

Thulir

This blog brings latest news of happenings at Thulir. "THULIR" is an Education Resource Centre at Sittilingi [a tribal village in Dharmapuri district of Tamilnadu, India], for children. It is a Tamil word meaning "a tender shoot", also "to sprout". The Thulir website is www.thulir.org

[formatted from newsfromthulir.blogspot.com - in reverse chronological order - Sridhar]

Monday, March 12, 2007

Thulir : Some reflections

Its almost April and it is anniversary time. As usual, it is time for reflection. Of course we just put up a news update that talked in detail about the activities at Thulir, so this note is more to summarise it and add how we see ourselves currently and where we are headed to.

Well, as things stand now, these are the various groups and set of activities currently taking place at Thulir:

- **Evening Sessions** are being attended by about 55 children [even as we write this the past two weeks have seen fresh children coming in. But on an average we have about 25 to 30 children attending. We have now arranged them into 3 groups [age and ability wise]. We have introduced more ordered exercises after feed back from the students. Apart from this we have the usual activities of basic language, Math , General knowledge, art and crafts and General topics, viewing documentaries and feature films. We have recently started computer classes .We are also seriously thinking of starting a sort of film club with regular screenings followed by discussions as we realize that a lot of their current thinking is deeply influenced by mainstream Tamil movies and therefore it is important to make them aware of this impact and to show alternatives. *Apart form this activity, we are currently working on how we could organize the academic learning part more effectively. This is a big challenge and source of many of our frustrations currently, as the*

students are not very regular and come for a short period of time everyday.

- **The Basic Technology course** students are continuing to do their mix of academics with technology skills. Some of their sessions are invoking interest from the other students and we are considering doing some of the skills activities with the evening session students too. We are truly amazed at the positive benefits working with the hands has on their self confidence levels and there is a subsequent drastic improvement in academic skills. *Ideally this should be available to all students and this might become the biggest challenge in the coming years for us. In a small way we have started this process for the evening class students and hope to work forward slowly.* Perumal, Senthil and Balu [along with Mohan who should be joining us back after he recovers from Surgery] being our first batch, need more time than the one year that would end by June. We feel they need a bit more of "hand holding" time, before they are ready to move on to either taking up a job or going for higher level skill training. So we are postponing taking in a new batch to the end of this year.
- **Sreyarth and Bharathi** continue with their "home" learning using Thulir resources. Twice a week, Ragini who is 6 years old and whose parents work at our hospital , also joins them. This group in the coming years may grow, as we have other parents in the hospital whose children are in the 0-5 age group.
- **The exam batch** : A group of 5 students are currently preparing for their 10th boards, They are here full time and apart from organizing their preparation we have introduced some general discussions classes for them. *Some of these students could continue to come to Thulir even after the exams and we are looking closely now at what sort of a programme might benefit them.*

It is obvious we dont have a conventional structure [say like that of a school with classes], and things look a bit too varied/ unorganised/ hap hazard. In fact part of our frustration is not being able to look at it with some sense of order, and especially in not being able to communicate this. It certainly seems we dont have a "target group" or "focus".

It is however getting clearer that what we *are*, is a Learning Resource Centre that is open to a wide age group. The way this is working out now is that *Individuals* are either , at the one end, getting motivated to learn and/or on the other , actually learning skills [both academic and vocational]. We wonder if it could be in some sense like students going to a University [in US?] and choosing her/ his credits and pace of completing the credits. For this to happen properly two factors are crucial :

- 1]. the ability of students to decide what they want to learn and when; and
- 2] that we are available with time/ energy and the right resources for them to be able to do this. In a sense this is what we are doing and with this clarity we may be able to a] evaluate ourselves better and b] perform better in future.

One of the important learnings from the Basic Technology Course is also that in a group, not everyone is ready to undergo a shared experience of learning and the specifics of what is taught/ to be learnt may not suit some individuals [which explains our drop outs from the course]. It would of course be ideal to open up the place for "any day admission". [In a sense we are that right now, except for the Basic Technology Course where we had a formal date of starting]. It is not too radical a thought as the National Open School now offers the possibility to write exams on demand [one can walk into any of its Centres on any working day, pay the fees and take an exam!!].

