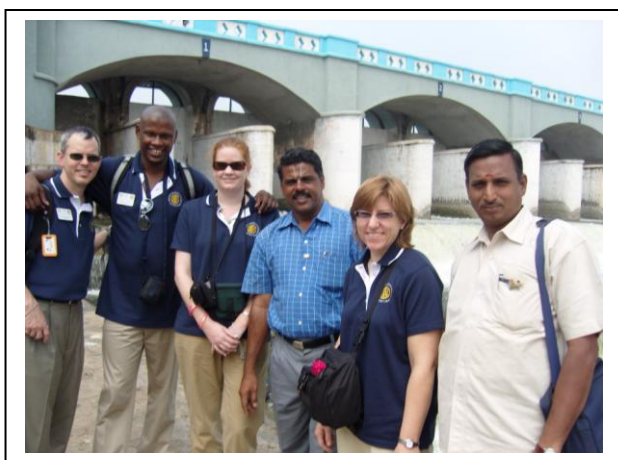


January 7, 2008

We ended 2007 on a wonderful note as the Rotary Club of Srirangam took us to two historical sites and one spontaneous but delightful surprise.

It is hard to say what was more beautiful, miles and miles of green rice paddies, or water-filled ponds alive with lilies and lotus blossoms, or coconut and banana plantations, or the brightly dressed women carrying baskets on their heads and smiling as we passed by.

We were on our way to The Grand Anicut or Kallanai was built by the Chola king Karikalan around the 1st Century AD and is the oldest dam and water-regulator structure in the world, still in use. It is a massive stone dam 1080 ft long and 60 ft wide, across the Cauvery River. The purpose was to divert water across the fertile Delta region for irrigation via canals. The dam which served as a model for later water projects has been updated and modernized to reduce flooding.



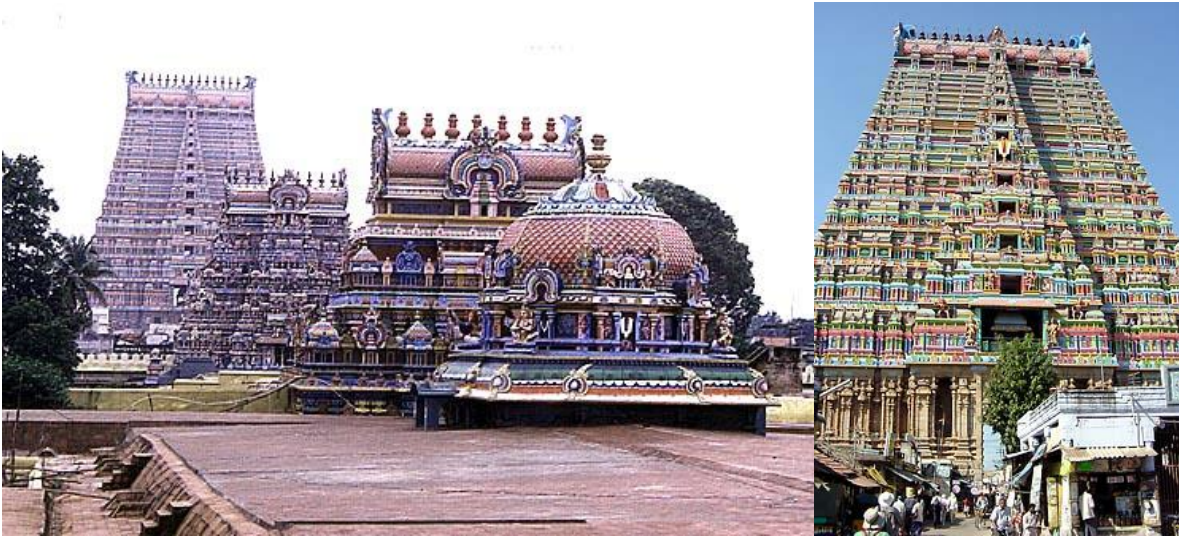
The team had the opportunity to walk on the dam and even enter the control room where water levels are checked so that water may be released, diverted or retained, depending on the situation.

We then drove to Srinangam Temple, past small mud houses with palm thatched roofs. The houses looked so vulnerable to the elements. Yet it is all the people can afford – it keeps them dry during the monsoons and cool during their blazing hot and humid summers. We of course continued to struggle with the oppressive heat and humidity during their coldest season of the year.

#### **Srirangam Temple Chola Period (9th - 13th century) with later additions**

Srirangam is an island within the Kaveri River (the largest river in the state and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in India). It is home to 1,500 followers of Lord Vishnu (one of the Trinity of Hindu Gods - the other two being Lord Shiva, the Destroyer and Lord Brahma, the Creator).

