



Site Visit: Prasanna Jyothi

Date of Visit: May 18, 2009

Report By: Ambica Ashok and Rahul Rao

Introduction

We visited Prasanna Jyothi on Monday May 18, 2009. We had called Sundari Mami earlier in the day and she suggested that an evening time (after 5pm) would be the most convenient. We reached PJ at around 6pm. Sundari Mami and a few of the kids eagerly came out to meet us at the gate. We went to the hall where all the kids (22 in number) also assembled. They all introduced themselves, mentioning their name, standard of study and the school they were studying in. All the kids are being moved to a new school from this year (Indira Priyadarshini). Sundari Mami later re-iterated that this was due to the prospect of better English education in the newer school, as well as a more convenient and safer route to school. Though the kids had not yet attended the new school, all the kids clearly mentioned the name of the new school, rather than the previous school they used to go to. We introduced ourselves as well. Ambica then mingled with the kids with Rahul spoke with Sundari Mami and looked around the place.

Rahul's Report:

The road leading to PJ is a muddy road, though it seems that it may become a pucca road soon considering the development in that part of the town and the number of houses that are in the vicinity.

PJ is a 2-floored structure, the lower floor consisting of the entrance hall, another hall on the right, and the kitchen to the left, and the catering-arrangement place. The top-floor consists of the prayer room, the computer room, the large sleeping room and the closet room. The computer room also houses the collection of books (though the books are kept at a height where it is virtually impossible for the kids to reach it by themselves: A book-case would be an ideal replacement). On the outside, there is a lake on the right, a small open area in front (which is the place for the new construction), and the entrance gate is to the left. The facilities were very clean, and well maintained. Mami mentioned that in previous years, during heavy rains (flooding), the water from the lake would come in almost to the door-step, which was very inconvenient. Now, there seems to be some water diversion done at the other side of the water body, due to the the problem is not that severe. It was raining when we got there, and continued to rain for the entire duration of our visit, and hence we didn't get to explore the outside much.

The area in front of PJ just had a bhoomi pooja, and Mami mentioned about some upcoming construction on that. I personally feel that doing so would take away some valuable open and playing space away from the kids.

Mami showed the recent receipts for admissions into the new school for all the kids, and for Child1's nursing school. The kids had received note-books for the school year which were in bright yellow bags. On enquiring about the kid who had left PJ recently, Sundari Mami mentioned that they had tried to contact the kid's father on multiple occasions. He has not been very responsive or communicative; hence keeping track of the kid's



progress has not been easy. On the periodicity of the visits by the parents of the kids, Mami mentioned that it is few and far, and also for short durations only. This helps in some sense, especially for kids who do not have parents visiting them, since they may tend to feel a sense of loneliness if the parents of other kids visit regularly.

We looked at the catering hall where the food for the catering services is being arranged. Mami mentioned that the catering service is doing so-so, in the sense that has not grown as much as she would have liked. They cater to one company near the old airport, and would like to reach out further.

All the kids currently learn music, irrespective of their age / interest. They sang us a song together, and some of them were keen enough on music to ask Ambica sing a song for them. Some of the kids expressed interest in dance, and mami mentioned about the possibility of having a dance teacher come in to teach the interested kids dance. The kids also showed us some art and craft that they done, including greeting cards, glass paintings, and drawings in their school / personal note books, which were very impressive (esp. the glass paintings). Some of the greeting cards were inspired by the designs on wedding cards. It was interesting to see the avenues from where the kids were drawing their creativity and ideas from.

Ambica's Report:

Sundari Mami had placed chairs facing the kids, for us to sit on. I felt this was too formal and went and sat on the floor with the kids, so that they would feel more comfortable interacting with me, and I with them. The older kids (8 and above) know how to speak and express their thoughts fluently in English, but the younger kids only speak Kannada, so I had to switch back and forth between the two languages. The kids were very enthusiastic about sharing about themselves, which was a real treat for me- They said they were happy being at PJ. When asked about their favorite subjects, they generally expressed interest in mathematics, science, while one kid mentioned English. Their aspirations ranged from being a world-renowned singer to a doctor or engineers to a research scientist. The kids seem very bright - some of them are class toppers. Among the older kids, Child1 is currently pursuing a nursing degree. She has a hectic schedule - the travel time from the home to her college campus is 2 hours each way, with a bus-transfer at 2-3 places. Apparently, she gained interest in nursery after seeing some ads regarding the same in the newspaper. After she gets home, she helps the younger kids with their homework before starting on her own. I don't remember all that we spoke about but she exuded such resilience and humility.

On a regular school day, the kids go and return from school in a van. The kids play some sports after coming home from school and then do their homework. Evening prayers and bhajans are sung before dinner. (Sundari Mami is usually there till 7 to 7:30pm). After dinner, they have some activity / play time before they go to sleep.

The kids were eager to know how it was in America and what we did for a living. I told them a couple of stories and asked them to have big dreams, and that they could achieve whatever they wanted to. The 5 and 6 year olds wanted to keep holding my hands. They showed me all the pictures they had drawn, and the trophies they had won in school which is arranged on a show-case in the first room. They literally dragged me



up the stairs to the second floor to see the prayer room with and large sleeping room. I even got to see their cupboard, in which each child is given a small portion to keep their clothes. They were so excited about their clothes even though each of them probably owned only 3 or 4 sets.

After the tour by the kids, Sundari Mami and Child1 insisted we have some fresh, hot dosas (which were tasty) and tea. We spoke for a while more, before heading out at around 7:30pm. Overall, I had a positive impressive of Prasanna Jyothi. The home is well run, clean, and the kids are happy, fed well and treated well.

I feel privileged to have visited the school, and feel like I have learnt so much from the children's simplicity and contentment with whatever they have. Sundari Mami is to be commended for the countless hours she puts in, into the running of the home.

On the flip side, the kids don't seem to have much interaction with folks outside of the home, only their music teacher, and than the occasional tutor. I say occasional, because, Sundari Mami mentioned that it has been difficult to find a tutor who comes regularly. Also, other than the newspaper, there does not seem to be any other means for the kids to get exposure to the outside world or events.

There is a computer but no internet connection and is used primarily by Child1. Perhaps the internet would be a nice introduction (though it probably comes with its own challenges). Also, I felt that the kids have been trained rather too well to introduce themselves, and be ready to sing a song when visitors come. Although this shows that the kids have been disciplined well, I felt sorry that some part of their natural and childish way of expression had been taken away.