

# Fachunterricht Englisch Sekundarstufe Klassen 8 bis 10



photo: Adivasi-Tee-Projekt



photos: Adivasi-Tee-Projekt



### Impressum:

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Die Informationen zur Situation vor Ort beruhen auf Interviews mit und Erfahrungen von unseren indischen Partner/innen bzw. Adivasi (Ureinwohner/innen) in den südindischen Nilgiri-Bergen.

Vielen Dank für Ihr Feedback. Unsere Materialien sind kostenfrei.  
Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Spende für unsere Bildungsarbeit.

### Gefördert von:

Gefördert von Brot für die Welt mit Mitteln des evangelischen Kirchlichen Entwicklungsdienstes.

Gefördert von ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL im Auftrag des BMZ.



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## Education and work of adivasis

# Arbeits- blätter

Unterrichtsmaterial  
für den Lernbereich  
Globale Entwicklung

Mantelbogen  
Innenseite

Mantelbogen  
Innenseite

## Adivasis

India has a population of about 100 Million indigenous people. India's indigenous people are called „adivasis“. This Indian term means literally the „first inhabitants“.

There are many adivasi communities all over the country, all with their own language, belief and customs. Almost all adivasis live in rural areas, most of them in quite remote hill and forest areas.

## Nilgiris

The Nilgiris are a hill area in South India with large forests and remarkable populations of wild elephants, tigers and other wildlife. The Nilgiris are home to about 22,000 adivasis.

There they are today a minority among other Indian communities. For generations and especially in the last decades, people moved to the Nilgiris to work and live there. The main economy is tea cultivation. The tourism is growing and there is a lot of crop cultivation.

## Work of adivasis

In earlier generations adivasis lived as hunters and gatherers in and around the forests of the Nilgiris hills. Today gathering of forest products like bamboo, firewood, herbs, fruits and honey has been allowed again to adivasis, but hunting is prohibited.

As adivasis have been living with forest and nature for generations, many know a lot about it and how to preserve it. This is why some adivasis work as elephant trainers or rangers for the forest department. There are also traditional healers who are experts on medicinal plants.

The majority of adivasis though works on tea plantations and in agriculture. Under British colonial rule large parts of the forests were cut down for tea plantations. Adivasis never officially owned their traditional land, and a large number of adivasi families have lost their land to migrants. Today, they work on their fields and plantations, often as day labourers.

## Adivasis' living situation

The living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiris hills has been very difficult. They are not allowed to live in the protected forest areas and lack land titles of agricultural land. As the villages are remote health care and education are difficult. Without good education they get only basic jobs and less income. Often, they work on daily basis only. But money is needed for all aspects of life.

## Adivasi organisation AMS

That many aspects of life have improved for many adivasis in the Nilgiri hills, has been the achievement of their adivasi organisation AMS. Volunteers and adivasi staff members work in the villages for land titles, health, education, better income and community life.

## Education for adivasis

Education is a human right. School has been compulsory for any child in India at least up to the age of 14 years. But about one third of the adivasi men in India and half of the adivasi women in India are analphabets and can't read and write according to the Census of India 2011.

There are prejudices in Indian society that adivasis don't value education much. But experts and adivasis themselves say this is not true. In fact parents want good education for their child, but in fact it has not always been possible or easy for them to get it.

The grandparents of today's young generation lived in very different and difficult circumstances. They lived in remote villages and hamlets with hardly any school around. As they and their families were busy working for their daily needs and income, and the children had to take care of younger siblings, most of them grew up being analphabets. Later as adults some were offered evening classes by government or organisations and therefore could learn how to read and write.

To improve the education of adivasis the government set up residential schools for adivasi children who lived in remote villages. The number of local schools also expanded when the population increased. Hence, more adivasi children went to school and the parents of today's children and teens passed at least primary or even secondary school.

Today more and more young adivasis pass 10th or even 12th grade successfully and continue even for higher education at one of the local colleges. Their parents work hard to pay their school uniforms, books, transport or hostel charges and school fees. Private high schools and colleges are more expensive, but better than government schools. According to the people's opinion and experience, a student will acquire fluent English skills only at a private school. English and good education are essential to get a better job. Therefore, the families will spend as much as they can afford for their children's education.

Besides this development, many adivasi children still struggle to attend and pass school at all:

- To walk to school through the jungle is dangerous. When there is a wild elephant around, the child has to return home and cannot go to school.
- Poor families can't afford the expenses for uniform, books and travel, even though government school itself is free of cost.
- Many children find it difficult to study at home: Their houses are small with no or little electric light and sun sets early evening. Parents often can't help their children in their studies.
- The adivasi mother tongues are not spoken at school. The classes are big and children with difficulties are sometimes left out. When a child can't cope anymore and fails exam, it drops out of school.

The adivasi organisation AMS in the Nilgiri hills addresses these difficulties by various efforts: adivasi teachers at the residential schools, village study centres, funds for families in need, an Adivasi School and volunteers to accompany kids through the forest.

