

Dear friends,

Forwarding a note written by Anita Balasubramanian for Asha Princeton. Anita used to be with Asha earlier. In fact she was the first Asha volunteer to visit us at the very beginning. Her visit and report paved the way for our initial association with Asha. Since she has been visiting Thulir from the beginning and has seen the developments over the years, her opinion is quite valuable to us.

Warm regards,

Anu

----- Forwarded message -----

From: "Anita Balasubramanian" Date: Jul 11, 2017 8:55 PM

Subject: Re: Thulir visit report

> Please find below my note.

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> Almost after 4 years I visited Sittilingi valley in September 2016. We reached just as the sun had gone down and even in the twilight, I could sense that I was going to see changes and then understand the way the changes in the activities were related to the changes in the structure/use of the structures. At thulir, I have always observed that structures were also built/refurbished based on the activity, never the other way around.

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> And so when the morning dawned, I took a walk around. The professor's house where I had stayed at some earlier visit was now being the school, the office spaces had become guest rooms, the older thulir classrooms were converted into thulir staff quarters and other minor changes to create separation between residential and work/school space. It was lovely to walk around and see so many more trees, despite the drought/lack of rains over the last 1-2 years.

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> I spent some time in the morning assembly, my two girls (7 and 5) also joined me, and they loved the songs/rhymes that the children sang in the assembly so much that they insisted that we learn them as well. And so over time we are learning them as well :) After this the teachers went to their respective classes and I spent much of my time with the teachers (rajamma, and a few others taking turns) saktivel and the older boys teaching them how to use the loom (a peg loom and a small table top hand loom). The peg loom was a instant hit and by next day the teachers had also taught the older children how to use it and make mats.

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> In the evening I met a few boys who were getting trained/interning as architects and also those who were at the hospital. We also met Dr. Ravi and Prema and discussed with them the possibility of starting a yoga training program for the nurses/hospital staff through the YogaVahini Foundation in Chennai and this has now taken off very well with

some teachers from the school attending as well, in addition to Anu attending this as well.

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> Having seen this place change, grow very organically over the last 13 years (from 2003 when Thulir did not even have space of it's own), I look forward to my visits to this place, to get inspired by the people - Anu, Krishna, Regi, Lalitha and so many folks who come here to give their time. For me every visit here is a sort of a rejuvenation in following the path that I have chosen to. Anu and Krishna's presence and guidance has continued to ensure that Thulir continues to be a reflective organization responding to the needs of the community rather than just their needs, and space for the local youth to develop into confident adults. Ravi, and Rajamma are teachers that I definitely see taking on much more of an active role in the organization and their sense of ownership to the organization is palpable. There is also a lot of warmth and caring that is evident in the space. I left my kids without any worries (not that I worry much anyway), but the point I am making is that this space and the people here ensure that children are given the most important thing needed in their childhood - opportunities for exploring the world around them in a safe, secure, loving environment.

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> A few weeks later I met Ravi at a conference held at Anakatti, Vidyavanam and he also visited our house. I could see that such experiences help them to see that there is value in what many people in Sittilingi still have - fresh air, access to good healthy food without fertilizers and pesticides, a clear night sky, low noise levels, a reasonably slow pace of life, a good community support structure and much more! It also gives them a perspective of how their work is important in the larger context of the world we live in today.

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> Over the years I have also seen how the youths associated with Thulir have come of their own. Senthil, a young shy boy I have known for many years, now handles all the accounts at Porgai. Bharathi, one of the youngest kids I have known at Thulir has now got into CMC on open quota for MLT course. Perumal, another youth does all the electrical work in the valley and in fact he has done the electrical work for our house as well in Sholayoor. Rajammal, Lakshmi and Ambika teach at Thulir.

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> I think it would be important to continue their fellowship so that they can continue to offer their time and energies towards the children and people of this valley.