



Every year we are surprised by what the children do when they have to take care of themselves! As they grow up in a free environment, they want minimum interference from adults and they take on the responsibility, to look after their own needs. This year the children of 8th class took some time to organize themselves but finally are taking care of all the daily chores while being supported and supporting the younger ones. As the year unfolds, the time around the festival of Deepavali is time to go to different places. At Puvudham we believe that travel opens out horizons and educates the senses in a way that is much beyond the curriculum. Therefore, every class is taken out on a tour. These visits are treasured by the children as storehouses of wonderful memories which they can tap into when they are feeling lost. Besides this, the time between October and January is used primarily for revision of previous modules. And for helping the children who need more attention to be able to cope with the languages, logic and observation skills.



The children of **class I and II** went to Durgam Fort near Rayakkottai, in August along with the adults Mathi, Kavitha and Elango. This was a day long tour, but the children spent the night away from home in the school campus and woke up very early at 3.00 am, got ready by 4.30 am and travelled in the school van for 40 kms to the fort. It is an 18th century fort built by Tipu Sultan who then ruled this area. As usual the children climbed to the top of the fort effortlessly and sat down around the swimming pool to have their breakfast. There are steps to climb and there is a pathway for the horses to climb

without much difficulty. There is a small temple with beautiful carvings. The fort has caves where people used to hide their treasures.

Towards the end of September, the children of **classes III & IV**, guided by Mathi, Pavithra and Senbagam went to Cuckoo Forest School - Puliyanur village in Singarapettai. This is a learning centre where children from other schools come for learning. They get hands on training on making saplings and nursery raising. The children enjoyed walking in the forest where they learnt to identify the native plants and trees. They were also engaged in free play and storytelling in the forest. There is a little stream where they all had a bath and little pools where they swam around in abandon. For these children, it was a three-day trip, where the children camped and learnt to live away from parents and their friendships deepen. (<http://cuckoochildren.in/>)



In October the children of **classes V & VI** facilitated by Sathya, Elango and Dhanalakshmi, parent of one of the hostel children, went to participate in a 8 day crafts workshop conducted by Marudham farm school, Tiruvannamalai. The children were exposed to variety of crafts taught by the experts and professionals. Children learnt how to work on the pottery wheel, made bamboo toys, did stone carving, basket weaving, kalamkari painting on cloth, learnt basics of houses construction, rope climbing, rock climbing, origami, ornaments using copper wire seeds and palm leaves etc. They played foot

ball and made friends with children from other schools. During the month of December, they continue to make more craft articles as a part of their entrepreneurship ventures and then we have an exhibition during our annual day function where the parents and other visitors get to see the work of the children. <http://www.marudamfarmschool.org/>

Just after Diwali in, November, the children of the **classes VII & VIII** accompanied by Madhavaraj, Gunavathi and Jaya travelled to Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling in West Bengal and Odisha. It was a 28 day trip. Every year the children of the oldest group are taken for these long trips. These trips away from home, in new cultures and across so many rivers and hills, give the children a glimpse of the diversity and expanse of India as a country and allows them to relate it to the rest of the world. They travelled to Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh, for the inauguration of Foldscope project- headed by Mr. Omo Muttang. The Foldscope project is a central Government project which we had applied to and it was



sanctioned. As a part of this we are obliged to go to the north east to share our learning and some north east organizations are supposed to come to Puvudham to share their learnings. <https://microcosmos.foldscope.com/>



Then they went to Natraj Gurukul School, Dhajea Basti, Darjeeling where they experienced a Gurukul's life for ten days. <http://www.natarajgurukul.org/> Essentially, the same as Puvudham, the life in the gurukul reinforced the values that we are trying to imbibe in the children and the adults of Puvudham.

