



Thulir - Site Visit Report

From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates...Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment.

Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*



Nostalgia. Inspiration. Hope. Optimism.

- ❖ I visited Thulir between June 29-July 2, 2026. While I did visit Thulir on few occasions during this time, to attend the Sittilingi Run, this was my first 'site visit' during school days in the last two years. I have been meeting the students and teachers every time they visit Bengaluru.
- ❖ It also marks 17 years since I visited Thulir for the first time on June 29, 2009. From a learning centre to a full fledged primary school, it has been a long and inspiring journey that I was fortunate to witness from close quarters.
- ❖ During this trip, I could observe classes on three days, meet with new teachers, relish lunches at Thulir, and have wonderful conversations with people associated with Thulir.
- ❖ As always, visiting Thulir brings with plenty of hope and renewed optimism. I report very little compared to the wide range of activities that happen during the year which is captured well in their newsletters.

**The pictures on the first two pages were from the nature walks with children from kindergarten.*

Introducing Manikandan

Manikandan is no new to Asha Bangalore. He has been one of the very active fund raisers between 2012-20 through Team Asha Program. He then started raising funds for Thulir directly through his multi-day runs, one of which featured in the documentary movie One foot in front of the other. In 2025, after taking an early retirement, he started directly volunteering with Thulir. He presently spends about 4 days-a-week at Thulir. Apart from Computer classes for children and spoken English for teachers, he has been active with the sports program in Thulir. He was involved with the first sports summer camp for children and youth, organised in association with Sai Viswanath Memorial Trust. He continues his fund raising efforts and helped Thulir reduce their dependence for funds from Asha for Education. Mani also actively engages himself with the other organisations in Sittilingi.



Thulir Kitchen

I have written about Thulir Kitchen in my earlier site visit reports in 2023 and 2024. Back then, it was all about the food and the hospitality that they provided to a group of cyclists, which included riders from Team Asha Silicon Valley.

During this trip, I realised that it is more than food. The overall experience of the cooking food, serving food, prayer, cleaning the dishes, and maintaining the dining space is an education in itself.



Thulir Kitchen - A Collective Enterprise



The Kitchen is entirely managed by the staff of Thulir with the support of two Cooks (and another supporting them on a part-time basis). From buying vegetables to the choice of menu, the decision making is collective and involves all the teachers. The kitchen is partly funded by AfE (mainly, salaries of cooks) and largely supported by other sources. It includes parents who come forward to contribute from their farm produce, firewood, or even assistance in the school maintenance. Thulir has started growing vegetables within school premises on a small scale to improve awareness about the cultivation of vegetables. Thulir has engaged two people to take care of campus maintenance and also the vegetable garden. Children continue to have their

vegetable gardens where the experiment with various plants (with guidance from teachers and the two helpers). The kitchen becomes a centre of education. Children are taught how to grow/source their food, the importance of people who bring it to their place, maintaining the cleanliness and hygiene, and eat together. I enjoy listening to their prayer where they thank the farmers, nature, and the two cooks who prepared their food. Apart from being tasty, the overall experience of having a lunch leaves a lot for thought about how we view food in our lives.

Thulir has decided to move the operations of Kitchen to a separate SHG model in an attempt towards self-sufficiency.

Classes at Thulir

During this trip, I attended a few classes and stayed as a silent observer. By design, Thulir has 'open' classrooms - from architecture of the classroom to the manner in which classes are conducted. Students are never forced to learn and they are allowed to learn in their own pace and manner. On Day 1, I attended classes taken by Jeevila and Sai Swetha.

Jeevila's Tamil class were focused on writing the words that children use on a daily basis. She asked them about their daily activities involving helping their parents and other sin their house. In the process, it turned out to be a lively conversation and children learned to write few words in Tamil.



Classes at Thulir



On the following day, I attended classes by Ravi and Chitra for standards 3 and 2 respectively. Ravi's class focused on the concept of gravity and unit of measurements.

They were practically oriented and references were drawn from their recent walks and village visits. Chitra's class was about Tomatoes - the plant, the word, the food items made out of it, before concluding it with an entertaining song. The kindergarten classes are located separately from other classes due to the high noise levels. I joined them on their nature walks (the pictures on first two pages were taken during the walk). Lakshmi and Sasikala were among the

earlier of the teachers who joined Thulir. It was interesting to see them grow over years and handle different batches of children. Their enthusiasm remains intact though. I also attended one of Anu's class which was entertaining and enriching. She was focused on getting the children to do role-play based on a story and I was asked to judge them!