The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple is the biggest functioning Hindu temple in the world and covers about 156 acres. Angkor Wat in Cambodia is the biggest (but non-functioning) Hindu temple in the world. It consists of seven concentric squares with access towers from the N, S, E, and West. There are 21 gopurams (towers), the largest being 220 feet high.



The temple complex consists of seven nested enclosures, whose walls are pierced by the tall gates providing access from all four directions N, S, E and West. The temple's outer three enclosures contain an entire town, with streets, houses, and shops. The inner four enclosures define the religious zone. The temple is dedicated to Vishnu – one of the three gods of the Hindu Trinity. The grandeur of the towers decrease as one moves away from, them towards the inner sanctum signifying that a person has to move away from earthly attachments in the spiritual quest. No one really knows when the temple came into being.

According to legend, a descendant of the Sun God, Rama presented the shrine to Vibishana when he attended Rama's coronation. Vibhishana, carrying the temple on his head on the way to Sri Lanka, rested at Srirangam and the shrine took root. The temple has a traceable history with written references to it in the third and 11th centuries. Architecturally the temple of Srirangam is unique among the great temples of India. The Sculptures found in the temple are some of the finest. The towers are supported by 1,000 stone pillars – each intricately carved from a single block of granite. The pictures below include the columns and outer walls.





We were guided through the temple by the High Priest who was not only a religious leader but a fluent English-speaking MBA. All of this was arranged by a Rotarian who is a substantial donor and member of the temple.

We had lunch at the home of another Rotarian whose family had extensive land holdings in the area. It was his land we had admired all along.

As we headed back, tired, hot, and stuffed full of food, we were asked if we would mind making a brief stop at another Rotarian's home. It was an offer that was impossible to refuse. And we were all so glad we didn't. We met the entire family. His 9th grade daughter was an accomplished Bharat Natyam dancer (classical south Indian dance) and a singer. She sat on the floor in her brightly colored skirt and sang a lively classical song while keeping rhythm by patting her palm on her leg to simulate the drums.

It was simply Amazing!

We started New Year's day with the Rotary Club of Trichy. The streets were packed with people celebrating. There were long lines outside the temples we passed as worshippers and festive alike wanted to get the New Year off to a good start.

We visited an innovative school that was started by a retired college professor to serve the children of lower castes. One of their campuses is located in the middle of a rice paddy. The school is supported by the Rotary Club. The team had the opportunity to talk to teachers and administrators and engage the school's charismatic founder.

We then drove to Worairur – a suburb of Trichy and went to a Middle School that had been started in 1902 to serve the lower strata (children of untouchables). All the students were children of the lower castes whose parents pick through garbage to recycle it in order to earn a living. Very often children have to help the families do this too.

Until the school was adopted by Rotarians it lacked basic sanitary facilities. Over the last few years the school was completely rebuilt. Rotarians provided children with money for books and uniforms. They brought water and installed toilets.

In the afternoon we were joined by the District Governor and several Past Presidents of the club. The RC club was thanked for its support and we were told about some of the things the school needed.



– such as breakfast for orphaned students and a room where they can study in the evenings. They have no electric lights in their homes. The DG promised that those needs would be met.

The children were exuberant in their “Happy New Year” greetings to us. The refurbished school is such a pleasant refuge that children love coming to the school. It warmed our hearts to be with them. The children then performed a few classical dances for us and answered translated questions. They were smiling, well-behaved and attentive and exuberantly happy.

We started January 2nd at a Micro Credit bank. This bank makes loans as small as \$250 to help women start a variety of business such as selling tea, knitting scarves, doing embroidery, sewing, etc. This particular bank has 80 branches in south India. We also visited one of their borrowers – a woman who now has 100 customers. We saw her products. Julie purchased a crocheted “Welcome” sign for her class. It cost 150 rupees or \$3.75.

We also visited 3 schools – 2 Rotary supported schools serving the underclass and a school serving the children of wealthy suburbanites (including the children of club's President and Past President). The teachers were able to engage with the students and the teachers.





At the slightly formal teacher to teacher meeting, the Club President became nervous and began stumbling over his words. It turned out that his Kindergarten and English teachers were in the room. And it reminded him how often he was criticized by them when he was their student.

We ended the day with a Rotary meeting, dinner and gift exchange. In attendance, were two past GSE Team leaders. They had taken multi-vocational teams from Trichy to Argentina and Belgium. We swapped funny stories and experiences common to all GSE teams such as language, strange food, housing facilities, host families and exhaustion. The previous evening my host, the DG and I had dinner. We got to know each other. While with him, I learned of the incredible success he has had raising money for the Foundation increasing the funds raised from about \$60,000 annually to over \$200,000.

