



My future is cast in stone!

It was a typically Indian train: robust and rumbling – a relic from *The Raj* - but it got the job done. We trundled down from the hills around Bangalore, to the plains which stretched to Chennai. I jumped down at a deserted stop, ten kilometres South of my destination; a market town called Tiripattur.



Standing on the platform, wondering what to do next, I see three boys dressed in rags. We begin chatting - a mix of my basic Hindi and their elementary English – when I notice they're holding small white plastic cups. That's their job they tell me, collecting the cups discarded by commuters, for recycling. I give them a ten rupee note and ask how to get to Tiripattur. With infectious smiles and self-conscious giggles, they point to somewhere

beyond the station gates.



They were right of course. On the road outside I find a black and battered *Ambassador* saloon car; the re-badged 1950s *Morris Oxford* - as known in England - which became the ubiquitous taxi for



three or four decades in India. I throw myself and bag into the back, then look around for the driver.

From where I sit, the pilot and co-pilot are hardly visible over the high-backed front bench seat; they look about 10 or 11 years old. The one driving seems competent enough as he works the stick shift, and the conversation in broken English is jovial; so *hakuna matata*, as long as they get me to my destination in one piece, that's okay with me.

In Tiripattur I'm escorted to schools and shown the town by Sandeep, a small middle-aged man, with a characterful craggy face and a large wing commander moustache, who seems to know everyone we bump into. On my second day I spot an elderly bearded man, sitting yoga style on the roadside, in front of a small pile of stones. *"What is he doing there?"* I ask inquisitively. Sandeep's English is at most times fascinating, but usually he gets his point across. *"He can see future. You like him meet?"*



I am intrigued. *"OK. Why not?"* So we sit down in front of the guy – a guru of sorts – then after questions to Sandeep and replies from me translated back to him, he proceeds to select a range of stones from the pile, throwing them in various directions: some big, some small; some near, some far. At the end of this miniature bowling demo, he begins to provide snippets of my past, along with predictions for my future. This is done through translation via Sandeep, along with a variety of elaborate hand signals.

Looking back, the soothsayer said things which were astounding. He told me my age and where I came from, recounting important events from my past. Beyond that, he also made predictions for my future, which at the time seemed far-fetched: that I would live in Africa, meet a dark lady, and have another child. I put most of what he said into the wild fantasy

basket, but the astonishing fact is, that almost all of what the fortune teller told me, as we sat on the grass verge that day, was true and came to pass over the next 25 years!

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