## Education and work of adivasis (indigenous people) in the South Indian Nilgiri hills

### Gangadaran – a teacher for adivasi children

Gangadaran, his sons Prasad & Prakash, his wife Saraswati (photo: ATP)



Gangadaran (photo: ATP)



An adivasi boy on his walk to school in the Nilgiri hills (photo: AMS)



Gangadaran (left) at a meeting of school and village teachers (photo: ATP)

## Education and work of adivasi

# Gangadaran – a teacher for adivasi children

## Gangadaran

1 My name is Gangadaran. I am 55 years old. I live with my family in Gudalur, a small town in the Nilgiri hills of South India. My native place is Nedungode, a small village. But now, I stay with my wife and my two sons in Gudalur as my wife Saraswati works at the adivasi hospital here in Gudalur. We live in the hospital quarters and share one hall, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. We love staying here very much. The buildings are new and very nice. We have a shady terrace to sit outside and chat with our friendly neighbouring families.

I know English, but my mother tongue is Mullakurumba. This is the local language of our community called Mullakurumba. We belong to the adivasis, the indigenous people of India. I grew up talking Mullakurumba and the local Indian languages Malayalam and Tamil. English I learnt at school.

10 My parents didn't have any education, they couldn't read and write. My mother Karutha was a housewife and took care of us six children. My father Payyan worked as a day labourer cultivating paddy and coffee. He could only write his name. And of course he didn't know any English.

15 Up to 12th grade I went to a government school in Erumadu, the town close to my family's village. My brother and my four sisters all went to school – but I was the only one to complete 12th grade. My elder brother Krishnan finished 8th grade. Today he works as a day labourer in agriculture and lives with his family in our village. My younger sister Geetha left school after 5th grade and works as a cook at a government school where she prepares lunch for the students. My sister Karthi finished 5th, my sister Seetha 8th grade. Both have three children and are housewives. My second youngest sister Pushpa completed 10th grade and got a job as an accountant of our adivasi organisation AMS in Erumadu. Pushpa has one child.

20 After 12th grade I got a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Madras through distant education. I went for distant education because immediately after school I had started to work. It was my job to conduct evening classes for adults from 5pm to 8pm in the village of Kappala. The government paid for my part time job.

25 A few years later, I joined our adivasi organisation AMS, and I became a volunteer teacher at a GTRS (Government Tribal Residential School) in Kappala. I merely got 350 Rupees a month for that work. But, at that time this income was enough for me as a pocket money as I was staying with my parents. And the work was important. Our organisation and the parents had decided that in each of the 14 residential schools, there should be one adivasi volunteer teacher to help the adivasi children to learn better and feel comfortable at school. The other teachers didn't know about their mother tongue and their cultural background.

30 I left the residential school after one year and started working at a study centre run by our adivasi organisation AMS. That study centre was important because there in Kadichankolli none of the children went to school. The study centre was started by Raji, a young Bettakurumba woman of the village, who had studied up to 5th grade. I joined his work. I lived in that village and taught the 5 to 15 year-old children. For my work I got 1,500 Rupees plus accommodation and travel expenses. So this rather small amount was enough for food and personal expenses.

35 Later, I earned a little more money when I became the education coordinator of our adivasi organisation AMS. I coordinated the work in the village study centres of my area. I also had to follow up with the teachers and parents how the children manage at school. To earn more money was helpful to run my own family. At the age of 30 years, I got married to my wife Saraswati. First, we moved into our own house in my village Nedungode. After our first son was born, we moved into a rented house in Gudalur town. The reason was that I participated in a full time teacher training there for two years.

40 When we successfully passed the teacher training, some of the trainees started working as teachers at our new adivasi school, some as assistant teachers at the residential schools for adivasi children and some trainees became area coordinators of our organisation. I have been working as education coordinator for our adivasi organisation since then – for 26 years now.

45 I really wanted to work for our adivasi organisation AMS to help our adivasi community. I would have done any work, but they needed teachers, and I was good at math. So, I started teaching Tamil language and math to the kids. Today, I coordinate our educational work of all our 300 adivasi villages. I like that everyone supports me and my work. I am also involved in planning, preparing proposals and reports, accounts, meetings and trainings. I wish to handover my day to day work to another person in future. Then I like to train people how to coordinate.

If I wouldn't have started to work as a teacher, I would have become a farmer; I like to cultivate. Our family in Nedungode grows some tea, coffee and pepper. I have been growing ginger on a small piece of rented land for the last five years. I like it and it gives an extra income. Some years it is a profit, some years it is a loss. For 1 kg of ginger I get 20 Rupees now, but in good times we get 50 or 100 Rupees. This year I harvested 1,000 kg out of which I sold 400 kg. 600 kg I kept for replanting next year.

55 Now I earn 15,000 Rupees per month as education coordinator because I am very experienced. My wife gets 9,000 Rupees as nurse at the adivasi hospital. This is a medium income. We have a lot of expenses for the education of our sons.

60 My elder son Prakash is 24 years old. He studied Geography at the Bharatiya University in Gudalur and completed his studies as Master of Science at the same college. Now he works for a local environmental organisation named The Shola Trust and does research on elephant behaviour. There are many wild elephants living in this region and quite a lot of conflicts between humans and elephants. These conflicts happen because the elephants don't have enough space for themselves.

