



LOVE ALL SERVE ALL

FEBRUARY 2020

Sevalaya helps FSS build rural toilets



K Natarajan, President, Parent Teachers Association, Kariyapattinam Govt. HSS inaugurating the new toilet block

A new toilet block at Govt. Higher Secondary School at Kariyapattinam Village in Vedaranyam Block in Nagapattinam District was inaugurated on 6th January 2020.

The toilet block was inaugurated by K Natarajan, President, Parents Teachers Association of the school. The old toilet block in the school was completely destroyed by Gaja cyclone.

Sevalaya, as a part of the rehabilitation works took up the construction of a new toilet block at the school. The project at a cost of ₹ 10 lacs was sponsored by Financial Software and Systems (FSS) Private Limited.

500+ girls of the school will be benefitted by the initiative.

K Chandra, Headmistress, teachers of the school and members of the Parent Teachers Association participated in the function.

The new facility will be very helpful for the girls studying in the school.

I thank FSS and Sevalaya for this initiative. We will take all steps to maintain it clean.

**K Chandra, Headmistress,
Kariyapattinam Govt. Higher
Secondary School**

Free breakfast programme for 1000+ students inaugurated



M Ramakrishnan, CEO, Thanjavur and K Rajeswari, DSWO, Thanjavur serving breakfast to students of Govt Girls HSS, Thanjavur.

The free breakfast programme for 750 students of Stds X, XI and XII of Govt. Girls Higher Secondary School, Thanjavur was inaugurated on 6th January 2020.

The programme was inaugurated by M Ramakrishnan, Chief Educational Officer,

Thanjavur. K Rajeswari, District Social Welfare Officer and Soma Arumugam, Secretary, Thanjai Periya kovil *vaara vazhipaattu manram* (Thanjavur Big Temple weekly prayer committee) participated in the function.

"Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. If a student skips breakfast, it will definitely affect his concentration and studies. Sevalaya has addressed this issue by providing sumptuous breakfast to the students who have to reach school by 7 am for special classes for the Board exams." observed the Chief Guest. K Rajeswari advised the students to eat healthy food, study well and make best use of the opportunities to succeed in life.

This is the 6th year, Sevalaya has initiated this project of providing free breakfast for a period of three months, i.e Jan to Mar to 750 students of Stds X, XI and XII who appear for Board exams.

Sevalaya has been providing free breakfast to around 100 children of Panchayat Union Schools in Thanjavur, all through the academic year.

This year, these projects are sponsored by Petrofac and many individual donors.

Joy of giving: *the way of life*

Dear Friends,

Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam, a Tamil spiritual monthly magazine published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, is celebrating centenary this year. It is one of the 5 magazines in India to celebrate the centenary year. An interesting fact is that all the 5 magazines are publications of Sri Ramakrishna Math. Sri Ramakrishna Math was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897 with the two-fold purpose of spreading the teachings of Vedanta as embodied in the life of the Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and to improve the social conditions of the Indians.

Whenever questions are raised regarding the quality of the content in present-day magazines, most of which is cinema or politics, crime stories, etc, the standard refrain of the publishers is that they give only what the reader wants and the present generation prefers only such contents. This notion has been totally disproved.

Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam contains articles

on spiritual and cultural topics, short stories and pictorial stories for children. It has special features like Youth Power, Teachers' World, Students' World, Sanatana Dharma, and our ancient scriptures among others.

The magazine has a circulation of 1,60,000 copies and nearly 1,00,000 readers are youngsters. This gives hope. The people are ready to know about our great culture and human values and good quality magazines do get great support.

The centenary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam commenced in Chennai on 12th January 2020, which is the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda celebrated as National Youth Day. Hon'ble Vice President of India M Venkaiah Naidu participated in the celebrations.

