

I am Rajaraman Krishnan, a volunteer of Asha Chennai. I had made a site visit to some of the schools supported by Project Sangamam on 7th November 2014.

Asha Chennai has given some Maths teaching aids to Project Sangamam. Since this was just a couple of days earlier, it had only reached the school at Pattarai Perambudur. The idea was to visit this school to see how the kits are being used by our teacher. I also decided to visit Gandhigram, another nearby school supported by the project and a new school that was requesting our support at Pondhavalkam.

Gandhigram

Gandhigram is a school situated close to the Thiruvallur – Thirutani highway. However it still feels a little remote since it is separated from the highway by a Kilometer long stretch of high Casuarina trees. The village is populated by Irulars (tribals) who fish in the poondi reservoir when that is possible and work as labourers in others' fields.

The school has two government teachers. One of them was on a long leave because of her daughter's marriage. So only the HM and Asha teacher, Shakila were at the school. Shakila was managing one class at a time while the HM was maintaining order with the other classes and giving them some work to do. When I went there, Shakila was teaching "Fruits and Vegetables" to the 1st standard children. I felt she was doing a good job with her teaching. I learnt a little bit about how the TN textbooks and the ABL cards correlate. The children were able to identify the fruits/vegetables and were able to identify all their colours which was part of the goal of this lesson.

I also spent a little time with the Fifth standard children. When I asked them to multiply two 2-digit numbers, they were struggling a bit. I tried to show them the pattern that $a*b$ and $b*a$ will always be the same. I couldn't do that too well since their multiplication skills themselves were a little limited. I instead showed them the pattern that $a+b$ and $b+a$ will always be the same.

The need for the Asha teacher was very clear. I think she is doing a much better job than the government teachers there.

Pattarai Perambudur

At Pattarai Perambudur the story was once again similar. The school HM was missing because of her daughter. Asha teacher Santha Sophya had to manage the 5th standard class also in addition to the 3rd standard that she usually manages.

Santha Sophya demonstrated how she would use the fractions kit to teach the children about fractions. I also asked the children to show $1/2$, $2/4$, $3/6$ etc. with the fraction circles and see how these are the same and got the children to share their observations. They were able to notice that these are the same and were able to come up with equivalent fractions to $1/3$ on their own. I also had better luck with these children in demonstrating how $a*b$ is the same as $b*a$.

After that we had lunch at the Sangamam office.

Pondhavalkam

The head-mistress at the Pondhavalkam primary school is Mrs. Kamakshi. She used to teach earlier at Kuppammal Chatthiram primary school which Asha has been supporting since 2004. So she was familiar with our work and when she had a need for a teacher at her present school approached Asha.

It looks like she is running the school quite well. She got the panchayat's cooperation and has taken care of all the infrastructural needs of the school. The school has about 120 children on the rolls and has more than enough classrooms and also a very large ground. The problem is that they have only 4 teachers. That too the first standard has been converted into English medium. They badly need a teacher for their school. As was the case at the other two schools, here too one of the teachers was on leave (but only for a day assured the head mistress!).

I could clearly see the need for an extra teacher. Even two teachers can be accommodated. I interacted with the 2nd and 3rd standard children. I tried my usual $a+b$ is the same as $b+a$. The children were interacting quite enthusiastically. I also showed how they can guess the spelling of words they don't even know in English by how it sounds. After some initial hesitation they were able to identify the first and last letters of names like "Sudan", "Bangkok", "Kanpur", "London" etc.

After that Mrs. Kamakshi took us to meet the oor-thalaivar. He was also quite keen to get whatever help possible for their school. It looks like the higher secondary school in the panchayat is also performing well. It is to their credit that in spite of the presence of private schools nearby in Uthukkotai, a small town, their numbers have not been dropping. I think the school should be supported by Asha as part of Project Sangamam.