

EVENING STUDY CENTERS

DR. AMBEDKAR CULTURAL ACADEMY

Mandela Nagar, Madurai – 22, Tamil Nadu, India

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01. THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

The position of Dalit Communities as untouchables in the caste structure was the most important factor that historically led to their exclusion from education in the Indian society. At the time of India's independence in the 1940s, Dalits who today constitute 16.6% of Indian population (according to 2011 census) had significantly lower literacy and school enrolment rates as compared to the rest of the population. In the post Independence decades, constitutional provisions, policy thrusts in education as well as parental aspirations for the education of their children increased the proportion of Dalit children in schools. However at the close of the last century, it was found that barely 48% of Dalit Children had completed the primary schooling. Even today there is not much change in the percentage. There are several factors that lead to increase in the dropout rates of the Dalit Children.

Dalit children in rural India particularly in the remote villages of Tamil Nadu state have mostly limited access and that to only to the Government schools or the SC/ST (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe) welfare-board schools. The teachers in the schools mainly belong to the non-Dalit Communities. Their approach to the Dalit children is mostly coloured with dominant caste ideologies. While teaching, the teachers of upper caste community give more attention to the children of their own caste or the castes of their rank. They normally don't bother whether the deserving children understand the subject or not. At the same time, the Dalit Children also don't ask questions or clarification in the subjects taught, since they are scared that teachers would scold, beat or insult and peers will make fun of them for what they do not know¹.

The participation of Children in co-curricular activities like sports, cultural events, etc is an important element for developing their personality and self-confidence. However the Dalit children in most of the schools are deprived of this important sphere of school life. The dominant caste teachers usually choose the Dalit children not for participating in co-curricular activities but compel them to do inhuman activities like cleaning the staff toilets and the school.²

Moreover, government schools and SC/ST welfare-board schools have poor infrastructures, less number of teachers and lack of resources, etc. There are a good number of

¹ Geetha B. Nambissan, exclusion and Discrimination in Schools: Experiences of Dalit Children, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and UNICEF, 2009.

² <https://www.dtnext.in/News/TamilNadu/2020/02/22024716/1216463/HM-suspended-for-forcing-Dalit-girls-to-clean-toilet.vpf>

schools where toilets are either not available or in very poor condition or dirty and all these constraints limit the children from achieving the purpose.

The Dalit children miss suitable environment for studies not only in the schools but also in their own homes. Many Dalit children in Tamil Nadu are not able to devote quality time towards studies at their homes due to various limitations. The lack of physical facilities, unhealthy living conditions, congested homes and the emotional stress brought about by poverty; keep the children distracted and occupied. Their parents are usually illiterate or poorly schooled and hence are not able to accompany them in their pursuit of knowledge. These are some of the painful factors that de-motivate the Dalit children to stay at school and pursue their education.

DR. AMBEDKAR CULTURAL ACADEMY (DACA) which has the motto of *‘knowledge is power’* is resolved to impart the basic education to Dalit children in south Tamil Nadu who are deprived of education for centuries and to reduce their dropout rates. To achieve this task, DACA with the generous support of Leopold Bachmann Stiftung and Stiftung Jesuiten Weltweit, zürich has established 97 Evening Study Centers in 6 Southern districts of Tamil Nadu state.



Inauguration of DACA's ESC at Vadakuppatti Village, Tirunelveli Zone

02. AIM OF THE PROJECT

To give quality primary education to rural Dalit children by providing them with suitable ambiance to study and develop various life skills and to motivate them to increase self-esteem to continue their studies and compete with other privileged children.

03. OBJECTIVES

DACA with its motto of *Knowledge is Power* has progressively envisioned the Evening Study Centers (ESCs) with three dimensional developments namely **Education, Personality** and **Community**. All our plans and activities for ESCs are based on these three objectives.

04. ACTIVITIES PLANNED

4.1. Action Plan for Educational Development

1. To reach out 100 marginalized Dalit villages and support nearly 2500 school-going children (25 children in each village) in their primary education.
2. To help the children initially to familiarize answers for 1000 general knowledge questions through a Quiz competition.
3. To honour the top rankers of our centers with Fr. Francis P. Xavier, SJ Award in order to encourage their academic excellence.
4. In order to inspire the 10th and 12th class students to score high marks in Govt. public exam, Fr. S. Marianathan, SJ Award has been established.