Year-long celebrations are planned all over Tamilnadu. Sevalaya will be organising the celebrations in Thiruvallur District. Oratorical, Essay writing and skit competitions are conducted for students of all schools and colleges in

Thiruvallur and prizes will be distributed to the winners in a grand function on 2nd February 2020. Swami Vimurthanandaji Maharaj, Manager of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai and Maalan, Senior journalist will be participating in the function. Nearly 1000 students with their parents and villagers will be participating in the function.

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Mahakavi Bharathiyar and Swami Vivekananda, Sevalaya has been engaged in spreading the ideals of the three great leaders among the youth, since its inception.

We are happy to take an active part in the centenary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam, engaged in the process of imparting man-making education as envisioned by Swami Vivekananda.

We invite you all to take part in the celebrations.

Thanks and Regards

Sevalaya Murali

Seva shop at Kasuva campus



Inside view of the Seva shop

Greeting and bidding farewell to visitors to Sevalaya's Kasuva campus is a well-stocked Seva Craft shop that has come up near the gate. It has a wide variety to pick as a souvenir to remember the visit, at the same time supporting village artisans and the education of rural children. Waiting on the shelves are hand-made craft items, fancy hand bags and eco-friendly carry bags as also agarbathies and candles. Also on sale are

fresh vegetables organically grown at the campus.

The ready-to-eat food section features bakery items made by the bakery students of the Community College. Those who love their home gardens can pack naturally manufactured fertilizers.

Visitors will be pleasantly surprised by the price – 50% less than market rates, in some cases.



S Manohar inaugurated the Seva shop
S Manohar, Former Head- Manufacturing, L&T Group inaugurated the shop on 10th January 2020 by becoming its first customer for a clutch of items! He expressed appreciation for the education system and laboratory of Sevalaya. He shared his hope that Sevalaya produces Scientist, Professors and Engineers.

Earlier, Sevalaya's elders and students offered a warm welcome to the guest and entertained the audience with songs and dances.



Pongal, the harvest festival celebrated Smokeless Bhogi



Pongal festival marks the end of the northeast monsoon and the harvest season in South India. The rituals of this festival include the worship of Sun God, mother earth and the cattle for bearing a good harvest, which is considered quite sacred.

As a prelude to the Pongal celebrations, Volleyball tournaments, basketball tournaments in the under-14 category, and rangoli competitions were conducted by Sevalaya, in the first and second weeks of January 2020.

Sevalaya initiated Village Volley Ball Tournament 15 years ago, as a safe alternative to Jallikattu for village youth. The Volleyball Tournament which was held on 5th and 11th January 2020, attracted 59 Teams and 700 participants.

The match was highly competitive. The top 4 teams that won the match were the Sugunambal Volleyball Club, Vengal, Thiruvallur Volleyball Club, Thiruvallur, Amudha Volleyball Club, Thiruninravur, and Thiruvallur Friends Volleyball club, Thiruvallur.



110 children from 5 schools of Tiruvallur District participated in the district-level Basketball Tournament held for the school children on 11th January 2020.

Both the boys' team and the girls' team of Sethu Bhaskara Matriculation School, Ambattur walked away with the first prize. The Sevalaya school team were the runners up in the boys' category and the girls' team from La Chatelaine Junior College, Virugambakkam, bagged the second prize.

Sevalaya conducted Rangoli Competition in and around Kasuva village in which 40 villages participated. The beautiful rangolis captured well the joy of Pongal celebrations. 3 winners were selected from each village and there were 120 prize winners.

S Madhan Kumar and B Dayalan of NRS Enterprises sponsored the prizes for the rangoli competition.

Sangeetha Raju, Union councillor, Thiruvallur, E Bakhavachalu, President, Puliur Panchayat, some ward members of the neighbouring villages and Sue Humphreys, a volunteer from the United Kingdom, participated in the Pongal celebrations at Kasuva centre, on 15th January 2020.



Pongal, a sweet delicacy made out of rice, milk, and jaggery was prepared traditionally in the open space on a mud stove in new earthen pots and offered to Sun God. The students of the school and community college presented a cultural programme.

