

Kondh Play Schools Site Visit

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Along with Naveen Ramisetty (AID Volunteer in Hyderabad), I have visited tribal villages in eastern ghats agency area in Vishakapatnam district. We met Ajay Kumar from APVVU (AP Vyavasaya Vruthula Union – AP Agriculture labour union). Ajay has been working with tribals couple of decades specially related to land rights and other development issues. Part of it was the play school (atala badi) for the tribal children.

Most of the villages are very small (between 5 to 10 households) and have about 10 to 20 children. Lot of the villages do not have government school as there are not enough children there. There are primary schools in bigger villages, but there are no commuting facilities (no roads and no vehicles), so most of the children stay in the village. Once the child gets to the age of 7 or 8 years, they will be admitted to the boarding schools (Ashram Schools), which is specially meant for the tribal children. The idea with “Sankaran Thatha Atala Badi” (Sankaran Grandfather Play School) is to provide a place where all the children can come together and start learning at the younger age through playing and singing. (Dr. S.R Sankaran was an IAS Officer who has done lot for the poor, specially the backward communities and tribals. The play school is named after him for all the work he has done for the tribals). Teachers are the youth from the region who have completed the college and they work in the play school in addition to their agriculture work.

I have visited the school in Ganugurolu village in mandal of G.Madugula, in the district of Vizag. To reach the village, it is about 5 hours journey by bus, shared vehicle and few kilometers of walk. Nearest village with the primary school is about 3 kms way. There are no roads and if children had to go there, they have to walk through hills. The play school in this village is very basic shed made of grass, which was constructed by villagers. Narayana is teacher in the school, he is from a near by village and completed 12th class in ashram school. As the day 26th January is republic day, there were flag hoisting in the school and children were given sweets. Currently there are about 8 children who come regularly to the school. They follow curriculum prepared by Shodhana Foundation in Vijayanagarm District (www.odhanafoundation.org) and everything is either singing, playing or dancing. They do not use blackboard and there are notebooks/slates. The children at home speak “koonth” tribal language and in the school they learn Telugu. We have seen some of the songs and games from the curriculum. Narayana has hand drum and with that he gives the rythims for songs. Children seem to enjoy being there and playing and learning.

We have also briefly visited briefly another school in Gummadikonda, which is about 30 minutes walk from Ganugurolu through hills. There the play school is run in Varanda of one of the villagers. As it was already later afternoon and being 26th January, most of the children went home.

Currently, there are 10 such play schools in different villages in the same region. Most of the funds are organised through personal donations of well wishers. Teachers are paid nominal salaries of Rs. 1000, which for even in the remote villages not enough to survive. Considering the teachers do not have qualification to teach, they need regular guidance and review of the work, which is done in Anakapally once in a month. We have also met the teachers who came to Anakapally to attend one such meeting. We were informed that, these meetings are helpful to share experiences and improve the teaching. Currently the expenses for traveling from village to those review meetings are born by teachers themselves and some nominal amounts are paid.

Ajay Kumar is very dedicated for the cause of tribal people and the children education is close to his heart. These schools are only the option for the children in the village to have fun at early stage

of their childhood. We highly recommend Asha to support the project.

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