On Thursday January 3, 2008 we departed for Perambalur – an agricultural town. Along the way we were informed that we had two choices for our accommodations. 2 GSE members could stay with the Club Secretary in his house. And four could stay at a Travelers Bungalow designed for Government Officials that had a sleeping capacity of 4. There were two rooms - two persons to each room. I decided to as fair as possible and let the GSE team chose. The first 4 chose the Travelers bungalow so Julie and I took the house.

As it turned out the Bungalow had two rooms – but only one bed in each room and no towels, etc. There was a lot of good natured joking about the sleeping arrangements until Julie and I saw our house. It was a spectacular mansion with red tiled roof and marble floors and western conveniences of every description. It could easily have been in Southern California – with the exception of the smell of curry in the air.



The officers of the RC took us to a College of Arts and Sciences for women. The mission of the college is to educate woman from a rural community in business and science with degrees in Commerce, IT, etc. The college was a Modern, clean, reasonably high tech college which trains women in the kinds of jobs that are emerging in Bangalore and Chennai.

We were taken around the campus by Rotoract officer. There are 219 members in the Rotoract Club performing all manner of community. There were plenty of opportunities to question the Rotoractors and staff of the college as they went about their duties.

After lunch which was served on banana leaves we took a short rest. In the evening, we visited several wood caring shops and some members of the team were so impressed that they purchased carved elephants, etc.

The outdoor Rotary meeting and dinner that was scheduled for 7.30 pm started reasonably promptly (Indian Standard time) at 9.00 pm. We were again warmly welcomed and each of the GSE members gave a brief talk that was well received. Gift and banners were exchanged.

I should have probably said something earlier but the GSE team has been a sort of celebrity. We were featured on the front pages of the Hindu, Tamil Nadu's daily newspaper. Julie was actually recognized from the photo by a shopkeeper. Here we were interviewed by the local cable station.

Since the meeting started late, it didn't end early! We were on the road by about 8.30am to visit a rice processing factory. The team members watched as they harvested, washed, steamed, dried, husked, sorted, bagged and shipped the rice.



Then it was off to Karur. Along the way we stopped at an Ashram (a place of peace). This ashram provides 25,000 free meals a day for farm workers. The facilities were built by engineers and they are able to cook rice and beans in 10 minutes. The food is then shipped out to the fields where the workers eat. This sect's belief is that it is impossible to know and worship God if you are hungry. It does not recognize castes so all are provided food. We met with the person locals refer to as "saint". The past president of the Rotary club told me that another district from the USA provided them an ambulance to transport injured workers to the local hospital.



Karur is 11 degrees north of the equator. It is a city and District with approximately 1 million people. It is an ancient city with a vibrant economy. Recent excavations reveal that it was a center for jewelry design and even imported gold from the Roman Empire. Today Karur is famous for its hand and machine made fabrics. Stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, IKEA, and others buy bedspreads, towels, floor rugs and other cotton goods here. They also build bus bodies here.

All the team members were housed in excellent accommodations. Rotarians were the same wonderful, giving people we experienced in other cities. The food here was particularly good. All the team members commented on it. The city looks less run-down and the suburban areas look clean and prosperous. Perhaps the fact that they receive many foreign business executives has something to do with that.

We started our visit by meeting with the head of the local Education Bureaucracy - something between a County Education Department and the state Education Department. After about 45 minutes of PowerPoint slides and organization charts I knew even less than when I walked in. The teachers' murmured "sounds familiar" as if to say this sound like one of our school District Presentations.

After lunch we proceeded to a private school started by a former GSE team member. His wife is the principal. After a tour of the school our teachers had the opportunity to meet and share thoughts with teachers and principal at the school. Then we were treated to a cultural show that included, classical and folk dances as well as some songs. We ended by answering questions from the students. The children of several Rotarians were in the audience.



This pattern continued for our two days in Karur. We were shown 4 private schools and a private college. All the institutions were patronized by Rotarians and their children. These are well dressed, well behaved children of upper middle class parents. We soon realized that we were not seeing schools where the bulk of Karur's children were being educated. We were told that there were over 200 of them. The medium of education is Tamil so they were excluded.

I have asked that we be given the opportunity to sit at the back of the class and observe the teaching methods and interactions with the students in public schools rather than another dog and pony show put on for our benefit.