65 My second son Prasad is 18 years old. He studies in 12th grade. The monthly fee for him is 750 Rupees, he studies at a private High School. The government schools don't provide good education. Prasad is slow in learning. I wish he would study better and go for higher education. He says, he wants to become an architect. Whatever our children wish to study or work I will support. My elder son doesn't earn much, but he has freedom in his work, which is nice. Once he starts a family, he will need more money.

### Tasks

#### 1. Read the texts.

They give you an insight into life and work of indigenous people, the adivasis, in the Nilgiri hills in South India. You may choose which text to read first.

#### 2. Answer the following questions:

- Why is it important to have one adivasi teacher work in every residential school? → See lines 26 to 27.
- Why do you think parents spend so much money on their children's education even if they don't have much income? → See lines 54 to 55.
- Gangadaran is a teacher. If he hadn't become a teacher, what would have been his alternative job? → See lines 48 to 52.

#### 3. Exchange with your fellow students what you found out.

Get into an exchange with your fellow students about what you found out about life and work of adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Suggestions: Start with presenting the person interviewed here. Compare the information given and find similarities, for instance about the educational situation of the different generations.

#### 4. Get into a discussion.

In what way has the life of adivasis changed? Explain what strikes you most. Which of the presented jobs you would like to do? Discuss what similarities and differences you find to your own life and living conditions. How does the adivasi organisation AMS work to improve the living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills?

#### 5. Get into action.

Think what you could do to support good living conditions for adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Consider aspects of a sustainable lifestyle as well as specific actions for support. Plan a strategy what to do and present it together with your fellow students.

## Adivasis

India has a population of about 100 Million indigenous people. India's indigenous people are called „adivasis“. This Indian term means literally the „first inhabitants“.

There are many adivasi communities all over the country, all with their own language, belief and customs. Almost all adivasis live in rural areas, most of them in quite remote hill and forest areas.

## Nilgiris

The Nilgiris are a hill area in South India with large forests and remarkable populations of wild elephants, tigers and other wildlife. The Nilgiris are home to about 22,000 adivasis.

There they are today a minority among other Indian communities. For generations and especially in the last decades, people moved to the Nilgiris to work and live there. The main economy is tea cultivation. The tourism is growing and there is a lot of crop cultivation.

## Work of adivasis

In earlier generations adivasis lived as hunters and gatherers in and around the forests of the Nilgiri hills. Today gathering of forest products like bamboo, firewood, herbs, fruits and honey has been allowed again to adivasis, but hunting is prohibited.

As adivasis have been living with forest and nature for generations many know a lot about it and how to preserve it. This is why some adivasis work as elephant trainers or rangers for the forest department. There are also traditional healers who are experts on medicinal plants.

The majority of adivasis though works on tea plantations and in agriculture. Under British colonial rule large parts of the forests were cut down for tea plantations. Adivasis never officially owned their traditional land and a large number of adivasi families have lost their land to migrants and work today on their fields and plantations, often as day labourers.

## Adivasis' living situation

The living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills has been very difficult. They are not allowed to live in the protected forest areas and lack land titles of agricultural land. As the villages are remote health care and education are difficult. Without good education they get only basic jobs and less income, often on daily basis only. But money is needed for all aspects of life.

## Adivasi organisation AMS

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## Farm land for adivasis

Land is a very valuable resource in India as the availability of land is limited, and the population is growing. Cities are expanding into the surrounding areas. Roads, industrial estates, tourist resorts and residential areas grow. Land plots get more and more expensive.

Last but not least, agricultural land is needed to feed the growing population in the cities and in the rural areas. In 2011, 69 % of India's population lived in rural areas. For most of the rural population to have an own piece of land means an income and enough to eat. More so for the adivasis. 90 % of adivasis live in rural areas, and the vast majority of them lives under the poverty line. Most work in agriculture. To have some land on their own secures their livelihood.

In the Nilgiri hills the adivasis have been living for generations and centuries in and around the forests. Besides hunting, gathering and fishing, they did agriculture also. But they never officially owned the land.

Under British colonial rule, a lot of forest was cut for tea plantations. Migrants from other parts of South India have moved into the Nilgiri hills. Refugees from Sri Lanka came in the 1970s to settle there. A large number of adivasi families lost their land to the new settlers. Poor adivasi families who got into debt had to give their land. Some sold their land. Some were cheated.

In the 1980s the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills were living in extreme poverty. They had no education, no money and finally no land. Many were starving having just one meal a day.

More and more young adivasis started to work as volunteers to change the situation. They organised a demonstration, which was a huge success: 10,000 of adivasis demonstrated for land rights. For hours they blocked the main road in Gudalur town. It was the first time that the local public and administration noticed the problems of the adivasis. It was the first time that the adivasis felt that they are many and can change things.

The adivasi organisation AMS was formed. More demonstrations and discussions with villagers and politicians were organised. During the 1990s more than half of the adivasi families got their land back, got official land titles, and started to do farming.

