

EVENING STUDY CENTERS

DR. AMBEKDAR CULTURAL ACADEMY

Mandela Nagar, Madurai – 22, TN, India

ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021

1. THE CONTEXT

As we all know that India has been severely infected with the second deadly wave of Covid-19. In recent days, more than 4 lakhs new cases of Covid are being reported every day, and more than 2,15,000 people have lost their lives. Some medical experts strongly believe that the death toll must be higher than the number reported officially. Long queues of Covid patients in front of hospitals, patients waiting in ambulances, relatives crying for medical aids to their loved ones, shortage of beds with oxygen and mass cremations are witnessed everywhere in the country. It is observed that the second wave is ripping through small towns and villages of India. It was not the case when the first wave hit India. As of 21 May, 2021, India stands in the second place worldwide in case of new Covid cases. Among Indian states, Tamil Nadu is in the 4th place with many confirmed cases.

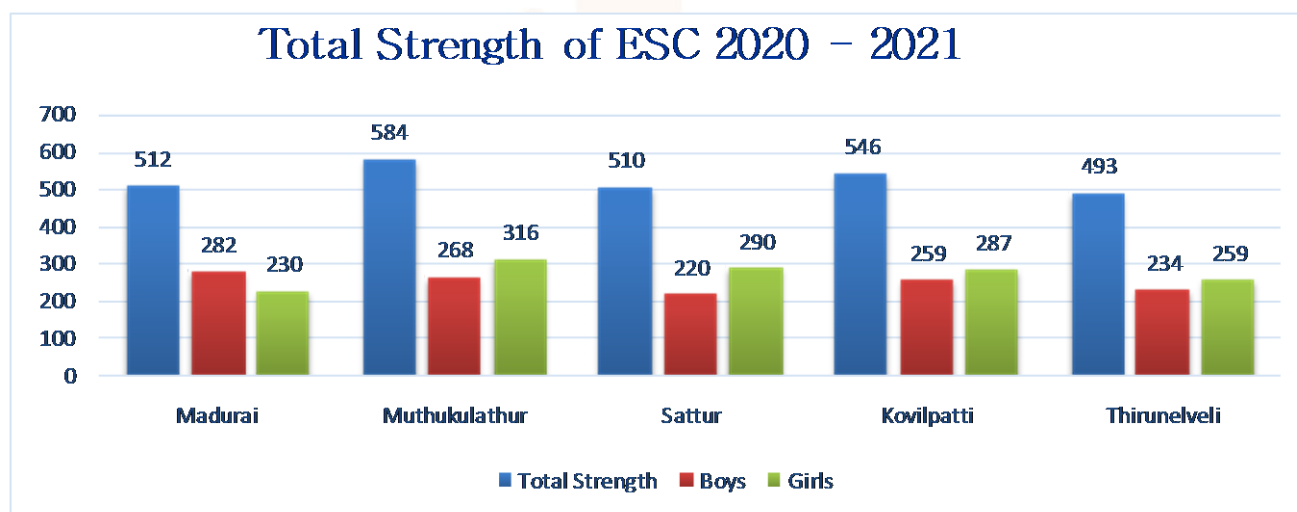
Tamil Nadu reported its first confirmed case of Covid-19 on 7th March, 2020. On 15th March, 2020, the State Government notified a series of instructions that restricted the movement of people in the state. These included – shutting down of establishments, such as educational institutions, theatres, malls, banning of inter-district travels, etc. Later this lockdown with many more restrictions had been extended up to November, 2020 by the subsequent orders. The prolonged lockdowns greatly affected the people from the lower Socio-economic Stratum (SES), especially the marginalized communities. Here it is to be noted that DACA, with the support of *Stiftung Jesuiten Weltweit*, Zurich and *Jesuit Madurai Province*, reached out to nearly 1500 families with food materials. The student community was the one which was indeed badly affected by the extended lockdowns.

The students below 9th standard missed out school based education for almost one full academic year (2020-2021). Even though, some schools conducted regular online classes, the students from rural villages could not fully benefit from that since, most of them could not have access to mobiles with online class facilities. Some had mobiles, but due to bad network they could not connect to the classes. Somehow they were all deprived from acquiring subject knowledge in the past one year. This in fact, made the students to develop a lack of interest for studies, unwanted habits and laziness on the whole. In this context, DACA decided to run its Evening Study Centres (ESCs) from 1st Oct, 2020 onwards and help the students with its three dimensional objectives – Educational, Personality and Community Developments. With regard to educational development, the children of our centres were constantly encouraged to take part in the regular classes, quiz contest and NMMS exams. For personality development, there were several activities systematically planned and well executed. To speed up the community development, the children were motivated to form Children Parliaments (CP), and get involved in village cleaning and greening activities.

