

# Helping People

## One Drop At A Time

Field Report From India

November 14, 2010

Dear Friends,

So much has happened since we last wrote to you that it would be impossible to fill you in on everything. So we will tell you a little bit about a couple of major events and leave it at that.

The Hindu wedding reception we attended for Rama Chandre's tenant was a "small" affair by Indian standards. There were a mere 1,000 guests invited to the reception. The reception hall is reached by a fancy granite staircase that passes by two statues of Hindu gods lavishly decorated with mirrored inlays adorned with flowers and plants placed around them and bathed in bright lights, a stunning sight. The reception hall is a cavernous area with seating for perhaps 500 or 600 people. In the center aisle of the reception hall there was a steel boom 50 feet long with a video camera mounted on the end along with a bright light and cables that feed back to an operator with a video monitor who can direct the boom all around the stage area and back into the seating area. Coordinated with this were a couple of flat screen monitors showing activities in an outdoor venue and in the dining hall downstairs. These feeds were from mobile videographers who were in other parts of the building and outside.

We were ushered to the VIP seats in front and received flower garlands and rose bouquets. We were brought up on stage ahead of a waiting line of guests to greet the bride and groom and their families. We stood for photographs with the wedding party and then proceeded to the dining hall one floor below.

Feeding 1,000 people as if it were a sit down family dinner is astounding. In rows of long narrow tables guests sit on metal stools in front of a banana leaf and bottled water. In India the banana leaf is the traditional "plate" for a meal. It is wide and long and provides a good waterproof base for the food. The diners first sprinkle water on the leaf and wash it with their right hands. Excess water is pushed off of the leaf; now it is ready for the food.

An army of servers march in front of the guests in a line like soldiers, each one with a different dish. First the salt man places a teaspoon of salt onto each leaf. Then the pickle man places a mixture of pickled spiced fruits, usually mango and lime, then there are several different vegetable and lentil combinations, each served by ladle



# 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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one after another until the leaf is nearly full. Two kinds of sweets were also placed on the leaf, one an almond based rectangular shaped confection like fudge and the other a gulab jamin, a fried and breaded confection soaked in honey sauce. Then comes bread, the traditional South Indian flat bread is called chipati, made with special dark wheat flour, a south Indian specialty. Rice followed with ladles of hot lentil sauce and finally more rice with curds, a yogurt-like preparation to end the meal. Each guest is served this full meal in about 30 seconds

After the meal we went outside to an area where snacks and desserts were served. There was fruit salad and vanilla ice cream, then a “chat” station, which is miniature round puffed fried breads called pouris stuffed with a mixture of puffed rice, onions, yogurt, spices and a green spicy sauce. Finally there was a table with “paan”. Chewing paan is a custom found all over Asia, where a green betel leaf is coated with a slaked lime paste and then mounded with areca nut, sweets and other condiments before being folded in packets and then chewed until gone. The betel leaf concoction is a mild stimulant and is meant to settle the stomach and give a feeling of satisfaction after a meal.

One of our missions on this trip is to help to start another workshop in Raichur, an area that saw severe flooding and devastation more than a year ago. Raichur district is located in the northeast part of the Indian state of Karnataka. It is about 350 miles from Kolar. The climate is quite different because that portion of the state is sea level while Kolar and the surrounding area is perched on the Deccan Plateau, about 2,500 feet above sea level. Because of the geological differences, Raichur gets an intense tropical heat even in their winter season. This area is also located at the confluence of two rivers, which over the centuries have flooded and deposited rich soil on the surrounding plains near the rivers. Since water is more abundant in this area, agricultural land covers vast areas. The primary crops grown here are cotton, toor dal, a yellow nutritious lentil, and rice.

Getting to Raichur is not easy. There are no nearby airports and the roads are not very good, especially since last year’s floods damaged them severely. The best mode of transportation is on the overnight train that runs between Bangalore and Mumbai. There are books that are written about the Indian railroad system and we could write one now as well! The trip from Bangalore to Raichur takes ten hours. Probably four of those hours the train is spent standing still on a side rail to let other trains pass. We were in second class air conditioned cars that have sleeping berths, four to a cabin and two across the aisle. There are thin curtains between the cabin area and a common aisle. There is basically no privacy and lights shine through the thin curtains. There is a symphony of snoring, chatting in several languages, babies crying, and cell phones chiming throughout the night. This is the essence of India, just like the food, a mix of exotic ingredients that all seem to work together to make an interesting concoction.