On their farm land the adivasi families grow vegetables and fruits for their own consumption. To get an income they cultivate tea, coffee and pepper plants or areca nut trees.

Tea cultivation is the main economy of the Nilgiri hills. That's why the adivasi organisation AMS supported the adivasi families to cultivate tea on their farm land. Another important reason is that tea leaves can be picked continuously so tea plants provide an income all year round – unlike coffee.

The adivasi tea farmers also found a cooperative to sell their tea harvest collectively. As cooperative members they are not cheated and get better prices.

Unfortunately, all farmers depend on the market prices. When the price goes, down their income drops so they need another income sources also.

## Education and work of adivasis (indigenous people) in the South Indian Nilgiri hills

### Ayyappan – a farmer and community worker

Ayyappan with his wife (2nd from right) and his children (photo: AMS)



Ayyappan (photo: ATP)



Adivasi tea farmers on their field (photo: ATP)



Ayyappan (left) at a meeting of AMS community workers (photo: ATP)

## Education and work of adivasi

# Ayyappan – a farmer and community worker

# Ayyappan

1 My name is Ayyappan. I am 50 years old. I live with my family in Theyyakunni, a village in the Nilgiri hills of South India. I have three children – two girls named Avaniya and Ashreya and a boy called Ashridh. My wife's name is Kavitha. My parents have expired a few years back. My father got 90 years old, my mother 88 years. My three sisters are married and live with their families. My brother also lives in Theyyakunni with his wife and four children.

I know English, but my mother tongue is Mullakurumba. This is the local language of our community called Mullakurumba. We belong to the adivasis, the indigenous people of India. I grew up talking Mullakurumba and the local Indian languages Malayalam and Tamil. English I learnt at school.

10 My mother Gauri didn't go to school, she was an analphabet. My father Kalan went to school till 2nd grade. He could read and write in Malayalam. My parents were farmers. They worked as agricultural labourers and on our own land. My parents had a field where they grew millet, paddy, maize, yams and tapioca for our own consumption. Some families in my village lost their land to migrants: When they borrowed money and were not able to pay it back, they had to give their land, or they allowed a new neighbour to cultivate on their land. Later on, that family would declare the land as their property. We always kept our family land.

15 Now my family and my brother's family cultivate food crops like paddy and tapioca as well as money crops like tea, coffee, pepper and areca nuts. This year my family harvestest 500 kg areca nuts, 100 kg coffee and only 20 kg of pepper due to a pest. Every month, we pluck about 150 kg tea leaves. For areca nuts we got 20 Rupees per kg, for coffee 55 Rupees per kg, for pepper 600 Rupees per kg, and for tea leaves 7 Rupees per kg. In total, we earned about 40,000 Rupees this year.

20 But farming is not my only work. I work as a community worker for our adivasi organisation AMS. For this work I earn 13,000 Rupees per month because I have many years of experience. Till last year I earned 11,000 Rupees per month. My wife is at home, taking care for our three children, cooking and household work. Our income is on medium level: It is enough for our expenses and we can save a little bit. Our main expenses we spend on education for our children.

25 My elder daughter Avaniya goes to college 20 km away from my village. She studies English and is in her final year for her Bachelor. Every year, we spend 10,000 Rupees for the college fees. For the exams we have to pay extra 500 or 600 Rupees. Additionally, we have to pay for her travel expenses, books and uniform. My daughter Ashreya attends 9th grade and my son Ashridh 6th grade at a Christian school in our area. Each year we have to pay up to 30,000 Rupees for their fees plus extra expenses. Classes are held in English. My only interest is that my children shall speak English well. By attending government schools, nobody is able to talk foreign languages.

30 My children can choose what they want to become – they are good students. So far, they haven't mentioned what they want to become. Adivasi children don't have that ambition.

I myself studied till 12th grade at a government school near our village. After 5th grade I went to a residential school for adivasi children, but I left the school after three months. The school was not good, teachers didn't come to class, and books were not good. So I went back to my village and attended a day school again. After 12th grade I applied three times for Bachelor of Commerce at a government college in Ooty, but I didn't get a seat. Then I studied commerce for one year at the same Christian college where my daughter studies now. But my parents couldn't afford the fees. When they didn't pay, I left the college.

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In 1984, when I was 18 years old, I started to do volunteer work for our adivasi community together with a few other bachelors. We formed a volunteer group for ten Mullakurumba villages. We fought against land loss, sexual harrasment and discrimination and handled family problems. You can call it social work as well as political work. I call it community work. My work was voluntary, I didn't have any income. But I was fine, because I stayed with my parents and we had food, because we grew our own rice on our field.

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Three years later we got in touch with other volunteers in other adivasi villages. Everywhere our people were very poor and starving. Many families had lost their land. On 5th of December 1988, we organised a huge demonstration for land rights with 10,000 adivasis participating. That time we formed our adivasi organisation AMS. Since then I have been working for it. I am one of the senior members. I also know a lot about our customs, about forest and wildlife and about medicinal plants.

