

## Site Visit Report – April 2014

After a long hiatus, I visited Thulir during April 16-18 and April 21-22. The trip co-incident with the first ever 'Thulir Elections' and their annual science camp, which I was unfortunate to miss out.

The Thulir elections was an innovative experiment to educate the children about the *modus operandi* of general elections. The Children were asked to form parties by themselves and three parties came into force, which included an all-girls party. Five constituencies were chosen for the elections – Leh, Agartala, Kochi and Gandhinagar from different directions and their own constituency being Dharmapuri. The children were educated about the major issues in these constituencies – separatist movement in Kashmir, armed forces in North East, communal violence in Gandhi Nagar and when it came to Dharmapuri, the children chose the issue of alcoholism.

The parties were asked to field candidates for each of these locations. They were also asked to work on an agenda, posters, election promises and other campaign material. They also had a symbol – motor bike, tree and butterfly. During the course of filing nominations, they were also asked to furnish details of their 'assets' in form of whether they possess mobile phones, TV sets and other luxury items in their home. For the purposes of voting, Senthil and his team prepared a special 'Electronic voting machine' – a simple gadget with three switches and two lights connected to each switch, one at the polling area and other light at the counting area. The places were separated and the feel of a typical election booth was created. All students above 3 years of age were invited to vote. A quick-fix voter ID card was also prepared ahead of the elections and distributed to all the voters. A permanent marker was used for marking the fingers of the voter. Each voter have to vote five times to elect five different representatives for the five constituencies. Each of the party was also allowed a 'booth agent' to sit in the counting centre to ensure fairness. All the staff of Thulir acted as the election officials. The children responded enthusiastically and got themselves acquainted with the electoral process.

The elections were followed by another major event in their calendar – The Annual Science Camp over the April 19-20 weekend. I had to skip the event due to other prior commitments. A more detailed report on these events will be available as a part of Thulir newsletter expected later this month.

## **Staff Update**

Senthil and Rajamma have moved to stay in the campus and taking full time responsibility for the centre. Devaki got married in February and has since moved out of Thulir. Shakthivel has rejoined Thulir since January and is expected to continue in Thulir for foreseeable future.

## **Agri enterprise**

Back in 2011, Senthil, Jayabal, Dhanapal and Jagannath started an Agro-based enterprise. A detailed report on the same is available here -

[http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/967/sitevisit\\_Nov11.pdf](http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/967/sitevisit_Nov11.pdf)

The enterprise did not take off since due to various issues and was decided to wound it up. The entire region has been experiencing severe drought and has received less than average rainfall for the past two years. I took some time out to discuss about the initiative with Senthil during this trip.

1. Dairy Products – They had one milch cow and a male calf when they started the project. Subsequently, two milch cows were bought and at the peak season, they were able to draw milk from all the three cows. Later, the one female calf was sold to Senthil, a milch cow and two calves were sold to Dhanapal and one milch cow was sold to Kannagi. The key constraints were lack of fodder, absence of grazing land and the increasing cost of hay.

2. Organic Farming - Their farming was largely rain-fed agriculture and as a result of the drought, the initiative suffered considerably. They cultivated about one acre of land and experimented with various crops like paddy, millets, pulses greens and other vegetables.

3. Gobar Gas – The gobar gas plant could not be activated at a large scale due to lack of fuel. It is presently used in a very small scale and kept functional by Anu for her residence.

4. Staff – Amongst the four, Jagannath was the earliest to leave in 2012. The financial situation in his family forced him to seek fortunes in Tirupur. Jayabal and Dhanapal left Thulir in 2013 and are presently in Sittling working in the construction projects of THI.

There is ample scope for revival if there are rains. Running it sustainably needs

additional infrastructural support and increased investment in land and borewells.

### **Thulir Newsletters**

There has been a paucity of publishing newsletter from Thulir. An earlier issue dated February 2014 was not circulated. You can find it here

<http://www.thulir.org/wp/2014/02/newsletter-sep-2013-feb-2014/>

And the present issue can be found here

<http://www.thulir.org/wp/2014/04/1930/>

The centre would be closed for vacations in the month of May and resumes in June 2014. All Asha volunteers have been invited for a site visit during the next year. A more detailed report on the utilisation of funds for 2013-14 and the proposed budget for 2014-15 will be circulated very soon.