From there they went to Tieedi Forest, Sonada, Darjeeling. This space is run by our friends Ashna and Utsow who are Permaculturists. They are also working toward a zero-waste culture removing garbage from the nearby streams and villages to convert the organic waste into compost and the inorganic plastic waste to making plastic bottle bricks to use for constructing benches or sending to recycling units. From there they went by train to Odisha, where they were hosted by Mind Tree- a Global learning centre for training in computer technology. They had the opportunity to visit places like Konark – Sun temple and beach. At Berhmapur, they went to Gram Vikas <http://gramvikas.org/> an NGO which is working with *CTX Green* in promoting sustainable development through organic agriculture and Bio-Diesel. Our friends Geeta and Ramani showed the children their laboratory and taught them the making of Bio-Diesel. The children also saw the yeast in the methanol through the foldscope. It was a thrilling experience for all. In Bissamcuttak they were hosted by Klorofeel, an organization conducting evening tutorial classes for the tribal children. The children got the chance to visit the Klorofeel centers and interact with the children and *Sathis (Evening center's facilitator run by Klorofeel)*. They went to MITRA Residential School Muniguda and stayed with the children in the hostel a day. The children also trekked to Niyamgiri hills and learnt about the struggle of the tribals against the multinational company Vedanta to protect their forests. At Kerindiguda got a chance to visit Debol Deb's organic farm where they are restoring 1440 varieties of organic paddy. The importance of saving traditional seed was driven home through this interaction. Later the children were introduced to Dr. Johnny and his *Christian Hospital*. <http://chbmck.org/> As a part of their extension program for improving the health of the people and the environment, they encourage farmers to grow organic vegetables and provide space for the local organic market. The farmers get a fair price and the consumers get good organic vegetables. Organizing this trip would have been quite difficult without the untiring support from our friends like Rishin, Siddharth and Aashiq.

All the tours were done by first week of December and now it was time to focus on our arts and crafts while preparing for our annual day celebration on the 18th of January. The theme for this

year's annual day celebration is Gandhi and Sustainability. Different classes will prepare with different incidents in Gandhiji's life and his practice of sustainability and living of a zero-carbon foot print life long ago people realized that this would be the mantra for the future survival of life on the planet. Minimalism- is now a necessity!

Music classes are helping to improve the vocal skills of the interested children. Some children are learning to play the harmonium or the Cassio piano. The teacher Mr. Chellapandiyan who is visually challenged and his wife come twice a week, for two hours each to share their skills. They have composed songs on the themes of environment to inspire the children. The practice of Karate is an enjoyable morning activity thrice a week. On Sunday the older children do a cross country run for about 5 kms while the younger children play on the swing and seesaw. Many of our children were awarded the next higher belt in martial arts in the month of October.

Volunteers and Visitors –

Mr. Gopal Negi from Himachal Pradesh visited in the month of September. He practices simple living and visions to build an alternative learning center like Puvudham. He stayed with us for a couple of days and was much influenced by our lifestyle. He visited the farms of the children and teachers and added few ideas from his personal experiences.

About 30 students (*Khojis*) from **Swaraj University**, Udaipur, came to visit Puvudham, in October, to study about our lifestyle and methodologies. They stayed in the community and we shared our experiences with each other.

Ms. Komal is a first-year student of Software Engineering from Nav Gurukul in Bangalore, a member of The India Multiversities Alliance. <http://www.multiversities.net/> She came as a part of their task called manthan- which means churning to learn about oneself. She found Puvudham lifestyle and pedagogy very inspiring. She stayed with the community for a month and helped in the daily activities of the hostel and school.

Mrs. Renu from Konkan, Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra, came to visit Puvudham for a day. She's documenting alternative schools in India.

Ms. Shristi was another volunteer who came from New Delhi. She stayed in the hostel for a week in December and was helping with the work there.

Ms. Sahitya who is a civil engineering student has come for her internship on mud architecture in Puvudham. She is from Coimbatore and stays in the hostel helping with kitchen works and assisting the children in studies.

A team of four from **Azim Premji Foundation, Pondichery**, visited Puvudham to understand the system. They stayed with the community for three days and followed the flow.



A group of artists from **Clay Fingers, Chennai**, were invited to conduct a workshop on theatre, mask and model making, folk dance, folk music and painting. It was organized and sponsored by our Trustees Geetha and Suresh along with **Nizhal Organization**.

