



RITINJALI IN THAILAND - 2008

Ritinjali's work with its educational initiatives for children has always been marked by its inclusiveness. Children across regions, classes and communities have been touched by our educational programmes. Moving ahead, Ritinjali has extended its activities to Lumphun Province in Northern Thailand.

The goal of Ritinjali's involvement in Thailand is to plan exchange visits with disadvantaged students from India and Thailand to promote cultural understanding and good leadership. It seeks to provide holistic education and varied experiences to those children who would normally not have access to this.

The students and one or more teachers will be invited to India to meet their counterparts and share their cultural experiences and traditions with them. They would be taken on an Educational Tour to famous places and experience Indian hospitality and culture. Students and teachers from India would later be invited to Thailand on an exchange visit.

Ms. Venetia Walkey of Dhamma Park organized for Mr. Kapur, the Chairperson of Ritinjali to meet with the Directorate of Education at the Lumphun Department of Education on Thursday the 28th of February 2008. The members present at the meeting were:

Ajahn Jongjet Luangrahaeng, Assistant Director of Education.

Ajahn Boonsal Yamlaor, Assistant Director.

Ajahn Nirandon Meunsook, Director of Ban Bong Mae Lorp School Mae Taa.

Khun Khru Subimongkol, Teacher and translator from Chankaonoi, Primary School, Pasang.

Khun Kulapat Tayutivutikul, Secretary of the Dhamma Park Foundation.

Venetia Walkey, Coordinator of the Dhamma Park Foundation and Director of the Dhamma Park Gallery.

Three suitable Secondary Schools were selected and visited.

1) Visit to Ban Bong Mae Lorp Secondary School

Bahn Bong Mae Lorp School, Tambon (district) Taa Mae Lorp, Ampur MaeTaa Lumphun Province, 51140, Director of School, Ajarn Nirandon Meunsook
Mobile: 081-8493448, Home: 053-543033

This School was selected because the economy in this district is very bleak. The problem families include children from the Karien Hill Tribes. They have limited boarding facilities. The school has students from Kindergarten through to High School level. The children are disadvantaged and the school can only provide minimum support



Sukanya Sookjai & Amnuay Lapang

The students of the school performed a Welcome Dance. There was a video presentation of Ban Bong Mae Lorp School, the only Secondary School in the district and the four Primary schools which depend on it. Only one school is proximate, three others are in inaccessible mountainous areas where only bikes and motor bikes can travel depending on weather conditions.



In this school, Ritinjali has put into place a scholarship for 2 (two) children. The two children chosen by the school to receive the scholarships are Amnuay Tapang and Sukanya Sookjai. This will enable them to continue their studies and complete Mathayom 6 as otherwise these children were on the verge of dropping out of school. Each of these will be given 500 THB per month for this. They are expected to do well in their studies and become leaders in their community. The selected students have strong cultural roots and an interest in maintaining their traditions and culture, preservation and conservation of the environment and self-sufficient lifestyles. They would be recording the life of their community and environment, traditions, customs, culture, history and language via video photography, stories, songs and music, dance, painting, poetry and other media, to enable a book to be published at the end of three years.

It was generally agreed that Ban Bong Mae Lorp School was an excellent choice. It is also an environmentally protected area because of the scarcity of flora and fauna. Solar panels donated by the telephone organization of Thailand were being installed at the school. Electricity is available but unreliable, but there is a back up generator. Some computers had been donated and there was a TV set. The teachers were dedicated and close to the children who were loved and well cared for. Some of them are weekly boarders. They seemed confident and comfortable in their relationship with the teachers.

Ritinjali would also sponsor a trip for the children from this school to Dhamma Park. The children of each (Mathayom) class will go on weekends, once a year to spend time at Dhamma Park. Mathayom 1 - 3 will go to Dhamma Park together, while Mathayom 4 - 6 will go together as a separate group.

The expenses towards travel and other arrangements will be borne by Ritinjali. Vinetia Walkey will give Ritinjali the budget for these visits. It would be ideal to use the school buses for this instead of hiring buses from outside. The first visit to the Dhamma Park would be for the 33 teachers who teach in this school so that they understand exactly what the children will be experiencing. In this way the Dhamma Park experience would be an ongoing experience in the school even after the visits are over.

Ajahn Nirandorn, seemed surprisingly young to be in charge of five schools with a total of 344 students and 32 teachers in such a remote and underprivileged area. He is evidently capable, energetic and progressive in his educational philosophy. Because of the adverse conditions in which he operates, he is in a position to be able to help preserve the fundamental values and right conduct which have been eroded in schools in developed areas where both students and teachers are constantly exposed to the demands, temptations and dangers of a rapidly changing society.

A visit to Khun Gong Primary School was also organized. This is one of the four Primary schools which come under the wing of Ban Bong Mae Lorp Secondary School, the only one in this district. This school was the most accessible; the other three can only be reached on two wheels or on foot.

Venetia had visited the school two years ago with a group of Doctors and Nurses from Lumphun Hospital. She was delighted to meet the teachers and some of the students again who remembered their earlier visit.

