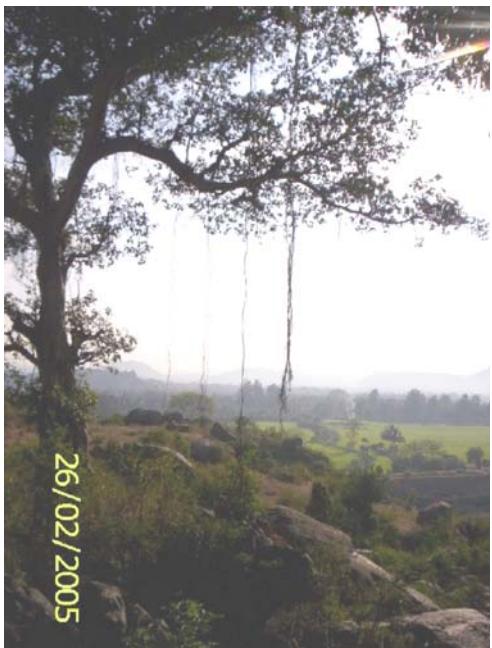


PUVIDHAM RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRUST

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

ANNUAL REPORT 2004-2005

Nagarkudal village, Dharmapuri district
Tamilnadu 636803.INDIA regd no 9/2000



Like this Banyan tree in the morning mist, putting out its roots, sometimes finding healthy soil and at other times only unwelcoming rocks, we too at Pividham have found that our attempts to grow have been met with both support and resistance.

There have been exciting opportunities for the children and varied learning experiences. All in all this year has been very hectic and unpredictable.

We are extremely thankful to all our donors and friends for being with us in this venture . We started living and farming at PUVIDHAM in 1992. After we had gained enough experience and confidence in organic farming , we decided to see what we could do to help the other farmers of the region. And we realized that before we expect them to see the benefits of organic farming and

environment protection they needed to be educated. We decided to focus on the children of these farmers , to educate and expose them to the various options and ideas . So we started the PUVIDHAM LEARNING CENTRE in 2000.

Subsequent to that we registered THE TRUST in 2002 and last year ventured in to employment generation and adult education for women . PUVIDHAM NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL came into being in 2004. We also had to run an informal hostel working out of our house for the children of migrating workers.

Since we started to care for a few children , we have had to start a proper hostel facility for these children . In June 2004 we started with 3 children and had a total of eight by March 2005. We have been warding off more children that would like to be in the hostel but it looks like we will have grown considerably by next year .

| Year | No. of Students | No. of Teachers | School Space (sq.ft.) | Excursions |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|
| 2000-2001 | 9 | 2 | 130 | --- |
| 2001-2002 | 15 | 2 | 250 | Rayakota Fort (2 days) |
| 2002-2003 | 30 | 3 | 1400 | Madras (3 days) |
| 2003-2004 | 45 | 4 | 1900 | Madurai (5 days) Timbaktu (10 days) Yercaud (1 day) |
| 2004-2005 | 60 | 5 | 2400 | sittilingi (3 days), Salem (1 day), Kerala(10 days)& Panchapalli (1 day) |

The beginning of academic year in June 2004 was very joyful for everybody. With the memory of the trip to Timbaktu School, Andhra Pradesh in March 2004, our children were eager to perform a cultural program every 15 days, just as performed by the Timbaktu children.

After reviewing our experience of Timbaktu we felt that we would benefit by regular visits to other schools, to interact with other children, experience different ways of living and learning and to be exposed to different ideas and parts of our country.

We also realized that if we wanted to have the whole big world to travel in, then English as a spoken language would help us to gain maximum benefit from our travels and, expand our horizons.

Thus, a play in English became an essential part of the cultural programmes. And all project work and workbooks were directed at achieving this to the best of our ability within this year.

Earlier in October 2003 we had tried **picture flash cards** and found them to be an effortless way of giving information. We found that flashing the cards led to maximum retention of information in children, especially in the 2 to 5 year age group. Towards the end of the academic year, in February 2004 we started to try the **word flash cards** idea of **Glenn Doman**, who founded The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in the USA. The teachers prepared around 500 word cards to be flashed in classified groups.

