

Saraswathy Scholarship Program

Update – January 2023



Saraswathy Illam

Ramanalayam



Introduction

Saraswathy Illam – Ramanalayam is a Spiritual day care facility for Elders and Vulnerable citizens who live in the vicinity of the Ashram in Kadduvan, Sri Lanka. Following the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, our activities have a spiritual foundation.

As a center that promotes meditative and dharmic practices, we aim to provide

a sanctuary in an area that had seen almost 3 decades of war and destruction.



The Saraswathy Scholarship Program, initiated in February 2021, has now entered its third year. The program provides incentives to primary school going children from schools in the vicinity of Saraswathy Illam - Ramanalayam in the Tellippallai division, within a 4 km radius from the Ashram. In 2023, we are offering scholarships to 210 children from 5 schools with generous support from sponsors across the world. The schools selected are Erlalai American Mission Tamil Mixed school in Erlalai, Myliddy South Gnanodaya Mahavidyalayam in Kadduvan, Pon Paramananthar Maha Vidyalayam in Kurumbasiddy, Varuththalaivilan American Mission Tamil Mixed school in Varuththalaivilan and Kattuvanpulam Mahavidyalayam in Kadduvan. Of these, 28, currently in grade 5, will leave school in March 2023. Invariably, this area, where all these schools are, was affected severely by the war that ravaged the country from the 1970s until 2009 and much of the area was released for public re-settlement only since 2016. In particular, Myliddy South Gnanodaya Vidyalayam was only released in 2019 and the school was rebuilt in 2020. All these schools (except Kadduvanpulam) have only up to grade 5 in their curriculum. The number of primary students in these schools vary from 25 to 85. Most families of students studying in these schools are resettled families, after 30 plus years of displacement. The parents are largely daily wage earners and most struggle to meet their household expenses from the wages earned.

Through this scholarship program, children targeted are attested by the Village Head (Grama Niladhari) as living in low-income families, families with single parents or those without a family member to look after them. One of the specific criteria for selection under this program is, even if the child is not a high academic performer, he or she should have an acumen and interest for education, and is capable of better performance if his or her economic situation improved.

Education in a changing environment

The education in the country overall, suffered significantly last year, due to the prevalence of COVID-19, an economic crisis and fuel shortage, forcing the schools to shut down intermittently. The crisis continues to strangle the population with high inflation and lack of

commodities. Educational materials, uniforms and private tuitions have all increased in cost impacting heavily on the household expenses. As a result of the partial closure, the academic year for students has again been extended until March 2023. New intake of students, thus, will be delayed until April 2023. The Scholarship will be provided to nearly all students supported in 2022. While those in grade 5 will leave the schools in March 2023, the remaining students and the new intake of grade 1 students will continue to get their scholarships until December 2023.

The Principals of all schools have unanimously told us that the Scholarship Program has improved school attendance of students and their overall academic performances. Children who had previously refused to attend schools because they were singled out by peers due to poor clothing, lack of note books and educational materials (mainly due to the non-affordability by parents to buy these), were less ashamed to come to school. The neater attire also gave them a greater sense of dignity and self assurance.

Some statistics of the program

For 2023, the program commenced in January this year and was inaugurated with visits to each of the schools on the 5th of the month. The children and a parent or guardian representing the child were invited to the gathering and were provided the first tranche of the scholarship with a full explanation on the program delivery. On the advice of the Scholarship Committee and the Principals of the schools, the scholarship amount was decided as Rs 1,500 per month for grade 1 & 2 students, Rs 2,000 for grade 3 & 4 students and Rs 2,500 for grade 5. The parents were instructed that the funds could be spent under 3 categories only, educational materials such as books and exercise notes, uniforms or related materials and private coaching at the recommendation of the school or teacher. Receipts have to be maintained by the parents and presented to authenticate expenses. In each subsequent month, the money expended is topped up to ensure each student had a total allocated monthly amount for the following month's expenses. Each school allocated a teacher in charge of monitoring and collation of information.

