By Devin Gibbs
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When I first made the decision to travel to India I looked at a globe in my boyfriend’s parents’ house. My first observation I could make at that point was that India is a long ways away. I really had no idea just how far we were going to travel. Now four days in I can honestly say this is nothing like I expected and I love every minute of it. From the time we landed my eyes have gone non-stop. I have asked so many questions that I worry that my new friends with CLIC Abroad will grow tired of me. Fortunately for me, and for all of us from the United States, for every question I have they have one in return. Marcus, Tom, and I have made fast friends with Ashi, Praveen, Jitender, and Bhaskar. Ashi is the only other girl with the workshop at this point so we are sharing a room. She and I are the same age—actually born only a few days apart—which makes it even more interesting to see how different our lives have been. We have joked that everything is opposite between our two countries, but today that statement really hit home. Today was the first day of the CLIC Abroad workshop and the first time that I have gotten to spend time with the children of Pragpur. There are similarities in some things, but at this point in the trip there are more differences than I ever expected. I have compiled a list of differences that show we not only live on opposite sides of the world and drive on the opposite side of the road, but in some ways we are so very different. 1. Last night Marcus, Praveen, Jitender, Ashi, and I stayed up for 6 hours talking about life in both countries and making comparisons between our lifestyles. Those of you in Georgia may have heard us laugh from all the way over there when we started comparing the exchange rate and how much money will get you what in the United States. I was showing Praveen a picture of the chocolate lab that I bought my boyfriend for Christmas and he asked how much I paid for the dog. I felt a little uncomfortable telling him because 5 minutes earlier we found out that a person could live off of what would be equivalent to $100 for a month, and comfortably. I finally told him that I paid $300 for Keith’s hunting dog and the reaction I got was priceless. Keep in mind that $300 in American money is enough to buy a great deal in India. Praveen’s face dropped and he said, “For 15,000 rupees I would come to your house and bark for you!” We all died laughing, but then the reality of it hit me. Five of us ate a full meal with rice, two vegetables, curd, and bread for what would be $5 in the states. Of course, at the time it was hilarious but it really puts things into perspective of how low the cost of living is here. 2. When we reached the school this morning the children were singing their prayers and Tom was able to record them worshiping. Later when I was giving an interview I cried about this part of my day because it was so moving. The room we were in was packed with the most beautiful children all curious about what we were doing there, but they never stopped singing. The team from CLIC Abroad sat in the front while the children sang behind us and that moment moved me so much that it was really hard to talk about later. The children have such a passion for learning and for life in general. It was hard not to think of the attitude that we often see in the states. Very few American children enjoy school and even someone like me who loves school still has a tendency to complain. Being in a place like this and seeing people so different from the people I know is a mental rollercoaster. I am physically tired after playing tag and hopscotch with the kids, but I am also mentally drained from trying to make sense of it all. I have learned recently though that some things cannot be explained. The culture and traditions are so strong here that some things will probably never make sense to me, but it sure doesn’t keep me from asking.
Didi which means elder sister in their language. They opened their arms to me and each one wanted his or her picture taken with me. 4. When we left one girl’s house, Tom was carrying a small camera bag and his tripod. Ashi and I were just walking back to the van a few steps ahead of him. Ashi and I were laughing about a joke she told me about yak bull milk and Praveen gently scolded us for making our “elder” carry his bag. I looked all around to find an elderly person, but then I realized he was talking about Tom! They explained that in India you never let someone older than you carry bags. I explained that in the states it is usually that men help women carry their bags and Ashi looked at me like I was crazy. I told her that if someone was elderly (as in older than Tom) we would offer to carry the bags, but since he is an able bodied man he can carry his own bags. There again, some social situations are much different from ours in the U.S. 5. The people here are also very close—literally. Their “personal bubble” is much smaller here than back home. Both boys and girls are affectionate to one another. I have seen several boys hug, throw one arm around each other and walk and talk that way, and even intertwine their arms the way girls who are friends do sometimes in the states. Boys back home very rarely show affection towards their other guy friends. In general most of us are very sarcastic and our way of showing affection is by picking on our friends. Within an hour of meeting Praveen, Jitender, and Ashi they each had something so kind to say to me about my personality and my soul. I blushed and they didn’t understand why. I had to tell them that people are kind in the states but we don’t complement each other often the way they do here. Even through all of these small social differences I have found that we are so much more similar than I originally thought. This sounds like a total contradiction from what I said before, but as I sit here blogging and talking to Ashi at the same time it is evident that we have the same goals. We both want a family; we want to be happy and successful. We want to earn a living in a way that we can be proud of and we want to treat people with kindness and understanding. The small differences are interesting, but the things we are similar on is even more interesting because we are from the complete opposite side of the planet.