

I am Rajaraman Krishnan, a volunteer of Asha Chennai. I visited different schools of Project Thulasi on Feb 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018. I travelled with my nephew.'

Click [here](#) to see the photos from this trip.

### **Assessment at Nallan Pillai Petral**

One of the main purposes of the trip was to train the teachers to conduct written assessments as well as get that conducted in one school when I am there. We drove directly to the school at Nallan Pillai Petral and reached there by about 11:00. Most of the Thulasi project teachers were already there. Project Steward Paripooranam and project coordinator Prabhu were also there. I talked to the teachers about how to conduct the assessments. The schedule for the next few days to conduct the assessments at all the Project Thulasi schools was also discussed.

It was lunch time by the time we finished all the assessment planning. We had lunch and then conducted the assessments at Nallan Pillai Petral. Since there were 8 teachers and a couple of volunteers we conducted the assessments for the 4 classes in parallel. The school HM and the teachers of all the classes accommodated us and allowed us to conduct the assessments without any interference.

We then visited the Kaatu Sithambur school. We met with a few of the teachers there and then went to the library. The library was being prepared for the inauguration function the next day. After this we went to Marutham school at Thiruvannamalai where Paripooranam works and lives. We were also staying there.

### **Visiting new Schools**

Paripooranam and I visited several new schools to see how we can expand the scope of the project. Here are the details of the new schools we visited.

#### **Gangavaram**

This is a primary school in a fairly well-off village. While the school's strength is 103, a much bigger number (500+) are going to private schools. They have increased the strength of the school from 17 to 103 in 3 years and the HM is confident of increasing it further to 150 in a year with Asha support. Here are the strength details of the school.

<b>Class</b>	<b>Strength</b>
1	26
2	16
3	23
4	18
5	20
Total	103

The school has 3 government teachers and one computer. There is enough space in the school to

accommodate an additional Asha teacher. The school has access to an eSeva centre where they can conduct a class. The school is entirely Tamil medium. The school is in Senji block where we are already supporting schools and they heard about us from Nallan Pillai Petral school.

We interacted with the children in the 5<sup>th</sup> std and the teachers were happy to allow us to gauge their level. The children's level of education was quite good. They need an additional regular teacher and can also make use of a computer teacher. They also would like drinking water facility at the school - an RO processing system.

### Sokuppam

This is a middle school with 154 children. The HM was a very dynamic lady. The HM seems to be taking direct interest in the pedagogy employed by the teachers. They were preparing detailed lesson plans and lots of TLM for the class. The school has 8 computers and a smart class setup. They were already using it for some computer science and curriculum education.

<b>Class</b>	<b>Strength</b>
1	15
2	21
3	15
4	23
5	19
6	26
7	25
8	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>

There are about 60 children going to other private schools. The school has been increasing in strength in recent years. The school has English medium from classes 1 to 6. They also heard about us from Nallan Pillai Petral school. They have 4 teachers for the primary classes and 4 teachers for classes 6 to 8. We felt the school was very well run.

They would like an additional teacher from Asha. They would also like a computer teacher from us and any other assistance we can provide.

We interacted with the younger children in classes 1 and 2 and also with the children in class 6. The children were quite good and education here seems to be doing well. The HM was confident of her school and allowed us to interact with the children without any interference.

### Melpaapanpadi

Paripooranam and I went to the school just as the children were starting their lunch. The school is right on the highway from Senji to Thiruvannamalai. The school now occupied the buildings which use to be the higher secondary school. So the area was huge. The students come from poor hamlets in that area. They have a strength of 96 and the number of children going to private schools is only about 15. Their strength has been steady.

<b>Class</b>	<b>Strength</b>
1	15
2	23
3	18
4	21
5	19
Total	96

The school has 4 primary teachers. The school also has one computer. As the children were having lunch, we couldn't interact with them.

The school would like an additional teacher and can also benefit from a computer teacher.

### Kolathoor

We then went for our own lunch to Kanniyampoondi, one of the school we support. I talked to the children a little about Solar system as they had recently learnt a lesson on that. I was impressed at how well they had learnt things. They knew their planets very well. Mrs. Ramani the HM at Kanniyampoondi treated us to a wonderful lunch. Paripooranam also played some games with the children.

This is one of the best schools that we are supporting but still the strength was dropping and children were going to private schools. We may have to pull out our teacher as the strength doesn't warrant our continuing to have a regular teacher there. We may just have a computer teacher at the school next year.

