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## **ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-188**



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## **'Why Do Tigers Have Stripes?': IITian Duo's YouTube Channel Makes Learning Fun for Tribal Kids**

“Currently we are sending recorded videos and the YouTube video links of Kathaadi on a common WhatsApp group so that the children can easily access them.”

Does air have weight?' Maya asks in the Youtube video.

She then takes two balloons with strings tied to the two sides of a stick. She then bursts one of the balloons. The side of the stick attached to the air-filled balloon weighs down.

Air has weight.

This is one among the several simple and effective videos posted on Kathaadi, an educational YouTube channel.

Deepak Chandra and his wife Maya Nathan, both graduates from IIT Madras, have been

resource persons for Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT) for the past two years. VBVT empowers Adivasi communities of Gudalur, Tamil Nadu by providing them with educational opportunities for free through the Vidyodaya school.

After their graduation, the couple worked as full-time teachers with the Teach For India Fellowship in a government school in Chennai. This experience made them aware of the gap in the quality of education and resources between urban and rural areas.

Soon after, they moved to Gudalur to work with tribal students at the Vidyodaya school.

In 2019, the duo started a YouTube channel under the name 'Kathaadi' explaining fundamental science and math concepts through experiments and activities that can be done at home.

“When we started teaching, many students did not have the foundational knowledge of subjects like science and mathematics in their elementary classes, so most concepts seemed to be quite abstract for them. That’s how we resorted to creating a Youtube channel to tackle this barrier,” he adds.

The channel started in 2019 and has over 400 subscribers and over 90 videos. These videos are aimed to help Adivasi students who lack the basics of math and science and others who struggle with language barriers.

### **The Youtube Channel ‘Kathaadi’ Starts Spinning**



Children

playing with the kathaadi

“Initially while working with the Vidyodaya school we used to provide the teachers and the volunteers with lesson plans and resources that were altered to make the classroom learning more interactive. But when we noticed that these lessons were not making much of a difference, we decided to move to videos so that the students will have a more visual understanding of abstract concepts,” explains Deepak.

The couple started using household objects like peas, leaves, newspapers and old bottles and uploaded videos in Tamil and English before every term, explaining abstract concepts in Science and Mathematics.

“On one of those breezy days in February, the children were out playing in the school ground. In their own ingenious way, some of the children had fashioned a toy from just a single leaf and a little stick. They ran around with their ‘Kathaadis’ and enjoyed it as the wind made them spin. This made us realise the intuitive science that the children have and that inspired us to name the YouTube channel “Kaathadi”. This incident has been a constant reminder to have simple and fun learning activities on the channel. We are now in the process of dubbing these videos into tribal languages so that it becomes easier for the Adivasi children to follow,” informs Maya.



“We realised that the students were able to grasp the concepts easily when we connected them to everyday instances or used objects that they were familiar with to demonstrate. When the videos started doing well, the teachers and even the students started giving us their inputs on how to improve the classes,” she adds.

This video from Kathaadi, for example, shows an innovative way to learn the division of integers using peas.

Nikithasree, class 4 student of VBVT school says, “The videos are easy for me to follow. I watched the video on ‘Air occupies space’ and tried it at home using a bottle and blowing a paper ball inside.”

Although the students were regularly attending the classes up until March, the lockdown period was quite a difficult time for the Adivasi communities.

“In the first month of lockdown, we couldn’t focus on the school because there were many basic problems like food and shelter that the community was facing. We had to find ways to ensure that every household had ration and other basic necessities to survive,” explains Maya.

Although VBVT has helped the tribals during the lockdown, the virtual classes are still something they are figuring out.

“Currently we are sending recorded videos and the YouTube video links of Kathaadi on a common WhatsApp group so that the children can easily access them. But not every family that we cater to has the privilege of owning a smartphone, therefore we’ve only been able to reach 70 per cent of the students during the lockdown,” Deepak explains.

The VBVT is now looking at setting up smaller study centres that comprise of 10-12



students each so that they all the students have access to education.

Kaathadi - Activity to understand camouflage

“Although we follow the syllabus of the Tamil Nadu state government, the education we provide is through life experiences that the students are familiar with, which makes a huge difference,” Deepak concludes.

“When we asked the tribal students to bring something special for ‘show and tell’, we expected them to bring a toy or a showpiece that they had at home but instead they brought feathers from rare birds they had collected and toys that they had made from leaves and sticks. That was a real spectacle for us because we realised that the knowledge they possessed was from real-life experiences unlike the students in an urban setting,” says Maya.

## Empowering Through Education



Arul

and Dhurga with their rain gauge

“When the Vidyodaya school was started in 1996, they trained 15 people from the tribal communities to become teachers in the community. The entire idea of the school was to empower the students and teachers to ensure that they themselves are capable of empowering their future generations. After joining the school in 2018, we can clearly see the positive change that the community has

undergone over the past 24 years,” explains Maya.

The education provided to the students at the Vidyodaya school is completely free of cost and all the study materials are provided to them at subsidised prices. The trust mainly runs on donations from corporates and individual well-wishers.

“Whatever money the students bring in order to provide to the trust is deposited in their own names and is used for school supplies and stationery,” says Maya. Some of the teachers from the tribal communities trained in 1996 are now members of the VBVT. Today Vidyodaya school has 83 students from Kindergarten to Class 5 from mainly three tribes in Gudalur and Pandalur, namely, the Paniyas, Bettakurumbas and Kattunaickan tribes.

Currently, the school has three teaching volunteers and five teachers who are also from these tribal communities.

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