45

I gave evening classes for adults to teach them how to read and write. Sometimes sick people came and we took them to the government hospital 20 km away. Our land rights campaign was successfull – many families got some land back. I helped adivasi families to plant tea on their land - we delivered tea seedlings from a tree nursery to the families. With tea cultivation you can get a regular income. We also formed a cooperative of small adivasi tea farmers to get a better price for the tea leaves.

Initially, I got only 300 Rupees per month. This was just my pocket money, I mainly worked voluntary. Three years later I got a salary of 3,000 or 4,000 Rupees per month. This was an average salary, not really good. But it was a regular income, and I could manage. At the age of 28 I got married to my wife Kavitha. My salary got increased every year, and today I earn 13,000 Rupees per month.

Today I am involved in many aspects of our community work, and I coordinate a lot. Often I attend meetings with the health team or the education team. I am also involved in marketing the tea. The villages call me if there is any problem with their land or in the forest. Normally a meeting is over by 5 pm before it gets dark. But if there is a problem, we work till night also. In my free time I love playing football. My son Ashridh isalso a big football fan.

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I like my work, mainly because our adivasi organisation AMS is good for our community. Without AMS our living condition surely would be worse. I like to continue my work. I like to live in my village, among my people – whereelse I should go? For the future I wish for good education for my children and for our adivasi community. Awareness is high among my people, but wealth didn't go up. Many adivasis are still poor. They are day labourers and don't earn much by plucking tea. Their income may be enough for food and basis daily needs, but they cannot pay for a good education for their children.

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## Tasks

### 1. Read the texts.

They give you an insight into life and work of indigenous people, the adivasis, in the Nilgiri hills in South India. You may choose which text to read first.

### 2. Answer the following questions:

- Why does Ayyappan prefer private school instead of government school for his children? → See lines 30 to 35.
- In 1984 he helped to form a volunteer group. What were their goals? → See lines 39 to 41.
- Ayyappan is a community worker. Give some examples of his work. → See lines 49 to 53.

### 3. Exchange with your fellow students what you found out.

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The majority of adivasis though works on tea plantations and in agriculture. Under British colonial rule large parts of the forests were cut down for tea plantations. Adivasis never officially owned their traditional land and a large number of adivasi families have lost their land to migrants and work today on their fields and plantations, often as day labourers.

## Adivasis' living situation

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## Tourism in the Nilgiris

Tea cultivation has been the main economy in the Nilgiris for more than 150 years. Under British colonial rule large parts of the forests in the Nilgiri hills were cut down for tea plantations in the 19th century. Plantation after plantation is to be seen along the roads.

However, there are still large parts of the forests left in the area which were declared as protected areas: The Wyanad Wildlife Sanctuary, Nagarhole Tiger Reserve, Bandipur Tiger Reserve, the Mukurthi and Silent Valley National Parks and Mudumalai Tiger Reserve.

In 1986 these protected areas were declared as the „Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve“ by UNSECO. The „Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve“ covers a total area of 5,520 km<sup>2</sup>. It is part of the larger Western Ghats, which is an important biodiversity hotspot in the world and a world heritage site.

The „Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve“ shows a high biodiversity of flowering plants, butterflies, birds and mammals. There is a large population of wild elephants and tigers. The forests are filled with other large mammals like leopard, deer and Indian bison.

Besides tea cultivation tourism has become an important economy in the Nilgiri hills. More and more tourists have come to the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the last few years. Reasons are the growing wealth of nearby cities and the growth of infrastructure within the Nilgiri area. Tourists come even from the city of Bangalore and from foreign countries to enjoy nature and wildlife and the comfortable climate.

There are more than 44 tourist resorts in the forest and even more hotels and lodges in the town areas. Tea plantations open their bungalows to tourists and offer „homestays“ as an additional income for the tea estate owners.

Though some people see the growing tourism economy as a positive development, others see the negative impacts:

- The increasing traffic noise and pollution affect wild animals.
- More wild animals get killed by road accidents.
- The passage of large animals is blocked by electric fences.
- Often the tourists are loud and litter the area with bottles and food wrappers.
- The growing wealth is unequally distributed, further expanding the gap between the rich and the poor.

The adivasi organisation AMS started an ecotourism hotel called „Ecoscape“. The hotel is situated on the tea estate of AMS, close to a stream and surrounded by forests. Ecotourism means to ensure benefits for local people and nature. „Ecoscape“ provides local adivasis jobs with good working conditions. All profits of this hotel support charitable work in the region. The „Ecoscape“ hotel also hosts workshops, training sessions, meetings, children camps and fun activities for the local adivasi community. The „Ecoscape“ hotel aims to have a limited impact on nature by using environmentally friendly materials, having a good waste management and respecting wildlife.

