



Asha
for Education
Chennai

(<https://chennai.ashanet.org/>)



RightStart 2026

Rightstart, Asha's annual teacher training program, was held from 18–22 May 2026 at IIT Madras. Over 200 teachers, coordinators, staff, and volunteers from Asha participated, with teachers traveling from Thiruvallur, Thoothukudi, Thiruvapur, Thiruvanamalai, and Chennai for the five-day residential program. Teachers from several partner NGOs also participated.

RIGHTSTART 2026

"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery." -Mark Van Doren.

One of the important element of Asha's pedagogy is the '**Teacher as a Learner**' model. We believe the teachers are lifelong learners. To support this philosophy, Asha organizes regular training sessions throughout the year, enabling teachers to strengthen their curriculum knowledge and equipping them with innovative tools to make learning more engaging and enjoyable.



(<https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image1-18/>).



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As a part of this goal, Asha conducts its largest annual **5-day residential teacher training program called Rightstart every May**. Teachers from all Asha geographies participate in this program. We invite external educators who challenge teachers to broaden their perspectives, expand their learning horizons, and embrace new ways of thinking.

You may view the album [here](https://photos.app.goo.gl/TDGdta5URh88ERe26) (<https://photos.app.goo.gl/TDGdta5URh88ERe26>).

Participants

Almost all the teachers from all our projects attended the RightStart teacher training. The attendees from our projects were as follows:

Asha Project Name	No of teachers	No. of staff
Sangamam	82	4
Thulasi	22	2
Pearl	41	1
Cauvery	10	1
Poorna Vidhya	16	1
Manigal	3	0
Total teachers	174	9
Grand Total	183	

In addition, teachers from these other organizations also attended RightStart:

Guest Name	No. of participants
Vizhith Ezhu Thozha (VET) Social Services	2
Centre for Learning & Empowerment (CLE TRUST)	3
Adi Federation (Adivasi-led NGO)	4
Olcott School	1

Total participants**15**

Organizing the Event

We organized the Rightstart event in IIT Madras between 18-21 May, 2026. As this was a 5-day event, arrangements were made for the accommodation and meals of teachers traveling from various geographies, including Thiruvallur, Thoothukudi, Thiruvallur, and Tiruvanamalai. Several teachers also choose to commute to and from Chennai every day, especially from our Sangamam and Poorna Vidhya projects, instead of staying back at the hostels.

The women were accommodated in the hostel named 'Tunga', while the men were housed in 'Krishna'. One warden was assigned to each of these hostels to help the teachers settle in. Breakfast and dinner were organized in the Himalayas Cafeteria. All teachers were provided food coupons on arrival. Breakfast time was scheduled from 7.30 am to 9am and dinner from 7.30pm to 9pm. Our administration team also worked with IITs Security officers to secure permits for the vehicles entering the campus. Most of the teachers arrived by vans on Sunday and checked into the hostels.



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The training itself was organized for the first 4 days at the Vanavani school auditorium inside the IITM campus. The fifth day training and the final valedictory program was organized at the Central Lecture Theater. Audio systems, projector etc. were managed by the local staff at these location making it easy for Asha to just come and use these facilities.

Keeping with our tradition, we distributed eco-friendly cloth bags to the teachers with their stationery kit.



(<https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image5-16/>).

The Event

The teachers were requested to gather at the Vanavani Auditorium by 9:15 am as the program was scheduled to start at 9:30 am. Mr. Rajaraman, Volunteer and Project Coordinator at Asha, welcomed the gathering and spoke to the teachers about the plan for the 5 days. With wide variation in what the teachers were teaching (Maths, English etc. for primary children, CS for all classes, advanced CS at our RTCs etc.), our common RightStart training has been consciously moving to train the teachers on broader topics of pedagogy which are relevant for any teacher. This year continued the same trend with a special emphasis on questioning!



[\(https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image6-14/\)](https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image6-14/)

Day 1 – 18 May, 2026, Monday

The training sessions were divided into two per day. The morning session on day 1 was conducted by Dr. V.R. Devika.

Storytelling and Heritage

Dr.V. R. Devika is an **educationist, author, and actor** and is the **founder and managing trustee of The Aseema Trust**, a nonprofit organization that links traditional performing arts and education. She has been training teachers and schools for decades in how to use storytelling and heritage in the classroom to enhance engagement and learning.