Some questions that arise are:

- Can we leave things to individual students to come up and say " this is what I want to learn now"?

Yes, we can. this is because for one, most students come to Thulir on their own: they are not compelled by parents to come. Secondly, after 3 years, we now have a core group of students who are motivated and therefore have created an atmosphere where by newer students get motivated much sooner.

- So once we accept this what about organizing learning for so many different students at different times/ different paces.? How is this to be done?

This has been our big challenge so far and it hasn't been easy. But given our peculiar situation of an institution where students do not come regularly, *there is no other way to do it*. It does not mean that we can't have classes for a group. Where it is appropriate, this does happen. Given our scarcity of teachers, we need to encourage students themselves to teach each other. This will lead to higher confidence levels as explaining a concept to another person really clarifies one's own understanding.

- How do we evaluate our performance / students performance?

The probable way to do this is to have individual portfolios where all the work of the children and occasional tests that they voluntarily take are all filed.

Along with the dates and their attendance records this would make it possible to have a fairly clear idea of how a particular student has progressed. These records would also give a pointer towards our efforts in organizing materials as well as teaching sessions that were involved with each individual. Apart from this, we could also include our notes on sessions we take for the children and notes on activities that happen here. This does seem a lot of work, but some of it we already are doing and so it requires the additional effort of streamlining this process.

Of course conventional pointers are always available...such as number of children passing 10th Std exams and so on. We also intend exploring other alternatives to the private candidate in the state exam mode that is currently being used. These could be various possibilities under the National Institute Open Schooling exams with certificate exams in various vocational streams, apart from the 10th equivalent academic/vocational 10th exams.

We would be very happy to hear from you what you all think and any suggestions/ comments would be very valuable. We look forward to hearing from you all.

posted by Anuradha and Krishna @ 8:22 AM 0 comments [links to this post](#)

A Test for Thulir

The review we did of Thulir with the students was called "Thulirukku oru paritchai" [a test for Thulir]. There were many questions each person had to answer. The following questions were some of the questions asked:

- How long have you been coming here?
- List the things you have learnt here.
- What else do you want to learn?
- What do you like most here? what do you not like?
- Shall we have sessions only on weekends and holidays instead of having sessions every evening on weekdays?
- What other rules should we have in Thulir?
- Should we be more strict generally and about attendance ?
- Is the supplementary snack we have in the evenings necessary or shall we stop it?
- Should we have written exercises every day?
- Is the way of teaching here OK or should it be changed?
- Do you know why some girls have stopped coming to Thulir?

It was heartening to see all the children sit down and write answers to these

questions. Most of them when they first came to Thulir could hardly write [even Tamil]. Of course they still make a lot of mistakes, but have progressed to the stage of confidently attempting to think and write on their own!

Among the things they have listed as having learnt are

- Tamil and English [to read and to write],
- Math,
- General knowledge,
- Talking to new people with confidence,
- and learning about the outside world from them,
- reading books,
- drawing, painting, crafts like knitting etc,

All of them have said they like it here. 4-5 of them have said specifically that they are happy here and that they have been able to learn here only because there is an affectionate environment around. Some girls [we know they have a traumatic family situation] have said that they are able to forget their troubles here.

Most children want sessions every evening and during weekends also! 4 children have said that they don't like the fact that we don't have evening sessions on Mondays [right now we keep Mondays for admin work, maintenance of the campus and buildings, and for planning and preparing classes]. Some older children expressed that they are expected to work in their family fields on school holidays and therefore not to have sessions on holidays.

Two boys have said we should hit children when they do wrong! [we asked this question as this is something we discuss often with the children and also right now a controversy is raging in Tamil Nadu as the Govt has removed the right of the teacher to hit...yes, it was sanctioned in law!]

Everyone has said they would attend Thulir even if we stop the food supplement.

Most want more spoken English classes and computer classes. Two older children [boy and girl] want sewing lessons.

Most have said that the teaching methods and teaching environment in general need not be changed.

All children want to do some written work every day.

Two children have expressed that the play time has been reduced nowadays and that it should not be done.