The floods last year in Raichur wreaked havoc on the Infrastructure, homes, and farmland that were inundated with water. Many NGOs have pitched in to help relieve suffering from the devastation in this area. Rotary clubs from many areas have teamed up to provide 100 Bio-sand water filters to schools in the area and 600 filters to new block homes that are being donated by Cisco Systems.

After the long train ride we were shuttled to the best hotel in town by two Rotarians who met us at the train station. The hotel provides hot water from 7am to 10am so we took advantage and cleaned up with a well need cup bath. After breakfast at the hotel we were picked up by two local Rotarians. They drove us to an orphanage where their Rotary club was conducting a dental clinic for the children. A local hospital has an RV that is converted into a mobile dental office staffed by several young dentists and assistants. We were shown the Bio-sand water filters in the courtyard of the orphanage donated by the Rotary club sponsoring the clinic. They were filtering murky river water which was obviously contaminated. The filtered water was crystal clear and the Rotarians drank it with relish. They are extremely satisfied with the filter technology and are anxious to provide more in this area. We were treated to a Bollywood song and dance routine by the children who formed several long lines in the auditorium. After a couple of short speeches we transferred to another room for biscuits and bottled water and to observe the preliminary dental checkups for the children.

We left the orphanage for a two hour grueling SUV ride to the remote farming area where the block homes are being built by Cisco Systems. We were in the middle of nowhere when our SUV punctured a tire. The driver put the spare on while we waited under the shade of a tree across the road and we moved on without a spare on treadless tires.

When we arrived at the site we were shocked and disappointed after seeing filters in disarray outside of the block homes along with empty filter media bags. Apparently some of the beneficiaries had moved into the homes without our knowledge and did not know what the filters are used for. They took them outside to make more room for themselves. Some of them were being used to store water for the toilet and others were just sitting or lying in the dirt near the house. Some of the media bags had been emptied and the bags were being used as foot wipes in front of the door to the home.

These are very basic cement block structures with no more than 200 square feet, three small rooms including a kitchen. There is a toilet in the back but they were locked so we couldn't inspect them.

We had a discussion with the project engineer who explained that once the homes are constructed Cisco turns the keys over to the government. The government has a lottery to decide who gets the homes. Apparently there was no communication between the government officials and Cisco and we were surprised there were people actually living in the homes. We began to formulate possible solutions to the problem but there was a sense of gloom that things had not gone according to plan.



We went to another area of Cisco financed block homes to make sure the same situation wasn't happening there. That location was ok and all of the filters and media were placed inside locked homes which were unoccupied.

After the long ride home we walked to a local restaurant for a quick meal and then collapsed in bed upon returning to the hotel...what a long day!

The next day two large men came to the hotel for a meeting. These were two gregarious Rotarians from the Raichur Cotton City Rotary Club, the newest of three Clubs in town. It was like the movie Pulp Fiction, where "the fixer" had to come in and clean up the mess caused by John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson. These men were going to help to fix the problem at the block housing site. They know a man who helped install 100 filters in schools in Raichur, a different project also involving the same Bangalore-based Rotary Club involved in this Cisco house project. They are planning on having him and two other men that will be trained in Kolar go to the homes that are occupied in the block housing units and install the filters properly along with instructions to the homeowners on their proper use and maintenance. The installers will also survey the filters and filter media to see what needs to be replaced. We thought this was a brilliant solution to have local people involved in the problem solving rather than having to do it from Kolar.

We had hours of discussions throughout the day, the last one had to do with the starting of a new workshop by three Rotarians just before we had to leave for the train station for the long ride back to Bangalore. The potential for delivering clean water to Raichur is great but difficult to manage from Kolar. We are grateful that local Rotarians are stepping up to meet this challenge.

More soon!

Cathy and Mike

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Taste The Healthy Difference