

Site Visit Report Seva Chakkara Orphanage Samajam

I made a surprise visit to Seva Chakkara Orphanage Samajam on Nov 12th, 2002. I took an auto from kodambakkam and reached the Orphanage within an hour. The roads were really slushy because of the two weeks of continuous downpour, Madras had, 3 days prior to my visit. (let me leave to imagination about the conditions. People who have stayed in Madras can have a better picture of that ☺) I was lucky enough to have avoided that. I reached the orphanage by 10.00 am in the morning after the rickshaw waala losing the direction, in the maze of narrow roads of Madras, couple of times.

The purpose of my trip was to see the conditions of the orphanage, the kids and also to discuss about the projects' immediate and long-term requirements. Apart from this, I am involved with Support a Child Program (SAC) for this project, and it gave me an opportunity to visit and see the kids for whose basic needs we are raising money.

I met Mr. Velayudam, the founder member of the samajam, as soon as I entered the building. I introduced myself to him and then he updated to me, in brief, about running of the orphanage. The building of the orphanage is pretty small when compared to the number of people residing in that. The orphanage is in total taking care of 127 kids of which 82 kids stay at this place, which acts as school in the morning and as home in the evenings.

Since it was a Tuesday morning, the classes were in full swing and all the kids from std. 1 to 5 were attending the classes. The school (part of the building) is a huge room, which is partitioned into small classrooms using movable cardboards. After talking to Mr. Velayudam, I went around all the classes and took the pictures of all the classes. You can have an idea of the classroom from the pictures at <http://www.ashanet.org/nycnj/projects/scos/chandraVisit/index.html> (this also gives an idea of my photography skills ☺). The kids were excited to see me. Some of them posed for the pictures. The same classrooms became their bedrooms after school time.

Everything happens in the same building for the kids. On one side, the classes were going on, and the room next to the classrooms is the kitchen, where the arrangements for the meals were being made. Lunchtime for the primary school is at 1.00pm. High school students, who have to go to near by government school, had their lunch at 12.00pm. I decided to wait and have lunch along with the primary school kids.

After the morning session of classes, I distributed candies to all of them, and all of us converted the classrooms into a mess (lunchroom). Some of the kids are assigned the duties of arranging and rearranging cardboards that act as partitions. They are very efficient and fast in that process and I was impressed with that. Just before having lunch, Mr. Velayudam had formally introduced me to the kids in Tamil. He thanked Asha for Education for supporting them, and then my most embarrassing moment came when he tried to garland me as a token of gratitude. I kindly denied that offer and instead made him garland the diety. All the children sang prayer in unison, before taking food. The lunch was very simple and sumptuous with rice, sambar, rasam and one curry. After the lunch, the kids carried their plates and also cleaned the plates. Few of them then cleaned the floor. I was very impressed with the organization of the kids and the small duties and responsibilities taken by them.

After the lunch, the kids modeled for the photo session. Some of them were so eager and enthusiastic that they posed for me couple of times. I felt really bad that I could not communicate to them in Tamil. Even then I was very happy to be among them. I took pictures of all the primary school kids. Some of the high school kids were having exams, so I could not get the pictures of them. Later I talked to the teachers. One of the teachers knew Telugu (my mother tongue) and she acted as a mediator.

The kids are very creative. They put all the creative ideas and thoughts of the kids into a book periodically. Mr. Velayudam gave me couple of copies of these books. Though I was eager to read the whole book, limited by the language, I kept in safe for my Tamil friends to read and explain the contents to me. Since building is everything for the kids, I was concerned about the recreational facilities for them. I was informed that the kids are taken once a week to local playgrounds so that they can play and have fun.

I talked to Mr. Velayudam about their needs. One of the gravest concerns they have is constant source of funding and money inflow. The orphanage is in dire straits if the funds stop coming for some reason or another. They have a high sense of insecurity considering the fact that they have to fill the stomachs of so many people. Making this project into self-sustainable project is out of question. He is very happy with the Support a Child Program which we started recently. This gives them enough security he thanked all the donors of SAC and asked me to convey the same to the donors. Other idea is to have a corpus fund, where you deposit large sums of money and try to cover the recurring costs from the interests. But this is a longtime goal.

Apart from this, Mr. Velayudam has given me a new proposal for buying the building in which they are now staying. The rent they pay for that building is 13,000/month, which is considerable amount of recurring cost for them. If, for whatever reason, they are asked to move from the building, then it will be very difficult to get a building like that for such a rent/month. So he feels that it is better to buy that so that they need not bear 13,000/month and also the orphanage can have a permanent place. The cost of the building is about 48 lakhs. I told him that I will inform the group and propose the same.

I congratulated Mr. Velayudam for the excellent work he is carrying out and at about 3.00pm, I thanked everyone and left the place to catch the train to my hometown filled with happiness of visiting the project and talking to the kids, for whom we are raising money. It gave me a great sense of satisfaction and happiness.