

Well known writer Joe De Cruz visited REWARD Trust on June 30th, 2018.

Below is a translation of the relevant sections of the article published in the August issue of “Kakkai Siriginile”

The event was one of the monthly teacher workshop/training events. A summer project for the teachers was reading literature by 10 authors born after 1960. Teachers formed groups and selected authors and books and discussed amongst themselves. At the event they were scheduled to present their thoughts and critique.

Note by Melli: This feedback below is particularly fascinating because it shows how the teachers have come alive in the event. I believe providing such opportunities to teachers on a variety of topics ranging from literature and art to governance, environment and more is as important training on teaching techniques that typical training programs tend to focus on. This has impact in the classroom, and on the teachers’ lives. The teachers are typically from the villages in the area, without much economic prospects before they join REWARD. This kind of exposure can change the way they think, and have a long lasting impact on their lives. Even if they leave REWARD they take this with them wherever they go.

Translation by Melli Annamalai, Asha Boston volunteer:

REWARD Trust appoints teachers in consultation with the headmaster/headmistress and the parent-teacher association and provides motivation, training and continuous supervision. In 2005 they started with four teachers, now they work with 67 teachers in 41 schools in the area that is a 30 kms radius around Kalpakkam.

Many teachers were first time readers. But that they were first-rate readers was clear from their vibrant participation.

The concerned authors should have listened to the criticism made by the groups. The teachers said reading was not like listening to someone else, but as though they were experiencing their own life. This is the contribution of realistic literature. The teachers agreed with the authors sometimes and contradicted them sometimes, frankly and openly. Every group claimed the author they read as their own.

In each group there was no specific leader, all members had read the book. They placed before the audience their understanding and disagreements without any hesitation. This is important in the current time. The thirst for literature increases their imagination and our hope is that it reaches the younger generation through them. In the colonial period education became universal but was not useful for life. In the name of education we are training armies of people who will do work they are commanded to do. They do not discuss, understand and find new ways by themselves.

Regarding education, western countries have understanding, what we have is training.

Literature makes you understand your life, understand your fellow human beings, makes you dream. Just knowing language does not give you knowledge. Only when you understand you get argumentation and imagination that it instigates and the internal stimulation which will create new ways of thinking. This is what also helps to be successful later.

Literature is to dream, it instigates imagination, this imagining is the teacher of Science, the next stage is technology. Westerners have mastered technology and continuously read literature from primary school. But for us the result is paucity of imagination. This generation has no creative instincts. It seems in 10 years there will be machines to do even skilled jobs then there will not even be software companies where the current youth work happily.

Literature is very important in life. This should develop into a movement.