



District
Rotary 5340
2007-08 GSE Team to India



December 21, 2007

Sunday January 20th was the coldest day of our trip. The temperature hovered around 36F but it felt colder because houses here have neither central heating nor insulation and only spotty hot water. Chattering teeth have a way of reducing one's power to appreciate nature.

Some of us started out around 8.30 am. However for a variety of reasons best understood by Indians, we did not get underway till about 9.30 am. The late departures and cold weather made it tougher on the 3 team members who are under the weather. It is a long road down the mountain from Kodaikanal to the humid plains near the Bay of Bengal – but that is where we were headed. We drove past beautiful lakes, waterfalls, and all manner of crops - from vegetables and fruits to rice and coffee. Finally, we reached Arangathi around 2.00 pm. We went to a Rotarian's home for Lunch and then on a tour of an ancient temple.

Legend has it that the temple was built by the poet/minister of one of the kings about 300 AD. Apparently, this minister was given money to buy horses for the king's army. On the way to the market he had a vision of Lord Shiva and spent the money building this ornate granite temple. The King was furious and called for his head. However, Lord Shiva, impressed by the poet's devotion, performed a miracle and changed the local the foxes into horses so the poet's life could be spared. The temple is impressive with detailed stone carvings of various deities and animals. The team however, is very tired and we have been told there will be a school visit, a cultural program tonight, a Rotary meeting and a "family night" dinner. We are so tired we begged off dinner so that we could drive to the next town where we are supposed to spend two nights. It wasn't that we were not hungry. But the track record of these events has been that they last for two hours.

We arrived at Puddakotti around 10.00 pm and were taken to a guest house. It was a large private home with many rooms. Each bed seemed worse than the other. Every room smelled like it had been freshly sprayed with insecticide. The sheets and mattresses were filthy. The team determined that we would not stay there; we asked for hotel rooms and told the local coordinators that we would pay for our rooms. At the hotel, we were met by the District Governor who was very solicitous about our condition and offered to do anything he could to ease our discomfort. Together we planned our final 3 days in India.

We agreed to be ready at 8.00am on Jan 21. We were taken to a Rotarian's house for breakfast at 8.10 am. Unfortunately, nobody told the poor family. They were shocked when 6 GSE team members and 2 Rotarians knocked on their door seeking coffee and breakfast. Tamil Nadu is not a place where you pour some cornflakes or whip up some toast. Few, if any, eat toast, eggs, cheese, or jam. Breakfast is a production of immense proportions the grinding of rice and lentils, the making of crispy pancakes and spicy sauces. All this takes time. Having skipped dinner the previous night we

were ravenous by the time breakfast was served around 9.45 am. Then we headed off to see an ancient fort, a temple, and a private school.

Mercifully, we were spared another cultural program. After lunch we were permitted to rest until the night's Rotary meeting and family dinner. After dinner we drove a little over an hour to the Royal Southern Hotel in Trichy. We reached there around 11.00 pm. Our team had heard a lot about "being ridden hard and put away wet". We were soaking!!! Tomorrow will be our last GSE event in India.

Our final GSE presentation In India took place last night at a meeting of all the Trichy clubs with about 150 in attendance. At our December 28 presentation we presented a montage of San Diego scenes set to "Surfin' USA" by the Beach Boys. To wrap-up, we presented a montage of our Tamil Nadu photographs set to a unique piece of music called "Mozart meets India".

Each member described experiences that had been special to them. The audience was moved by their heartfelt insights. I summed my thoughts on Rotary involvement and collaboration. I thanked everyone for their generosity, kindness and hospitality. We were warmly applauded, and many people came up to each of us to express how well our presentation was received. I'm very proud of everyone's part and involvement, and feel we collectively and individually represented District 5340 and our sponsoring clubs very well.

District Governor Raja Michael and the GSE Chair invited the team to join them for dinner. It was a tasty dinner and a fun time but with a serious purpose. After complimenting us he began to talk about the districts' challenges and asked us to help. He talked about major projects he would like to work on together with our District.

Most public schools in Tamil Nadu do not have desks. Students learn to read, write and take tests sitting on the floor. However, when it is time to take the statewide exams upon graduation from high school they are taken to examination halls located in other locations where they have to sit at a desk to fill the exam booklets. The set-up is alien to the students and they perform poorly even though they know the answers. What he would like to do is set up at least one furnished classroom per school where students can get a feel of what it is like to sit and take a test on a desk before going on to the real thing. He proposes durable steel desks that seat 4 to a desk. Each desk would cost about \$60 and last 10 years. A class of 40 students would be about \$600.