New addition to the team!

Introducing Sai Swetha

Sai has been visiting Thulir since 2024 and chose to stay there since last year. She hails from Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. After finishing her schooling in Tamil Nadu, she pursued graduation and post-graduation in Trivandrum and Bangalore respectively, in area of International Studies. It was the 2-year fellowship from Bhumi NGO in 2022 that got her interested in education in grassroots. She first visited Thulir as a part of her fellowship.





During her fellowship with Bhumi, she visited various schools and worked in the areas of foundational literacy. Her work exposed her to skill development for teachers, interactions with parents of students, and direct experience in teaching. She also visited many schools, including alternative schools across Tamil Nadu. As a part of the fellowship, she visited Thulir for few months and was impressed by what she witnessed in Thulir - collective decision making, education grounded in the local culture and traditions, and the freedom to explore new ideas. After her Boomi fellowship, she worked as a program manager but did not find herself working with data, presentations, and fundraising in a mechanical manner for long. She quit the job to join Thulir on a full-time basis.

She is passionate about dancing and trains children in dancing. She found that many of the boys were shy about dancing and helped them overcome it. I witnessed one of their performances during Anandyana in June this year. She is actively engaging in supporting the sports programs which includes youngsters in the village, apart from the students.

I attended one of the classes she took for children in class-5 which involved discussion on space, Mars, life on Mars and space exploration. She was using the multi-media available in the school and supplemented the content available in the text books. Interesting questions during the session includes whether we can go to the Sun and how do you count the number of days in Mars. Later that day, I also attended the dance classes, as a part of the after-noon sessions.



Teacher Trainees

Anu has always envisioned expansion of Thulir into many villages as a network of schools instead of confining within a single campus. As a step towards that vision, a new batch of teachers are now trained at Thulir.

Teacher Trainees

The trainees have been selected from different villages. They are young graduates with interest in teaching. The conventional route would be to pursue a degree in education and appear for government exams, which have very little relevance to education in Sittilingi valley or even teaching children. Having trained the current batches of teachers at Thulir, Anu (along with other teachers) have chosen to train them on the job.

The current trainees (village names in the bracket) are: Sunitha (AK Thanda), Sudha (Malaithangi), Akileswari (Nammangadu), Muthulakshmi (Malaithangi), Valarmathi (Palakuttai), Krishnaveni (AK Thanda). All of them have completed their graduation.

They attend classes along with other teachers and handle part of the classes or on some occasions, the entire class under the guidance of current teachers. They also have regular meeting with Anu and discuss about their activities. Having seen some of the teachers develop over the last decade in Thulir, I am convinced about this approach.

They are planned to be either absorbed within Thulir or help them start their own centres (with support from Thulir) for after-school or as early learning support for Govt. school students. It has been a long term objective of Anu to take education to children rather than bring them to a centre.

Meeting with Anu

My visit to Thulir always involves meeting Anu for a discussion on wide range of topics; although this report restricts the content only to those relating to Thulir and Education, in general.

The very first batch of Thulir students who joined in 2014 are now in class 12. Thulir has been regularly organising alumni meets to bring children (including those part of Basic Technology course and evening classes) back to school and monitor their progress. While no formal record of alumni is maintained, Anu seem to remember and follow up on each one of them.

Apart from the Sittilingi Run (which I attended), two other events were held for the first time - a career counselling session for students in class 11 and 12 (not limited to Thulir students) and a sports camp during the month of May for children and youth, including girls, in the village. The teachers were actively involved in various aspects of organising these events.

There is a request from parents to start classes 6-8 within Thulir. While Anu sees potential in some of the teachers to handle those classes, she feels it is too early to take a call. One step forward has been in recruiting the teacher trainees. The plan is either absorb them in Thulir or find them opportunities in starting after-school learning centres in their own villages. Presently, they are helping the teachers in different classes.

We also discussed about the budget for the year. The salaries of teachers need to undergo a revision to include provision for Provident Fund and Gratuity. The teachers have stepped up over the years to shoulder many of the administrative responsibilities, which includes managing kitchen, accounts, auditing, regulatory obligations among others. In terms of changes in staff, Swetha has left Thulir due to personal reasons and replaced by Sai Swetha. Thulir is benefitted by the retention of staff over the years. Apart from Sai Swetha (and Anu, of course!) All the other teachers hail from the villages around Sittilingi and been with Thulir for a minimum of 5 years.

The number of students studying full-time in Thulir is now about 70 students. Thulir continues to stay open for children from other schools to visit on special occasions.

Thank You



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