Dr. Devika conducted a session titled “Storytelling and Heritage”. The session aimed to help teachers explore how storytelling can be used as a tool in the classroom. She illustrated this by sharing videos from the Mahabharata, and a traditional Theru Koothu village performance. In addition, she also introduced participants to actions and dance movements that can be incorporated into lessons, making stories more engaging and interactive for children.

She was assisted by Reshma, a Bharatanatyam teacher from Rukminidevi Natyakshetra, who demonstrated the dance steps!



(<https://chennai.ashanet.org/word media image7-2/>).

Nature Around Us

Post lunch, the session was taken over by **Mr. Arun**. Mr. Arun has been in teaching for the past 29 years. He is a nature conservationist and an educator. He is also a long term coordinator in the SSTCN, sea turtle conservation network and one of the **Founders of Marudam Farm School**.

Mr. Arun engaged the teachers on the theme “Nature Around Us”, emphasizing observation-based learning. In his session, he spoke passionately about nature and pressing environmental issues. He shared his perspectives on the current education system and touched upon topics such as politics, global warming, and plastic waste. Through his talk, he highlighted the urgent need to protect the environment and underscored the importance of creating awareness among students. He created a lively discussion in the hall by asking provoking questions about the meaning of education and what it should prepare students for.

He invited the teachers to go on a walk outside and explore the fauna in the IIT campus. The teachers were divided into teams of about 10 and were guided by Mr. Arun and some other volunteers from their school. They pointed out various plants and invited the teachers to ask questions about their names and characteristics.



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Day 2 – 19 May, 2026, Tuesday

Karadipath Training

On day 2, we had planned for a session by the Karadipath team. Asha Chennai has partnered with KaradiPath to launch the Magic English SLL program. Karadi Path has developed a method for teaching English through actions, songs and stories. Their idea is to create an environment for learning English the same way as children learn their own mother tongue. Asha is already implementing the Karadi Path programme at about 75 of our schools which will further expand to additional 20 schools this year.

We believe that every teacher can benefit from a deeper understanding of how language learning works. To support this, we offered Karadi Path training to all our teachers this year. The session was led by **Ms. Preetika, COO & Head of Innovation at Karadi Path**, along with her team, who introduced the teachers to the unique KaradiPath learning approach.



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Through stories projected on the screen, Ms. Preetika demonstrated how images can enhance storytelling and make language learning more intuitive. Two facilitators ??? and ??? performed a lively dance to narrate a monkey story, blending movement and narrative in a way that made the session both interactive and memorable.

This training not only showcased creative methods of teaching but also highlighted how storytelling, visuals, and performance can come together to make language learning more engaging for children.

Touching upon the questioning theme of this RightStart, Preetika pointed out to a study that found that classes where only the teacher's voice was heard for more than 50% of the time performed significantly worse than classes where students voice was heard more than 50% of the time!

Dealing with Conflict and Discomfort

The afternoon session was conducted by **Ms. Thilakavathi who is a legal professional and counselling psychologist**. She serves as an Advocate Commissioner and Panel Lawyer with the Madras High Court Legal Services Committee, and works as a legal consultant and trainer.

In her session, she shared strategies to prevent conflicts and facilitated activities where participants worked in pairs to exchange thoughts and experiences. Her session emphasized non-violent communication as a way to strengthen interpersonal relationships, highlighting the importance of empathy, active listening, and expressing needs without blame.

In addition, she offered practical approaches to repairing relationships and building trust, while providing a foundational understanding of gender sensitivity.



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[13/](https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image10-)).



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[12/](https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image11-)).

Day 3 – 20 May,2026, Wednesday

Once upon a Science

Over the years, **Dr. Purva Bhattar** has collaborated with Asha to train teachers in innovative approaches to teaching science and helped to strengthen the science content offered through Asha Kanini. She is the **founder of KriVidya, which aims to transform science education in India.**

Continuing her tradition of experimentation, this year she introduced a fresh idea: a training program that blends language arts, science, and computer science. Each team was tasked with reimagining a classic children's story by exploring the science behind it through three steps:

1. Understanding the science through hands-on experiments.
2. Rewriting the story through a scientific lens and adapting it to a modern context.
3. Digitizing the science and its outcomes using Scratch or HTML.