## Education and work of adivasis (indigenous people) in the South Indian Nilgiri hills

### Ramesh – an ecotourism hotel staff

Ramesh works in the open dining hall of the ecotourism hotel (photo: ATP)



Ramesh with his wife Chandika and his son Chandradas. (photo: ATP)



Guests of the ecotourism hotel go for a walk (photo: ATP)



Ramesh (left) with his team colleagues (photo: ATP)

## Education and work of adivasi

# Ramesh – employee of an ecotourism hotel

Ramesh

1 My name is Ramesh. I am 28 years old. My family lives in Erode, a village in the Nilgiri hills of South India. Now my father, my mother and my younger sister stay together in our house. Till six month back I also stayed there with my wife and our baby. My wife's name is Chandika. She is 22 years old. The boy is 10 months old. His name is Chandradas. Six month back we shifted to a flat in Gudalur. My wife used to work as a nurse at the adivasi hospital in Gudalur, and there she started to work again now. Our boy is taken care of in the kindergarten of the hospital.

I know English, but my mother tongue is Paniya. This is the local language of our community called Paniya. We belong to the adivasis, the indigenous people of India. I grew up talking Paniya and the local Indian languages Malayalam and Tamil. English I learnt at school. And I practise English a lot through my work. I am one of five staff members of an ecotourism hotel. With our hotel manager Ankur we have to talk in English – he is from Delhi in North India and speaks only English and Hindi. Also with foreign guests or guests from Bangalore I have to communicate in English because they don't know our local languages. I can understand everything, but talking in English is difficult sometimes.

My mother and my father didn't go to school, both can't read and write – they are analphabets. My father works as a day labourer in agriculture. Once or twice a week my father goes to work. My mother also used to go for the same kind of work, but now she is at home as she gets old. My eldest sister Bindu is 35 years old. She went to school for one or two years only, but she has a regular income. She works as a tea plucker on the same tea estate where I work at an ecotourism hotel. My elder brother Manikandan is 30 years old. He went to school till 8th grade. He works together with me at the hotel. My younger sister Meena is 20 years old. She studied up to 10th grade at a government school in Devala, a nearby small town. She is not yet married. She was a teacher trainee at our adivasi school in Gudalur. When she got some health problem, she stopped the training. Now she is at home.

I have the best education in my family. After 10th grade I studied hotel management in Gudalur. This small town is about a one-hour drive away from my village. It was a one and a half-year course, and I got my diploma. I had to pay 35,000 Rupees for the course. My elder brother Manikandan paid for my education. At that time he went to the forest to dig for gold. Sometimes he found gold and sold it. On average he got 2,000 or 2,500 Rupees per week. We didn't take a loan. Many people went for gold digging. Gold digging is very bad for the environment. My brother stopped when he didn't find much gold anymore and when I asked him to join this new ecotourism hotel. He likes the job.

As part of my hotel management course, I had six month training at the five star hotel „The Residency“ in Coimbatore. Coimbatore has about one million inhabitants. The local language there is Tamil. From Gudalur it takes at least five hours by bus to get to Coimbatore. I learnt a lot there. It was a very good hotel. Together with the other trainees, I stayed in the hotel, and we had a really good time. After my training I decided to go to Ernakulam to work in hotels there. I have chosen Ernakulam for the experience. This city lies at the west coast of South India. I liked the place for its beaches and boats. The local language is Malayalam, which I also know. And like in Coimbatore many business people and hotel guests talk in English.

In Ernakulam I earned 3,000 Rupees a month, and I got free accomodation and food at the hotels where I worked. It was my first salary and I still was a bachelor. Every month I kept 500 Rupees for myself. 2,500 Rupees I sent to my parents. After three years I moved to a three star hotel in Coimbatore again. Why? A friend of mine worked there and asked me to join him. I was alone in Ernakulam, and the salary was better in Coimbatore: I earned 9,000 Rupees a month. I went on supporting my family, and I could save a bit of money. For five years I worked in Coimbatore.

Then my father asked me to come back home and marry. So I came back to our village Erode and married my wife Chandika. Most people have an arranged marriage, but we had a love marriage. I met my wife in Gudalur when I took my sister to the adivasi hospital in Gudalur. Chandika worked there as a nurse. That's how we met. We married two years ago.

When I came back home and married, I was lucky to get my new job here: Two years back I joint the ecotourism hotel here. It is a new hotel, we had to start with getting the rooms ready. The building was already there – it used to be a training centre for our adivasi community with very basic facilities. It is in the middle of the adivasi tea estate; this estate belongs to our adivasi organisation AMS. Our organisation bought the land with the help of a British trust and a lot of donations from India, Great Britain and Germany. The place is beautiful. There are not only tea plants but many trees also. There are a stream and waterfalls nearby and forest all around. For the last few years some people have had the idea we should start an ecotourism hotel here – and now we have our company Ecoscape and its hotel.

We did a lot of construction work to modernise the old building in the estate. We set up bathrooms, built stairs, a terrace, a kitchen and an open air dining hall. We renovated all rooms and decorated the walls with traditional paintings. The hotel gets more and more popular – on weekends and in high season we are always full. My team has to organise everything for the guests. When guests are here, four members of our team stay here overnight. We clean and prepare the rooms for the guests. We organise their transport from town. We cook and provide breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as snacks and hot and cold beverages. In the morning and evening we take the guests for nature walks, birdwatching or a bath in the river.