4.2. Action Plan for Personality Development

1. To provide space for the children on Fridays and Saturdays to exhibit their cultural talents on particular themes and to produce creative works for the students' Magazine.
2. To conduct zonal level cultural contests where the children could exhibit their cultural skills and talents and grow in self-confidence.
3. To identify student writers and give them special trainings at zonal level to improve their writing skills.
4. To bring out a quarterly *student magazine*.
5. To form Children Parliament in all our centers in order to motivate our children to become responsible future leaders.

4.3. Action Plan for Community Development

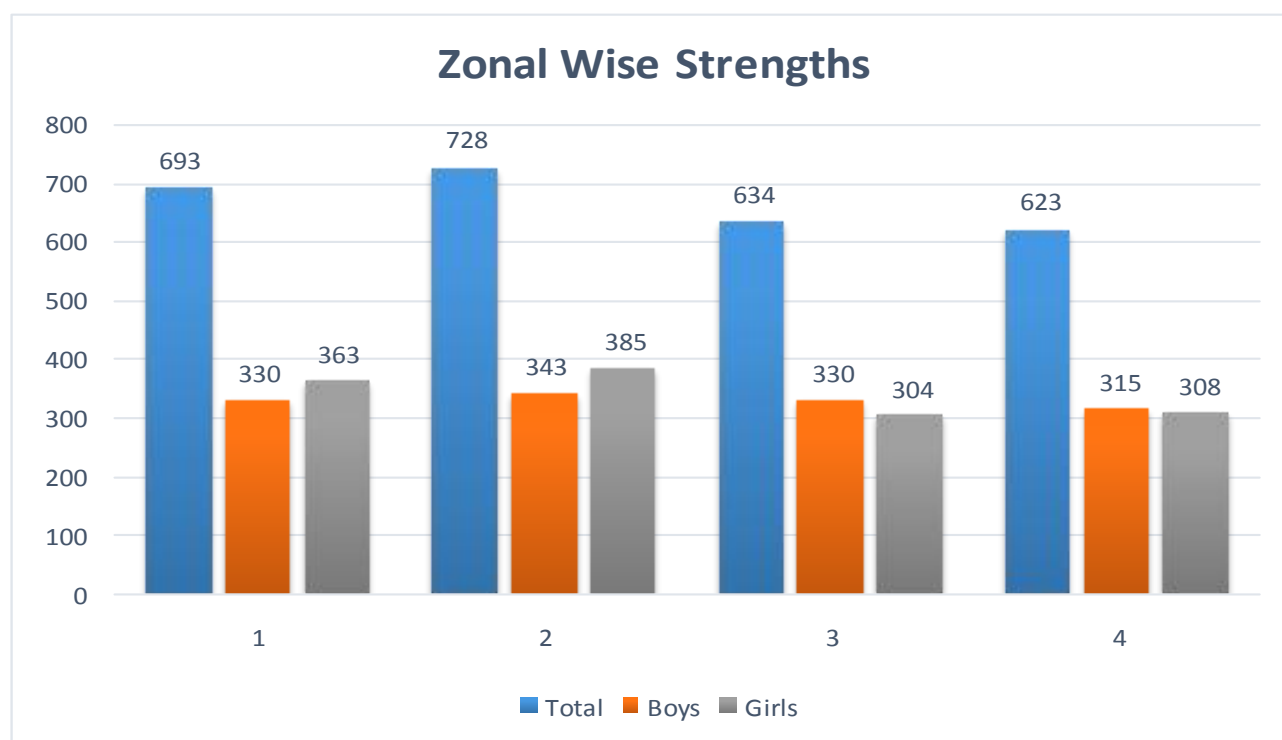
1. To analyze the village problems and represent them to local Govt. officials with proper signed petitions seeking solutions.
2. To organize rallies so as to create awareness in the villages on preservation of eco system, rain water harvesting, importance of education and other concerns.
3. To plant at least five tree-saplings in each village in a year and take care of them with the support of the children
4. To honour with awards those centers which maintain their village green and clean.

5. To commemorate the significant days that are celebrated nationally and locally.
6. To provide cadre training to the animators for drafting petitions.

05. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

5.1. FORMATION OF STUDY CENTERS

DACA with the support of its committed Zonal Coordinators and Animators identified 97 educationally backward Dalit villages and established 97 Evening Study Centers. These centers are spread across 6 districts of South Tamil Nadu (Madurai, Ramnad, Sivagangai, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and Virudhunagar). These six districts are clubbed under four zones namely Madurai, Muthukulathur, Sattur and Tirunelveli. Each Zone is coordinated effectively by a Zonal Coordinator. Nearly 2,678 Dalit Children (1318 boys and 1360 girls) have been enrolled so far and are making use of the centers to sit, study and do their home-works. Each center has a well motivated animator to accompany the children in their studies and help them pick up skill formation for life. The below chart represents the Zonal wise strength that follows this order 1. Madurai, 2. Muthukulathur, 3. Sattur and 4. Tirunelveli.



5.2. EDUCATIONAL AWARDS:

DACA has announced two different awards namely Dr. Francis P. Xavier, SJ Award and Fr. S. Marianathan, SJ Award to motivate the children in ESCs and to excel academically.

5.2.1. DR. FRANCIS P. XAVIER, SJ AWARD

Rev. Dr. Francis P. Xavier, SJ who is a Dalit by birth, has proved himself second to none in academics, science and administration, etc. DACA has announced an award in his name in order to inspire the young minds of Dalit Community to aspire for greater things in life. This award is given to the first three rank holders of school exams – quarterly and half yearly exams. We are glad to inform that 141 children received this award in the quarterly exam, whereas in the half yearly exam the number of awardees has been increased up to 184. We hope this award would encourage many more children to do their studies better.



Distribution of FR. FRANCIS P. XAVIER, SJ AWARD

5.2.2. FR. S. MARIANATHAN, SJ AWARD

Fr. S. Marianathan, SJ who is a Jesuit of Madurai Province strongly believes that only through education Dalits could break the chain of centuries old oppression and come up in life. He himself has helped many Dalit students to pursue their higher studies. DACA has announced an award in his name to motivate the children of classes 10th and 12th to secure top ranks in the Government Public Exams.

5.3. KNOWLEDGE FEST 2019

As part of educational development, ‘**Knowledge Fest – 2019**’ was systematically planned and organized through a Quiz contest with the aim of orienting our children to have a comprehensive knowledge in their subjects. All the animators of our centers took efforts to collect questions from the school text books of classes 6th to 10th. The core team of ESCs jointly worked on the collected questions to design a quiz study material covering one thousand questions with answers. The quiz manual extensively covered the areas like

Literature, Science, Social Science, General Knowledge, Inventions, Abbreviations, B.R. Ambedkar, Sports and Significant countries, important years and dates. The text was distributed to the centers in the beginning of September. One and a half month was allotted for the children to familiarize its content. The zonal level quiz contest was conducted in the month of October, 2019, where nearly 764 children participated. The state level contest for the winners of zonal contest was held in November, 2019 where nearly 92 children took part. The winners and participants were honoured with prizes and certificates. The knowledge fest 2019 indeed increased the self-esteem of our children to a certain extent.

S.N	Date	Zone	Participants	Winners
1	13.10.2019	Madurai	209	Chinnaudaippu & Kusavankundu
2	13.10.2019	Muthukulathur	181	Kathayan & Sambakulam Anna nagar
3	20.10.2019	Sattur	162	Periyathathampatti, Chathirapatti
4	20.10.2019	Tirunelveli	212	Alaguneri, TherkuThittankulam
S.N	Date	State	Participants	Winners
1	24.11.2019	Tamil Nadu	92	Alaguneri, Kathayan, Vidivelli Girls' home



Zonal Level Quiz Contest



Honouring the Winners of Quiz 2019

5.4. DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY AND GAMES MATERIALS

Before imparting education, it is imperative to secure the basic requirements of a child. After establishing 97 study centers, DACA has provided them with required materials for their better functioning. Altogether, six materials were distributed to all the study centers respectively to fulfill the academic as well as physical necessities. A Blackboard (size width 4 ft, height 3 ft) was given to all the centers with the purpose of writing every day English vocabulary and a *Thirukkural* (A Classic Tamil text consisting of 1330 couplets dealing with life values). It is also used to clarify doubts in mathematics, to conduct group tests, to encourage drawings and so on. To promote physical exercises

among the children in the evenings and weekends, a Volley ball, a pair of Tennikoits and a couple of cricket balls were supplied to all the centers. Since all the study centers are practically located in remote villages, these materials are very useful and supportive to the children's education and enhance other skills.



