

# Trekking through forest to school

To provide mid-day meals, teachers use donkeys for loads

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ADASULANATHA, Nagamali, Tulsikere and Indiginatha villages are located in the Malle Malahadeshwara hills in Chamarajanagar district.

The nearest high school is ten kilometres away; the villages are located in forest area. There are no roads, no electricity connections, no drinking water from pipes.

However, the government schools in these villages function, thanks to the brave teachers who often trek over 12 kilometres through dense forests to get to the schools; some teachers stay in the classrooms, which serve by day as sites for the children to gather for the lessons and by night as bedrooms for the teacher.

Students from the hamlets in these villages are often first-generation learners, with little support in schoolwork from parents, who in most cases cannot read or write. To provide the children with a cooked meal as is provided under the government's midday meal scheme, the teachers carry vegetables on donkeys.

The food is cooked with water drawn from wells. Pencils, pens, school uniforms and notebooks too are taken to the schools on the backs of donkeys, the only mode of transport in the area. The teachers pay Rs. 50 for each trip made on the donkey.

Despite all these hardships, the teachers are highly motivated; all the 22 children who took the class seven examinations have passed. Five secured a first class; 17 boys have been admitted to high

school in the Malle Malahadeshwara hills, ten kilometres away. However, seven of the eight girls have dropped out of further studies; the nearest high school for girls is 70 kilometres away, at Ramapura or Kollegal.

Two of the teachers posted to Indiginatha, which is eight kilometres from the Malle Malahadeshwara hills, Raghavendra and Divya Rani, have been living in the village for the past six years.

They live in a classroom each. Divya Rani even has her father here for company. She says she has long nurtured the desire to teach children, and that this has been a rewarding experience.

A large number of girls drop out after class seven, Cluster resource person Nagasundar said there was need for a high school for girls in Tulsikere.

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