Most said that children should be asked to come more regularly but if they have work in their fields then they should be excused.

The older children have said that the reason for some girls stopping was the attainment of puberty and the death of a boy in the stream.

We hope to keep this dialogue going and take on some of their suggestions. Already some measures have been put in place, for instance, writing exercises every day. We are happy that we did this exercise with the students as we have a better understanding of the way they perceive Thulir's activities. It has helped us clarify in our minds too what we ought to be doing in future.

posted by Anuradha and Krishna @ 8:19 AM [0 comments](#) [links to this post](#)

Thank you all for writing in.....

Our last news update in this Blog has elicited such an overwhelming response.

We now know that so many of you read our Blog [even such a long and possibly rambling one as our previous blog !]. But we have been moved that so many of you have shown concern that we wrote about feeling low. We have been moved by your expression of concern; and by your sharing of similar experiences [we now know from you that these things happen and one can overcome with perseverance!].

Thanks to your writing in we dont feel anymore that we are in some remote place facing challenges alone..... we are truly fortunate to have so many friends who care and are willing to express support. Thank you all so much.

We are also happy to say that we are feeling a lot more positive and optimistic. The Thulir children have played a major part by their positive feedbacks and by being responsive to our efforts of late.

We have had a hard look at Thulir and what we have been doing and have posted the thoughts as " Thulir -- some reflections". [One more post for you all to read :)].

Thank you all once again for all the support.

posted by Anuradha and Krishna @ 8:14 AM [0 comments](#) [links to this post](#)

Monday, February 26, 2007



Its been a long gap since our last post. The reasons for this are many fold. Our internet connectivity has taken a nosedive in terms of quality and we are unable now to send anything more than simple text messages, if at all we are able to connect. The Basic Technology course has taken a lot more of our time and energy than we had imagined. This combined with the preparations for the 10th class exams and our regular Resource Centre activities took a toll on our energy levels and we started feeling frustrated. The low morale led to less communication with the outside world!

The course has been going through many exciting times as well as some frustrations. Two of the students left for Thiruppur to take jobs. One of these two students had to leave due to family problems which made it impossible for him to continue living in Sittilingi. The other left suddenly without giving us reasons and so we are not very sure of why he left. A third student has stopped as he has to undergo a major heart surgery, and is quite unwell right now. A fourth is also on sick leave as he has been frequently falling sick. These students' difficulties while they were on the roll had a negative effect on the group as a whole.

One of our staff, Anbu , left in November. He was commuting from a village 6 kms away and found it difficult to continue. Over the last one and half years , with Ravi's help we had slowly trained him to handle accounts and other Admin work and he had just started doing a good job when we lost him. Our workload increased. All this resulted in our feeling frustrated and affected the general morale in Thulir. It has taken a series of efforts, from taking a break and trekking in the Himalayas with the family [something we have been planning for years], to taking the Thulir children in various groups on study tours , to bring back our optimism.

We are currently reviewing Thulir activities to chart the course for the coming year. It started as a review with just the two of us as we were not very happy with the way things were, wondering if we ought to be making changes. We were looking for more tangible and faster results. We had more questions than we had answers; we were looking at all the aspects that were unsatisfactory and could be improved. But this soon lead to a feeling of frustration and a bit of pessimism. Luckily, we were able to interact with friends who are seniors [and with many decades of experience] in the field of alternative education

and this helped us hugely.

We were able to look at things in a more objective and positive manner. Subsequently we talked to the children, putting forward questions that we had in our minds and asked them to reflect with us and give us a detailed feedback. This was something that had been in the back of our minds but had not been initiated. We called it a " Test for Thulir ". It was gratifying to see the children take the whole process very seriously and put in a lot of effort for a couple of days . Even the children who couldn't write well wrote whatever they could. Right now we are in the middle of this process and will report on it in detail soon. But what has come forward till now has been very very useful and positive and makes us feel hopeful about Thulir's future.



Update on the Basic Technology Course:

The dropping out of two boys and the illness of two others caused some lowering of the morale of the remaining boys. But they have steadily been learning and doing various things..