This year we tried word card matching and flashing along with the traditional **phonetic alphabet**.

Nagini joined us in as a teacher of the 5-7 year age group . She has a background in environmental sciences and is keen to share her knowledge with the children . This helped the children greatly to learn spoken English and get an early introduction into the classification and recognition of local vegetation.

Stephan Raj came to Puvidham school as a music teacher. He taught the children a lot of songs and taught some of them to play the dhapali. He discontinued due to personal reasons.



Learning to dance

Tilakavati joined us with an interest in working with women's education and empowerment. We started a small awareness group in Kalanikattur village and are keen to continue working on land regeneration issues.

As a follow up, we also started a library in the same village. This was very exciting as many more children are able to access books closer to their homes. Tilakavati also taught Tamil to the first, second and third level children.

Sadhana came to Puvidham to learn English and further her computer skills. She filled the gap in Tamil teaching after Tilakavati left us.

. We had a great sports day and a good number of in-house cultural shows.

Mr. Singhi from Kothagiri is a regular visitor to the school. His speciality is Origami. He also spent time teaching the children to draw plans, elevations and sections. He was impressed with the level of concentration of the Puvidham kids and now comes to the school at frequent intervals and so the focus is on arts and crafts .



The proud antelope

Lakshmi Murthy from Udaipur, Rajasthan, came to the school for a workshop on health, the body and changes as we grow up. She and her organization Vikalp Design have made very innovative learning materials on these issues. All the 8-15 year olds participated in the workshop and learned from the candid discussions. Lakshmi commented that the children already knew a lot and that in her many years of running such workshops, this was the first time when boys and girls were allowed to sit together for the discussions. She thoroughly enjoyed her time at Puvidham. She also interacted with some women and girls in Kalanikattur village

Then on August 19, 2004 calamity hit a school in Kumbakonam, in Tamilnadu. There was a fire accident and about 100 children were burnt to death. As the fire happened in a thatch roof building that was unauthorized and temporary, the Tamilnadu state government declared all thatched structures unsafe for children.

Meenakshi's house and the school are all thatched structures! We had also just finished thatching another building which was to be a hostel for children whose parents work in the quarry industry..



Why Thatch? All our buildings are made from mud and thatch, because both these materials are environmentally and economically sound. They are also climatically apt for the extreme climate of this region. We have no need to use fans or artificial lights during the day. And the thatch that we have done is around 10 inches thick and very compact. Also the windows are large and do not have grills and the doors are unlatchable. These structures are not temporary and are very safe.

Nevertheless, the government officials kept questioning us and forced us to close down the school. We assured the parents that we would construct a tiled structure nearby but were totally unaware as to where we would get the funds for this structure. Even this had a hitch because according to the new rule no thatch structure could exist for a diameter of 100 feet around the structure housing the children.

It was then that Meenakshi and Madhavraj went to see the Collector personally to discuss with him that if that rule was to be applied in this case, then, Meenakshi, Umesh and their children would be homeless. We asked him to look at the place as a whole and help us to continue our work with minimum needed construction and expenses. He then called all the concerned officials and asked them to allow us to continue.

As we were wondering how to go about the construction, an Engineer friend decided to give us some materials. So we started the work. Luck was looking our way and 4 people from the Rotary Club of Dharmapuri came to visit the school. When we told them of our dilemma and the financial problems we were facing they offered to send some masons and to pay for the doors and windows. This eased our situation a lot and after 30 days of intense activity in which all the teachers and older children participated, the new building was ready.

In the mean time we had restarted the school and were running the classes under trees. But we still lost some children. We were also forced to apply for registration of the School up to the primary level

Once all of us had settled back into some routine, we were able to think about taking the children out on study visits to other schools.



The new school building

In October 2004, Meenakshi and Madhavraj took our 8-12 year olds to Sittilingi in Dharmapuri District. This is a remote tribal area in which some friends, Dr. Regi and Lalitha have run a Tribal Hospital for 10 years, and, Anuradha and Krishna have just started Thulir, a learning center. The children took a tour of the hospital, went for walks in the forest, camped in tents, and swam in a tank.

