

Site Report

Introduction

Although I have been a volunteer at Asha Chennai for over seven years, participating in monthly meetings regularly, it has been my regret that I had not visited any Asha supported school so far. . Thanks to Venkat who took me around I was able to make a single-day whirlwind tour of schools under the Sangamam project in Poondi block and also RTCs nearby on the 1st of September'23... Sujatha, a co-volunteer, and her little daughter accompanying us made the trip memorable. All the places we visited lay northwest of Tiruvallur and east of Poondi Reservoir The farthest place from Tiruvallur we visited was Seethanjeri about 20 KM

Tiruvallur Office.

First, we went to the Office under construction at Tiruvallur. Srinivasan, our field coordinator, took us around the premises. Toilets have been almost completed, the main hall is still a work in progress. Since I did not find many men at work, I asked Srinivasan when he hoped the construction would be complete. He promised me that it would be over by mid November and ready for use.

Kuppammal Chathiram PUPS

Our next stop was the Primary School at Kuppammal Chathiram. It is slightly away from the main road adjacent to some agricultural fields. It is a coeducational school. It was nice to see children turned out neatly in uniforms. The strength of the school is about 90. I learned that there had been no drop in the strength of this school even though there was a reverse migration, post corona, to private schools in many areas. . .

Classes 2 and 3 were having [Karadi Path](#) English Class taught by our teacher Usha. Our teacher Deivanayagi, a regular teacher teaching all subjects, was also present. [Karadi Path](#) English Language teaching is activity-based. I was eager to know if all children were responding to the commands of the teacher or mimicking the neighbouring boy or girl mechanically. We selected a boy and a girl at random and gave them the cues and we were happy to see that they carried out the actions correctly.

I was happy to observe functioning regular classes of 1 and 4 but very briefly

Ms Lakshmi, the Head Mistress, was cordial. She was appreciative of Asha's support of her school.

Kosavapalayam PUPs

The next school we visited was at Kosavanpalayam, about 6 KM from Tiruvallur. . It is also a coeducational school. We were welcomed by Asha teachers Jaya and Prabha and HM Meena. We also met Asha computer teacher Tamilselvi. In the same hall partitioned by book shelves there were two class rooms. Here again students turned out well wearing clean uniforms and alert in appearance. Children were turning up at school at 8 AM, since the introduction of the breakfast scheme. I tried to talk to Class 4 students asking a few simple questions in English. Initially they were in awe but slowly one girl student piped up. I was particularly impressed by a boy who was sitting behind her translating my questions into Tamil. . I learnt from the children that all were living

nearby and walked to the school except the boy, the interpreter, who was being dropped by his father by bike. I also enquired from the children what they got everyday for breakfast. Everyone appeared eager to answer that question.

Lunch and Rest

We had a sumptuous lunch at Perambur Srinivasa thanks to Venkat followed by an hour of rest at KP Palace Hotel arranged by Srinivasan.

Poondi RTC

Kumari , one of our notable lead teachers, and MV Dhatchayani, both RTC teachers, received us. They had just completed a programme of distribution of certificates to the second batch of RTC students on their passing the tests. Although they appeared a bit jaded because of the morning function they enthusiastically chatted about work related to RTC with us.

Seethanjeri High School and RTC

It is a very big school in a big compound in a lovely setting with a lot of area for assembly and playground and a number of trees. It is a Government High school . We visited the computer class in the school premises and our Asha teacher Radha was in charge of teaching 8th Class students on the day. The class is housed in a spacious room with desks set against the walls with a laptop for each of the 20 odd children present there.

Frankly, the setting evoked in me a sense of pride in my association with Asha that I had not felt before when I was merely attending monthly meetings virtually. The children were learning to insert Tables and populate them inside a Word document. I was impressed at the speed with which some of them did the exercise. When we were there, the power failed and one of the students took the initiative to lead unplugged activities. It was a fun activity using playing cards for recognising a pattern and identifying the odd one. When the power returned I asked one of the boys to capture a picture of him and me with his laptop camera and insert it into his computer document. It was amazing, he did it without faltering or fumbling. These kids were amazing. Kudos to Radha!

After taking leave of the children we visited the RTC. It has relatively a smaller space compared to Poondi RTC. Radha too came to the RTC . There was no class going on then. I was informed that the attendance was good in this RTC. One thing occurred to me when I saw laptops piled one over the other on the floor, maybe, over a period of time, we may think of providing a standardised cabinet for keeping computers and accessories neatly when these are not in use or waiting for repair.

Since, we, more particularly I, wanted to return before the traffic became heavy, we returned taking leave of Radha.

General Impression

I didn't realise the enormity of the task undertaken by Asha until I saw for myself first hand. .I almost felt like the Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Defence who didn't know the muzzle end of the gun from the breach end until he visited a gun factory, to borrow a metaphor from my earlier

profession. Emphasis on English by Karadi Path training and exposure to computer operations at an early age will help the children face the challenges of the future.

The school premises of primary schools are not adequate. It seems there was a building which was demolished but the government has not built a new one in its place. This is not uncommon in most schools. Unsafe buildings are demolished and it takes years for the government to build new premises

Post Script

I have a suggestion. We should put up name boards of RTCs on the main road showing the directions. We must also mark these places in Google Maps.

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