2. ACTIVITIES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. REGULAR EVENT

As the schools remained closed for the students ranging from 1st to 9th Standard, our committed Animators began to run the centres from 1st Oct, 2020 onwards. Nearly 2645 students, ages 8 - 17 enrolled in our centres for 2020-2021. To enhance the learning of the students, the Animators were regular in conducting weekly tests to revise the syllabus part by part. On every Wednesday, they were taught spoken English and some basic vocabularies. Once in a month on an important occasion, parents and students meeting was effectively conducted in the presence of Zonal Coordinators. On such occasions, the students were given opportunity to exhibit their multiple talents and cultural skills in front of their parents.



2.2. NMMS EXAM

NMMS (National Means cum Merit Scholarship) exam is nationally sponsored scholarship exam, conducted by the Union Government of India to support the students financially to pursue their higher education. It is conducted every year in all the states and union territories of India. This year, DACA encouraged nearly 48 students from its ESCs and distributed them e-materials through social media to prepare and write the exam well. We hope and wish that all those who wrote exam will get scholarship by passing the exam.

2.3. FR. S. MARIANATHAN SJ AWARD

To motivate and encourage 10th and 12th Standard students of our centres to secure high marks in their Annual Government Public Exams (AGPE), we have announced Fr. S. Marianathan, SJ Award. Last academic year, two of our students were qualified to get this award by scoring more than 80 percentage of marks in the exam. They were namely, N. Monika Sri, 416/500 from Keelakannicheri Center, Muthukulathur Zone and P. Sethu Ramakrishnan, 407/500, from ChinnaKollapatti Center, Sattur Zone. Both of them were awarded with Fr. S. Marianathan, SJ award in Zonal level celebrations.



Presenting FR. S. MARIANATHAN'S AWARD

2.4. KNOWLEDGE FEST

DACA innovatively organizes 'Arivu Thiruvila' KNOWLEDGE FEST (Quiz Contest) as one of the major events every year. Due to the pandemic, we had planned to conduct Quiz Contest at Zonal level on 9th, 10th January and 14th March 2021. 76 study centers actively took part in it. The total number of participants was 675. The winners were honoured with special prizes, medals and certificates. All the participants of the contest were also rewarded with consolation prizes. The Animators of the winning centers were also awarded with special prizes. The judges were highly appreciative of the performance of our students and the commitment of our Animators. For more details please click on the YouTube link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guerU83HnWI>

SN	Date	Zone	No of Centres participated	No of Students participated	Winners
1	09.01.2021 Saturday	Kovilpatti	17	147	1. Thittankulam 2. Alaguneri 3. Vadakkupatti
2		Sattur	15	131	1. P. Thathampatti 2. Kunnur 3. Chathirapatti
3	10.01.2021 Sunday	Madurai	15	133	1. ChinnaUdaipu 2. KiriyaKawndanpatti 3. Kariyapatti
4		Muthukulathur	17	154	1. Kathayan 2. Gandhi Nagar 3. Keelakannicheri
5	14.03.2021 Sunday	Thirunelveli	12	110	1. Paruthipadu 2. Nochikulam 3. Kadmpankulam
		Total	76	675	



Quiz Contest 2020-2021

3. ACTIVITIES FOR THE PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

3.1. E-CULTURAL CONTEST

To enhance personality of the children, we organized e-Cultural contest systematically by reading the signs of time. There were five cultural competitions conducted online, namely, Drawing, Elocution, Story-telling, Singing and Still Acting (mime). Nearly 998 children actively took part in the event. This e-Cultural contest profoundly enhanced children's self-confidence and brought out their innate talents as well. Though all the cultural competitions were programmed online, the Animators and students could to make the best use of the current technology. For the Thirunelveli Zone alone, the cultural contest was conducted offline. Though it was a maiden attempt, the programme turned to be a great success. Students were creative enough to bring out the relevant themes through their various performances, and eventually they showed a progress in overcoming stage-fear and inferiority complex. For further details regarding the e-cultural contest, please have a click on this YouTube link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSsILrdPon0>

SN	Zone	No of Centers participated	No of participants	No of Prize Winners	Prize winning villages
1	Madurai	17	240	66	7
2	Muthukulathur	16	168	63	6
3	Sattur	14	158	55	10
4	Kovilpatti	17	203	60	5
5	Thirunelveli	19	229	68	8
Total		83	998	312	36

3.2. INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The International Women's day was meaningfully commemorated on 8th March, 2021 in all our centres. Many centres innovatively arranged a thematic debate on 'women empowerment'. Apart from debate, singing and dancing, awareness rallies were conducted in many villages. Surprisingly, many youngsters and parents actively took part in the events coordinated by our Animators and students. The elders of the village and the officials of local *Panchayath* were present for the celebration. On the same day, TN AICUF PAP (Political Awareness Program) team volunteered to stage a street play in 8

villages of Muthukulathur Zone to promote the electoral awareness. In a way, this program added its small contribution to bring a political change in the recently held State Election.



