

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

From: **kannan gopalan** <[ask.kannan@gmail.com](mailto:ask.kannan@gmail.com)>  
Date: Thu, Feb 21, 2013 at 2:30 PM  
Subject: Puvudham  
To: Kannan Gopalan <[iyer\\_gobulu2004@hotmail.com](mailto:iyer_gobulu2004@hotmail.com)>  
Cc: "ask.kannan" <[ask.kannan@gmail.com](mailto:ask.kannan@gmail.com)>

I visited "Puvudham Nursery and Primary school, Nagar Koodal Village, Via Indoor, Dharmapuri PIN 636803" on 18 February 2013. I stayed in Dharmapuri town. To reach school, one has to travel on the highway to Salem from Dharmapuri and at 10 Km distance come across a village called Nallam Palli. From here take a right turn for Nagar Koodal which is another 10 Km distance. Route no 2 A town bus passes through this school once in 2 hrs from Dharmapuri and other means of conveyances are auto rickshaws (costing Rs250/-one way) and taxis (costing double the auto fares).

The school is started by Ms.Meenakshi in year 2000 and is at present ably assisted by 2 males and 2 females for teaching. The current strength is 87 and out of this 30 are in hostel - whose parents are staying far away. Other students are from the nearby areas. There is a minibus making two trips for pickups and similar for drops. Students using the bus service are to pay for it. I was in the school at 8.30 am and students were trickling in. Each student has already been assigned some specific duty like cleaning the class rooms, open areas, drainage, toilets etc. which they start on arrival. By 9.50 am they have a small prayer and by 10 am the classes start. There are 5 major divisions :- Viz., Nursery, Class 1 & 2, Class 3 & 4, Class 5 & 6 and finally Class 7 & 8. Meenakshi takes care of Nursery students. The two male teachers cover Class 1 & 2 and Class 7 & 8. The other two grades are guided by the other two female teachers.

The classes are conducted in a homely way - I could observe students in convenient postures like lying, rolling while writing / attending the lessons. I would compare it to our households where a boy or girl is coached in the evening by his brother or sister. Rightly so the male teachers are called "Anna" meaning elder brother and the female teachers are called "Akka" meaning elder sister and Meenakshi is called "Aunti". The mood of the students are the guiding factor for the topic being discussed - like the early morning was spent on learning mathematics and slowly the other subjects follow. There is no specific time period for any particular subject - as long as the students are attentive, the subject is continued. One teacher teaches all subjects. There is no bell to indicate the start or close of school timings. The final class students get uniform from Government aids and others wear Puvudham dress and uniforms are compulsory on Wednesdays. On other days they can come in their comfortable dresses. Emphasis is given that they should take bath and should wear washed clothes on a daily basis.

There is a govt school within 500 meters and Meenakshi said the parents prefer to send their children to Puvudham than to that govt school even though every thing is free there because of the kind care and attention and upbringing given in Puvudham. There were 7 students in the group of 7 & 8 th class and similar strengths were observed in the past years in final stage. There were nearly 20 students in Nursery. To my question how the strength reduces from 20 to 7 as the students continue their studies, the main reason given is the change of working place of parents. To my question whether Puvudham is considering adding classes 9th to 12th, the response was negative. Meenakshi conveyed that those who study in govt school and complete 10 th and 12 th stds stand to gain more benefits and so in the near future Puvudham will continue to cover only till 8 th std. All those who have completed studies in Puvudham have been admitted in other schools in 9th std and this is happening every year indicating that the school standard is matching with the requirement of Tamil Nadu Board standard.

Once a year a homeopathy doctor from Dharmapuri visits Puvudham and conducts complete check up of each student. In case of sickness, the details are given to the doctor to get the medicines for the affected persons. This expense is met by Puvudham. I could see the students were healthy and cheerful. Puvudham collects a fee of Rs 150/- per month per student and in few cases based on the financial situation of the family the fees are reduced. Those who stay in hostel pay only Rs 150/- and are not charged for the school. Puvudham do not have any specific new project in the current year ie., 2013 - 14 and so do not expect high

increase funding requirements. Meenakshi said there are few regular local donars and ASHA has been consistently funding them and with all these help and with no new plans for this year no extra immediate assistance is required.

They have a hostel for boys and girls about one Km from the school and I visited that place also. There are two separate areas for the stay of boys and girls and cook stays there to cook for them. Also there is a warden - who happens to be an ex student of Puvudham. There is water shortage in the school and good water is available in hostel location. Daily a tractor with storage tanks brings in water from hostel to school and this expense increases every month. I suggested them to have a overhead tank at hostel and run a underground pipe to school to get water by gravity and this is a one time expense. Puvudham agreed to explore this possibility.

To my query on what is their number one problem, Meenankshi said finding teachers is big issue. Meenakshi and the two male colleagues are committed to this school. But the two females may move once they marry. There is a disparity in salary payments between Govt and private schools and hence there is less demand for working in a private school. They are trying their best to get more persons to this school and as on to day the progress is not much.

At the end of the day, I called for a small meeting of all five teachers and appreciated the efforts and energy put in by each one of them. If located properly, a nursery & primary school is a goldmine with no accountability on the quality of students. I left school around 4 pm wondering what force is behind these five persons to perform a noble job of increasing literacy in a remote area instead of minting money.

Regards, Kannan. G.