In December, the 8-12 year olds went to Kanavu school in Wayanad, Kerala, for a ten-day exposure trip. This exposure trip turned into an exchange programme! Nagini and Meenakshi accompanied the children and they all got exposed to tribal culture, music, kalaripayit, and a type of community living as practiced in Kanavu. Three of our children wanted to stay back and learn more. After a discussion with K.J. Baby & Shirly (the founders of Kanavu), we decided to have an exchange programme.

Two of the Kanavu children wanted to come to Puvidham and three of the Puvidham children stayed back at Kanavu.

We found this exchange has done wonders for Puvidham. Our kids now sing not only Tamil songs, but also songs in other languages ranging from Gujarati, Rajasthani, Hindi, English, French, Kannada & Malyalam. The children, especially the middle to older group, have also learned more dance and become more confident in singing and dancing.

The Kanavu children were at Puvidham to learn more English and structured Maths and they also picked up a lot of Tamil.



Another overnight trip was organised for the 8-12 year group to see a couple of dams around 60 km from Puvidham. A friend of Madhavraj hosted the group and took care of travel and food expenses.

In January, Rani and Saroja, two teachers from Vikasana School in the outskirts from Bangalore came to Puvidham. Rani is trained in "creeping and crawling" exercises which are part of Glenn

Doman's methodology towards developing mental sharpness and coordination. She taught us these and more exercises and since then they have become a part of our daily schedule. Both Rani and Saroja also shared their songs with our children.

In March 2005 we had Chitra & Rajagopal visit us from Mumbai. Chitra works at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and has written activity books and prepared detailed science experiments. She gave us a lot of inputs on how to make science a real learning experience. She held a short class for the teachers. Gopal has done extensive work in networking & technology. Our discussion with them has helped us focus on our goals and made us priorities our activities. They have taken it upon themselves to nurture us with their experience & guide us through our work

Meanwhile, three children from our school appeared for the 10th state board exam.

Four kids will appear for their 8th state board exam next year and thus slowly Puvidham children are growing up.

Finally, to end the academic year, we had a fair in school on the 2nd of April. There was a science exhibition, a magic show and a puzzle solving competition. In addition there was an exhibition cum sale of all the products made in the school by the kids like, soap, cloth bags, wire bags, embroidered handkerchiefs, greeting cards, toys, dolls and ribbons and a lot more. There was also a delicious food and drink stall that was very popular!



The fair went off very well and a lot of the kids' parents were very pleased with their children's performance. The complete fair was organized and conducted by the older group called Malars (10-14 year olds) and we were all very proud of them. After the fair there was a cultural program where all the children, ranging from the 3-4 year olds to the eldest group, performed songs, folk dances and dramas.



The whole event was well attended and all, young or old from the surrounding villages had a gala time. It was a fitting close to the year and we began our summer vacation on a high note.

PLANS FOR THIS YEAR

- We had started the construction of the hostel on the request from many parents who are migrant workers. The building construction had to be stopped because non acceptance of thatch in schools. The same building will be finished now and used as an **activity center** for the youth of the area . Already the embroidery unit has been functioning for the last 6 months .
- The other activities for employment generation for women is weaving . Two girls are being trained in the activity and we plan to put up 10 looms and also buy one sewing machine .
- Another major activity is the outreach in organic farming and the production of value added food products like dried tomatoes, mushrooms , dried bananas and pickles .
- A nursery will be started to further the village library program with the supply of forest tree species and to plant around the school and hostel .
- Manufacture of vermicompost and panchakavya will be undertaken to further the idea of helping farmers to shift over to organic farming .
- A new brick and concrete hostel building will be built.
- Our attempt to get the school recognized by the state govt is in the final stages.



OUR SINCERE THANKS TO ALL OUR FRIENDS .WE LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU ALL AND SEEK YOUR CONTINUAL SUPPORT .

Detailed audited accounts available on request .

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN US IN OUR EFFORTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH US AT puvidhamtrust@hotmail.com .