Meanwhile, Mohan's health has deteriorated . He has to have a double valve replacement heart surgery immediately. With the financial help of a friend of Thulir , he is getting operated in C.M.C, Vellore on March 7th.

Bamboo work

The boys had learned to make chairs out of Bamboo earlier at Timbaktu and based on that experience made similar chairs at thulir too. There is some local demand for their chairs " the forest council leader and the postman want these chairs.

Excursions



We made a few excursions to cheer the group and provide them exposure. First we went exploring some of the villages on the nearby Chinnakalrayan hills during a day trip. This was a welcome break for us from routine and helped pull ourselves up a bit.



Later we went to Bangalore for a three day trip. The objective was to fix our old computers that were not functioning properly. We opened them up to learn about some basics of the hardware before going to Bangalore. There friends of ours helped to fix some of the troubles and helped us to go shopping for some spares. This has now lead to Mahaboob Subhan visiting to spend a month teaching basics of Computers to our students. Mahaboob Subhan, 22 years old, studied at the Learning Centre run at Timbaktu in Andhra and is learning computer hardware and software.



We also visited a house in Bangalore that has been built using alternative technology and is experimenting with alternative sources of energy. It was an interesting visit and we could get exposure to many different technologies in one place.

Follow up workshop on bee keeping

We had been having a bad spell with our bee colonies too and so we invited Justin and Rajendran from Keystone , Kothagiri to conduct a follow up

workshop and help us with some of our practical difficulties. Analyzing our efforts and finding out where we were wrong and interacting with them helped raise our spirits . We now have three colonies in and around Thulir.

Resource Centre activities

Our regular evening activities have continued. Our regular children came even during the monsoons undaunted by the incessant rains ,our bad road and the stream across the road. A number of girls had stopped coming after the death of Murugan in the stream in summer. We went and talked to the parents and began escorting the girls back to the village after classes. Now some of the girls are coming back. The children still go back by 6.30 pm.[before it gets dark]. We have continued our sessions of learning basic languages, math and general awareness through various methodologies. Our first group of children show some improvement in all these aspects and in their confidence levels. Sometimes we ask them to teach the other kids.

The head mistress of the local Govt. school and some of the teachers have been visiting Thulir and looking at our materials. The headmistress asked us to help take some classes for the older children in the school. We agreed and everything was fixed when some of the male teachers went up in arms against the headmistress and the whole thing fell through.

We had a plastic awareness campaign . In connection with this, children have been making news paper covers and we supplied some to the local shops. The THI Staff had earlier talked to the shop owners about the need to reduce use of plastic. Together with the hospital team and the children, we cleaned all the village streets one day. Plastic disposal still remains a problem.

Senthil, Mohan and Arul were coached for their class 10 English exam and they passed. Somehow a reputation has formed and now we have 5 new students coming to Thulir to prepare for their class 10 exam. But they have come 2 months before the exams and we don't see ourselves being able to do much for them.

Most of them don't have a conducive environment at home to study [with the T.V. on and drunk parents/ neighbours, apart from other distractions]. So just providing the physical space to study would be a help

Thulir children go on an excursion

We decided to visit Sathanur Dam, Thiruvannamalai and Gingee on a day's trip with 40 children. This had a been a long standing demand from the children that they be taken somewhere on an excursion. So finally we did it end Dec on a weekend. This was also the peak pilgrimage season. On the one hand we would have preferred a quieter day but on the other hand it was also an opportunity for our children to be exposed to crowds [being from a small

village, it is certainly a novelty!; though we were nervous about losing one or two of them in the crowds!]



From days before there was a lot of excitement among the children. Some 15 children who live far from the village, came the previous evening to spend the night at Thulir [we had planned on a 4 am departure]. Selvaraj went the previous evening itself to Harur [2 hours away] to meet the bus and bring it so that it could reach at 4 am at Sittilingi. We cooked food together the previous night and carried it.



Amazingly, 15 children woke up, heated bath water, had their baths using the 1 bathroom we have and were ready long before 4am ! Our children were terribly excited but very well behaved throughout.

