

## Visit to Viveka Tribal School of Learning (VTCL), July 2015

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Asha and Oracle (Asha submitted the original grant proposal) now support various educational components in the area. Going forward the Asha Boston/MIT chapter plans to integrate these components more closely:

VTCL (tribal school): Partly supported by Asha-Boston/MIT

VTTRC (D.Ed college next to VTCL): Supported by Asha San Diego

Vignyana Vahini (mobile science van, supports 91 upper primary and high schools in the area, including 10 Ashram schools for tribal children): Asha-Boston/MIT and Oracle

As an example of one type of integration, 20 VTTRC graduates have joined the Ashram schools as teachers (these are temporary positions with lower pay). Some of these graduates are from VTCL. This builds capacity in the area and within the community. Strengthening this type of integration is important, instead of just training students to work at schools in Mysore and then struggling to find staff for the local schools.

During my visit I met with VTTRC staff and students and spent some time at VTCL. The day-to-day functions are going on well.

### English Teaching

There is an emphasis on teaching English everywhere. For an interesting encounter with the VTTRC students on the topic, see [here](#).

At VTCL, the tribal parents (in particular those who studied at VTCL and now send their own children to VTCL) have begun to demand an English medium section. I am concerned by this, as I worry that it will impact learning. There is a notion that reading English textbooks and listening to some English words in class will help students learn English. It will help them know some words, but it will not help someone learn a language to use it well to read, write and speak in it. I believe a language has to be taught as a language, with grammar, vocabulary, a focus on comprehension, reading, and writing. It cannot be taught through a medium of instruction. Children end up knowing neither the language nor the subjects well. Of course every child should have an opportunity to learn English. But through the medium is not the best way in my opinion.

However, it is clear that the tribal parents are empowered now to ask for this. They see the VSOE school in Sargur, which is English medium (that is a fee-paying school, started by SVYM to prove that a first class school can exist in a rural area, students of wealthier farmers attend this school). They want that type of education for their children, and so are asking for an English medium section.

It is good to see the tribal parents actively participating in the decisions of the school.

## Opportunities After School

This remains a difficult problem. As discussed above, a tight integration between the multiple projects will help the VTCL graduates work towards teaching opportunities in the area. Beyond that, some radical ideas are needed. VTCL has done a fantastic job helping students adjust to life in Mysore (see reports on the projects page), and slowly and surely helping VTCL graduates become successful in higher education in Mysore. It can be extraordinarily tough, because the environment is very different. VTCL has found mentors for every student in Mysore and that has helped a lot. But surely there are economic opportunities in the tribal area, when a resort like [this one](#) can thrive? A few are employed by the resort, mostly in cleaning jobs. No one knows the forest like the tribals. Why not start their own nature hikes and eventually resorts?

There is a new coordinator at VTCL (Mr. Ramkumar). He is keen to start thinking about issues related to integrating education more with tribal life. For instance, some children did the art for use as school uniforms. See [here](#). What would it take to develop economic opportunities from such artistic talents?

This is not to say that we should discourage going to Mysore, quite the contrary. Rather, we should give people who would like to stay an opportunity to do so.

These are questions for the chapter to ponder.

There has been an ongoing discussion at the chapter on whether we should continue supporting this school because our overall percentage of support is not high. But during the visit the project emphasized how important the support was. We have been a true partner, for years, and when they discuss new initiatives we are flexible where it makes sense and this support is invaluable.