We don't let our guests walk around alone – this would be too dangerous. Two wild Indian bisons live on the estate here. And there are leopards and wild elephants in the forests around. Often we see their tracks. A few weeks back a male elephant came close to our hotel building. An American girl was very happy to see the elephant while she was save on the terrace. The elephant ate some forest fruits and went off peacefully. But they can get very angry and dangerous when they feel disturbed.

For my future I wish to work here only. I like everything of this work. I earn a salary of 11,000 Rupees. My wife gets 5,700 Rupees at the hospital so we can manage well and support our parents. My team is great. I work together with my brother Manikandan, my cousin and two other *Paniya* boys. Our hotel manager Ankur lives here and works with us, he is a nice fellow. I love to meet many different guests. And I love the nature here.

## Tasks

1. Read the texts.  
They give you an insight into life and work of indigenous people, the adivasis, in the Nilgiri hills in South India. You may choose which text to read first.
2. Answer the following questions:
  - a) Why are Ramesh's English skills particularly important for his job? → See lines 10 to 13.
  - b) In line 44 Ramesh tells that he had a love marriage instead of an arranged marriage. Explain the difference between these two traditions.
  - c) What's Ramesh's daily job as a hotel staff member? → See lines 55 to 56.
3. Exchange with your fellow students what you found out.  
Get into an exchange with your fellow students about what you found out about life and work of adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Suggestions: Start with presenting the person interviewed here. Compare the information given and find similarities, for instance about the educational situation of the different generations.
4. Get into a discussion.  
In what way has the life of adivasis changed? Explain what strikes you most. Which of the presented jobs you would like to do? Discuss what similarities and differences you find to your own life and living conditions. How does the adivasi organisation AMS work to improve the living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills?
5. Get into action.  
Think what you could do to support good living conditions for adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Consider aspects of a sustainable lifestyle as well as specific actions for support. Plan a strategy what to do and present it together with your fellow students.



## Adivasis

India has a population of about 100 Million indigenous people. India's indigenous people are called „adivasis“. This Indian term means literally the „first inhabitants“.

There are many adivasi communities all over the country, all with their own language, belief and customs. Almost all adivasis live in rural areas, most of them in quite remote hill and forest areas.

## Nilgiris

The Nilgiris are a hill area in South India with large forests and remarkable populations of wild elephants, tigers and other wildlife. The Nilgiris are home to about 22,000 adivasis.

There they are today a minority among other Indian communities. For generations and especially in the last decades, people moved to the Nilgiris to work and live there. The main economy is tea cultivation. The tourism is growing and there is a lot of crop cultivation.

## Work of adivasis

In earlier generations adivasis lived as hunters and gatherers in and around the forests of the Nilgiri hills. Today gathering of forest products like bamboo, firewood, herbs, fruits and honey has been allowed again to adivasis, but hunting is prohibited.

As adivasis have been living with forest and nature for generations many know a lot about it and how to preserve it. This is why some adivasis work as elephant trainers or rangers for the forest department. There are also traditional healers who are experts on medicinal plants.

The majority of adivasis though works on tea plantations and in agriculture. Under British colonial rule large parts of the forests were cut down for tea plantations. Adivasis never officially owned their traditional land and a large number of adivasi families have lost their land to migrants and work today on their fields and plantations, often as day labourers.

## Adivasis' living situation

The living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills has been very difficult. They are not allowed to live in the protected forest areas and lack land titles of agricultural land. As the villages are remote health care and education are difficult. Without good education they get only basic jobs and less income, often on daily basis only. But money is needed for all aspects of life.

## Adivasi organisation AMS

That many aspects of life have improved for many adivasis in the Nilgiri hills has been the achievement of their adivasi organisation AMS. Volunteers and adivasi staff members work in the villages for land titles, health, education, better income and community life.

## Health for adivasis

Proper health care is a human right: Whoever is sick shall be able to seek a doctor's advice and afford the necessary medicines and treatments.

For the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills of South India, a good health care has been difficult. These are some of the reasons:

- Some of the adivasi villages are very remote in the Nilgiri hills. People have to walk through the forest on hilly foot paths to get to a road and then go by bus to reach a medical shop or doctor. No nurse or doctor would visit the patients in their home.
- A majority of the adivasi families in the Nilgiri hills live in poverty. Poor adivasis can't afford a healthy nutrition. Vegetables and milk products are quite expensive to buy. Poor housing conditions support colds during the rainy season and Tuberculosis.
- Many work as day labourers with little and irregular income. Poor families can hardly save money. They find it very difficult to meet extra expenses for medicines, medical treatment and transport.
- The adivasis in the Nilgiri hills have not been well educated. Almost all grandparents of today's children were analphabets. They didn't know much about possible treatments and medicines. They only spoke their adivasi languages and couldn't understand the doctors in town who spoke a different Indian language.
- Adivasis have been exploited and discriminated for generations by landowners, traders, business men, rich people and town population. Adivasis were cheated and laughed at by them. Even at hospital they were discriminated – they had to wait longer and doctors shouted at them. Therefore, the adivasis didn't like to go to town or a hospital. Just twenty five years ago adivasis would hide themselves when a stranger came to their village.

