

Helping People

One Drop At A Time

Field Report From India

November 8, 2010

Dear Friends,

In June we brought a little bit of India to the USA by hosting our Indian managing director, Rama Chandre and his wife Jaya for two weeks at our home in Connecticut. Our original plan was to spend five days in Montreal attending the Rotary International convention, an annual get together of Rotarians from nearly every country in the world. However, like the best laid plans, this one went off script! The Canadian government was refusing to grant entry visas due to a security threat from the G-20 meeting that was held at the same time in Toronto. Instead of flying into Montreal, they flew to New York.

Both of them were raised in south Indian villages and took their grammar school lessons sitting on the concrete floor of the village primary school. Ram was a good student and eventually received an engineering degree from Mysore University and became a successful businessman, running a factory that manufactured hydraulic pipes for earth moving equipment. It was only after retirement and a commitment to devoting his life to service through Rotary that we met him in Kolar, India. He has worked as a volunteer tirelessly for five years to make our Bio-sand filter project one of the best in the world.

Our gesture in bringing him to the States is only a small token of what we owe him. We had great fun showing them the sights of the area; New York City, the Massachusetts shore, Circe du Soleil, many Rotary meetings to thank supporters, and social events with friends. We all had a great time.

It has been nearly a year since our last trip to India so we were more than ready for the journey. Ram and his son, Soma Shekar met us at the airport and drove us to Kolar. After a few hours rest we were ready for some time with Ram's family. There was food, gifts, naps and laughs...not an action day but a gentle beginning to our adventure.

On the seventh of every month the community stewards make their way to Kolar for a meeting. The community stewards are the heart and soul of the Adopt-A-Village program. A steward is someone from the village who is trained in the use and maintenance of the Bio-sand filters. They are paid a stipend for a year to go from household

 South Asia
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giving

**U.S. dollars go a long way
in India....for example:**

Adopt A Family: \$ 32

Donation of one water filter to a needy family who is unable to purchase a filter.

Adopt A Village Partnership: \$ 3,000

Provides up to 90 filters to needy households in a village. Each family (i.e. partner) must pay a small portion of the cost of each household filter (approx. \$5.00); the remaining cost is paid by the sponsor. Soap and educational program for village children, donated water filters for schools and child care centers, community steward for one year period. Sponsor name is painted on the side of each filter.

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to household each month to make sure the filters are being used properly and to see if there are any problems. The meeting in Kolar is a combination of training and an exchange of ideas to further enhance the knowledge of the community stewards. They are paid a stipend at this meeting which ensures good attendance.

The meeting lasted a couple of hours. There was a lively exchange of ideas during which Anjenalu, one of the workshop employees, checked the monthly log books maintained by the stewards, which provide information about each of the filter users. Of course there was coffee and biscuits and liberal doses of Fanta orange soda. Usually when we are in Kolar we take the stewards out to lunch but because of a cyclone off of the east coast of India the weather was sketchy at best and they wanted to go right home, which for some is a two hour bus ride followed by some walking to get back home.

Since we finished up early we spent some time in the afternoon shopping for a gift for a wedding we are to attend. The shops in town are interesting; in one tiny shop you might see children's toys displayed next to jewelry which might be next to toiletries; anything goes. We came across a fruit and vegetable market and we wandered through ogling at the beautifully displayed produce.

Today we visited two villages about fifteen miles north of the workshop. These villages were sponsored by a Rotary matching grant involving Bangalore and Minnesota Rotary Clubs. When we do village tours we typically meet the community steward in the village and visit with the village leader before embarking on a walking tour to individual user's homes to inspect the filters and inquire about the user's satisfaction with the filters. Typically we find that 95% of the users are very enthusiastic and describe improvements in health from a reduction in gastrointestinal illness, skin rashes, joint pain, headaches and other maladies associated with contaminated water. The filter users are delighted to see us and are very hospitable offering such things as sweets, tea, and bananas. The children are curious about us and follow us around trying to engage us by speaking whatever English words they know. They are usually surprised when Mike answers them in their native language, Kannada.

The villagers are by and large agricultural workers who make approximately \$120 per year for their families. The houses are very basic, some with dirt floors. A great variety of animals can be seen; many villagers have cows or water buffalos tethered on their property. These animals are milked for food and some of the milk is sold to a local dairy for cash.



You can also see bullocks which are castrated males that are used as draft animals in the fields or hitched to carts to carry crops and construction materials throughout the village and beyond. There are plenty of mangy dogs roaming the village along with chickens, cats, an occasional pig, and wild monkeys in the trees and on the rooftops. Needless to say with all of this wildlife you must be careful where you step so eyes are generally cast down looking for a safe place to plant your foot. We always like visiting the villages. It is heartwarming to hear positive stories about the filter use and there is a certain quietness there that calms the nerves and relaxes us.

Tonight we are attending a wedding at the hotel where we are staying. The daughter of Ram's tenant is getting married and we have been invited to the reception. When we were at Ram's house yesterday there was already a houseful of friends and relatives who had gathered for a puja (prayer) ceremony. The hotel has been setting up since morning; it is bound to be an interesting night for us.

More soon!

Cathy and Mike

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Taste The Healthy Difference