Commemorating International Women's Day in ESCs

3.3.STUDENTS' MAGAZINE – *Thalirgalin Puratchikathir*

The third issue of *Thalirgalin Purachikathir*, the children's magazine was successfully published in March, 2021 with the current themes, "COVID-19" and "SUPPORT TO FARMERS". The second theme was to highlight the long protest of the farmers in our country against the Union Government of India. The standard of the write-ups in the magazine has been improved gradually. Students and Animators are able to critically think and bring out their thoughts in a form of write-ups and drawings.



The 3rd Edition of Thalirgalin Purachikathir

3.4. DR. AMBEDKAR MONTH

The month of December is dedicated to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in order to mark his death anniversary (6th December). Throughout this month, everyday some hours were allotted to teach the famous quotes of Dr. Ambedkar and songs about him to the students. On 6th December, all our centres commemorated the death anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar in a meaningful way, and sentimentally expressed their gratitude to him by paying homage to his statue, garlanding his images and reflecting on his valuable contributions to our nation.



Celebrating the death Anniversary of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

3.5 ‘ONE-DAY TEACHER’ PROGRAMME

To excavate the leadership skills of our students ‘ONE-DAY TEACHER’ programme was successfully initiated at a centre level. It personally stimulates the children’s curiosity and enthusiasm to hone the personality skills. As per this programme, each day a student functions as teacher of the centre, and leads the group creatively and interactively. This practice helps the children to overcome the stage-fear gradually and know their strength.

4. ACTIVITIES FOR THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 CHILDREN PARLIAMENT

Children Parliament (CP) is a Democratic Children Movement which works for multiple developments of the Community as well as individuals. In February, the process of CP was well explained to the Animators and children to make solid changes in their villages. A week-long electoral procedure created a great enthusiasm among the children; in addition they had a student election at centre level to democratically choose able leaders among them. Then onwards, it has been remarkably vibrant in all our study centres. Once in a week, the elected children of CP come together to discuss various issues that are affecting them as well as the villagers, and come out with concrete plans to resolve them creatively. This practice demands the full involvement of the children in all the endeavours. Many action plans for the community development are discussed in the meeting and well executed in a prescribed time. Some of the activities they carry out are, making the villages clean, green and plastic-free, small savings, planting saplings, conducting rallies, etc. Through CPs, students join their hands with the villagers and act concretely for the welfare of the village.



Children Parliament & its various Initiatives



4.2. OBSERVANCE OF SIGNIFICANT DAYS

Observing the significant days of a month is a unique act of our centres which helps our children to understand the society better, and grow socially responsible and mature. It also keeps the centre alive and vibrant. Children's Day, Farmers' Day, Human Rights Day, Indian Constitution Day, National Science Day, Republic Day, World Water Day are the some of the days observed thematically and meaningfully in all our centres. On each significant day, special talks, awareness rallies, parents' meeting and cultural events are well planned and creatively executed.

4.3. PETITIONS DRAFTING AND HANDING OVER TO THE OFFICIALS

On Republic Day, 26th January, 2021, our children took initiatives to draft collective petitions demanding the fundamental necessities of their villages, especially repairing of the street lights, water tanks and clearing the drainage, etc. The written petition was signed by the villagers and handed over to the concerned local Panchayat officials. To our surprise, those petitions were considered instantly by the Government, and immediately responded to its demands. Nearly 8 villages succeeded in lodging the petitions to the concerned Government offices in this year, namely, Sattur BDO Colony, Cunnoor, Indira Nagar, Kusavankundu, A. Lakshmipuram, PeriyaThathampatti, PalaiyaAppaneri and Vadakkupatti. The unified efforts are very much appreciable.

