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Tribal children get their chance at online education



Mankode Eco-development Committee and forest dept collectively arranged TV sets, computers for underprivileged children

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Most tribal hamlets in Kottur are yet to realise how things have changed for the outside world due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some are completely oblivious to the pandemic itself. Forest department officials have started efforts to create awareness by distributing masks and setting up hand-wash kiosks in the settlements. When the education department decided to commence online classes for students across the state from June 1, the children of these tribal families found themselves at a disadvantage since they have no access to any electronic devices or smartphones. Tribal children from Kottur section, including areas like Mankode, Valippara, Mulamoodu, Ariyavila, Chonampara and Kaithode are among those facing the struggle.

However, forest officials and members of Mankode Eco-development Committee that works for the welfare of tribal settlements have now arranged computers and television sets to enable the tribal children to study. Nearly 75 students have started attending online classes through the facility made available in the Employment Guidance Centre of the forest office at Kottur.

“Children from the tribal hamlets have no access to the internet. Since the online classes began from June 1, many children had to miss out on the classes due to the lack of facilities. So, we thought of arranging provisions at our employment guidance centre so that children can attend classes in different batches,” said Gopika Surendran, beat forest officer -cum-secretary of Mankode Eco-development Committee. “Since children come from remote settlements, we have arranged transport facilities for them. Also, lunch is provided to them at the centre,” she added.

The classes began at the Employment Guidance Centre on Monday. The programme was inaugurated by J Devaprasad, Conservator of Forests, by handing over a TV set to J R Ani, Thiruvananthapuram Wildlife Warden. The forest officials have decided to set up television sets in common points inside the settlements so that children need not travel everyday to the centre.

Officials are also planning to give special classes to children who are appearing for Class X exams this year. “We have been giving PSC coaching to tribal children. This time, we are planning to teach 12 students who are appearing for the board exams,” said Gopika.

Mini library at the Centre

Catering to children of the six settlements in Kottoor section, a mini library has also been set up in the centre where reference as well as fictional books will be made available in the coming days. Nearly 100 books have already been made available in the library with the help of forest officials, NGOs and clubs for tribal children inside the settlements. Since new books cannot be made available to all the children due to the lack of funds, members of the Mankode Eco-development Committee have decided to collect books from people who are willing to contribute. Nadabrahmam, a youth club in the tribal sector, was the first to donate books and study materials.