As he envisions it his clubs would raise some funds, our clubs would raise some funds, our district and his District would match what was raised and the Rotary Foundation would match what the Clubs and the Districts raise. "Wouldn't it great if we could put one of these in every school in Tamil Nadu"? The answer was obvious.

The second project he discussed were the sanitary conditions at many of the schools – especially for the women. In many places this consists of a thatched fence and a hole in the ground with a few other girls providing the needed privacy by holding out their saris and skirts. The project would involve building clean, concrete girls' bathrooms, where possible, with water.

Members of the team talked about two projects that they would like to help with as well. The first was the orphanage for children with HIV/AIDS that they had visited about halfway through the trip. The second was providing education assistance for the visually impaired.

With so much passion and commitment on all sides, Governor Raja said that he would ensure that he would use the web site and ensure that the paperwork submitted would meet Rotary's requirements. Team members and I agreed that we would discuss these projects with our clubs and the District once we see the requests on-line and receive the matching grant paperwork.

By the time we ended the dinner and discussion, it was time for bed.

Today, January 23rd is our last day in India. We leave the hotel around 9.30 am to arrive in San Diego at 9.45 pm on January 24th – roughly 27 hours in the air and 36 hours by the clock.

While at times we thought the trip would never end. It has flown by - an emotional roller coaster-- excitement, wonderment, puzzlement, fatigue, stress, outburst, rest, rejuvenation, elation, acceptance, and fatigue. We are happy we came. We are thrilled with the experience – but it is time to go home. There will be time to reflect, to recall and re-tell funny stories. For now, the return journey beckons, the shoulders droop, and the bags seem heavier.

It has been my privilege to accompany this team - your family – our extended Rotary family - on this adventure in service. We will now refer to them as Alumni of the Group Study Exchange program. They join over 40,000 other graduates.

It is said that a trip like this changes you. We start with a sense of excitement and anticipation, experience a roller coaster of emotions, internalize the lessons, and share our experiences.

This team was selected because they are wonderful examples of great American Teachers. It is my fondest hope that each of them will be even better teachers and human beings than they started out to be.

I know I will.

Yours in Rotary Service,

Larry Sundram

larrysundram@gmail.com

(A list of events is on the next two pages)

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 DGE	01/06/08
	Rotary meeting and Dinner, Theni	01/08/08
	Rotary meeting and Dinner, Bodi	01/10/08
	Rotary meeting and Dinner, Madurai	01/11/08
	Rotary meeting and Dinner, Madurai	01/12/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/13/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/14/08
	Dinner with Rotarians	01/15/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/16/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/17/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/18/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/19/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/20/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/21/08
	Lunch and Dinner with Rotarians	01/22/08
	Totals	21
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
	Folk Dances at Organic Farm	01/07/08
	Folk/Movie Dance@student-teacher	01/08/08
	Folk Dances at Primary school	01/08/08
	Periyar National Park	01/10/08
	Pongal Dances at Lakshmi School	01/11/08
	Classical Songs and Dance at TVM school	01/11/08
	Pongal Festival in small Village	01/12/08
	Folk Dance at Rotary Meeting	01/12/08
	Pongal Festival in small Village (Rotary)	01/13/08
	Pongal Festival in small Village (Tourism Dept)	01/14/08
	Cultural Program at Puddaikotti school	01/20/08
	Totals	16

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
	Meenakshi Temple	01/12/08
	Nayak Palace	01/12/08
	Gandhi Museum	01/12/08
	Arangathi Temple	01/20/08
	Puddakotai Temple	01/21/08
	Puddakotai Fort	01/21/08
	Totals	9
Economic Sites	Village Wood Carving, Perambalur	01/03/08
	Rice processing Factory, Peramalur	01/04/08
	Textile Manufacturing and shipping	01/05/08
	Textile Wholesale business, Karur	01/05/08
	Organic Farm, Dindigul	01/07/08
	Hand-loom silk sari manufacturing, Dindigul	01/08/08
	Silk Cotton Processing Plant, Bodi	01/10/08
	Coffee, pepper and cardamom plantation, Bodi	01/10/08
	Puddakotai Bakery Factory	01/21/08
	Totals	9
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, Puliur	01/05/08
	PSNA Engineering College, Dindigul	01/07/08
	Lakshmi School, Madurai	01/11/07
	TVM School, Madurai	01/11/07
	Meenakshi Matric School	01/12/08
	St Peters School, Kodikanal	01/18/08
	CSI (christians in southern India) School	01/18/08
	Arangathi school	01/20/08
	Puddakotai School	01/21/08
Totals	18	