

January 2011



Vidya Vanam Newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 1
www.vidyavanam.org

UPCOMING EVNTS

- Pongal Festivities
- Annual Day
- Arts Day
- Addition of 15 new computers to the computer room
- Two new teachers coming on board



View of Nilgiris from the school



In front of the new School Bus



Playing word games in class with Ram



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Rangachary Reports

We have had a tremendous six months of activities. On the day school opened, we were overwhelmed by the response of the community to enroll their children in the school. We had anticipated to increase our enrollment by 30 but it exploded to over 200. We had to pare down the younger aged children, and requested they join six months later. We now have 185 children and increased the number of class rooms.

More important, has been the response of the parents. Their participation in parent teacher conferences and children's activities in plays and sport have been close to one hundred percent.

For all the increases in the student body and the stretching of the resources, the staff have held together in a tremendous show of solidarity to the cause of early childhood education. To them and all the staff, I am eternally thankful.

Highlights

- Our school strength after the beginning of June now stands at 182 (51% girls and 49% boys)
- We completed the expansion of class rooms in the quadrangle thanks to the generous support of the Dore and Hariharan families.
- We have added six new faculty members and an equal number of non academic staff.
- A new 45 seater bus was donated by Asok Leyland.
- Prema Rangachary was the chief guest at the Independence day celebrations at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan school in Coimbatore.

"I love my school and am ready to come every day to study."

"Even on Saturday and Sunday?"

"Yes!"



Sneha with her mother and sister (middle) and with her friends bottom panel.

Profile of Sneha –Jamun Group

Sneha is one of our first founder children. Joining Vidya Vanam as a three-year-old she is now in the Jamun group having spent all her education at Vidya Vanam. Older of two children she comes from the local tribal families around Anaikatti. Her father drives a van for a local NGO and her mother is a laborer, breaking stones from quarries for road construction. Currently, she is a stay home mother with two children, the younger of whom is also enrolled in Vidya Vanam. Her mother has had finished fifth grade education and her father is illiterate.

They live in a 100sq ft house, consisting of a sleeping room and a kitchen. They have shared this small abode for 12 years. With help from the state government they are hoping to move into a bigger place. Her mother is aware that this place is too small when Sneha begins high school.

Sneha is the cheerleader of her class spirited in her participation and at times shy to answer questions. She is quick to answer math quiz. She has a great ear to music and she accompanied with six other students to participate in the choir in Chennai. That was her first trip outside of Anaikatti and the first travelling by train. She is a natural dancer and with a gift for smooth and elegant movement. Her mother had never seen her dance until she performed on the annual day celebrations held in Coimbatore this year.

Her day is spent helping her mother and getting her younger sister (also a Vidya Vanam student) ready for school. She is gregarious with a lot of friends in her class and her village and she admits that she spends too much time playing and less time with her homework. Her goals are to be a school teacher and teach English to other children of Annaikatti.

A visit to Chennai by the Vidya Vanam choir

Kala Manjari in association with Sa Re Ga Ma, organized the first children's choir in Chennai. This project was initiated as a means to introduce the elements of music in a format that is not usually seen in South India. The aim of the organizers was to make music a communal experience for children.

Children from different schools, in total 65 from ages, 5 to 15, were selected and had rehearsals throughout the first term of the school. Teachers at Vidya Vanam were contacted and the participation of students from an entirely different background were invited to come to Chennai for the inaugural event. Both Hi and Low technologies were used to teach the different songs in different languages to the students. Using Skype, CD's with embedded music and good old didactic instructions eight students were taught to sing in harmony with other children from Chennai.

This was a novel experience for the children, receiving instructions on line from Sudha Raja (organizer of Sa Re Ga and who has been associated with Mr. M.B. Srinivasan) via the internet!

None of the seven students who went to Chennai had been in a train, seen a metropolitan city of the size of Chennai, and the sights and sounds of a bustling city. Prema Rangachary noted that they were so excited that they did not sleep on coming to the city and was worried about how they would do. After a day of rehearsal they were ready for prime time.

They sang seven songs and one a solo piece (Shravana, in Kannada, a song welcoming the rain). It was a thrill for the students to be then interviewed by the local media and their songs shown on ND-TV (Hindu).

T.M. Krishna (exponent of Carnatic music) gave them the certificate of appreciation and lauded their singling skills



T. M. Krishna giving the children a present for their wonderful performance.



On stage with their peers from the schools of Chennai. Sudha Raja is the conductor .

Profile of R. Chithra teacher of Pre –school children, Orange and Mango Groups.

