Introduction:

Thanks to KT Srinnivasan ("Cheenu") for helping me with some points of my India memories sent for the CARE India's 50th anniversary nearly, 11 years later.

During my thirty-three year service with CARE I was honored to serve twice in India. Some memories from those assignments follow.

Separate writings are being prepared for the following CARE assignments:


CARE-India:
Deputy Director 1975-1976
Country Director 1987-1990

Highlights:

1975-1976: This was my first assignment away from the Western Hemisphere, where I had served with CARE in seven Latin American cities beginning in 1963.

We arrived in India after nearly five years in Peru, with our children Eric (13), Karin (12) and Caroline (6). (Caroline had been quite upset to leave her friends and the only home she remembered. I promised her a ride on an elephant for her 6th birthday, which was just to be few days after we arrived. Little did I know when making this promise (we were still in Peru) that I would be able to fulfill it--the Ashok Hotel where we were put-up after arriving in New Delhi had a resident elephant and mahout!)

India was extraordinarily exotic and foreign to us. Its sights, smells, languages and countless other aspects of the country and its people will always be with us.

At that time CARE-India was the largest and most prestigious CARE Mission (as they were known then) in the world. Total program value exceeded US$100 million, accounting for about 1/3 or more of CARE’s world-wide total.
Because of the size of the program, CARE had two Country Directors positions in India. I had worked previously with Country Director Allan Turnbull as Assistant Country Director in Colombia for nearly two years and was honored with his request that I become Deputy Country Director of CARE-India.

Leaving CARE Peru with its then-modest program and small staff behind, it was a thrill to join CARE-India with programs and state and port offices around the country, the world's largest PL-480 program, some 14 million pre-school and school nutrition program beneficiaries, and a staff of 500.

A couple of months after my arrival in February 1975, a third Country Director-level person, Phil Johnston, was assigned to India and given responsibility for developing an emergency food-for-work program in drought-stricken areas. A few months later the two key Assistant Country Directors in charge of programming and food, Rudy Ramp and Don Sanders were transferred out of India. It was decided that Phil would assume responsibility for all programming and I would supervise the personnel, administrative and finance operations.

This position was a significant learning experience for me, both personally and professionally. CARE-India was a sophisticated and efficient operation, far larger even than CARE's New York headquarters (In those days there was no CARE-International. CARE-Canada was legally a part of CARE-USA and functioned much as the sixteen fund-raising Field Offices around the United States.) I learned a great deal from the wonderful CARE-India staff, which prepared me for increased responsibilities outside of India (far sooner that I or anyone else anticipated).

During this period CARE-India was active in 14 states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal. I traveled extensively to state and port offices. During this period most State Administrators were Americans. We were trying to increase the number of Indians and reduce the number of expatriates on our staff. This was not hard considering the high level of competence of the CARE-India staff.

The programs, all coordinated at the central level and implemented in coordination with state governments reached a huge number of school and pre-school children as well as food-for-work program participants, a total of some 13 or 14 million. Very positive relationships existed with the GOI, thanks in great part to the interest and commitment of GOI counterpart Deputy Secretary Mr. R.K. Saha.

Whenever visits were made to state offices it was customary to meet with government officials at the highest levels. CARE-India received a very high level of respect, cooperation and appreciation from them.

Our program was based on the delivery of PL-480 food obtained from the US Government. All of our in-country costs were paid by the various state governments, with which we signed agreements.
A highlight, early in 1976, was the visit of former U.S. presidential candidate Senator George McGovern to the Punjab. With Punjab/Haryana State Administrator Pat Carey (who had been a McGovern campaign worker) and American Embassy staff, we met Mr. & Mrs. McGovern at the Pakistan border and accompanied them for a day and a half visiting PL-480 programs in various communities. Senator McGovern had been director of the then White House-based Food for Peace program during the Kennedy administration, and was very supportive of CARE and our involvement with PL-480 programs around the world.