On our way out we found a small archaeological site which was a stepped pond decorated with panels in stone depicting scenes from the ramayana. At Sathanur, we had a picnic breakfast and walked around the garden and the dam itself. At Thiruvannamalai, we visited the main temple, which was really crowded with pilgrims. We explained a bit of the history of the temple and the many mythical stories attached to it.



We moved on to Gingee which has a fort with many

rocky hills with palaces on top. The highest hill is about 800 meters high and we were warned not to climb it as we may not be able to get back in time before the fort gates close for the day at 5 pm. We were told we would need at least an hour to 90 mts to climb it. The children were very keen and we decided they could go as high as possible in 30 mts and return in time for the closure. They being fit for outdoor activities climbed up in 20 mts flat!! There's lots to see at Gingee and we need to go there again someday with lots of time.



Pongal at Sittilingi

Pongal was celebrated with great fanfare this year. We were invited for the poojas and lunches in people's farms and homes and the bull races in the temple. We are getting more accepted in the village and being involved in their pongal celebrations feels good. Vedyappan and his youth friends organised competitive events that had sports [traditional such as kabaddi, tug of war etc.] and song and dance competitions.



A youth group, including Selvaraj, learning traditional *therukoothu* [street play], put up an all night performance that was well attended in spite of the cold weather.

At Thulir we celebrated by filling all possible floor spaces with colored kolams. It was a non competitive event that had very enthusiastic participation by all age groups and both the sexes.

Visitors

As we write this Blog, Sanjeev and Anita from Asha Austin are visiting us. They have been here for a week and have sessions introducing puzzles to the

children. They have also introduced basic Electronic circuits to the Basic Technologies course students. Right now they are building circuits to make white LED products that would be useful at Thulir. Visit their blog [Sanjeev and Anita](#), for more details.

Dr Abraham, a dentist visited Thulir and conducted classes on dental care. He made nice charts with detailed drawings explaining the anatomy and details on dental care. The children went on asking a lot of questions, though we had warned Abraham they might not take to theory!

Prachi Aggarwal, an architecture student taught the children embroidery. Mrs Mythili Santhanam who visited again this winter too continued her embroidery sessions.

Rajamma Ravi, from Sittilingi, has been teaching knitting to the children a number of socks and woolen caps have been knitted.

Rachel a student volunteer had visited us and during her sessions she taught some songs and games.

Anisha, a medical student came to spend a month at the hospital. She took classes for Shreyarth on the human body. This was very useful as of late we had been a little preoccupied and Sreyarth was missing some serious learning sessions.

Esther came again this year and held several sessions with the children. she brought dried fruits, pictures, currencies and stamp from Europe and talked about them.

Dr Nick, who had come the previous winter too, returned this January. He has been teaching the children English conversation.

We thank all the visitors for spending time with the children of Thulir. We really believe that it is important for children to gain confidence and get exposure by interacting with outsiders, and visitors by interacting with children really enrich their learning. In fact, during our "test for Thulir", some of the children have mentioned "talking to strangers" being able to talk to foreigners" as an important skill they have learned!

posted by Anuradha and Krishna @ 7:49 PM 1 [comments](#) [links to this post](#)

Wednesday, September 27, 2006

Greetings from Sittilingi. Its been a while since the last post and hope this update will help fill the gap in communication. We have had the usual problems with crashing computers, and dead phone lines [the Thulir phone is dead as write this, and we are hoping to somehow access the net from

elsewhere to post this!]. The connection is very poor in Sittilingi so this update might just be largely text without photographs.

Update on Basic Technology Course:

The course has so far been a roller coaster ride with moments of exhilaration and of depression and despair. Its been constantly on our minds to put down detailed notes and share it with you all through the Blog. But one of the major outcome of starting the course has been a lack of time and energy to sit down and write.

We started the course with the idea that one of us can take charge of the course full time and leave the other person to look after the continuing programmes at Thulir [the other morning and evening classes]. We had to quickly give this up as it became too exhausting for a single person to be with the students for the full day and take all the classes [not to mention the quick boredom amongst the students in having to sit with a single teacher for the whole day!]. Now the two of us are involved together splitting the classes between us.

