

Growing up In India

The India in which I grew up about thirty years ago had very few people with cars, and I remember taking my time to cross the roads. I lived in the center of Delhi then, avenues leading out from our little traffic circle into six different directions. My favorite was the one that carried my friends and I, six o'clock early summer mornings to the boat club within the India Gate lawns.

We took turns waking each other up for a five or six mile walk with a boat ride in the middle of it, swishing sticks and collecting flowers the entire way. I was in elementary school then, perhaps fifth grade, and my parents thought nothing of letting me go. We slept on cots in the garden outside. All I had to do was to pick up my bedding, and be off.

There were many ends to Delhi then. An uncle who had moved across the Yamuna river, used to take me on his bicycle to his home across the bridge. It wasn't far but it felt like one had arrived somewhere else, across green farm-fields to a small village-town. I remember snakes popping up in houses. A cousin with a brand new flat in South Delhi had land colored turquoise with peacocks in front of her balcony.

New Delhi of my childhood was green: Filled with centuries old Banyans, Bottlebrushes, Mulberries, and Willows with strands with which to jump rope. It was filled with the fragrance of Queen of the Night and Jasmines. It was spacious and a girl could bike or play outside safely enough. That Delhi had homes with gardens.

Today, my sister won't let her granddaughter go out of her front-gate alone. She lives trans-Yamuna too, but that edge of Delhi has now extended beyond a hundred

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Delhi's of my childhood combined. The traffic in that direction now jams across many bridges.

I don't know any children who go for morning walks or would be allowed to beyond the closed gates of their communities. There are many parties late into the nights though and many children of today's Delhi are there dancing to DJ's, or watching movies or spending time on the internet.

Yes, the world has changed since I grew up in Delhi. But how many Americans say similar things of their childhoods as well? Our children today are plugged up with electronics. And how safe do we feel letting them out of our sight?

And yet, as I walk along the bay in Maine, where I live with my children, I fill up with gratefulness- for being here. For giving to my children a world somewhat similar to the one I grew up in, where I can still sleep outside in the garden and see the stars if I want to. As for the Delhi of today- it's now greening faster than any other major city in the world, and has a first world Metro that has begun to cut across the chaos under the ground.