whether it is the highway crossing two miles down the road or your hometown 200 miles upcountry! Carrying more tonnage than the railways, there is no doubt that today, trucks are India's lifeline, transporting everything from petroleum to perishable products to every nook and corner of this country. The truck driver has a spacious cabin, with a built-in bunker for his assistant, a music system and lots of sitting room for a couple of others. It is a comfortable ride for the hitchhiker, provided one can bear the loud ethnic music favourite of the driver!



Text & Photographs: Nihal Mathur

THRU RED CHILLY COUNTRY

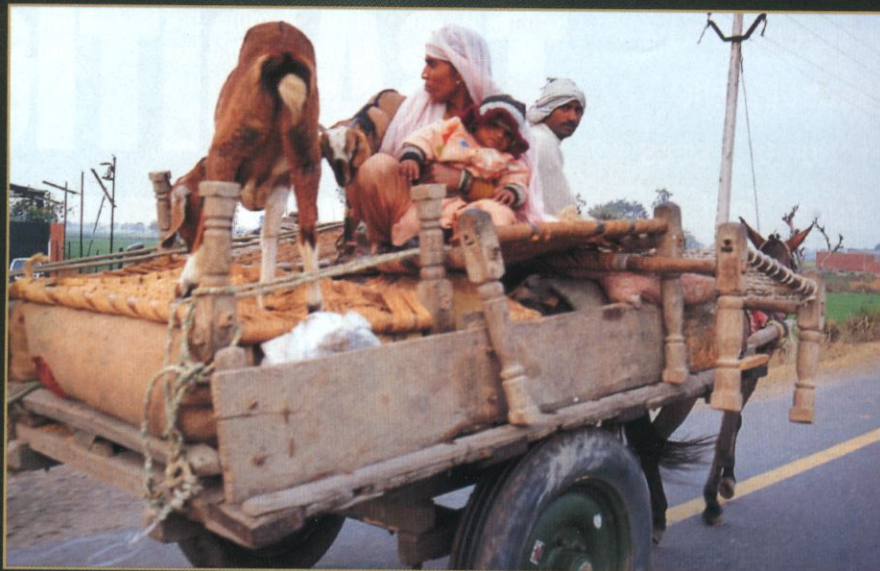


Rich in bio-diversity, India provides an extraordinary range of landscapes as one travels from one region to another. In north India during the winter months, one could drive through miles of mustard with its cover of yellow.

You could also be on a "Rice Road" down south or cut across coconut country, admiring more shades of green than did Rousseau. In some areas, kilometres of corn line the highway while in others wheat stretches to the horizon.

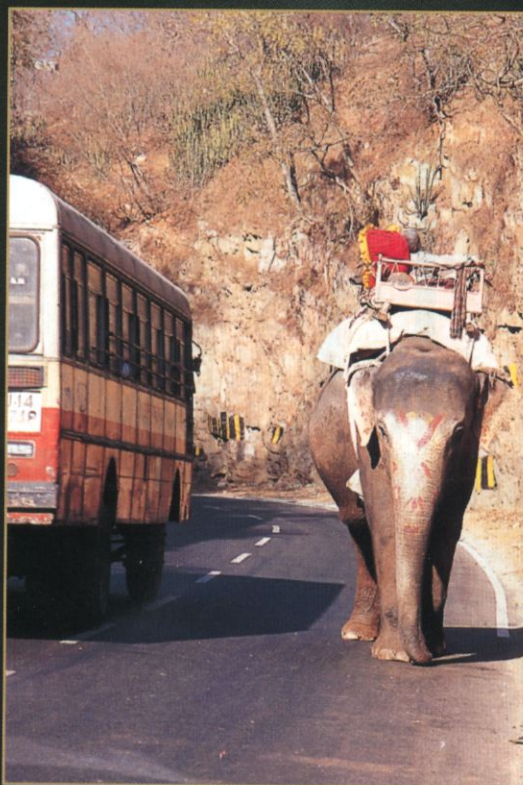
However, there is nothing more dramatic than travelling through red chilly country during the harvesting season. Freshly plucked, the raw red chillies are spread out on the land to dry before it is sold. Drying out entire crops of a particular region, whether it is in Andhra, Gujarat or Rajasthan, often means that mile upon miles of land on either side of the road is carpeted with red chillies as seen here between Bharatpur and Bayana in Rajasthan.