We visited an “export house” where we saw a variety of cotton threads and learned how they are inspected for quality before they go to hand looms and spinning mills. We saw workers turning fabric into a wide variety of products. They are paid by the piece and each piece is carefully inspected. We also saw these products being boxed and prepared for shipment.

We also visited the wholesale operations of an entrepreneur – R. Balaji. He purchases small, un-exported lots of finished textile goods (eg. 100 out of an original shipment of 10,000.). He then sells these to retailers. Incidentally, he is the same past GSE team member who started one of the private school that we saw on our first day in Karur. He gave the team gifts of table cloths, napkins and other things that they liked.

Sunday January 6, 2008 is National Immunization Day. This is the day that the United Nations, World Health Organization and Rotary International immunize children against polio in the four remaining countries of the world. The team went to the local bus station and women came to us with the babies. Every member of the team had an opportunity to squeeze a child’s lips and insert a couple of drops of medication on the tongue. Over 700,000 children were inoculated today in Tamil Nadu alone!

Then we were off to a Rotary presentation where we were the star attraction, we had lunch and departed for Dindigul in our Air Conditioned (Thank God!) van. We were scheduled to have a half day of rest but we did not depart until 4.30 pm. Needless to say we were exhausted. We have been on the go for 11 days straight without a break. From early morning till 10 or 11 at night we are always with other people and always “on”. From time to time this stress gets the better of us.

We were so relieved to reach Dindigul at 6.15 pm. We were warmly received by Rotarians and quickly ushered into a large hall where there were over 250 empty chairs and a large stage with about 10 chairs. They directed to two rooms – the bride room and the groom room where we were supposed to rest for an hour. I was a little irritated. “Rest before what?” I asked. “The Bon Voyage Reception for the District Governor-Elect before he departs for San Diego”, I was told. “What about our half day of rest?” I persisted. The poor fellow either had no clue or had no answer.

I asked for meeting with the Rotarians in charge and asked to see a schedule for our visit in Dindigul. And as you might have expected it was packed. Starting with breakfast at 8.00am and dinner at 8.00pm. I have learned to decipher that as “be ready at 7.00 am – and you will return to your host at 11.00pm.” Together with the team we re-negotiated the itinerary. We are to be left alone for half a day tomorrow. Then, we put on our game face and attended the reception and dinner.

Here are the team members’ impressions of the trip thus far:

### **Anthony La Rue**

“Anything is possible” are the words I have shared with my kindergarten students everyday and now I share these words with the people and children of Tamil Nadu. I believe that when a child receives a proper education they will grow into a productive member of any society. Furthermore I believe that a high quality education is a bridge that will lead the lower socio-economic children in Tamil Nadu and all over the world to economic success and better lives.



We have had the opportunity to visit private and government ran schools in Trichy, Perambukur, and Karur. The resonating theme from these schools visits is that the higher socio-economic students receive a better education than students studying in government funded schools. The difficulties encountered by teachers in Tamil Nadu are similar to teachers in the USA: 1) What are the best ways to discipline students? 2) How do you encourage parent involvement? 3) What are the best methods of teaching? The similarities I have noticed after having numerous discussions with teachers in various schools is that we all care about children and that we want them all to succeed. The difference that is apparent is that private schools are well kept with a student ratio of 20students to 1 teacher while government run schools have larger class sizes at all grade levels. The underlying theme is that all children should be educated equally no matter what socio-economic background they may come from. Furthermore the problem of providing a quality and equal education to all children still exists in the USA and all around the world.

The interesting thing is that no men teach kindergarten in India! It is still considered a woman's job in this country. They seem to find it fascinating to have a man teaching young children. The funny thing is that at all of the Rotary meetings and schools we have visited, the people keep calling me "kindergarten cop"! I believe it takes a real man to teach kindergarten and I hope the paradigm of teaching young children is woman's job is hopefully changed when I leave India. Although this trip is really hard, I am learning that all children around the world need an education to secure a better future and I may be the best spokesperson for this endeavor in the coming years. I believe that if we can feed children, we must feed them knowledge so the world can grow.

PS. Go Chargers and I love you Shannon!

## **Bridget Persons**

We have now had the opportunity to move out of the larger city of Trichy and drive through the countryside. Along the route we see coconut groves, sugar cane fields and rice paddies. When crossing rivers we may pass long lines of trucks waiting to be loaded with sand. Ox carts pass, children play. Each village is a mix of buildings and thatched roof huts.

When applying for this trip, I had no knowledge of Rotary. I now understand the amazing impact that Rotarians have had. Today (January, 6, 2008), I immunized a child against Polio at one of over 10,000 immunization sites sponsored by Rotary. I have seen the impact that local Rotarians have had in the classrooms, providing equipment and even entire buildings. I immunized

Our experience in schools has been eye opening mostly because we have such similar concerns. Teachers always ask about how we handle discipline problems and how we help struggling learners. Children want to know whether we assign homework and give tests.