The interesting challenge so far has been trying to balance classroom theory sessions with practical classes. there have been times when we have had more of theory, and the students had lost patience and interest and showed restlessness. At times such as these we try to quickly move on to practical sessions, though this is often not easy. The reason being that practical work needs careful planning and ensuring that the right type of tools in adequate quantities along with the raw materials are available. This is proving to be difficult as we have yet to establish our workshops and equip them properly and out of campus work such as electrical wiring/ plumbing needs real life work available when we need it.

Well, coming down to the specifics of what the course has been going through so far, you may remember that we had talked about the beekeeping workshop in our last post. Here's continuing from there...

The Beekeeping training at Vazhathottam was very useful. The boys learnt many useful tips on how to capture bee colonies from the wild and also various aspects of maintenance of the bee boxes.

As mentioned earlier in our previous Blog post, the workshop conducted at Thulir on beekeeping by Justin Raj and Rajendran of Keystone, generated such a lot of enthusiasm that we decided to take it further. So Senthil, Jayaram, Perumal, Balu and Selvaraj along with Anu and Sreyarth went to Keystone's Field Station at Vazhathottam, Nilgiris.

Excerpts from Anu's notes on this trip:

"It was a truly great experience. Vazhathottam is located in the Sigur plateau next to the Mudumalai wildlife sanctuary and staying in such a place was a bonus. We went for walks into the forest nearby and spotted Malabar squirrels, wild dogs, deer etc.

Justin Raj was an excellent teacher and the boys had more than enough opportunities to work on many bee boxes each at a different stages of development and honey production, presenting one with its own unique problem. We were particularly happy that Sreyarth [our 9 yr old son] was completely involved in the training, took notes diligently, kept a record of the days happenings every night, and handled bees with ease and with interest. He asked us for a Bee box as a birthday gift. Seeing his enthusiasm, Drs. Nandakumar and Shyla at Gudalur, gave him one of their empty bee boxes. We were also very impressed by the dignity and confidence of the tribal boys while handling the bees. They are absolutely quiet and full of concentration . They do not flinch or move even an eyelid when they get stung. And to think that none of the boys had had any previous experience with the bees!"

Once they came back, there was much enthusiasm and almost every day they would be off early morning or later in the afternoons to hunt for colonies to capture. Of course , some of the boys got stung . The bees seem to especially like the area around the eyes. Soon we had most of them moving around with swollen eyes and temporarily half blind. Balu, while walking early morning to his family farm spied a bee colony in transit[with his one working eye of course!]. Bees in transit are ideal for capture, as they have voluntarily left their hive to setup a new hive. Balu was not prepared as he didn't have an empty box or a netted bag which is normally used and had no one to help. Not one to be easily discouraged, Balu found a one foot long piece of bamboo lying by the road side, picked up a piece of waste plastic carry bag, to use as a stopper for the bamboo, neatly gathered the bees and put them into the hollow of the bamboo. Having thus captured the colony, he promptly was at our doorstep at 7 am on a Sunday morning! Very soon we had 7 boxes with new bee colonies. Every body was on a high and every morning we had bees and boys buzzing all around us . The boys kept inspecting the boxes, making sure that no ants were getting to the boxes and that bees were staying put. This went on for a couple of weeks. Then slowly disaster struck. One by one the bee boxes got attacked by worms that feed on the wax and so the bees started dying and the colonies started disappearing. Soon one morning all the boxes were empty leaving us depressed.

It took us a couple of weeks before we could pull ourselves and start afresh. We did a postmortem and realized some of the mistakes we did. In our over enthusiasm, we disturbed the boxes too much and this could have driven some of the colonies away. We have started the process again. At the time of writing there are two colonies, while a third disappeared just yesterday.

Construction work at Thulir Extn:

The Construction of the new wing at Thulir [which we had briefly mentioned in our post of July 28th] is over. The mud and thatch workshed and storeroom has been finished and we have started using them. The lack of space, the constant construction activities and the heaps of mud and stone and dust amidst all our varied activities and increased number of people were getting on all our nerves. We heaved a sigh of relief when we had the extra space. We inaugurated it with all the younger kids making patterns with flowers all over the floor [Pookolams] on Onam day. A big thanks to V.Krishnan and Santhanam Sridhar for financing the workshed.

