

## **Vivekananda Tribal Residential School run by Wayanad Girijana Seva Trust**

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Initially we planned to reach Kerala on 9th January by train. Because of a general strike on 8th and 9th in all over India, we had to break our train journey in Coimbatore. We then instead arrived in Vadakara (near Kozhikode) on the morning around 11am of 10th January. We met Mr. Baburaj, founder and coordinator of WGST (Wayanad Girijana Seva Trust) at the station and travelled to the school. which is about 60 kms from the train station. We arrived at the school around 1 pm.

The school is located on a hill surrounded by greenery. On one side, there is a thick rain forest. Mr. Baburaj mentioned that couple of months back, wild animals had been seen near one of the school buildings. After that they installed solar electrical fencing with the support of one of the donor.

In the school, we met another founder Mr. Rajeev. They have started the project for tribal children in 2002. Initially it served as a literacy camp for adults and children from the tribal communities. After seeing that several children are dropping out of government schools, they started the Vivekanada boarding school. In the beginning for primary classes and later more classes were added. Last year the 7th batch of 10<sup>th</sup> class graduated school.

The school is run completely on donations. Several organizations like Indian Oil Company, Cognizant etc have donated funds to construct the various buildings. Asha Kansas supported the school between 2014 and 2016. In 2018, Asha Kansas and Purdue donated funds for flood relief activities undertaken by WGST. Asha Frankfurt supported education and accommodation for 15 children in 2018.

Currently there are 215 children (109 boys and 106 girls) studying at the school. They come from different villages in Wayanad district. There are 13 teachers in the school, out of which one teacher is from a tribal community. The teachers' salaries are below Rs. 10,000. Most of the teachers stay in the school campus.

The school is run for 1st to 10th standard children. For 10th, the children give board exams in the district headquarters in Kalpetta, which is about 40 km from the school. Children travel every day from the school to write exams. Last year out of 30 children 24 children passed the exam. Children who fail continue to stay in the school and prepare to resit. Recently 10 to 15 children who graduated school got jobs in the police and excise departments.

After having lunch in the school, Mr. Baburaj showed us the campus. All the buildings are well maintained. The hostel rooms have good ventilation and enough space for each child. They also have a library where the children can either read the books or take them to their room.

Mr. Baburaj mentioned that after the christmas/new year holidays, not all children have returned. Normally he goes each weekend to different areas to pick the children up.

Because of the language barrier we could not interact much with the children. Our observation was that children seemed were happy to be there in the school and they enjoy having the freedom to focus on education.

In the school campus they also have a stitching center which they plan to start shortly so that children after 10th class can learn stitching as a mean to earn their livelihood. Mr. Baburaj also has plans to start a carpentry training center as there is a high demand for trained carpenters in the region. He is looking for funding to establish such center.

We are quite impressed with the work WGST team is doing for the children. They are very dedicated for the cause of tribal children and always work towards making the place more resourceful so that more children benefit.

We highly recommend supporting the school. They are looking for funding to support running of the school and also for carpentry training center. If any of the Asha Chapters or any other donors, would like to take up, please write to Mr. Baburaj. For additional information about our site visit, please write to us at [sandeep.morthala@gmail.com](mailto:sandeep.morthala@gmail.com).

Photos:



School Campus



Classrooms building



Kitchen storage room



Dining hall



Boys hostel room



Campus surroundings



Class 10<sup>th</sup>



Class 6<sup>th</sup>



Mr. Baburaj, Mr. Rajeev with children



Sandeep and Nancy with Mr. Baburaj and Mr. Rajeev