

Site visit report for ASHA Foundation

Name of Reporter	Mohan from Chennai
Date of visit	28 th April 2010
Surprise or scheduled visit	Scheduled visit
Accompanied by	Santhana Gopalan and Aravind of Mother
Project Name	Mother
Sites Visited	Thandalachery, Poovalembedu
How to reach the sites	The villages, Thandalachery and Poovalembedu, are situated off State Highway # 52 between Kavaraipettai and Satyavedu. These are situated within 20 kms radius of Kavaraipettai. Kavaraipettai is situated on National Highway # 5 at a distance of around 60 kms from Chennai.
Information gathered about Mother from Santhana Gopalan	Mother was started in 1998 as a service organization in Mylapore in Chennai to impart additional coaching to children living in slums nearby. A small place in Mylapore was rented as a tuition center for this purpose. Tutions were conducted by Santhana Gopalan and his brother Aravind. After seeing success on this mission, he expanded his services to the villages near Kavaraipettai. When I asked him why he chose these villages, he said he come in contact with a Ramakrishna Mission activist who introduced him to these villagers. Since these village elders were not enthusiastic bout their missions, they had to take help of some volunteers from these villages. They were paid nominally for their services. After engaging these volunteers, a lot of students took up coaching from the tuition centers established in these villages. These coaching centers were started around 2002 and slowly the students grew. He engaged more volunteers and covered more villages. In 2005, the student population was at the peak. He claims that he purchased a plot in Poovalembedu and constructed a permanent building. He also bought some old computers from Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and installed them in tuition centers. He took classes in the villages in the week ends, while local volunteers took care of the students in the week

	<p>days. The duration of coaching was two hours daily in the week days. He also claimed that the pass percentages in public exams increased dramatically after coaching classes were introduced. He also claimed that the increase was from meager single digit to near 90%.</p> <p>He said that the computers failed in all the tuition centers due to poor upkeep and voltage fluctuations. He could not carry out repair of PCs, since there was no reliable service centers nearby. They had to be done only in Chennai.</p> <p>Funds flow was good till 2008 from private charities and ASHA Foundation. ASHA promised a total of Rs. 1.80 lakhs. He got only 50% of the amount promised and the balance, which was to be disbursed in 2008, is yet to reach him. He is struggling to arrange fund to keep his services going as of now.</p> <p>He also claimed that he involved in health care activities by inviting other health service organizations who carry out regular services in the villages. He claimed that he incurred expenses like hiring shamiana, transportation, etc.</p> <p>The expenses he needs to cover are rentals for tuition centers, payment to volunteers, administration and travel charges. He also informed that his future focus would be on training in English language and computer science. His immediate fund needs would be for purchase of a PC for Thandalachery village. He claimed that the government school in the village would provide a room for this purpose. He also want to repair the temporary structure in the plot owned by Mother in Poovalembedu village. This structure is in addition to permanent structure that is existing. The permanent structure can accommodate only ten pupils, hence the need for the temporary structure also.</p>
What I observed in Thandalachery village	<p>I was introduced to local volunteer, named Gandhi. He is employed in a private company nearby and doing this volunteer work after office hours. He is not a professional teacher, but claimed to have acquired B. Sc., degree. It was he who could communicate effectively with the parents of students and could enroll them for the coaching classes of Mother. I was taken to a room in the government school stating that the room would be loaned by the school for computer classes. The school has 380 pupils and</p>

	<p>has only five permanent teachers. Another two teachers were appointed by PTA (Parent Teacher Association). Teacher student ratio is 1:60. I could not meet any teacher or student from this village. I also could not meet any parent from this village. It was noon time and vacation time, The volunteer Gandhi seems to be influential with his social works.</p>
What I observed in Poovalembedu village	<p>I was taken to the plot supposedly owned by Mother. I did not verify the ownership. The plot is situated in the area of the village reserved for the downtrodden section of the village. The permanent structure in the plot had one big room and two small ones. The main room could accommodate ten pupils. A small room was marked as "Dhyana Arai (Meditation room)". That room had a PC that was dusty and not usable. Santhana Gopalan claimed that PC was old when brought there and failed due to voltage fluctuations. I also saw an UPS with the PC. The permanent structure was found to be clean and coloured in recent years. I was taken to another structure in the plot. I was told that the structure had thatched roof and sides, The thatches survived four years. Now, the roof is lined with asbestos plates and the sides are open. Santhana Gopalan intends to cover the sides with brick walls and doors. This temporary structure can hold around thirty pupils.</p> <p>The local volunteer was introduced. I forgot the name of that person. He seemed to be not educated well. I assume that he is the contact in the village for arranging anything that Mother needs. He did not look like a teacher. Two old students were introduced to me who were benefited by Mother. One has completed BBA and is looking for a job. The other person is in the final years of diploma in EEE. Both the persons talked highly of Mother, without which they could not have achieved what have done now. They also confirmed dramatic pass percentage after Mother took up extra coaching classes. they seemed to be genuine when talking about their experiences.</p>
My comments	<p>Mother had contributed to these villages few years back when they were flush with funds. The promoters of this organization were also much enthusiastic in early years. They had contributed to coaching in these villages with regular travels.</p>

	<p>I base this opinion based on the respect they received from past pupils in the villages. Funds have completely dried in recent times. Santhana Gopalan claims that volunteers would be engaged when the funds accumulate. This means that there is no active volunteer as of now. Since promoters are employed and the volunteers are not engaged for paucity of fund, I suspect that Mother activities in these villages have been nil for the last couple of years.</p> <p>Mother could not quantify the results of their activities, like persons registered, persons passed out in public exams, name of volunteers, etc. Release of fund from ASHA may revive Mother's activities. I suggest ASHA to get financial statement from Mother for the past two years to ascertain their activities. AHSA may ask other details like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph.</p>
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