

I am Rajaraman Krishnan, a volunteer of Asha Chennai. I visited Senji from 29<sup>th</sup> Nov to 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. I visited the school for CP & MR children at Avalurpet as well as the schools supported by Project Thulasi. The Avalurpet CP & MR Children's School site visit report is not in this document.

See the photos from the Thulasi project [here](#).

After visiting Avalurpet, I went with Paripooranam (the project steward) to Seeyapoondi. It is her home town. We reached the school only by about 4:00 pm. As was quite usual for this school, the HM was not present. The other government teacher was present. The school was not doing well. The villagers didn't trust the teachers of the school and were sending their children to other schools - even government schools in places like Melmalayanur.

I interacted with 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> std kids this time. I didn't have too much time. I tried an activity which I had recently tried at other schools. I asked one student to measure the number of steps to cross the room. Then I asked the children to cross the room in less or more number of steps. This should give them a perspective on division. Some of the children got the hang of it that you should take smaller steps if you need to traverse the distance in more steps and vice-versa. I could interact with the children for about 30 mins before the school ended.

All our Thulasi project teachers came to Seeyapoondi for a meeting. They all arrived by 5:00 pm. We met at the school itself. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss the upcoming oral assessment. The last couple of times, there were problems in the way it was conducted at some of the schools. I wanted to ensure there were no problems this time. The meeting went on till about 6:30 pm. We then went to the library and then Paripooranam and I to the tuition centre. The teachers had their dinner and then left back for their villages.

The children had not been coming to the tuition centre the last couple of weeks because a lady had publicly immolated herself and committed suicide very close to the tuition centre! So the younger children were scared to come there. They came today because we were all there. I played various games with the children. I first asked the children to make a triangle with three sticks. Showed them why the longest side needs to be smaller than the sum of the other two sides. We played "Simon says". The children enjoyed the activity. Then I divided the children into two groups. One group has to come up with a word longer than 5 letters and the other group has to come up with a word starting with the last letter of the previous word and so on. We played this for a while. One girl who goes to a nearby English medium school was coming up with words

like “ectoplasm”, “nucleus”, “mitochondria” etc.! No marks for guessing what Biology lesson they are currently teaching!

Then I went for dinner to Paripooranam’s aunt’s house. We had nice chappathi and potato masala. Then I went to Senji to spend the night there. The next morning, at 6:00 am, I took a jog across the Senji fort. I would say this is easily one of the most scenic jogging spots!

We had planned to conduct the oral assessments at a couple of schools that day. I went to Keezhpennathur and picked up Paripooranam and Sasikala. We drove to Kaatu Sithamboor. That is the biggest school among the schools we are supporting. It has 200+ children and about 120 children in classes 1 to 5. The Asha teacher there Sathya was efficiently organizing the conduct of the assessment and the rest of the teachers were conducting it well. I was just overseeing the effort. The school’s government teachers were interested in what we were doing. I heard from Sathya that one of the teachers was going back to his class and teaching them three letter words, subtraction, multiplication etc. as that is what we were asking in our oral assessment. It would have been funny if it were not so sad! I appreciated the firmness with which our teacher Sathya handled the government teachers.

We finished classes 1 to 4 before lunch and then had lunch over there. Then we finished class 5 as well. The HM was very keen to hear my opinion on how the children were doing and their weaknesses etc. It looks like there is a lot of pressure from the government hierarchy for the schools to focus on basic achievement rather than just the scores in the Summative Assessment. This is certainly a good thing. So they welcome our conducting these kinds of assessments these days.

After that we went to Kanniyampoondi, a smaller school in Thiruvannamalai Dist. Note the rest of the schools are in Villupuram Dist. The school is a good performing small school with a very motivated HM. Sasikala, the Asha teacher at the school helped conduct the assessments while the other teachers conducted it. As expected the children did better in the assessment at this school. The HM Mrs. Ramani was not there as she had to attend some meeting. She came back a little early from her meeting so that she could meet us. She was very thankful for our continued support and was also very happy with Sasikala who joined us this year.

After that I dropped some of our teachers back at Kaatu Sithamboor and Paripooranam at Keezhpennathur and then returned back to Senji.

We had planned to visit a bunch of new schools that were requesting Asha support on the third day. We had also planned to conduct oral assessments in two more schools on that day. We thought we can also drop into these schools during our travel. However weather had other plans. Cyclone Ockhi was pounding Southern Tamilnadu and that was causing heavy rains even in Thiruvannamalai and Villupuram Districts. They announced the closure of all the schools in the morning! Paripooranam called all the new schools and requested the HM or some teacher to be there so that we can at least visit the school and get the details even if we cannot interact with the teachers. I was very happy that in 4 of the 5 schools we were planning to visit, a teacher was there to interact with us!

We first went to Melmalayanur. This is close to Seeyapoondi and one of the reasons for considering this school is to find an alternate school for Gnanasoundari, our teacher from Seeyapoondi. The strength at Seeyapoondi doesn't justify our teacher there and the lack of support from the government teachers meant we weren't able to contribute much to this school. The middle school at Melmalayanur was a big school with about 300 children and they certainly had a need for a couple of more teachers. The Asst HM who was there was quite motivated. The infrastructure at the school was also good.

Then we went to a really remote school at a village called Cholanthangal. This was a good 4 or 5 Kms from the main road. The last couple of kms were just dirt roads. There is some legal problem that the HM is facing (unrelated to the school and his work) and therefore he is suspended. So there only one teacher there. The need at this school was very real. However the school has lost a number of children to some nearby schools and had a strength of just 25 or so with the one asst teacher. He was confident the children will return if there is a teacher but we are concerned about that and also how we can find a teacher who can come up to this school.

We then went to PUMS Semmedu. This is right on the Senji - Thiruvannamalai highway. One of the subject teachers for the middle school is the ex-HM at Kamagaram. She knows Asha and desperately wants our support to improve this school. This is a huge school physically. It has a huge playground. However the rooms where the middle schools classes sit were all badly damaged. They should be getting new rooms by the next academic year. The school needs a middle school teacher (esp. in Maths or Science) as well as a primary school teacher. The primary classes have good rooms.

Finally we went to PUPS Nagalampattu. This is once again a remote village some 3 Kms away from Nallanpillaipetral. This is a beautiful scenic place situated amidst the rocky hills typical of that area. The school building was good and the HM was also very motivated. He has managed to increase the schools enrollment and now there are 50+ children with 2 teachers. He wants a teacher from Asha and hopes to increase the enrollment even more.

Paripooranam and I felt we can consider supporting Melmalayanur (instead of Seeyapoondi) and Nagalampattu from next academic year. Paripooranam has taken the details of the schools.

We finished our visits by about 12:00 noon. I was also glad to leave back for Chennai earlier as heavy rains were continuing to pound the area. So I dropped Paripooranam back at Keezhpennathur and then drove back to Chennai.