



Dear Friends,

## Reflections on the India visit

**We returned to southern India after a gap of seven years, Jenny and Laura having visited in 2018. With the intervening period being affected by the pandemic, no visits had been carried out for over four years. Zoom calls have sufficed to assess ongoing need and to verify expenditure, but a visit was well overdue.**

We flew into Chennai on 8 February with a connecting flight to Madurai where we were met by Sr Hilaria and members of the DEEPAM team. We were struck by the changes since our last visit; new roads and ever changing technology has affected the way people live. However once in the more rural areas, and particularly viewing the work of our partners, it was clear that poverty is still widespread.

Concern about government (at all levels) and uncertainty about the stability of democracy was voiced more often. That said, there seems to be more government funding for the

disadvantaged. Our partners generally welcome this, but it comes with

bureaucracy and influence that is sometimes frustrating and uncomfortable. We were left in no doubt that our support, both financial and through our relationships, was hugely valued.

It wasn't all work, however, and we were grateful for some downtime on three most interesting excursions. On arrival we were whisked away to visit the Pillar Institute near Madurai and walked to caves and groves that Jain monks had used from 300BCE. They seemed to us to be well ahead of their time. Some days later, Renata Desai walked us around the land adjoining AHM Campus and explained more about how she and her late husband Shashi had founded the organisation. Finally, at Mannackanad we walked with Sr Rani further than ever before into the woods below the School – she displayed an unsuspected knowledge of flora and fauna.

Whilst a rather rapid trip, it was great. We spent quality time with each of the partners and strengthened still further the bonds between us.

Sheila & Andy



*Members of a Tribal Community supported by JJH.*

## DEEPAM

**The wonderful Sr Hilaria is back overseeing DEEPAM after a period away, and she manages to combine this with being a Professor at Ghandigram University. During the pandemic, their base moved out of the grounds of Leonard Hospital to a facility on the bypass of Vathalagundu which gives more space for their programmes. We received a “royal” welcome and presentations, personal stories, song and dance.**

Our focus has always been on the after-school programmes and in the evening we visited 3 of the 75 communities where these are conducted. Often in very deprived areas, one of the classes took place in an alley between houses and another just under an awning outside their teacher's house. It proves easier to get girls to attend and we saw examples of their work, heard reading in English, met the Kabaddi team (a quite boisterous local sport) and talked about cricket.

DEEPAM's excellent staff had more ideas about developing the work than we could hope to afford, but we continue to support with what

we can and have sent funds for two mopeds to help the staff move around.



*After-school class*

## Leonard Hospital

**It was good to meet up again with Sr Dr Jacqueline and see some of the equipment bought from the emergency funds we provided in 2021. Items, such as ventilators, continue to be used but there are thankfully only a few COVID sufferers.**

## Jeevan Jyothi

**We had previously met Sr Prema on video calls, and she was equally reassuring as Director of the Jeevan Jyothi Hospice when we were able to spend time with her and the other sisters. Sr Anastasia remains at the place she founded but is rather frail after a remarkable recovery from major surgery last year; that didn't stop her being with us throughout our time there. We have recently helped with redecoration of the various buildings, and we were shown the refurbishment work that is continuing.**



The prevalence of HIV & AIDS has mercifully reduced significantly, and there were fewer patients than on previous visits. This prompted a conversation about expanding the role of the hospice and offering more general palliative care, and we will want to engage with the sisters as they work through such issues.

Outreach, particularly to those living with HIV, continues and is in demand; a good diet is essential and we helped with a regular food distribution session.



*Loading up with food*

## AHM Trust

**At AHM in Bodinyakanur we had a full tour of their campus in amongst coconut palms giving pleasant shade. The clinic (which we have supported since its inception) was busy and back to full operation after the pandemic. The separate hostels for elderly women and men were fully occupied as was the children's hostel. AHM runs Childline (with government funding) and has a new building to house anyone needing temporary shelter – those escaping child marriage remain the largest category. The training centre was humming with activity, and in addition to courses for computer use, electricians and nursing assistants, there is now a beautician's course with mobile phone repair soon to be added.**

The Trust is in the safe hands of Babu and Stella; it was good to see a very positive atmosphere amongst the extensive staff as they celebrated the AHM Annual Day – we stayed clear of some very wet games! Renata Desai (co-founder) hosted us very graciously. Most encouragingly, as our support has of necessity reduced, they have found other sources to keep this valuable operation thriving.