So the Basic Technology course students have a classroom/ workspace as well as a new equipment/ tools store. The construction gave an opportunity to learn basic some building skills. The students got to help in doing the thatch roof as well as in making walls of Rammed earth. The theory classes conducted alongside introduced them to measurements, basic drawing of plans, concepts of scaled drawings etc.

The next step was to do a small construction project by themselves [without masons!]. We had plans to do a small extension to our house nearby and so this was a good opportunity for them to take on a building project. As a first step the students learnt to make stabilized mud blocks using a simple hand operated machine. The next step was to learn to mark out a building on site, and learn to do foundation work. The work started with ambitious 6 hour long work sessions, and soon every one was too tired [including us as we haven't been doing construction work at site for a while now!] and exhausted to pay any attention in the theory classes that dwelt on estimation and working out costs for billing their work.

So we settled down to a routine where they work 2 to 3 hours every day. Once they started to do the wall masonry the excitement mounted and the fascination in learning to build a wall to plumb took over. As I write this [sept 21st], we have just finished building a masonry arch today and are all feeling very good! There's something almost magical when the form work that supports the arch is removed and the arch stands by itself defying gravity. [We just had a ceremonious removing of the form work that was greeted with a round of applause by the evening students who came to Thulir!].

With this achievement the students are feeling so good today, that they want to also try their hands at doing the bamboo and thatch roofing by themselves without a carpenter.

Maintenance of electrical and plumbing work:

Our students have become so confident now of their wiring and plumbing skills that they take up any maintenance work in our campus with keen interest and are able to complete it without constant supervision. They were able to locate a shorted underground cable, and fix it! This we thought would be a tricky job and had planned to arrange for an electrician to come after the boys give it a shot.

Billing of work:

One of the most important work that the students have to do routinely is recording details of materials used, their costs and also amount of time spent/ and quantity of work done. We feel that this is the most important aspect they need to learn to be able to become entrepreneurs. Also we need to quantify all the work that is done by the students and properly cost it so that the course too is clear about costs involved in training as well as income generated through learning by doing. Already, having heard of the kind of work the students are learning, the villagers have started getting small jobs done by us. Recently, we were asked to come and do a costing for a construction work done in the village to settle a dispute regarding contract payment. Our students went to measure the building and we helped them to work out the quantities. There have been requests to fix electronic gadgets such as radios and TVs, but currently we don't have the expertise and so are unable to take on these jobs.

Drop in number of Girl children visiting Thulir:

In April this year we had a tragedy. Nearby Thulir there is a stream with beautiful rock formations with a large pool at its bottom. This is a favourite place for children to go swimming and diving during hot summer afternoons. One afternoon when the Thulir boys were at the stream, a neighbour who had just finished his school final exams, and had come back home from his hostel, took a hurried dive into the shallow end of the pool and smashed his skull on a rock under water. Our boys had to pull out the body from underwater and we were all helpless as death had been instantaneous. This was a traumatic event and it took several weeks for the boys to shake themselves off it and resume normal visits to Thulir. This particular spot and the land adjacent to it was always believed to be haunted and this event reinforced this. The tragedy too was attributed to the spirit. But as children have to pass this land to come to Thulir, for a while, attendance at Thulir dropped drastically but picked up again. But the girl children have not come back in the numbers they used to before this tragedy. Coupled with this some of the senior girls came of age and the event has provided a convenient excuse for the parents not to send them. We have talked to some of the parents, and offered to escort their children back to the village in the evening [a distance of 600 meters], and so a few of

them have started coming back. Visiting these homes in the Village was a very encouraging experience. We were welcomed very warmly and parents were generally appreciative of Thulir's work. After being in Sittilingi for 3 years, now we are better accepted and are greeted warmly when we pass the village. We feel a lot more comfortable now and feel that we have some measure of acceptability among the villagers which we expected to happen [if at all] after a much longer time. THI's work and the goodwill they have earned among the community, is an important factor in this happening so fast. We also hope that this is a sign of some degree of acceptance of our ideas among the community.