## **Tim Dobbins**

The last few days have been a whirlwind of activity we have visited 7 schools and seen another beautiful temple, visited a textile mill, and given our presentation twice in the city of Karur.

We are exhausted from the pace but grateful for the warmth and open arms we have been shown in India.

As we approach the mid-point of our trip, we find ourselves beginning to gain a glimpse into the Indian mind, and personally, I am in awe of the hospitality and generosity that everyone has shown us. We came prepared

to give small gifts as a sign of our thanks, and instead have been showered with gifts and kindness in return! I have already unpacked and opened my second collapsible suitcase just to carry all the treasures I have received!

One moment I will never forget happened when we were taken to a small village outside Perambukur to visit local woodcraft artists. After being shown their products, I was peering into corners and discovered a beautiful elephant figure which I purchased. Like all our experiences here, this wooden elephant will be with me for the rest of my life.

## **Sarah Clark**

India continues to welcome us with love and hospitality. As we travel to schools, visit Rotarians, and explore the industries of India we are treated like celebrities. Already our pictures have been in the newspapers and we have been interviewed for local television. I am starting to know what it must be like to be famous.

One of the most important activities we have taken part of is Rotary's National Polio immunization day. We were given the chance to play a small role in Rotary's efforts to eradicate polio. We also had the opportunity to visit a village that specializes in wood carving. I made my first purchase in India – a beautiful wood elephant.

Every day continues to offer us unique experiences in India!

## **Julie Tandon**

Whenever I get the chance, I ask people I meet what it is that connects and unites the different peoples in India in spite of their differences. The answer is always "the way of life" or "the culture". But when I think about culture, the first things that come to mind are religion, language, customs, traditions, language, and lifestyle. However, just as in Europe, the people in India differ in all these functions. So what is the "culture" that connects India?

It is a set of values that is common to all regardless of language, religion, or traditions. First the people of India as a whole have a great respect and sense of duty to their family, ancestors, and elders. This includes automatic respect extended to teachers.

A wandering guru told me that the Indian culture is also strongly influenced by a sense of duty to protect and appreciate women. In America, he said, every woman is a potential wife. But in India, every woman is a potential mother.

Another factor that binds the people of India like an undercurrent is the philosophy of selflessness. It is everyone's duty to care for others first. A natural extension of this is the generous hospitality we have been experiencing in every home, but it is also a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood toward every man. The philosophy of selflessness also involves patience and acceptance. If someone does wrong you must let them do wrong, accept the person as whole, mistakes and all, without trying to change them.

Not surprisingly, the people of India, just like people in the U.S., are bound together by a love of country. When a student at a school we visited was asked if he would like to visit the US, he replied, "No Ma'am. I love my India".



**Larry Sundram** : I have been keeping track of our activities. Here is what it is so far:

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	DATE
Rotary	District Conference	12/28/07
	Micro Credit Bank	01/02/08
	Rotary Meeting	01/02/08
	Rotary Meeting	01/03/08
	Rotary Meeting	01/05/08
	Rotary Meeting	01/06/08
	Reception for DG	01/06/08
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>
Cultural Events	Classical and Popular songs at District Conference	12/29/07
	Song recital at Rotarian's Home, Trichy	12/31/07
	Dance Performance by children of Untouchables - at school	01/01/08
	Dancing and singing at school, Karur	01/04/08
	Bharat Natyam Dance, Karur	01/05/08
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>
Historic Sites	Rock Fort Temple, Trichy	12/30/07
	Sriranganathan Temple, Trichy	12/31/07
	Dam on Kaveri River built in 200 AD	12/31/07
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>
Economic Sites	Village Wood Carving	01/03/08
	Rice processing Factory	01/04/08
	Textile Manufacturing and shipping	01/05/08
	Textile Wholesale business	01/05/08
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>4</b>
Vocational	Sironanda Balalaya School (2 sites) - New Education concept	01/01/08
	Middle School in Worryiar (slum school rehabilitated)	01/01/08
	Infant Jesus primary school - primary	01/02/08
	St. Philomena school – poor middle	01/02/08
	Monfort School – modern high school	01/02/08
	College of Arts and Science for Women, Perambalur	01/03/08
	LNVN Private Primary school	01/04/08
	Regional District Education Office	01/04/08
	Meenakshi College	01/05/08
Raja Metric School, Puliyur	01/05/08	
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>