*Nurse assistants studying*

## RUADT

**Murugan presented us with certificates celebrating the 25 years of co-operation between our Fund and RUADT. The future was in mind, however, as it seems that both his daughters (one a doctor) are getting more involved with the operation. We opened a small building refurbished as a clinic from which it is planned to support pupils and their parents.**

The campus (newly fenced, partly with our funding) looked very tidy, and much regular activity: classes, therapy etc. was going on. A big celebration was organised with the four “schools” under RUADT’s management all providing entertainment; particularly moving were lengthy recitals from memory by autistic pupils.

Active participation in sports has moved up the agenda; we met Puttupandi (a badminton player, as are we) who is the sports coach. On the day we left, news came through of success at a district-level competition.



*Audience for entertainment*

## Holy Cross Special School, Mannackanad

**We travelled into Kerala for our final visit and were warmly welcomed by Sr Rani and the pupils and staff at the school. There are 110 on the role with varying disabilities; not all attend every day which gives the 26 members of staff a chance to give the close support necessary. Some government assistance is given for those under 19, but only around half the pupils are this age, it being very difficult for many of them to move beyond a school setting.**

We had not previously seen the wheelchair ramp which connects the three stories of the building. Now completed, we walked up and admired the way the central spaces had been used for an office and physiotherapy room. The latest project, that we have been helping with, has been to create a playground by levelling a space beyond the school building that is set in the wooded hillside. The whole community had been invited for the opening ceremony to coincide with our visit. The local Member of Kerala’s Legislative Assembly and the Panchayat President did the honours, and Rani got her views about the inadequacy of government support across! The pupils took over with an Olympic-style parade and colourful aerobics to

very loud music. We, on behalf of the Fund, were thanked several times in the speeches for our commitment to the school and support for the playground. It was a very joyful occasion.



*Olympic parade*



## Snippets

**You will know that the Fund has been the beneficiary over the years of very generous legacies and that we use them slowly in order to support our partners in the medium to long term. Last year provided a bit of a shock as, in common with many others, the Fund's investments were affected by market volatility. There have also been imposed changes to our Charities Aid Fund investment, so we have taken this as an opportunity to make new choices on where to invest for future stability and growth. Fortunately, this will not affect the guarantees already made to our partners regarding funding for the next two years.**



Keeping up with our partners now takes place regularly by video call, especially when we don't have a visit planned. We had such a call with Nicholas and Agnes at CODI in April. Life is very tough in Nairobi for many reasons; they were a bit gloomier than usual but ultimately undaunted and determined that their mission remains essential.



Regular readers will know that we have been running a series of articles covering the history of our involvement with each of our partners. That hasn't concluded, but we put it on hold for this issue in order to cover the visit to India. Back next time ...



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# MiriamDeanFund



Trustees:

Jenny & Robert Buchanan, Sheila & Andy Moore, Laura Buchanan,

Miriam Dean Refugee Trust Fund Charity No: 269655

Hidden House, 3 Ladwell Close,  
Newbury RG14 6PJ

Telephone: 0300 102 3064

Email: [trustees@miriamdeanfund.org.uk](mailto:trustees@miriamdeanfund.org.uk)

[www.miriamdeanfund.org.uk](http://www.miriamdeanfund.org.uk)





## About the Fund

**We are a small charity, founded in the late 1940s, when it operated out of Miriam Dean's home.**

We reach overseas to some of the world's poorest people in partnership with established local groups, providing financial resources to turn their ideas into a positive reality. Our partners work in: physical & mental disability; education & training; health and the elderly. We are in touch with them regularly.

At home, we aim to maintain personal contact with our supporters, hoping to make the Fund feel like an extended family.

We do all this voluntarily. We have no staff or premises and minimal expenses (covered by income from funds awaiting allocation), so that we can send overseas every penny given to us in donations. This year that will be around £120k.

Miriam wrote in the early days of her recognition that she could "lift only tiny corners of human suffering". We accept that today but still feel motivated to follow where she led.

## Postscript

It is topical to think of Service following the coronation, and of course the term is very appropriate, and clearly heartfelt, as a compliment to His Majesty who is Head of State. Our own Service is to the Great Love at the Heart of all things and as such we consider ourselves to be a family; where the love for others is at the heart of our motivation.

Of course the circumstances may be very different between those of you that generously give and those that our partners serve; but the whole, sole purpose of our existence is to lift our brothers and sisters out of poverty, so that they may also prosper in this world. As fellow family members your role in this is both essential and deeply appreciated.

Robert