HEADING
ON THE HIGHWAY



Text & Pictures by Nihal Mathur

QUADRUPED POWER

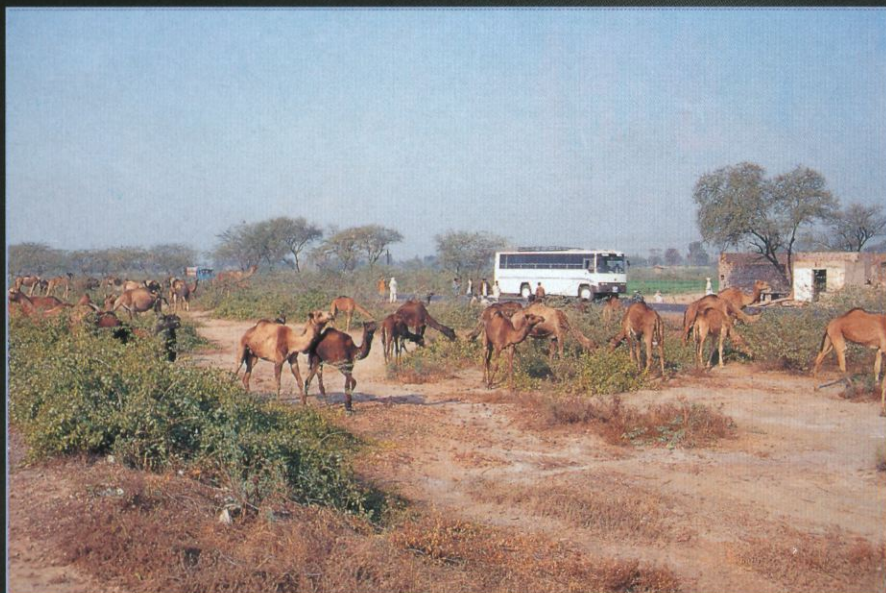


Horsepower? Simply defined as a unit of power that equals 550 foot-pounds of work per second. Indeed, man has given an equine equivalent to measure the power of his wheeled machines. But that does not mean that anything that moves on the road is to be measured in terms of a horse! Heading on the Highway, we still find all kinds of quadrupeds in India. Take for instance the elephant! Although its true home is tropical forests of south and east India, the elephant is found all over the country where it is variously used. Besides its traditional role in timber trade and temple ceremony, the elephant is now a major requirement for the tourism industry, the Indian marriage markets and period movies. But it is the Camel the most commonly found quadruped on the Indian highways that is seen pulling a cart! The ancient bullock-cart survives the centuries along with horse drawn tongas and mules that are still pressed into service and find their rightful place and pace in the company of tankers, trailers and other Tata-bodied giants of the highway!



Text & Pictures by Nihal Mathur

MAGIC BUS



There is a great variety in bus travel as there are many types of buses - each one presenting a different picture of India! Originating in the heart of the metros, the buses penetrate the immensity of India's hinterlands, in an intricate system that is both state & privately controlled. At the bottom of the system is what is termed as the Ordinary Bus — a type that would stop at all stops and would wait for the passengers to arrive and besides a lowly fare, has no fixed schedule of arrival or departure. Then, there is the faster version called The Express, which is supposed to have fewer stops and faster pace. In the state nomenclature, there is also a "Super Express" which means that there is reservations of the seats and there is no free seating as in the case of earlier two. A notch higher is the Deluxe, with its two by two seating and large windows - indeed a comfortable bus. Further up-market is the Air-Conditioned Deluxe with its tinted glasses usually reserved for the tourists.