Then Mrs. Ramani also accompanied us to the nearby school at Kolathoor. At Kolathoor the HM had called a PTA meeting and a number of parents were waiting there. I also talked to them a little bit and told them to continue admitting their children to government schools.

<b>Class</b>	<b>Strength</b>
1	15
2	23
3	18
4	21
5	19
Total	96

The school has a strength of 152 and only about 30 children go to private schools. The strength at the school is stable. The school has 2 computer. They have 6 teachers at the school.

The HM took us to couple of the classes. One class (I think the 4<sup>th</sup> std) run by a male teacher was very good in terms of the LTM they has made. The entire class was filled with LTM made by this teacher. His passion for that was very evident.

The school has a really huge campus and can easily accommodate additional classes. They would like an additional teacher from us. They can make use of a computer teacher from us as well.

### Pallikulam

This school is very far from the rest of the schools we support. This was half way from Senji to Thindivanam. This is in the Vallam block where we do not have any presence at the moment. We couldn't visit this along with the other schools. On the way to Chennai I went to this school the next day along with the project coordinator Prabhu. Paripooranam couldn't join us.

The school is really remote and it took us a while to locate it and go to the school. Even though this was a Sunday, the HM and another teacher were there to receive us and show the school. This school was doing very well in terms of getting all the possible support from the government, local people as well as other organisations.

Class	Strength
1	16
2	20
3	17
4	16
5	21
6	27
7	16
8	14
Total	147

This is a middle school with a strength of 147. They have 4 teachers for the primary classes and 3 teachers for classes 6 to 8. There were very few children going to private schools (about 10 to 15). The school was English medium in classes 1 to 6.

The facilities at the school would put the best private schools to shame. They have about 25 computers and a proper SmartClass all housed in an airconditioned computer room!!! They had a separate Maths lab which was being operated by Altius Foundation also from Chennai. The school had a well stocked library. They had a RO system big enough to supply the village it looked like! Each building was beautifully decorated with artistic painting by one of the teachers in the school! The school has won several awards including,

- Kamarajar award for the best school in the block from state govt.
- Swach Bharath award from the collector.
- Pudhumai Palli award.

They would like an additional teacher from Asha either to teach computer science or handle slow learners. They are willing to get any other help we can provide.

### **Inauguration of library at Kaatu Sithamboor**

On the second day evening after seeing Kolathoor, we went to Kaatu Sithamboor where we were inaugurating the Asha library. The library building along with some books belonged to the Panchayat Union and they have allowed Asha to run it. Paripooranam had stocked the library with some more books. The books were well organized in the shelves there. We have also appointed a local girl - Paulina as the librarian. Paulina, Prabhu the coordinator, Annamalai our computer teacher who hails from this village, Sathya who is the Asha teacher

at the Kaatu Sithamboor school etc. were all there. Gershon Gurin Podlish a volunteer from Boston who has been instrumental in raising funds for the project and pushing us to get this effort underway was also there. His sole cause is to get as many of these kinds of remote village libraries functioning.

All the government teachers from the school were also there. A huge crowd of children from the school were there. We lighted the Kuthuvilakku and I cut the ribbon to open the library to the public.

Paripooranam spoke about Asha starting to run this library. The school HM and teacher talked about the great work Asha is doing at their school as well as villages in that area. I also spoke a bit about our vision for transforming the education at a village using the library as well as working with the school.

The children were restless. They were dying to know when they can start using the library! Their enthusiasm was palpable. Paripooranam engaged the children with a puppet show of the Thirsty Crow story. Then we distributed snacks to all the children. They were keen to just get back into the library. The biggest claps came when Paripooranam told them that they will get a free book every time they finish reading 7 books.

So we decided to tell them some more stories. I told them a simple story of a man who sold 7 donkeys. Then Gershon told the children a story in English. They could understand only a part of it. After that we told the children the library will open the next day.

## **Conclusion**

On the last day Paripooranam took me and my nephew on a trek around Arunagiri to see the forest regeneration work she and people at her Martham school. Then we went to the Pallikulam school and then headed back to Chennai.

The project is moving along well. It has sufficient strength to have regular internal training meetings, conduct their own assessments etc. The library program is also expanding from the one village at Seeyapoondi to now a second one at Kaatu Sithamboor. It can expand to a few more schools among the ones we visited. The schools at Gangavaram, Sokuppam and Kolathoor were certainly deserving of our support.