Prizes were distributed to the winners of the volleyball tournament, basketball tournament, and rangoli competitions.

The second day of the celebration, known as Mattu Pongal, is dedicated to worship the cows, the friends of the farmers. On 16th January 2020, the 70 cows at Sevalaya's Vinobha gaushala were bathed and decorated with garlands. Special prayers were conducted and Pongal was cooked and offered to the cows. Sevalaya's advisor Amarchand Jain and his family participated in the celebrations.



Traditionally during Bhogi, the first day of the Pongal festival, houses are cleaned up and all unwanted things accumulated over the year are burnt. Broken Plastics, old rubber tyres are also burnt and the fumes pollute the air causing a serious health hazard. For the past 15 years, every year Sevalaya carries out a rally, to create an awareness about the health hazards of this practice.

This year 1000 students participated in the rally which was held on 10th January 2020, Chief Guest M Venkatesan, Asst. Commissioner of Police Pattabiram range flagged off the rally along with S Jeru Jones Priyadarshinin, President Nathamedu Panchayat. The rally which started from Dr V P Ramakrishna Kalyana Mandapam in Thiruninravur went through the thickly populated streets of Thiruninravur and culminated at Shanmuga hall near Lakshmi theatre Thiruninravur.

Students from Sevalaya's Mahakavi Bharathiyar School, Dasar High School, Amudha Matriculation school, Government High School, Pakkam and Government Hr Secondary School, Thiruninravur, participated in the rally. Students marched through the streets carrying placards containing slogans on the dangers of burning plastics and rubber and the urgent need to protect the environment, raising slogans to safeguard the environment and beating drums to catch the attention of the public. Handbills carrying this message were handed to the public by the students.

Speaking to the students at the meeting after the rally, Arulraj, Superintendent of Police, Avadi and S Jeru Jones Priyadarshini, President, Nathamedu Panchaya said that awareness on environmental issues is effective when students are involved.

Pongal in Ernst and Young (EY)



Ernst and Young (EY), is a multinational professional services firm active in over 150 countries. The leadership team from EY, Chennai visited our Kasuva campus and were impressed by the discipline of the students. They assured that they would support Sevalaya in all its initiatives.

EY invited the school children to participate and present a cultural programme at the Pongal celebrations at their office in DLF, Porur, Chennai.

20 children participated in the event. They performed traditional dances like Karagattam and Kolattam, and sang Bharathiyar songs.

300 EY employees enjoyed the children's performance and cheered them. A mehendi stall set up by the students of the beautician trade at Sevalaya's Community College at the venue attracted many visitors.



Vodafone fulfills childrens' wishes



Sriram, GM, Customer Care, Vaishali Bhansali, GM, Admin and Mary Jeraldine Kavitha, GM, Capability and Talent, Vodafone Idea presenting gifts to children

Vodafone Idea, telecommunication major, filled smiles in the faces of 100+ children by fulfilling their fervent wishes. Vodafone Idea Chennai team gathered the wishes of more than 100 primary school children. On 8th January 2020, nearly 10 persons from leadership team travelled to the school with gifts for the children and spent half a day in distributing and chatting with them happily.

They also enjoyed spending time with elders.



Inter homes competitions



Students of Sevalaya's homes won prizes at the inter homes cultural and sports competition conducted by Department of Social Defense at Don Bosco Beatitudes Social Welfare Centre in Vyasarpadi on 4th and 5th January 2020. Students from 30 Homes participated in this event.

Chennai District Collector R Seethalakshmi, IAS, Chennai District Child Protection Officer Suriyakala and members of the Chennai Child Welfare Committee participated in the event.

S Saradha from Std X got second prize in singing competition. R Dinesh, Std XII std got first prize in high jump. P Lakshmi of Std IX, G Ammu of Std X, Akshaya of Std VII, Rithika of Std IX and Rupa of Std VIII won the 1st prize in Ball Badminton.