Number of scholars in the five schools

School Name	Total students	Class breakdown
Erlalai American Mission Tamil Mixed School	37	Grade 1: 8 Grade 2: 7 Grade 3: 4 Grade 4: 8 Grade 5: 6 Grade 5+: 4
Myliddy South Gnanodaya Vidyalayam	27	Grade 1: 8 Grade 2: 5 Grade 3: 6 Grade 4: 5 Grade 5: 0 Grade 5+: 3
Pon Paramananthar Maha Vidyalayam	44	Grade 1: 8 Grade 2: 5 Grade 3: 9 Grade 4: 8 Grade 5: 8 Grade 5+: 6
Varuththalaivilan American Mission Tamil Mixed School	58	Grade 1: 12 Grade 2: 7 Grade 3: 12 Grade 4: 11 Grade 5: 6 Grade 5+: 10
Kadduvanpulam Maha Vidyalayam	41	Grade 1: 7 Grade 2: 5 Grade 3: 7 Grade 4: 7 Grade 5: 10 Grade 5+: 5
TOTAL (Including 3 miscellaneous scholarships) <i>(5+ students are those in grade 5, but will leave in March 2023.</i>	210	Grade 1: 43 Grade 2: 29 Grade 3: 38 Grade 4: 39 Grade 5: 29 Grade 5+: 28

Donors, Disbursements and Reporting

To date, we are in receipt of Rs. 4,046,307 in total from donors in Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, USA and Canada. Of the five of the large donors are, from London **Mr Karunakaran Kuddythamby** in memory of his parents Mr Kanapathypillai Kuddythamby and Mrs Rasammah Kuddythamby and **Mr Sivananthan Sangarapillai** and family in remembrance of their parents Mr Sabapathipillai Sangarapillai and Mrs Nagaratnam Sangarapillai. A group of senior citizens from Canada who collectively identify themselves under the name of ***Friendly Hands***, **Mr Sri Haran** from USA and **Dtk Dr Ravindran Jega** and his students from Malaysia are the other three major donors. Based on the scholarship amounts received and the number of children allocated, the total amount of anticipated funds required for the scholarship for the year 2023 is Rs 4,075,000.

For January 2023, the following amounts have been distributed to the schools:

Erlalai American Mission Tamil Mixed School: Rs 50,500

Myliddy South Gnanodaya Maha Vidyalayam: Rs 34,000

Pon Paramananthar Maha Vidyalayam: Rs 63,000

Varuththalaivilan American Mission Tamil Mixed School: Rs 84,500

Kattuvanpulam Maha Vidyalayam: Rs 57,000

Miscellaneous Scholarships: Rs 7,000

From the carry forward of funds from 2022, we have agreed with each of the 5 schools to pay for the mock scholarship exam papers published by Thinakural Newspaper, within the Northern Province to students of grades 4 and 5. Although the Saraswathy Scholarship Program is extended to a limited number of students, the payment for the scholarship exam papers will be extended to all students in those grades benefiting a greater number of students. In preparing for these exams, students are eligible to apply for Government Scholarships in grade 6 and also seek admission in more popular schools.

Scholars from Gnanodaya Maha Vidyalayam, Myliddy South



In the course of this month (January 2023) we will provide each of the donor the details of children (or child) being sponsored, including their photographs. With increased numbers of scholarships, schools are still in the process of allocating scholarships and not all the

photographs of students have been received. Into the year, we plan to give a progress of the program on a quarterly basis as Fact Sheets. During the year, it is quite natural that some changes in students will happen, either due to lack of cooperation of parents in the program or because of students moving schools. When students change, donors will be informed of the changes and reasons.

Distribution of funds in 2022

In 2022, a total of Rs. 2,724,559 was expended for the Saraswathy Scholarship Program. Of this, Rs 2,338,954 was distributed to schools as scholarships, Rs 87,500 was distributed as miscellaneous scholarships, Rs 145,000 was paid as allowances for staff who administered the program and Rs 153,105 was expended miscellaneous expenses including transport, printing and stationery.

A balance of about Rs 385,000 is being carried forward to 2023 and will be utilized for additional scholarships and adding value to the education program in the five schools selected.

Scholarships Distribution for each school in 2022.

School name	Disbursed amount in Jan 2022 (SLR)
Erlalai American Mission School	Rs. 429,222
Myliddy South Gnanodaya Vidyalayam	Rs. 277,848
Pon Paramananthar Maha Vidyalayam	Rs. 514,271
Varuththalaivilan American Mission School	Rs. 683,095
Kadduvanpulam Maha Vidyalayam	Rs. 434,518
Miscellaneous Scholarships	Rs. 87,500
Institutional, Stationery and Miscellaneous	Rs. 298,105
TOTAL	Rs. 2,724,559

Scholars from Varuthalaivilan American Mission Tamil Mixed School



Scholars from Pon Paramananthar School, Kurumbasiddy



Scholars from Kattuvanpulam Maha Vidyalayam



Scholars at Erlalai American Mission Tamil Mixed School