MSW students and teachers from **Don Bosco** had come for a day's visit to Puvudham and cooked lunch for the community which was followed by a grand show of colourful folk dances.

Banu Srikant from Bangalore came to know about Puvvidham through our friend and well-wisher, *Healer Baskar*. Srikant visited Puvvidham with his members to teach us making of **Bio-Enzymes and Pro-biotics**.

Apart from this we have a regular flow of individuals who are educators, farmers, practitioners of minimalist lifestyle or curious parents who want to understand how a space where children are not taught functions!

Extension work of Puvvidham

In June this year, we had started working with DHAN foundation, an organization working in the kalvarayan hills at Vellimalai through their volunteer Akshatha. Meenakshi went there twice to speak with the people about sustainable practices in farming and the importance of **soil and water conservation**. In October Geetha, Madhavaraj and Gunavathi went to Vellimalai to help start the activity of soil conservation by showing them how to mark and make trenches and bunds while leading the overflow of water to farm ponds.

Avvaiyar Government Higher Secondary school invited Puvvidham to demonstrate eco-friendly products. Gunavathi and Senbagam from Puvvidham spent two days teaching the adolescent girls the harmful effects of the use and throw sanitary pads both to the environment and their own health. Then they showed them how to make their own **reusable cloth sanitary pads**. The program was a huge success and was covered in the local news papers

Awards/Recognition to Puvvidham – *DHAN Mutual Movement* Conferred an Award for the education ideas evolved at Puvvidham and was received by Mrs. Meenakshi Umesh, the founder of Puvvidham, for 150th Gandhi Jayanthi Celebration held in Madurai on 2nd of October, 2018.

Madhavaraj, who is one of the trustees of Puvvidham trust, has been the administrator, accountant, manager, driver, mechanic and classroom facilitator for the last 18 years, was invited to Karur, by a group of people who were interested in Puvvidham's Sustainable lifestyle. He received an awarded after sharing his experiences of how his life evolved in Puvvidham.

Our new crafts workshop: Since our children learn mainly through working at different crafts like spinning, weaving, carpentry, clay work, origami etc, we needed to create more space to house these activities. So, we decided to construct a building last April. The building itself was taken on as an experiment in constructing without any cement. The vaults are built with local country bricks and soil mortar. The plastering is done with a lime and soil mortar. The external finishing is done with terracotta tiles with lime mortar. This

vault building is an attempt to make cheaper homes with mud and lime.

It has four vaults of 10 feet width and different lengths converging into a dome in the center. A lot of architecture and civil engineering students volunteered during the construction and learnt the technology while working hands on. The children of the 7th and 8th also spent time understanding why it would be more economical and provide vertical space where we can put an internal mezzanine floor with bamboo to store material etc. It is in the finishing stage.





Making the moulds for folk dance called poikaal kudirai aattam



my camera



yoga class

We are having our monthly parents camp *Return to the soil*, where eager parents who wish to understand the approach to children in Puvudham come to study the life and education here. We also have interested individuals who want to engage themselves in rural life and architecture. Sathya and Rameshwari have taken charge for conducting these camps.

Surabhi Nivas Hostel is a source of continuous surprise for visitors who come. The children cook, clean, manage the cattle and maintain the space with minimal assistance from the adults. This house of children is indeed a space where they learn to live together and work together to make life easier for each other.



Geetha, Jaya, Elango and Madi are the adults who support the children and provide for their needs and facilitate the planning of all the hostel activities. Mathi, Elango and Sathya have taken full charge of driving the children to school and dropping them back along with their regular classes.

Though Meenakshi has been on a sabbatical the school is functioning wonderfully and the credit goes to all the dedicated adults and the wonderful children!

Beautiful flowers will be found only if we walk in the wild!

We thank all our donors and friends for their continued support! Do look us up at www.puvidham.in or just come over!

If you would like to foster one or more children or contribute to any of the activities, contact puvidham@gmail.com

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