

# THE ANNUAL REPORT (2021-2022)

## VIDIVELLI GIRLS' HOME

DR. AMBEDKAR CULTURAL ACADEMY  
Mandela Nagar, Madurai – 22, MDU Province, India



The inmates of VIDIVELLI GIRLS' HOME for 2021-2022

### VISION

*To enable the children deprived and downtrodden to live a dignified life,  
to instill in them a hope of a bright future and  
to empower them to work for a just social order.*

## 1 THE CONTEXT

India had become a country with the second longest COVID-19 pandemic-linked school closure in the world — next to Uganda. According to the United Nations’ report, the school closure in India was estimated approximately 82 weeks, with some intermittent classes in-between. Many states of India reopened schools in the month of July, 2021, following the ebbing of the third wave. However, the months-long closures in 2020 and 2021 have made a devastating impact on the academic learning of children, their socialization and mental and physical well-beings.

One of the most profound impacts of the school closure is the loss of interest for learning, which indeed affects several students, pushing them back to months, if not years, in their academics. S. Gokulakrishnan, a mathematics teacher in Tamil Nadu’s Tiruvallur district says in an interview, “for average students, who are from poor families, the continuity in learning is important. The school closures de-motivated the children and have made it hard to sustain their interest.”<sup>1</sup>

The school closure has not just affected the children’s learning alone, but also affected them in all aspects of their lives. During the isolation period, there has been a rise in the number of children who have developed anxiety or depression, technology-related psychological and behavioral problems, etc. Moreover during the continued lockdowns, there has been a rise in child labourers, child marriages, school dropouts and children becoming anemic. The children belonging to marginalized communities of India, in particular in the state of Tamil Nadu, were worst affected by the prolonged lockdowns. Dr. Ambedkar Cultural Academy (DACA) with its collaborators has resolved to support the Dalit girls and children through its VIDIVELLI GIRLS’ HOME and EVENING STUDY CENTRES to overcome lockdown related problems and continue to pursue their education in a dignified ambiance and manner.

## 2 THE ACADEMIC YEAR (2021-2022)

The regular classes for the academic year 2021 - 2022 in the state of Tamil Nadu commenced for the school and the college students on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2021. As per the direction of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the state government, the VIDIVELLI GIRLS’ HOME of DACA was reopened on 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2021. Both the school and the college going girls were admitted at our Home to pursue their studies and they were altogether 165 in number from 9 districts.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/education/indias-prolonged-school-closure-has-set-children-back-by-years-academically-and-taken-a-toll-on-their-wellbeing-emotionally/article65048342.ece>

Rev. Fr. Antony Raj, SJ, the strenuous fighter for Dalits and Founder of our Home has visualized that 'Education is the only powerful weapon to break the social discrimination, prevailing in our country'. Dr. Ambedkar Cultural Academy (DACA) gives this powerful weapon to its inmates through various studies and cultural activities.

Above all, DACA ensures safe and comfortable environment to the girls so that they can grow, not only in effective learning but also in self-confidence, self-assessment and self-discipline.

In addition, the life in DACA's Home allows students to interact with their colleagues and peers, make friends and develop into good human beings, capable of independent judgment and competent in handling the day-to-day pressures of life. Some students may leave their homes for the first time but they are reassured that DACA would eventually turn out to be their home away from home.



The Inaugural function of Vidivelli Girls' Home

### 3 THE LIFE IN VIDIVELLI GIRLS' HOME

Every day, our girls get up at 5 am and then after fresh-up they go for 15 minutes of Yoga and Meditation, where they feel really refreshed for the day. They spend at least 4 hours a day for their studies. Ms. Josephine, Ms. Nathiya and Ms. Christy are the care-takers of the Home. They assist and motivate the girls in their studies and formation by creating learning environment and opportunities. In the school campus, our girls are looked after by Mrs. Esther, the mentor of our girls. She accompanies them by her guidance, encouragement and emotional support. Every day in the evening hours our girls are either engaged in farm work, games or in martial arts like Karate, Taekwondo and Silambam. On holidays, special classes were organized on various subjects so that they could easily understand the subjects without

any difficulty. During week-ends weekly tests were being conducted in order to improve their academic knowledge.

### **3.1 CHILDREN LEADERS:**

We are proud to inform you that our Home was completely maintained by our girls. They keep the Home and its campus clean and tidy. As per the direction of the management they function through various departments like Education, Culture, Sports, Farming, Food, Water, Health and Electricity. All these departments were headed by volunteers. By involving themselves in various activities as a team, they were mutually grown in the leadership qualities as well as in the human maturity and also they have developed healthy interpersonal relationship with others.