A significant challenge I faced almost immediately after my arrival was the assignment I was given to resolve a considerable number of lawsuits that resulted from the implementation of infrastructure projects using excess rupees obtained from the United States Government from the sale of PL-480 commodities. These projects included food storage units, central kitchens, the infamous "ready-to-eat factory" in Andhra Pradesh and many others. The total value of the lawsuits was quite significant, I believe around US$1 million. Settling them was complicated by the uncompromising position of CARE-India's expatriate project engineer, who threatened to resign if we agreed to any compromises in settling most of the claims. A further complication was the sense of a conflict-of-interest of our consulting engineering firm. This firm appeared anxious for us to settle most of the claims at amounts we felt were a bit generous. Per our contract with this firm, the larger the settlement the more they would be paid. This was a confusing and almost overwhelming task for me, a non-engineer. I believe there were at least fifteen different cases, and that all but one or two were settled by the time I left India in April, 1976.

Another lawsuit had been filed by an individual contracted to produce educational comic books for CARE-India, again using U. S. Government resources. He had apparently copyrighted the work in a small town even though it was done under the guidance and at the request of CARE-India. The story was that he had been bribing CARE-India staff to pay full price for simply changing the language when the comic ("Lakshman Kills a Tiger") was reprinted in other languages. His contract was terminated when this was found out, and he filed suit. CARE staff (Desmond Ignatius) and a local attorney hired by CARE devoted years to fighting a series of lawsuits resulting from this matter, which evidently was finally settled--against CARE--in 1998. Rumors were that the plaintiff received funding and encouragement from the Soviets, as he was a person of limited resources yet managed to fight the cases through the courts in various states for 25 years. He was effective in having articles about the cases printed in various newspapers through the years. The articles were invariably critical of CARE-India and the United States. (Since the attorney CARE hired received a monthly retainer, in retrospect one wonders how effective his efforts might have been.)

During this period India faced one of its most difficult constitutional crisis since independence, the declaration of the emergency by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. A couple of incidents related to this stand out in my mind. One was an invitation we had received to a dinner at the home of a US Embassy official, whose wife my wife Stephanie had played tennis with. The dinner, in a luxurious residence in the Golf Links area in New Delhi, was attended by a large number of Americans
and Indians. I noticed that the host, who I had met when making official calls on the American Ambassador, was going around to various guests and telling the Indians that they should not stand for what was happening. It seemed to me that he was encouraging them to take whatever action might be within their power to oppose Mrs. Gandhi. When a few days later I expressed my concern about this to a close friend employed by the US Government, I was told "although you are not supposed to know" the individual in question was the CIA Station Chief. This left me feeling very uncomfortable. Said individual was invariably present when official meetings were held with the American Ambassador, but from then on we ended social contacts.

Around this same time we were invited to a going away party for Punjab/Haryana State Administrator Tom Zoph, who was leaving for the Philippines after serving for more than 5 years in India. The party was in the home of some Indian friends of the Zophs, who arrived quite late from Chandigarh and were flying out of Palam International Airport later that night. One Indian woman who appeared to be a bit inebriated was going group to group complaining about Mrs. Gandhi, saying that they should all rise up and get rid of her. This made me a bit nervous, as many people were being arrested and jailed during this very uncertain period. When commenting to one of the guests about this I was told "not to worry"—the woman was Indira Gandhi's cousin. (Apparently the two had never gotten along anyway...)

Little did we realize that only 14 months in CARE-India we would be transferred to Bangladesh. We were saddened to leave India and our many friends, but I believe I had grown professionally in a short time. Much of what I learned during that short assignment served me well for the rest of my career.

1987-1990: Little did we realize that we would return to India once again. After three years in Bangladesh I had been promoted to Assistant Executive Director and moved to CARE's New York headquarters, where I remained for nearly five years. In 1983 we left New York to reestablish CARE-Mexico, moved to Bolivia in 1985, back to Mexico in 1986 expecting to remain there for a reasonable period of time. The request to assume responsibility for CARE-India came as a surprise, one we were happy to accept. By then our children were grown, so it was just the two of us.

By this time CARE-India's overall leadership role within CARE had diminished. CARE-India no longer accounted for more than one-third of CARE’s total program value, but it was still a significant operation. There was now a CARE-International with ten country members in addition to CARE-USA. CARE as an organization had grown significantly, and CARE-India was but one of a number of very large country offices.

India was no longer strange to us, and we felt quite comfortable returning to the familiar places and many old friends.