Ajahn Arun was introduced to all the students who were waiting to return home. He picked out one boy who bravely offered to show him the forest and said he was going to send him a present. He enquired whether there were any children with disabilities. One boy, who had undergone brain surgery and was mentally impaired and very weak, was introduced to him. He asked the boy what he was planning to do in the future. The boy replied that he wanted to become a Monk. On further enquiry he said he really wanted to continue with his studies. Arrangements may be made for him to go to a special school.

After visiting this school, Ajahn Arun visited Amnuay Lapang's village and was introduced to his parents and the headman of the village.

2) Visit to Pasang Mathayom Secondary School

Pasang Mathayom (Secondary) School, 6 Pracha utit Road, Tambon Pasang, Ampur Oasang, Lumphun Province 51120. Director: Ajahn Boonchote Marcasin.

Contact: Ajahn Wassana Waikakul Mobile: 086-9219828 School tel.: 053-521044

English Teacher: Ajarn Jormjai Prongjit, Mobile: 083-2083228,

E-mail: Pasang@Pasang.ac.th

Ajahn Arun next visited Pasang Mathayom High School, Pasang. Though this school is better able to support children from poor and problematic families and is in a more prosperous area, yet some of the children drop out after Mathayom 3.

Members Present in this meeting were:

Ajahn Tanyaluck Mookdapirom, Assistant Director.

Ajahn Wassana Waika khun.

Ajahn Jongjai Prongjit.

Khun Khru Chintanna Subimongkol.

Khun Kulapat.Tayutivutikul

Venetia Walkey.

Ajahn Arun was formally introduced to members of the staff and 20 students. The project was explained to them. He was also introduced to the Director, Ajahn Boonchote Marcasin. He explained the process to him and gave him information on the link up with Ban Bong Mae Lorp School. The process followed in this school would be the same.

In this school too, Ritinjali has put in place a scholarship for 2 (two) children - Chutima Wasun and Suriyaporn Yanatan - who will continue their studies and complete Mathayom 6. They are expected to do well in their studies and become leaders in their community. In this school, the Ritinjali Prize for the most ethical student has also been instituted and a 16 year old boy, Wasan Tynawa, was given this award. He was immediately offered a sum of 1000 THB and a special certificate will be prepared by

Khun Chintanna and Venetia. In all these cases, the children who were given the scholarships as well as the most ethical student were chosen by the school.



Chutima Dasoon & Suriyaporn Yanatan

3) Visit to Wat Bahn Gong School

Wat Bahn Gong School, Pasang District

Director: Ajahn Boonyong.

School Counsellor: Ajahn Anong

Ajahn Arun was also requested to visit Wat Bahn Gong School, although this was unplanned, as there was a dire need for Ritinjali's help in this school.

In this school, there were three children who desperately needed financial assistance for them to be able to continue their studies. Though this additional number of children was not anticipated, Ritinjali has stepped in and given 500 THB per child per month for one year. Again, these children are expected to be conscientious in their studies and do well. They are Teerasat Sarapipak, Angkarn Kitsakunee, Anshuk Ayuwanua. Later, Ritinjali decided to continue these three scholarships for the next 3 years as well.



Teerasak Sarapipat, Angkarn kitsakunee & Anshuk Ayuwanua

Future Activities

Ritinjali plans to invite seven children, who are being sponsored by Ritinjali, (2 from Ban Bong Mae Lorp, 2 from Pasang Mathayom School and 3 from Wat Bahn Gong School) with one of the teachers from either school, for a pilgrimage to the Buddhist sites in India. This will be an opportunity for children and teachers from Thailand to meet with children and teachers in India and experience Indian culture and hospitality. Teachers and students from India would later be invited to Thailand on an exchange visit.

Ritinjali has also donated a number of books and equipped the Karen School library.

Conclusion

Through this intervention in Thailand, the funds for which need to be raised in Thailand and in India, Ritinjali has been able take a step forward in:

- a) Encouraging children, who drop out after Mathayom 3 either due to poverty, lack of motivation or early marriage for girls, to continue in the school system. The objective is not only to make them remain in the mainstream by stopping them from slipping off the education radar, but also empowering these children to become leaders of their community.
- b) Helping children retain their tradition and culture through helping them put together a book on the various aspects of their heritage and culture. The objective is to instill in these children a sense of pride in their own rich and diverse cultural traditions and ensure that they are well-rooted and grounded in it. At the same time, ensure that the children understand and respect the richness and diversity of other cultures. As Mahatma Gandhi said, **"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."**
- c) Facilitating grass root level collaboration between the marginalized children in India and Thailand. The purpose is to strengthen the weakest links of both the countries in order to further build the relationship between the two countries.

This intervention by Ritinjali in Thailand has been welcomed and appreciated by the people, NGOs and the Government. This will also eventually strengthen cultural exchange between the two countries. Ritinjali is now 'bringing hope where there is none' not only in India, but internationally and we intend to extend our boundaries to many more nations.