### **3.2. THE JESUIT WORLDWIDE LEARNING (JWL):**

In addition to formal subject learning, our college going girls who are above 18 years old, are taught English through the Global English Language (GEL) Programme of Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL). As an outcome of this course, they have cultivated self interest for language. This programme indeed helped them to develop English knowledge and self-confidence. Nearly 16 girls appeared for A-2 level exam held in the month of March, 2022 and in which 11 girls have passed with more than 60 percent of marks. Fr. Francis P. Xavier, SJ encouraged them by distributing Certificates on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2022, during the first year death anniversary of Rev. Fr. Antony Raj, SJ.



**Fr. Francis P. Xavier distributed Certificates to the JWL Students**

### **3.3 THE MOTIVATIONAL TRAININGS**

To inculcate good values and sound characters, we have organized a series of trainings in various fields. A team consisting of experts from the field of psychology, sociology and law has been helping and training our girls to know more about their goal and to find out their

self- identify. As a result of these trainings, our girls who underwent inner struggles or worries were gradually healed and they have started to cultivate moral values and good habits as well. These trainings indeed helped them to focus more on their studies and future goal.

### 3.4 THE MARTIAL ARTS:

It is said that the physical and the mental fitness are essential and it is a base for human growth and development. Every day in the evening hours and on holidays, our girls are taught martial arts such as Karate, Taekwondo, Silambam etc. by Master Balamurugan. During the recreation hours, they are encouraged to play mind games like Chess, Carrom, Chinese Checkers etc. We are proud and happy to inform you that six of our students took part in the zonal level Silambam (stick based martial art of south India) competition held on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2022 at Madurai and they have won 4 First Prizes and 2 Third Prizes respectively. On 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2022, five of our girls participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Kodai Cup Karate contest, in which 2 of them won first prize and other three won second Prize. Such opportunities have been given to our girls in order to find out their hidden talents and grow in self-esteem.



Our Silambam players showing certificates and Trophies after winning the contest

### 3.5 THE PARENTS MEETINGS

Once in three months, Parents meeting was organized in DACA in order to have an interaction between the parents and the staff for better learning of our girls and functioning of our home. During these meetings, the plans and the actions for the growth and the development of our girls were briefed to their parents. After the meeting, the parents were advised to meet the care-takers of the Home in person and to know more about the performance of their children. On these occasions, we have honored the students who have

scored the highest marks in the exams and also those who have won prizes in sports or in cultural contests.

#### **4 THE CELEBRATIONS**

Now and then, we commemorate the important celebrations in our home in order to boost the spirit of enthusiasm and togetherness among our inmates. These celebrations serve as platforms for our girls to showcase their creative skills in front of our own crowds.

##### **4.1 THE GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION**

In DACA, we had a thanks giving celebration on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 in order to mark the Fifty Golden Years of Rev. Fr. Francis Xavier, SJ, as a Priest in the Society of Jesus. He is the person who has inspired many students by his noble qualities of perseverance, self-discipline and time management. Even though he hailed from a rural background, through his studies and hardship, he has become successful in his life and carrier. On that occasion, he advised our girls to be clear about the idea of what they want to become in future and progress towards it with perseverance and hard work.

##### **4.2 THE SUPPOSE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION**

The suppose Christmas was celebrated on 22 December, 2021 in a small scale. Rev. Fr. Vargheesh, SJ celebrated the Christmas mass. In his homily, he motivated and enkindled the minds of the girls to help the needy and the poor. Soon after the Holy Eucharistic Celebration, our girls came together for the carols in order to make the celebration joyful and meaningful.

#### **5 THE ORGANIC FARM**

DACA has developed a Brazilian Organic Farm where we could cultivate variety of vegetables yielding throughout the year in a small scale. In the evening hours and on holidays, our girls contribute to the growth of the farm by their physical work. In the farm, our girls mostly carry out weeding, mulching and harvesting vegetables in small groups. The farm activities make them dignify the physical labours and labourers. We are happy to inform you that today our farm attracts many outsiders to step into the campus for learning different types of agri-techniques. DACA tries its best to give our girls healthy and sumptuous meals every day. Apart from the work, our girls keep the campus green and the places clean.



