

# Helping People

## One Drop At A Time

Field Report From India

December 7, 2011

Dear friends,

We are back in the USA and spending a vacation week in Florida. Mike has bronchitis and a touch of pneumonia and this restful week in the sunshine state is just what he needs. However we did want to tell you about our final week spent in India.

When Mike was in Kolar in September he met an interesting man from the city of Mysore named Sharanappa, who was attending the first week's training course sponsored by our organization. It was a teaching program for village level health workers and trainers of those health workers. Sharanappa was so interested in the bio sand filter technology that he stayed for the second week of training which involved learning all the technical aspects of manufacturing a bio sand filter and some of the softer sides of the program, such as creating a program to distribute the filters and educating people regarding clean water. Sharanappa is interested in manufacturing the bio sand water filters and Mike had promised him that we would visit him so we planned a trip to Mysore as part of our agenda.

The ride to Mysore is fascinating. Mysore is about 300 km from Kolar but it seems like a world apart. The trip is agonizing because to get to Mysore you must drive through Bangalore, a two-hour bumper to bumper ride in some of the world's worst smog. The traffic in Bangalore is beyond imagination and the air is filled with micro droplets of diesel fuel that seems to invade every pore of your body. Mike can never make it through Bangalore without getting a headache from the noxious fumes. Once through Bangalore the highway to Mysore is pretty good and as the kilometers tick by the landscape changes dramatically. The dusty, rocky landscape turns into wet fields of rice sugarcane and coconut plantations. The closer you get to Mysore the more fertile and lush landscape becomes and as we passed over three significant rivers during that journey there seemed to be no end to large quantities of fresh water.

The city of Mysore is very different from Bangalore; it is much smaller and not as commercially oriented. It has a lot of tourist attractions such as the Maharajah's palace and the Hill Temple and it has a museum and a zoo and other attractions that draw people. It is known as the pensioners' city and is a popular retirement community where people can live out their days enjoying the parks, gardens and



# 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.

**Make Checks Payable to:**

**South Asia Pure Water Initiative, Inc.  
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broad avenues of the city. Mysore is also a center for learning; there are many colleges and universities that grace this metropolis.

Our destination was an orphanage run by Sharanappa where we would be spending the night. We were met by a lively bunch of children at the gate who sang us a song of welcome, said some prayers and introduced us to a custom I had never seen before. One girl had a pan of water colored with red powder and three flowers floated in it; she said some prayers and dabbed some water on our foreheads and then poured the contents of the pan in a line in front of us. We were told to proceed with our right foot to cross the line and enter the compound. We were given a tour of the orphanage as the kids bubbled with excitement all around us. It was beautiful and meticulously maintained. The main building is new and made out of red polished brick. The interior floors were surfaced with cream colored polished stone. The children had decorated the interior with various sand and stone diagrams of welcome.

Eventually we were shown to our room, which was quite large by Indian standards and contained a small bed, another daybed, a couple of chairs and a table. It had a private bathroom and seemed very comfortable. Mike needed to lie down and was beginning to show signs of fever and chills. We got to rest for about 45 minutes and then had to proceed to a Rotary meeting to give a presentation to a local Rotary club about the bio sand water filter. Our intention was to involve the local Rotarians so we could develop more local interest in the filter technology and perhaps create a partnership to create local programs to distribute the filters.

After the meeting we returned to the orphanage for the night. We rose the next morning and were offered coffee which we had with some biscuits. Sharanappa joined us and sat on the daybed and we had a discussion which turned out to be jaw-dropping as well as eye-opening.

When Sharanappa was 12 years old he was on a pilgrimage with his mother to a remote Temple in the Mysore forest. The trek to the Temple was nearly 25 km through the forest. On that trek they saw native people in the forest who belong to tribal groups indigenous to that area. These people were naked except for loin cloths, did not shave or cut their hair or bathe and did not engage them in any way. This forest was known for its wild elephants, lions, tigers and leopards as well as bears, monkeys and other jungle animals. Wide-eyed Sharanappa asked his mother what kind of animals are these? His mother explained that these are not animals at all but human beings like us but extremely poor with no resources other than what the forest provides. Reflecting on what his mother said Sharanappa had a vision that someday he would help these people.



After completing his studies Sharanappa impulsively left his family one day and went to the forest that he had visited years earlier. At first he could not gain the local people's trust and was forced to eat the flesh of dead animals and drink dirty water to survive but he was determined to feel like a native and understand how it was to live like them. He slowly gained their trust and they showed him how to avoid being attacked by the forest creatures and how to find food in the forest. They showed him how they brewed an alcoholic average from roots and berries. They danced ancient dances around the fire at night. For shelter they had tiny huts that did little to keep out the cold night air. He explained that he would use a gunnysack to keep warm but it only covered half of his body so from his head to his waist would be warm and part way through the night he would shift a gunnysack to the lower half of his body to warm that up. In the meantime his family was frantically searching for him. He had not told them where he was going but they knew he was inclined to help the forest tribes so they mounted a search for him. The area where these tribal people live is vast and of course his family never found him. After three months Sharanappa returned to his family but they barely recognized him as he was unbathed, unshaven and unshorn.

From that moment on he has devoted his life to improving the lot of these tribal people. They trust him and he understands them and over the last 25 years he has provided medical care and education for these people. The orphans of the tribal people are the ones that occupy the orphanage where we stayed. We were transfixed by this story and immediately became fans of this man who walked the walk as well as talked the talk. We also noticed that he was helping to clean the orphanage building along with the other staff. This man leads by example and has a staff that doesn't hesitate to do what it takes to get the job done. What a refreshing change of management style in a country that is hindered by its hierarchical and archaic system of management.

We toured the grounds of the orphanage viewing the old parts where his parents lived, the areas where the food is prepared, and the swimming pool, now dry in the cold season. The setting is very bucolic out in the country. The land was owned by Sharappa's mother and before her death she proclaimed that it should be used to help the tribal children. We toured a concrete platform area that Sharanappa said could be used to manufacture the bio sand filters. RamaChandra noted that it needed to be covered and they needed a small shed to store materials and tools. It is important to keep the crushed granite filter media dry or it is very difficult to sieve. Besides those modifications it appears to be a suitable place to make the water filters.

After we had some delicious vegetable rice at the orphanage we drove to Sharanappa's home, where he has an office on the second



floor. His assistant got us some literature about his organization as well as some photographs of the tribal areas. We chatted about the startup costs necessary to start manufacturing the bio sand water filters and put together the beginning stages of a budget, to be completed after some more figures are obtained by Sheranappa. We agreed to try to help him find donors for the startup costs as well as sponsors to help provide filters for the 30 tribal areas he helps.

When we went downstairs to leave several of the boys from the orphanage sat on the living room floor with their eyes glued to Sharahappa's television set as they watched a show about snakes on Animal Planet. They had come by after school for some television and snacks. They gave us a quick good bye song before once again becoming entranced in the show. We waved goodbye, feeling excited about the future prospects in this area.

Cathy and Mike

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