The winners will participate in the state level competition which will be held at the end of month in Jawaharlal Nehru stadium, Chennai.

Lesson on inclusiveness



Prof Ramesh Gopalaswami addressing the villagers

Prof. Ramesh Gopalaswami, an independent consultant, eminent author, visiting / adjunct professor in several reputed universities conducted a session for parents on 16th December 2019 to educate them about the needs of children with learning disabilities.

Nearly 45 parents of students from LKG to VI standard attended the session. He advised the parents not to force their expectations on the children but to motivate and encourage them to develop their skills.

He stressed on the importance of working with the school to bring out the best in the children.

Ramanujan Day celebrated

Every year Sevalaya celebrates Ramanujan day to honour the legendary mathematician, by organising a maths talent test for students in Chennai and Thiruvallur Districts.

Amirtham Surya, Senior Sub Editor, Kalki Magazine, who has authored valuable books on diverse topics, was the Chief Guest at the function held this year on 25th December 2019.

26 schools participated in this years' competitions and 22 winners received their prizes from the Chief Guest. Sevalaya students presented a cultural programme which included a dance of shapes, a skit highlighting the mathematical wisdom of our fore-fathers and a talk on Ramanujan's life and works



Amirtham Surya, Senior Sub Editor, Kalki and Sevalaya Murali with the toppers of the Maths Talent Exam

Bharathiyar Day at Thanjavur



P Rajarajan, Executive Trustee, Bharathi Iyakkam handing over certificate to a visually challenged student Also in the picture: Sevalaya Murali and K Muthuramakrishnan, Advisor

Sevalaya celebrated Mahakavi Bharathiyar Day at Government Girls' Higher Secondary school, Thanjavur on 6th January 2020

The Chief Guests, Dr Rasu, professor, Kundavai Nachiyar Women's College, Thanjavur and P Rajarajan, Executive Trustee, Bharathi Iyakkam spoke about the powerful verses of Bharathiyar.

Sevalaya had organized singing, drawing and painting, competitions for the school students 123 students from 16 schools participated in these competitions. Government Higher Secondary school for the visually-impaired and the hearing-

impaired students also participated and the winners received their prizes at the function.



Fire safety training



Fire safety drill at Kasuva centre

A National level Fire and Evacuation drill was conducted at Sevalaya's Mahakavi Bharathiyar HSS on 21st January 2020.

The exercises were conducted by N Bhaskaran, District Fire Officer Thiruvallur and P Bhaskaran, Additional District Fire Officer Thiruvallur. This exercise is conducted every year on 21st January 2020 at a national level in selected schools.

Students were divided into 10 groups and given training on how to put off the fire and evacuate all to safety. A mock fire was then created in the computer lab and the teams worked efficiently and did the needful to put off the fire and evacuate all students.

1004 students and 20 teachers participated in the drill. 2 fire fighting vehicles and 10 fire fighting commandos participated in the drill. It was a useful session for the staff and students.

From Germany to Sevalaya

"To be honest, I never expected anything like this, it's amazing that one NGO can provide such a well-structured environment for so many people, from young children to old people. Also, the fact that it generates jobs for those in the surrounding rural society."

That is Phil Leuci, an 18-year-old German youth, living at the Kasuva campus and volunteering at Sevalaya for the last 11 months. He wanted to use his time before college to discover more about the world, and explore a new culture, while also helping the underprivileged. His family originated from Puducherry, so he wanted to find out more about his heritage. His original project was with a different NGO which only offered him work in a boy's orphanage, but at the last moment he was switched to Sevalaya.



He had little information about Sevalaya before he reached Kasuva campus, He anticipated landing in some small organization, confined to classroom, teaching in a disorganised school. On arrival, he was wonderstruck at the

number of services provided here and all his expectations were exceeded. He said, "Sevalaya is covering almost every important area in which an NGO can operate. it's just stunning.!"