This year we have also had several requests from students appearing for class 10 exams that they would like to prepare for their exams by coming to Thulir full time. Right now we have three such students and two of our Basic Technology course students are also appearing for class 10 exams in some subjects [Mohan is writing English and maths and Senthil is appearing for the English exam.]. This also takes a considerable time and effort from our side. Sometimes it is really frustrating as the students have not been taught any of the basics.

A new trainee has joined us:

Gowri from Sittilingi, aged 21 has joined Thulir as a trainee. She has studied B.A.

Tamil/Math month at Thulir:

This year we thought we would organize the evening sessions a bit more and so decided to focus on a single subject every month. So the activities [whether they are games or puzzles or reading writing exercises are all pertaining to the subject of the month. We have had focus on Tamil and are currently onto Math.

Visitors to Thulir:

Varuni: A graduate student from New York, Varuni taught the children craft work with wastepaper.

Tarsh Thekaekara came from Bangalore and fixed problems with the Thulir Computers. Thulir computers decided to crash one after the other and suddenly we were left with none of them working. Thanks to Tarsh we now have one working PC and so are able to send and receive mail [when the phone lines work!], and are able to do some of the routine writing and accounts work. He took a class on electronics for the students, teaching them basic soldering skills.

Harsha and Tariq visited us from Bangalore. Besides doing sessions in Art with Thulir Children, they also gave a boost to the volley ball game played in the evenings.

All the above mentioned persons are children of friends and colleagues of ours and we have seen them grow up as children. Now they are all confident young adults involved in learning different vocations. Having them visit us was such a pleasure. They deeply empathise with Thulir children and were ready to interact with them and conduct sessions for them. We also realised how much they have thought about issues relating to learning and education.

Shri. Balasubramanian and Shrimathi Meenakshi from Chennai spent a few days with us. Shrimathi. Meenakshi conducted interesting sessions for the younger children. Her Tamil classes for our son Sreyarth were especially helpful as on most days we tend to neglect his needs while we cater to the various demands being made on us. She also helped the hospital with a lot of Tamil – English translations.

Maggie and Caroline, medical interns visiting THI hospital are with us for 2 months and have been interacting with the Thulir children every week. They joined us on a hike with the children to the nearby forest. Their sessions give an opportunity for our children to learn English.

Mr Suresh Nair and Mr S.Bhashyam from Bangalore visited us last month. They were appreciative of our work and made a generous financial contribution.

We would like to thank all the above mentioned people and look forward to their visits to Sittilingi and support in the future. We also take this opportunity to thank all of you who have been good friends of Thulir, and shown your appreciation through words of encouragement, visiting us and conducting sessions with Thulir students and through financial contributions. We have been very fortunate in having a large group of very supportive individuals without whom our efforts at Thulir would be impossible. We look forward to continuing this relationship and hope to see more of you visit us.

posted by Anuradha and Krishna @ 3:12 PM 0 comments [links to this post](#)

Friday, July 28, 2006



Construction at Thulir

We are adding a new wing which will have a class room cum workshop for the Basic Technology course, and a store room for the tools and materials that would be used by them. The wing will also have an entrance lobby, where additional classes can be held. The wing has been designed in such a way that we now have a court in the middle that can be used for large gatherings [100 persons] and performances.

This has also provided an opportunity for our students to learn some construction skills and some of the days in the past couple of weeks has been spent working at site and in theory classes on basics of construction materials and their properties.

posted by Anuradha and Krishna @ 11:29 AM 1 comments [links to this post](#)



- **Bee Keeping Workshop**

On 11th and 12th July we held a 2 day workshop on Bee Keeping. Justin and Rajendran, Staff from Keystone, an NGO specialising in beekeeping and honey gathering activity in the Nilgiris, were the resource persons. Apart from our course students, 4 farmers from the villages around also participated. The workshop generated a lot of enthusiasm amongst our students and we also realised that given a rich forest area around us, there is a lot of scope for serious Bee keeping and honey processing activity.

As a followup 4 of the students from the batch along with Anu and Sreyarth are currently visiting Keystone's field Centre at Vazhathottam in the Nilgiris to learn more practical skills in bee keeping.

More of their visit in the next post after they come back!

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