(<https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image12-12/>).



(<https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image13-13/>).

She divided the participants into 15 groups, assigning each group a specific topic. The morning was spent in lively discussions, with teachers collaborating on their assigned science concepts.

In the afternoon, every group presented the story by enacting it, and illustrated its science theme through experiments, making abstract ideas more relatable. To deepen the connection between science and technology, each team also showcased a Scratch program linked to their topic, demonstrating how digital tools can creatively explain scientific concepts.

Day 4 – 21 May, 2026, Thursday

Math Training

Day 4 was dedicated to a full day session on Math. The session was conducted by **Ms. Meena Suresh**. She has been training Asha teachers since 2015 and has played a key role in building a comprehensive program to strengthen Mathematics education. Her contributions include enhancing lesson plans, enriching the content offered through Asha Kanini, helping us identify the components of Maths kits that we have equipped schools with, and helping us shape the assessments that we conduct for both students and teachers.

The main theme for this year was questioning: asking questions that make the students think and in particular open ended questions. In the first session in the morning, she engaged the teachers in a questioning activity using categories such as Always True, Sometimes True, and Always False.

A question like “will the product of 2 odd numbers always be odd?” or “will the square of a number always be larger than the number?” makes one think much more than objective questions that have a single correct answer. Ability to generalize the result is an important skill that develops through these questions.



[\(https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image14-13/\)](https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image14-13/)

Meena mam also explained various mathematical concepts and formulas using drawings and visual representations, making abstract ideas easier to grasp.

As the final part, she also introduced open-ended questions to spark critical thinking and meaningful discussion, encouraging students to approach mathematics with curiosity and creativity. A simple question like, find the odd one among 9, 16, 25 and 43 can have any of the 4 numbers as the answer. Rather than an objective answer, the answer becomes one of creatively coming up with interesting explanation for our choice of answer!

Rajaram also assisted Meena mam in the questions sessions. Nathiya, our Maths trainer assisted her in the mathematical concepts session. Teachers participated very enthusiastically, especially coming up with creative answers during the last session!

Day 5 – 22 May, 2026, Friday

Importance of Questioning

Dr. Hema Ramanathan wears many hats: teacher and teacher educator, author and writer, podcaster and blogger. She has taught at PS Senior Secondary School and Rishi Valley School in India, as well as in schools and colleges in the US. This year, she led an engaging session on the “Importance of Questioning”.



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Dr. Hema turned the usual order of lectures by spending the first hour in Q&A! Teachers were encouraged to ask her any questions, personal or related to her areas of work and the teachers also participated enthusiastically. She then highlighted questioning as a vital tool in classroom teaching and learning, showing how thoughtful questions can spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and encourage active participation. She explained how the lower order questions which typically start with “what”, “where”, “when”, “who” etc. go towards recall and understanding of the lesson. Higher order questions that start with “why”, “how” or “what if” take the children deeper in terms of applying the concepts they have learnt. She also explained how to prepare for and ask such questions in a classroom.

Closing Ceremony

The second half of the 5th day was the closing ceremony and the valedictory function for the teachers. Teachers are encouraged to showcase their talents through engaging performances, which include songs, dances and drama. The teachers spend time learning and rehearsing for these and are pretty excited to showcase their performances during the closing day. As always, the performances were varied, vibrant and cheerful. They also took the opportunity to poke fun at the coordinators, lead teachers and stewards – all in good spirit of camaraderie!



[\(https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image17-11/\)](https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image17-11/)



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Every year, Asha honors employees who have completed more than 5 years at Asha with a **Loyalty Award**. This year, the awards were presented to 10 employees who completed 15 yrs, 10 yrs and 5 yrs with us. Here are their names-

Employee Name	Years of Service
Ms. Santha Sophya	15 years
Ms. Malliga IP	15 years
Mr. Thamodharan V	10 years
Ms. Ishwarya M	10 years
Ms. Dharani R	10 years
Ms. Vaiteeswari A	5 years

Ms. Divya R	5 years
Ms. Nithya R	5 years
Ms. Bharathi R	5 years
Mr. Suresh Rathaour	5 years



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[8/](https://chennai.ashanet.org/news/2026/08/rightstart2026/image22-8/)).