Our girls harvesting vegetables in the farm

## 6 OTHER EVENTS

1. Once a month, a cultural programme is organized to all of our girls in order to sharpen their innate cultural skills and talents.
2. College going girls are constantly encouraged to use library very often.
3. A motivating thought for a day is shared with our girls, every day night before bed by Jesuits and our collaborators.
4. The great Indian Leaders' birthdays are observed by conducting various competitions such as drawings, speech, dance, arts etc.
5. Quiz for 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> standard girls was conducted to improve both their academic and general knowledge.
6. Regular meetings for the leaders of various departments are being conducted to enhance their activities and performances.
7. During holidays, our girls are given time to learn more about computer.

## 7 CHALLENGES

1. The changes caused by the prolonged lockdown in the attitudes and behaviours of our students.
2. Gradual loss of interest for studies among our students.
3. Students have developed fascination for mobile phones and their various apps during lockdowns.
4. Less interest for physical work and exercises.

Sometimes, our work among the marginalized children and people is very hard and difficult, but we are both determined and dedicated to carry forward the mission of empowerment with

love and support of our collaborators. However, after the completion of academic year 2021-22, there has been a lots of improvement in the thinking and behavioral pattern of our girls.

## 8 WHAT DO THEY SAY

### A. NAGARJUNA, 9<sup>th</sup> Std.



To tell you the truth, I am privileged to be at DACA, because it is a very calm and pleasant place to study, play and grow joyfully. We are all coming from very poor families. In my case, I have no good situation to study and play both at home and village, whereas here in DACA home, all facilities are available. I am very happy to be here. Here I not only do my studies, but also learn other skills like karate, yoga etc. Apart from skills, I also learn moral values and good qualities, needed for a meaningful life. I am grateful to those who provide us such opportunities to grow holistically.

### R. SARANYA, 11<sup>th</sup> Std.



I thank the Almighty for having given me this beautiful DACA in my life. I don't have a proper house to live in my village and there is no electricity at my house for studies. But in DACA, we have good rooms, full-time electricity, good water facility, healthy food and also all other facilities needed for our growth. Therefore we are able to concentrate on our studies and secure good marks in the exams. So, I could affirm and say that DACA plays a vital role in our growth and development. DACA now and then conducts several cultural programmes like singing, dancing, speech etc. and also competitions like writing, drawing etc. to improve our talents skills. I take this opportunity to thank all who are helping us and pray that God bless them to continue their support to us.

### P. PRAHAMATHI, 10<sup>th</sup> Std.



I am Prahmathi staying in DACA and doing 10<sup>th</sup> std. I take this golden opportunity to share my experience. I am proud to say that I have scored very good marks in the half yearly exams, because of the favorable ambiance prevailing in the campus of DACA. I hope that I will secure good marks in the public examination too. I am grateful to DACA for arranging special teachers to accompany us in understanding the subjects like Mathematics, Science and English. Finally, I express my sincere thanks to our beloved Director and care takers for their love and kindness.



**R. DHARSHINI, 11<sup>th</sup> Std**



I am Dharshini. I am very glad to share my experience about DACA. Every day we are given enough hours for studies both morning and evening. Thus we are able to perform well in our studies. Here we don't pay any fees for our accommodation and food rather we give our physical labour as a fee with a token of our love. DACA is our home of love and this campus is our place of happiness. I always carry out the happy and sweet memories of this campus. I could see that this place is ever green like a beautiful garden. The atmosphere in DACA makes us to feel loved and respected. I sincerely thank everyone in the campus and also all our well-wishers.

## **9 WITH A SENCE OF GRATITUDE**

I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to *Jesuitenmission*, Nürnberg, Germany for its continued support to the education of our girls in the past years. It is because of your generosity, our girls are able to come out from the psychological barriers of centuries old caste discrimination and pursue their long awaited dream of education. Rev. Fr. Antony Raj, SJ, the founder of DACA once said 'If Dalits only get an opportunity; they will reach the Promised Land where there is no bondage and servitude and they will be the fearless Children of modern society, who will be able to assert themselves'<sup>2</sup>. Today, I can affirm and announce that the *Jesuitenmission* plays the role of Moses leading our Dalit girls from darkness to light, illiteracy to knowledge, despair to hope and oppression to liberation through the stick of education.

Once again on behalf of DACA Jesuits and its inmate girls, I wholeheartedly thank each and every one of you for your continued love and service.

With grateful heart to the *Jesuitenmission*, I earnestly seek your continued support for this noble cause of providing education to our girls in the coming new academic year (2022 – 2023) too (*Please look at the budget proposal attached*).

*Rebort by*

**FR. VARGHEESH ANTONY, SJ**

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<sup>2</sup>. Rev. Fr. Antony Raj's interview in *The Hindu news paper* on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2011.