

## Site visit by Melli Annamalai, Asha Boston

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Avith, Program Manager at SVYM and Prathima, Academics Head for all education activities at SVYM picked me early morning for the drive to Viveka Tribal School of Learning in Hosahalli in HD Kote taluk, about two hours away. On the way we had an opportunity to discuss updates on the various education programs run by SVYM.

We stopped for breakfast at the “Millet Canteen” a restaurant run entirely by 12 tribal women, with items like millet dosa and millet bisibele bath on the menu. The restaurant was spotless, and I believe popular with people driving by to the resort by the Kabini river. Being on the main road, the restaurant draws this tourist traffic, and there is growing sense that millets are healthy. I was very impressed with the canteen and how it provides a livelihood for these women. Various livelihood initiatives for the tribals been tried and this seems to be one of the successful ones. In the front lobby is art work by a tribal youth for sale, who also painted the walls of the restaurant.



*Millet canteen*



*Produce from tribal groups sold at the canteen*



*Millet Canteen*



*A school building*

Our next stop was the Viveka Tribal Center for Learning (VTCL). As usual the last stretch took us awhile, as the road quality is not good as we get closer to the forest.

A change when compared to recent visits was that VTCL now has buses to pick up children in a 12 km radius, and all children in classes I to V come by bus. Students in VI and up have to stay in the hostel, and curricular activities go on well into the evening.

Since my last visit several new buildings have been constructed. The campus looks bigger, and was buzzing with activity. Classes were in session, and a set of teachers from the Budding Teachers program were visiting. We met with the school head Mr. Kumar, who took us around campus. Our first stop was the Skill Education centers, as this is where Asha Boston funding is used.

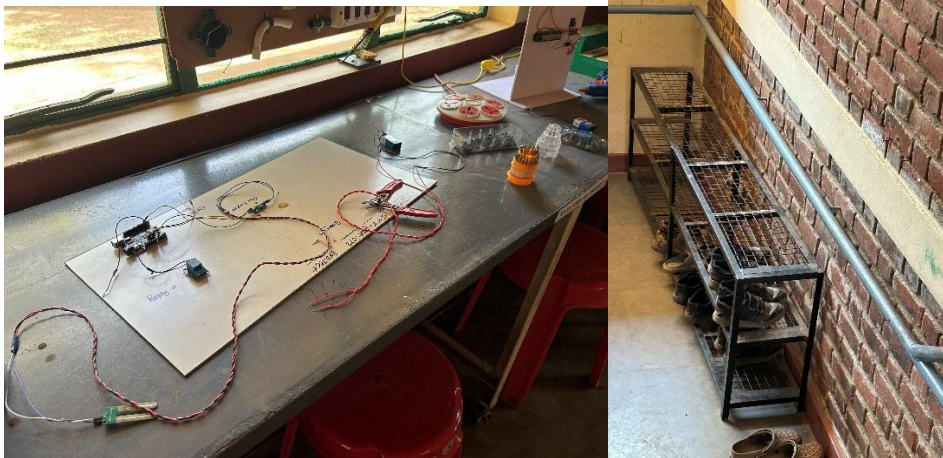
There are 4 Skill Education centers, electrical, mechanical, tailoring, and agriculture. Tribal children are kinesthetic learners, and very good at building and creating things. These centers help channel this talent they have. The learning at these centers is part of the school curriculum, and they also weave in some curriculum components into these activities (such as understanding fractions when cutting cloth for tailoring, angles when cutting steel, and so on). Students in class VII and up start having classes at these centers, and they now build and create many things the school needs. For example, all the uniforms for the children are stitched at the tailoring centers. All the shoe stands and dustbins are made from metal at the mechanical center. Students designed by themselves lights across the walkways between several classrooms. There is also ample opportunity for creatively building new things such as new dress designs and sculpting metal statues.



*Mechanical Skill Center*



*Tailoring Skill Center*



*Working table at the electrical skill center*

*Shoe rack made by students at the mechanical center*

The teacher (Madu Kalkar) in the electrical skill center is a VTCL alumni. After graduation from VTCL he had finished his diploma at NTT (a polytechnic institute, they sponsor a few select students to study there), worked outside for a while, and then wanted to come back to his community and teach other tribal students at VTCL. He showed me a drip irrigation system he and his students had built, entirely from scratch, for use in the gardens maintained by the agriculture skill center students. (Drip irrigation was invented in Israel to provide exactly the right amount of water a plant needs, and sent directly to the plant root, so that almost no water is wasted.) The pride with which Madu showed me his invention was palpable.



*Madu Kalkar showing what he and his students have built*

After visiting the skill education centers we walked around the classrooms. These are newly constructed and they look very good. Several classes were in session. Mr. Kumar has been at VTCL for over 25 years, and he spoke about how early on no children would wear footwear, and now every child wears footwear (tribals are now more connected with mainstream society). In the Montessori classes children were working on whatever they wished to work on, in keeping with that philosophy. The teacher staff room was designed to be truly open.



*Staffroom and a classroom*

We next walked over to the building where some of the teachers stay. Prathima explained that the teachers generally fall into 3 categories – teachers who really want to work with an organization like SVYM, teachers who see the quality level of the school (with policies such as adhering to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020), and some teachers who need a job and take up a position even though it is in a remote area. Increasingly they have more and more teachers from the first two categories joining the school, which has helped reduce attrition and increased stability. I find it particularly heartening that some alumni have joined the school (Madu in the electrical skill program, Manoj as an Art teacher,

and the HM is an alumni from the teacher training college that Asha San Diego used to support). Prathima also shared that wild boars were a real problem, and they make quite a racket. The fencing around the campus does not stop them. Teachers are sometimes frightened walking back from the school to their living quarters, and they have a system where someone escorts them back.

We also then toured the library, and I saw the “Science kits in a trolley” created by an NGO in Bangalore that could be wheeled to classrooms for Science classrooms. A session on safety for girls was being conducted by a volunteer from TITAN, a long-time funder of VTCL.

Finally we had lunch, and I left with the gift of a bunch of vegetables (brinjal, methi sappu, and sapotas) from their garden.

**Note:** SVYM also now selects promising rural students from underprivileged from across Karnataka to study at VTCL. These are currently conducted as a separate section, and they are finding that this class (particularly the aspirations these students have) could be motivational for the tribal students. They call this the Viveka Chethana program.

In summary what I understand more clearly on this visit was that SVYM is striving to make VTCL a center for excellence, in other words a top quality school that helps tribal students aspire for and achieve ambitious goals (and not just a school that runs on a thread bare budget to help poor tribal students).

Photos link: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/A5cDVkmyvt1PZ2Qo6>