Phil plays the major role in teaching primary, Montessori, and English tuition at boy's home. He is even coaching boys to play football and he is training then on social media. This makes him happy, as he can work across different faculties, making his experience more interesting and enjoyable. "Compared to my fellow volunteers, I have obtained the best project" he says.

Phil loves talking and spending time with the children, though he has the language barrier. He feels fulfilled through his service. Children's smile and happiness fill him with joy. He loves the way Sevalaya is caring for these children, giving them the opportunity to develop their personality. He is confident that this year of learning and experience with Sevalaya will broaden his horizons and teach him many things that will help him to succeed in life.

"My hearty wishes for Sevalaya to realise the dream of a free university, and another campus like Kasuva to extend the helping hand to the poor and needy. " says Phil with his trademark smile

Blessed to have studied in Sevalaya

Lakshmi, an alumna of Sevalaya joined Sevalaya school in Std IX. Her father, V Marimuthu, is a tailor and mother, M Amudha, a home maker. She has three brothers. Her father found it difficult to educate all the four children. " We were fortunate to get admission in Sevalaya which provided free education and all of us got an opportunity to study." says Lakshmi.

All four of them got educated in Sevalaya. She passed her Std XII in 2016 with good marks. She joined B.Sc Maths in Hindu College, Pattabiram. Her college education was supported by Sevalaya by getting her financial aid from BNY Mellon. During her college days, she attended



the weekend training programme - BNY Steps, conducted by volunteers from BNY Mellon, for the alumni of Sevalaya, whose higher education the company was supporting.

The students were trained in communication skills, spoken English, basic computer applications, group discussions, and interview etiquette.

Out of the 10 alumni who attended the programme, 3 were called for interview,

and Lakshmi was one among them. She was successful and is now an employee of BNY Mellon. Now her life has become easier. "We as a family will always be grateful to Sevalaya for bringing about this great positive change in our life" says Lakshmi.

"We get wonderful opportunities here at Sevalaya. It is upto us to make good use of them and come up in life." is her message for the students of Sevalaya.

Montessori: holistic, joyful learning



The Montessori method of education at Sevalaya, Initiated in 2009, has been offering holistic education to over 300 rural children.

The motivation for introduction of Montessori teaching came from its greater impact on developing motor coordination skills, deeper understanding of concepts in maths and language and in motivating students towards self learning. Yet, there were doubts expressed that it may not be suitable for Tamil medium rural children as the method needed well trained teachers and costly kits. But Sri Ramacharan trust stepped in to help by giving basic training to 5 teachers of primary school. Many well wishers generously donated kits.

The first batch of students, now in Std IV “display a greater level of confidence and have good linguistic and numerical skills, dispelling the myth that this method is not suitable for a rural set up”, comments K Revathy, Assistant Headmistress. In Montessori environment there are four parts which include Exercise of practical life, sensorial, language and math. EPL has a set of activities which teaches the children the basic domestic activities such as preparing dough with wheat flour and making chapathis. This helps in the fine motor development of their fingers. Sensorial activities help stimulate our five senses.

India lives in its villages and the dream of a developed India can be realized only when that social slice is empowered to meet the challenges of this century.

Research has shown that poor maternal nutrition, unhygienic practices and inadequate supplementary nutrition in the younger ages leave a negative impact on the growth, mental development and performance of children. So many of the rural children start their lives with this handicap and are unable to catch up with their city counterparts. So they need special help to get good education and come up in life.

Own choices

The structured Montessori classroom gives children a great deal of flexibility to make their own choices about the kind of work to engage and gives children encouragement to think independently and act as a member of a social group. The “whole child” approach helps each child reach full potential in all areas of life. Activities promote the development of social skills, emotional growth, and physical co-ordination. The holistic curriculum allows the child to experience the joy of learning, and provides the experiences from which children create their knowledge.

