

HAVE WE DONE OUR BIT IN THE CAUSE OF RURAL EDUCATION IN INDIA...?



Dr. Abdul Kalam, the wise President of India, has a prescription for the country to move forward more rapidly, without political, caste and religious strives hampering progress. He has been stressing on the need to provide good, modern, value-based education to about 40 crore children, 70% of whom are living in villages. The Government, no doubt, does its best but their 'best' is not 'good' enough, given all kinds of constraints! Government may pay good salary to the teachers, including village teachers, but that does not ensure that qualified, well trained and highly motivated teachers are available for being posted in the villages, given the lack of attraction to live in a village.

If private schools could supplement the efforts of Government to help the cause, almost all of them, unfortunately, are run on commercial terms, with a stiff fee structure that is beyond the reach of the poor village children. The question, then, arises if it is possible to provide quality, modern, value-based education at affordable costs to the less privileged rural children. SRI RAMANI RANGANAYAKI TRUST was formed in September, 2001 to find an answer to the question raised.

SRIVIDYASRAM NURSERY & PRIMARY SCHOOL was set up in 2002 in the little hamlet of Vadakurangaduthurai in Papanasam Taluk of Thanjavur District, on the left bank of the River Cauvery. Great care was taken to select local girls and to train them as teachers in the Montessori system. Training on the job continues relentlessly. The emphasis is on the all round development of the children, respecting all the old world values and growing up as proud Indians, shorn of all 'isms'. As the rural children suffer the greatest handicap by not learning English while at school and as they compare unfavourably with the city-bred children for that reason, the emphasis in SRIVIDYASRAM is on using English as the medium of instruction, while giving due and rightful importance to learning good, correct Tamizh. The emerging happy trend can be seen by those visiting the school.

Today, SRIVIDYASRAM educates 323 children (188 boys and 135 girls) coming from 25 villages to study in 7 classes from Pre-KG to Std-IV. The first batch of students will move out of the primary school

to go to Std-VI in June, 2008. The question is where will they go? If they wish to pursue their studies in English medium, the poor children can not afford to pay the fees that will be demanded by private schools, irrespective of the quality of education they offer. If they go to Government schools or aided schools, where the cost will be minimal, the medium will be Tamizh, and their exposure to English for 8 years in SRIVIDYASRAM will end prematurely, without reaching its logical end.

SRI RAMANI RANGANAYAKI TRUST does not want to throw in the towel and give up. To continue its good work, the Trust has already purchased over 5 acres of land to build a High School, with the same objective, namely, to make a difference to the lives of the village children by continuing their efforts to bring up the children as well rounded, knowledgeable youth, with a nationalist outlook. The foundation for the High School has been laid and superstructure work will begin in November, 2006.

The modern, model School will have 24 class rooms and 6 halls to cater to the needs of children studying ultimately in Stds - VI to XII, with, perhaps, two sections in each class. It will have a floor area of 10,000 sq.ft. in each of three floors and will cost Rs.200 lakhs (\$ 450,000) in all. It is estimated that each room will cost Rs.400,000(\$ 9000) and each hall (laboratory) Rs.700,000 (\$ 15,500).

The project can be completed only with substantial aid coming from those currently backing the efforts of the Trust as also from other large hearted philanthropists and corporate houses. As the project period is 2006-2010, contributions can come annually for the next few years, if necessary.

Rupee contributions qualify for Sec.80G rebate under the Indian Income Tax Act as per IT Dept. Notification No.DIT (E) No.2 (289) / 2001-02 dated the 31st August, 2005. Dollar contributions can enjoy tax break in the USA if donations are routed through either (i) the Society for Voluntary Aid to India (SVATI, for short), c/o Dr.N.Nagarajan, 71, Milwaukee Avenue, Bethel, CT-06801, a tax exempt non-profit organization under IRS Code Sec.501 (c) (3) with ID No.20 1967534, or (ii) the American Association for Social Advancement of India (AASAI, for short) c/o Dr L.Raghavan, 501, Suffield Drive, Gaithersburg, MD - 20878, USA, another tax exempt non-profit organization under IRS Code 501 (c) (3) with ID No.31 - 1634640. The cheques should be marked "For Village School Project"

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