Distribution of study and games materials

06. PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

6.1. CHILDREN PARLIAMENT

Children Parliament (CP) is nothing but a democratic children movement which works for an ideal world wherein the children grow up in an environment of love, respect and dignity. CP is quite vibrant in all our study centers. Once in a fortnight the elected children of CP come together to discuss various issues that are affecting them as well the villagers and come out with concrete plans to resolve them creatively. A few centers have conducted so far more than 20 meetings of CP. CPs have played a vital role in making the villages clean and green. It has encouraged small savings among the children. It also in certain villages reduced the dropout rates. Through CPs, students not only grow in leadership skills but also started owning their communities and villages.



Children presenting a petition to VAO



Children Parliament at Alanganoor

6.2. CULTURAL CONTEST - 2020

A Cultural contest was organized in the zonal level in order to create a platform for the children to demonstrate their multi cultural skills and talents. We are happy to inform that nearly 947 children made proper use of the contest to display their discovered talents. The total beneficiaries of the Cultural Contest 2020 are **947** (Madurai: 279, Sattur: 191, Muthukulathur: 240 and Tirunelveli: 237). The children performed four different cultural events namely Thematic Skit, Folk Dance, Singing and Public speech. Altogether, 312 winners were honored with attractive prizes. For many children, it was the first time to be on stage and perform in front of a large audience. The stage performance indeed boosted their self-esteem.



Cultural Contest at Muthukulathur

Honouring the Winners at Madurai

6.3. FRIDAY EVENT

Every Friday is meant for cultural performances in all our centers. The children are given a particular topic on the first day of the week. They prepare various cultural events on the given topic during the week and perform the same on Friday evening in front of the villagers. This practice helps them to sharpen their cultural skills and talents and nurture their self-assurance. The villagers also grow in their commitment to educate their children. We are proud to say that this 'Friday event' has encouraged our children to take part in the District and zonal level educational and cultural competitions and add feather to their cap with colourful medals and certificates.

6.4. STUDENT MAGAZINE

As part of the Personality Development, DACA brings out a children magazine called "**Thalirkalin Puratchi Kathir**" which means *revolutionary rays of the shoots*. The first magazine was released in October, 2019. The next edition is in progress and yet to be published in March. We plan to bring out 4 editions a year. This magazine provides an

opportunity for our children to express their critical thinking and creative ideas in the form of writings, art and paintings. We are sure this initiative would help our children to inculcate the habit of reading and reflecting.



Children's Magazine



Children at Keelakannicheri Village

07. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

7.1. CREATION OF GREEN & PLASTIC-FREE VILLAGES

Given the present ecological crisis and environmental degradation going Green and Clean is the need of the hour. Many of our animators together with our children have taken constant effort in creating green and plastic free villages at a micro level. We are glad to announce that nearly 29 villages have initiated to eradicate plastics in their villages and create green and clean villages by planting a number of trees; many centers have organized rallies on auspicious days to sensitize the villagers regarding the protection of *common home*. The children parliament of a village called Vadakkupatti, Tirunelveli Zone drafted a petition and submitted to the local Village Administrative Officer (VAO) and petitioned him to clean the marshy land in the center of their village. The local government took immediate action on the petition and appreciated the goodness of our children.



Cleaning Krishnapuram Village



Greening Keelakannicheri Village

7.2. AWARDING THE ACHIEVEMENTS

In order to motivate the animators and children, two awards have been announced by DACA namely the **FOUNDER AWARD** for the Best Animator and the **DACA AWARD** for the Best Center. Altogether 40 centers were nominated for these awards. A team of appointed experts went to the nominees' villages and evaluated their centers based on the given guidelines to identify an animator and a center for the above said awards. For the year 2019-20 the Founder Award was given to MS. JEYA CHITRA, Animator of Pitchaithalaivanpatti village and the DACA AWARD to Mr. Ashok Kumar, Vadakkupatti village. The awards were distributed on 25th Jan, 2020 on the occasion of DACA DAY. We hope these two animators would become a source of inspiration for others to work hard for the welfare of the children in their respective centers.



FOUNDER AWARD

DACA AWARD

08. CHALLENGES FACED

1. It is very difficult to identify the self-motivated animators and coordinators. Therefore, we could not get good results in few centers.
2. Gathering all the 97 Animators from four different zones every month is a herculean task, therefore, it is planned to gather them thrice in a year.
3. Many villages have no proper common space like Community Halls or Schools to conduct the centers. Therefore we are forced to run the centers at the most spacious house of the village. During the season of rain, it is difficult to run the centers.
4. Our animators lack techniques and methodologies to handle the younger generations. We are planning to evolve a new pedagogy of training animators.
5. The children need extra trainings to improve their writing skills.