The Montessori child is encouraged to follow what interests him the most. The child is free to work and learn in the classroom at his own pace and at their own level of understanding without any interruption. There is no pressure nor stress or time limits to adhere to. Each child is guided through their own natural pathway of development individually. Research studies show that Montessori children are well prepared for later life academically, socially, and emotionally.

Children are given activities that stimulate their brain. Activity Based Learning is a method based on cards and milestone development of each child. The items found on the shelves in the classroom are “materials” rather than “toys.” The children “work with the materials” rather than “play with the toys.” This allows the children to gain the most benefit from the environment by giving them a sense of worth – the same sense of worth adults experience as they go to their jobs and do their “work.”

In the Montessori system there is an emphasis on concrete learning rather than on abstract learning here. Children need to experience concepts in concrete “hands-on” ways. It is a child-centered environment – All the materials are easily within the child’s reach and placed on shelves at their levels. The tables and chairs are small enough for the children to sit comfortably while pictures and decorations are placed at the children’s eye level.

Today Sevalaya’s Montessori classrooms are well structured. The infrastructure with a huge room of about 4500 sq ft was sponsored by Page Pierre Foundation of Switzerland - a long standing donor, who has funded the construction of hostel, dining hall, among other things. This large room can accommodate more than two classes at a time.

C Girija, Montessori teacher echoes the feelings of Montessori teachers when she exclaims how proud she feels working in a different environment wherein importance is given to the motor development of the children.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, right? Then listen to what M Chandrakala, mother of M Abhinash, a student of lower grade in Montessori class, has to say: Abhinash has learnt to eat neatly without dropping his food. Every day, he is brimming with reports of what he did in class. Obviously, he is enjoying it”.

For D Dakshan, Abhinash’s class mate, doing colour tablets is the greatest joy. I enjoy Mystery bag activity, when with my eyes closed, I touch and recognize the shapes”, he says.

Gandhi arrives on the scene

Gandhi arrived at South Africa in May 1893. He had no idea of the previous history of Immigrant Indians. He went there purely on a professional visit. An important law-suit was pending between two rival firms, Dada Abdulla and Taib Haji Khan Mammed.

Gandhi observed on the very first day that the Europeans meted out most insulting treatment to Indians. He had bitter experiences in the courts within a fortnight of his arrival; he encountered hardships in the railway stations; received thrashing on the way. It was practically impossible to secure accommodation in hotels. He had gone there only for a single case prompted by self interest and curiosity. He saw that South Africa was not good for him. He had a positive aversion for earning in a country where he was insulted. Two courses were open to him. He might either free himself from the contract and run back to India, or he

might bear all hardships and fulfill the engagement. He came to the conclusion that running back would be cowardly, and decided to accomplish what he had undertaken.

Having completed his assignment in 1894, he prepared to return to India. In the farewell function, he came across a copy of Natal Mercury which contained a piece of information about the Government's intention to bring a legislation to disenfranchise Indians. He suggested to the assembly that Indians should strongly resist the attack on their rights. The leadership of the struggle naturally fell on the shoulders of Gandhi. The traders extended their cooperation and insisted that Gandhi should stay on and guide the movement. Gandhi felt that there should be a permanent organization to take care of the interests of Indians. Gandhi declined the offer of a permanent salary. It was agreed that the traders would give

their legal work to him. Gandhi enrolled himself in the Supreme Court despite objections from Natal Law Society which was over ruled by the Court.

The organization was named Natal Indian congress. The organization worked throughout the year with full vigour. Side by side with external agitation, the question of internal improvement was also taken up.

The Europeans throughout South Africa had been agitating against Indians on the ground of their ways of life. They contended that Indians were always dirty and close fisted. At Congress, lectures were delivered, debates held and suggestions made at meetings on subjects like domestic sanitation, personal hygiene and the necessity of separate buildings for homes and shops, for well to do traders on living in a style befitting their position.

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