4.4. SUPPORTING FARMERS' PROTEST

The Union Government of India passed Farm Bills, amending some provisions in three different Farm Acts which were unjust and unfavourable to the farmers. To repeal the Farm bills, lakhs and lakhs of

farmers from different parts of the country gathered together at Delhi, and protested non-violently against the Government. Realizing the importance of the farmers' protest, we wanted to stand with them in their protest for the welfare of our nation through the online protest. On Farmers' day (Pongal Day), our students, getting down to the paddy fields, dressed up as farmers, voiced out slogans for the rights of the farmers. The campaign in a village was recorded and sent to the Chief Coordinator, and then it was circulated in a wide range. The important as well as appreciative note was the collective involvement of the parents and village leaders in the protest. For the more information on the protest, please click on the YouTube link given here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NHYjtFdFJw>



In support of Indian Farmers



4.5. AWARDING THE ACHIEVERS

To motivate our individual Animators and centres, we have announced three different awards at zonal level. The awards are FOUNDER Award for the Best Animator, DACA Award for the Best Centre and AMBEDKAR Award for Socially Committed Animators. More than thirty nominees applied for these awards. A team of appointed experts went to the nominees' villages and evaluated their centres based on the prescribed guidelines to identify the Best Animators and Centres for the above said awards. On 18th April 2021, all the Animators gathered at DACA, Madurai for the Award Ceremony. Three distinguished guests, Mrs. Ponnuthai, the MLA Candidate of Thiruparankundram Constituency, Mr. Baskaran, the Labour Union Leader from Dindigul and Fr. S. Marianathan, SJ, the Managing Trustee of MJDPW Trust, were invited to the Ceremony. Their experiential sharing was very much stimulating and captivating. The guests were highly impressed with the activities of our study centres. For the academic year 2020 – 2021, totally 16 Animators were honoured with these awards. (4 – Best

Animator Awards, 3 – Best Center Awards and 9 – Ambedkar Awards). It was a fulfilling culmination of the academic year 2020 – 2021 where we acknowledged the committed service rendered by our Zonal Coordinators and Centre Animators. Here is a YouTube link for more information regarding the award ceremony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHfg9wRhTHQ>



Honouring the best Animators with Awards

5. CHALLENGES FACED

1. During the pandemic, the situation in the villages where we work was unsteady and uncertain, therefore to gather children in a common place was a herculean task. But later it was feasible gradually.
2. As the schools remained closed for the students between 1st and 9th Standard, it was very difficult to bring them regularly, and so the strength of students got fluctuated from time to time.
3. There was a lack of cooperation from the parents, because of the uncertainty and anxiety. In order to bridge the gap, parents' meeting was held occasionally at centre level. Later on, they understood our goal and objectives and supported all our endeavours.
4. In a given situation, many programmes were conducted at zonal level, and could not make state level competitions except a final programme. In addition, some programmes were also conducted online occasionally, and it will not be a case for the next year.
5. The movement of the people was restricted in a few number of villages, therefore, the village children could not participate in the offline competitions, especially Quiz and Cultural Contests.

6. SUCCESS STORIES

6.1. **KALAIARASAN**, 8th Std, Thittankulam, Kovilpatti Zone

I really made use of every opportunity given by DACA through various competitions. I was quite regular to the class, and I learned to attempt the NMMS exam first time with the help of our Animator. I was very happy when I won first prize in the quiz contest. This year, I had an activity based time table which interested me to make use of the time properly. I am very grateful to my Animator for all her support and DACA for all its encouragement.



6.2. KOWRI, 7th Std, Kallamanayakarpatti, Sattur Zone



This year, we had a different experience of learning in our study centre. In the beginning, the e-Contest was very interesting and useful for us to showcase our cultural talents. But the offline programme was really unifying and good to meet new friends from other villages. Our teacher was very encouraging, helpful and friendly in teaching the lessons and clarifying our doubts. What I liked most was the event showing our solidarity with the farmers through online campaign. I felt happy about my contribution. I attend class regularly and made best use of all the available resources. Thanks to DACA for its support.

6.3. MS. MALATHI, Animator, Kathayan, Muthukulathur Zone

The parents were very appreciative and supportive in conducting study centres, though the schools remained closed for the students. This year we had organised many activities, and engaged students in, not only academics, but also personality and community development. Children Parliament is something uniquely achieved this year. Students were very particular to come together once in a week and discuss for the welfare of the village. I took it as a golden opportunity to train my students, and it was a great joy for me. We also received Best Centre Award for our active participation in all the events.



I dedicate this award to all my students and village people for all their involvement and cooperation. We are enthused now to step forward in the forthcoming years. Thanks to DACA for all its guidance and motivation.

6.4. MR. DEIVARAJ, Zonal Coordinator, Sattur Zone



This is my third year of working as a DACA –ESC's Coordinator. I am very happy to see its gradual growth year by year. Though the schools remained closed, we began our classes from October onwards. While I visit the villages, many parents express their sense of appreciation to DACA for the risky initiatives during the pandemic. Luckily, we have no Covid cases or related problems till date. Students are very positive, and attend the classes regularly. I am happy to note that many villages energetically involve in the community development activities, compared to the previous year. DACA continuously gives action plans for the next phase of development in all the three fields.

We are eager to actualize them, and hoping for the best in our new endeavours.

Report By

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