09. SUCCESS STORIES



IRULRAJAN
Class 10, Karisalkulam Center
Madurai Zone

DACA's Evening study center is very helpful for me. After joining the study centers, I score high marks in the school exams and many of us complete our home-works daily. Another important point is, along with subject knowledge, we also learn various skills such as folk dance, singing, skit, public speech, etc. Learning such extra skills shape our personality too. The quiz competition really helped us to enhance our academic depth, in addition to that, the 1000 GK questions were a great help for us to prepare for the talent exams conducted in the district level.

In fact, ESC creates a platform to display our talents both intellectually and culturally through events like Quiz and Cultural competitions. I also feel very happy, when I am honored with prizes for these efforts. This year, there was a special activity in our center regarding the community development. We are constantly eradicating plastics and planting many trees in order to make our village clean and green. Knowledge fest really deepened our intellectual curiosity. Our animator is very helpful and friendly in teaching the lessons and clarifying doubts. I promise to make use of all the opportunities offered by ESC.



MEENA
Class 10, Periya thathampatti Center
Sathur Zone



MUTHUSELVI
Class 11, Vadakkupatti Center
Tirunelveli Zone

After joining DACA's ESC in my village, I am able to score first rank in the class both in quarterly and half yearly examinations. I have been elected as a chief minister in the Children Parliament. This democratic system helps me personally to enhance my leadership skills. So far, we have conducted 21 meetings and for the welfare of our village, implemented many initiatives like eradication of plastic, cleaning the public places etc. The cultural contest was indeed remarkable. We got attractive prizes for our hard work and practice. I got first prize in speech competition and it was an unforgettable moment to deliver a thematic speech. All these achievements were made possible for us because of the ESC. Mr. Ashok Kumar, our Animator is very encouraging and active.

It is indeed a joy to be an animator of DACA's ESC. There are 65 students in my center. I train them in all the areas such as discipline, education, cultural arts etc., I also learn to be a good guide to the students. I use to get feedback from the students on regular basis to make my center creative and take it forward. I do conduct special classes for the students of classes 10th and 12th, who are going to write their government public exams. I feel content and much energized while supporting the education of my children.



BALA MURUGAN
Animator, Keelakannicheri Center
Muthukulathur Zone

I am going to complete my 4th year as an animator of DACA'S ESC. Every year I improve myself to be a better guide for the students. After joining the ESC, I am motivated to be a



JEYA CHITRA
Animator, Pitchaithalaivanpatti Center
Tirunelveli Zone

socially service-minded animator. With the help of my children, I have organized a couple of rallies to create awareness among our people on various issues. To make the center more alive, we do celebrate significant days of a month in a creative manner. All my children have developed a habit of planting trees in the available public places of our village to commemorate their birthdays. I am glad to inform that we were the first center to inaugurate a library in our village in the name of Dr. Antony Raj, SJ to cultivate reading habits among our children. As students get good ranks in their school, their parents feel proud to send their children to our center. I am also so happy to see my students grow in academics. The saving system is well appreciated by the students and their parents as well. It is true that I came to know more about myself through the activities of DACA.

I came to know more about the importance of education through my office as a coordinator of a Zone. As part of my job, I have learnt to handle the current generation and encourage the animators whenever I pay a visit to their villages. It is a new experience for me to interact with the students and animators and listen to their feedback. Organizing monthly meetings and the two mega events (Quiz & Cultural competitions) gave me a variety of experiences. Together with my zonal children, I am grateful to DACA for providing us with lots of educational benefit.



UDHAYAMOORTHY
Coordinator
Muthukulathur Zone

10. THANK YOU

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude and appreciation to all our **LOVING FRIENDS** and **WELL-WISHERS** of DACA for your timely support and financial assistance towards the establishment of ESCs in 97 remote Dalit villages of Tamil Nadu State.

It is your generosity which has nurtured nearly 2600 withered buds of Dalit Community to grow into fruit bearing trees. Your support and love not only helped the formation of our children but also encouraged and motivated us to be committed in our mission of empowering the Dalits.

On behalf of DACA Jesuits and the children of its ESCs, we make a kind request for your continued support and guidance to DACA in the years to come.



Thanks to
Leopold Bachmann Stiftung & Stiftung Jesuiten Weltweit

Report by

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