R. Chithra, the pre-school teacher belongs to the core of four teachers who started working four years ago. Born in Vadakkalur a village about 1KM from Vidya Vanam campus, she grew up with parents, neither of whom were literate and who worked on either subsistence farming or in the kilns. She struggled with meager resources and after schooling, completed her diploma in teacher training. After working with the Balwadi group program came to work as a faculty in the school.

She now feels that after going to at least six conferences and workshops that she had to unlearn methods of early education-the old method- that relied on book based method of learning, to activity based learning. She feels that the response has been immense. She has learnt a lot and also made changes in her style of teaching. When asked what her challenges she faced here , she relates her need to remind herself that each child has different strengths and that she may have to change her approach to suit different children if she was to be a good teacher.

She has also come to realize that in past her temper would get the better of her, now, she recognizes the importance of



Chithra in front of her house in Vadakkalur

keeping the child's need and with persistence that she would be able to get things across.

When asked what she found most surprising, she recounted how the child has listened to different words in his/her environment and was able to reproduce them although they did not know the meaning. For example, while doing a phonetic class, she was asked to say words that have the "d" sound at the beginning of the word; one child(4 years) came up with the word diagram and another dinosaur. Considering that these children have had little or no exposure to English, she found these responses surprising.

She says that nothing gives her more gratitude that to see the child grow. She says she this everyday.



**“No words can express our appreciation for Ms. Rangachary for the work that she has initiated . “
Ms Periaswamy Principa
I of Bharathia Vidya
Vanam**



**Posters and presentation
of the different groups**

Project Day—December 5th 2010

There is only one word for the activities of the students presented on project day and that was, “WOW”.

The second semester is the shortest period in the three semester school. The staff and students decided to involve a vertically integrated group of students spanning different age groups to write about their own culture and environment. The children were divided into four groups and they called themselves the Irulas, Temple, Post office and Nilgiris. Every day, for 6 weeks, the teachers accompanied the children to the village of Thuvaipatti about 3Km from the campus. Team Irulas studied the life style of the Irula Tribe, team Nilgiris, the the flora and fauna of their surround, temple explored the religious activities and post office looked at the infrastructure of their village.

Using only material that they could either make or get from their surround they constructed extraordinary models of the village life, made graphs and pictures of the things around. Most interesting were the food recipes from a typical Irula family that were made and brought by the students. The Irula dessert was a hit and almost all of it disappeared by mid morning.

There were depictions of the folklore of the tribes. “The children heard stories and myths surrounding the region. The villagers were traditionally snake charmers. So the Varagi story of a woman marrying a snake who then transforms into a handsome man is present in the Iru-ala community and has many similarities to Western folk lore, the beauty and the beast.

The two day exposition was opened by the principal of Bhatiya Vidya Bhavan, Coimbatore. Since all the props were handmade, so was the opening door to the exposition, a matted palm leaf that was designed by the children. Ms Periasamy, who was visibly moved by what she said the following in the guest book, : “No words can express our appreciation for Ms. Rangachary for the work that she has initiated . Anaiaktti is blessed and should feel proud for the presence of Vidya Vanam.”.

One of the parents while leaving the campus said that if one needs to see a Irula village they must go to Vidya Vanam.’

Comings and goings

Vidya Vanam said goodbye to Kavitha Jairam and Arali Nugegouda.

Kavathi was returning to Singapore to be with her family. She was a great teacher who will be missed.

Logistical problems with international travel prevented Arali from return-

ing. She was the early innovators of teaching taking students on walks and reading poetry under trees and on the banks of the streams. We will all miss her including Jimmy her favorite companion. We welcome a number of new faculty to meet the expanding student body.

Suresh Kumar, with his Masters in Phys Ed, has insti-

tuted yoga for all, manages the after school activities and plays an active role in all extra curricular activities. He is now the go to person for all IT problems, an expertise that he has garnered.

K. Riya comes to us from the State of Assam. An accomplished teacher of science and English, she is responsible for the science curriculum in the upper levels. Shownike Das comes from Bihar. He felt that an NGO with a flexible approach to education suited his

ideas on how children should learn. Das teaches English and does after school drama program.

M. Velusamy comes from the community of Anaikatti. He is able to relate to the needs of the children, having grown not far from the campus.

He teaches math and languages.

Sulochana is the new addition to the kindergarten program. A trained Montessorian, she has rapidly adapted to the school philosophy of learning by doing. An active gardener, she can be caring for plants when not in the midst of children.

Guests and Visitors

Ms Kalpana Guttman with her family spent two days in the campus. A teacher and teacher trainer from Boston, MA, USA she is coming back for a two week period to teach and train in the summer of 2011.

Dr. and Mrs. P. Rau also from Boston visited for a day in the summer. They are also planning a return trip this year.