The India we returned to had been somewhat torn asunder by various tragedies in the intervening years. Civil strife in Kashmir, the Punjab and elsewhere had been their toll. The assassination of Indira Gandhi and subsequent slaughter of thousands of Sikhs in New Delhi and elsewhere resulted in a far less secure overall feeling than had existed previously. Population growth continued almost unabated, and the population had grown from 750 million to 900 million, increasing at a rate of 17 or 18 million per
year. New Delhi, which in the 1970s seemed more like a number of unconnected towns, villages and the planned capital built by the British earlier in the century, was by 1987 a huge, polluted city with a population approaching ten million.

The CARE-India program had recently been concentrated in fewer states (Haryana, Punjab, Kerala and Tamil Nadu were closed). The program was 100% in support of the GOI's massive ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), focusing on pre-school children and their mothers in some of India's poorest regions.

Other CARE country programs seemed to be more on the cutting edge, while India was stuck with PL-480 food programming in support of a program developed and managed by the GOI and state governments. Innovative monetization programs, to be funded with some US$4 million from the monetization of PL-480 commodities, were to a great extent stuck without approvals at the GOI level, in spite of support from our various state government counterparts. Other international and multilateral organizations faced similar problems with the GOI counterpart.

There seemed to be far fewer bicycles and scooters in Delhi than previously, and many more small cars with the corresponding increase in congestion on the streets. One thing had not changed: cows continued to wander freely, at times adding to traffic problems, but providing an important service in consuming household waste through the city.

Upon arrival for my second assignment with CARE-India I encountered considerable internal strife. The reasons for this situation are known by many, and will not be addressed here. Suffice to say that the senior staff was quite demoralized. Rebuilding confidence and an effective team was one of the great challenges of my career.

One significant change within CARE-India was that by this time there was only one State Administrator position held by an expatriate. Whereas previously there had been about 15 North Americans on staff, by the mid-1980s the number was five or six. All of the other positions were held by Indian nationals, many with twenty or more years of service. Numerous other CARE-India colleagues at all levels had served loyally for many (some more than 30) years. I had worked with the majority of them during my first tour in India, and it was wonderful to reestablish relationships with former colleagues at both the CARE-India HQ and state office levels.

CARE-India continued to be almost 100% dependent on the US Government's PL-480 program for resources, not a desirable situation. We continually felt threatened by the fragility of bilateral relations, US trade policies, USA-India official inability to understand each other, etc. Frustrations caused by the low level of cooperation on the part of our GOI counterpart agency were a great disappointment. CARE would have allowed me to remain for several more years in India, but upon completion of the three years I had originally committed to when agreeing to return to India, I accepted the opportunity of reassignment to Ecuador. This decision was in part motivated by the opportunity my departure provided for Deputy Director Pat Carey to be promoted to Country Director. When I first served in India Pat was a young intern. When I returned in 1987 he was also on his second assignment there, having returned to India
after assignments in Haiti, the Philippines and CARE’s New York headquarters. Pat was extraordinarily competent and intelligent, highly qualified to take over CARE-India at that time. (A dear friend and colleague, all were saddened by his untimely demise a few years later. RIP, dear Pat!)

During both of my assignments to India cooperation with USAID and its officials, especially the Food for Peace office, was very positive.

Of great significance and importance during both of my assignments to India were the quality of the CARE-India staff and their great loyalty.

A friend remarked how living in India significantly impacted on the lives of my family: my daughter Karin married a former classmate from Kodaikanal School in Tamil Nadu. While they are now divorced, our granddaughter's lovely face and name (Maya) proudly reflect her Indian heritage. Our son Eric married a woman from Germany. They were introduced by an Indian friend in New York City. Eric's range of friends reflects his international upbringing, and the five and a half years he spent in India as a student in both New Delhi and Kodaikanal. On our second assignment to India my spouse, free from the responsibilities of mothering, enjoyed the opportunity to travel extensively throughout the country.

The personal and professional memories of India will always be with us. My professional successes would never have been possible without the knowledge and skills acquired in India. My family shares wonderful memories of countless friends and experiences in India. We will always treasure these years as among the most important and significant of our lives.

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