For all these reasons, the health situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills used to be really bad in the 1990s: Maternal mortality was very high and also infant mortality. A large number of children didn't survive their 5th birthday.

Today the majority of adivasis is still poor, and the villages are still in remote places. Today however, the adivasi organisation AMS has established a health care system, which improved their health situation a lot:

1. Adivasis from the villages were trained as nurses. Each nurse visits a number of 20 to 40 villages at least once a month. They give medical advice and simple medicines and treatment. They regularly check the health condition of babies, pregnant women, elderly people and chronic patients.
2. With the help of Indian doctors, the adivasi organisation AMS set up an adivasi hospital. All the nurses are adivasis, they know the language and problems of their patients. The hospital established a health insurance system so the adivasis only pay for medicines, but not for deliveries, treatments or operations. The hospital is a very good one. That's why the town population also likes to come – and everybody respects the adivasi nurses.

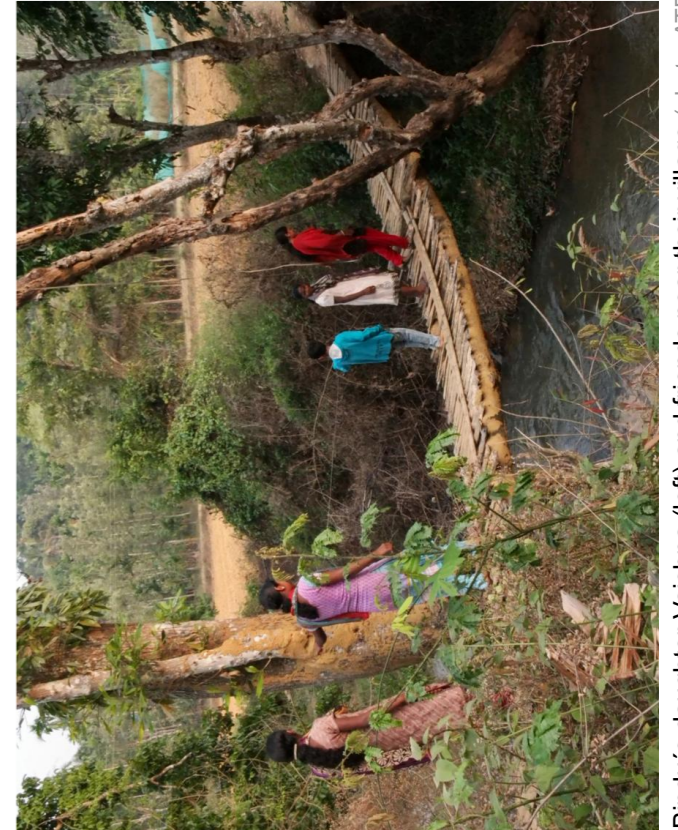
## Education and work of adivasis (indigenous people) in the South Indian Nilgiri hills

### Bindu – a nurse for adivasi villages

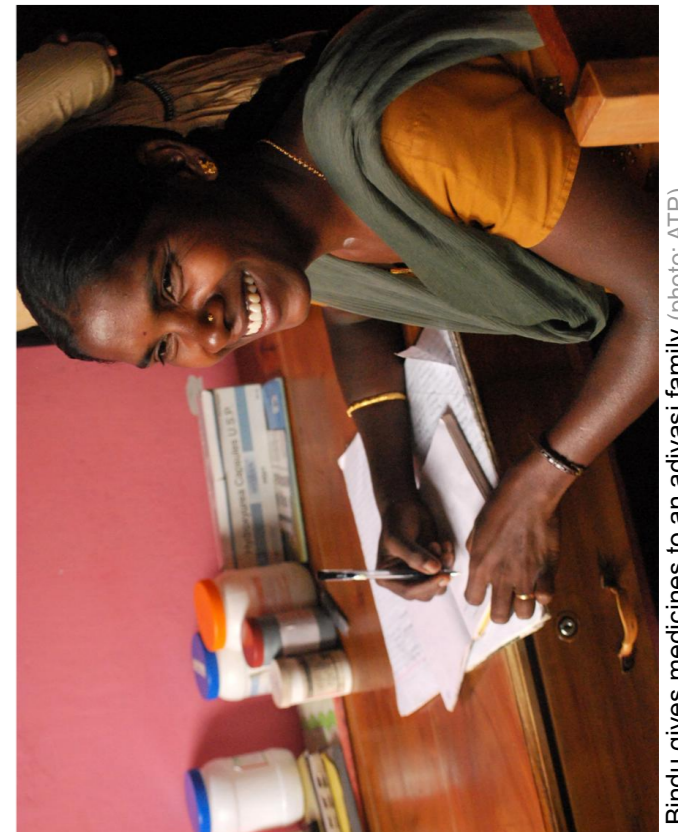
From left to right: Bindu's mother and father, Bindu and a friend (photo: ATP)



Bindu (photo: ATP)



Bindu's daughter Vaishna (left) and friends near their village (photo: ATP)



Bindu gives medicines to an adivasi family (photo: ATP)

## Education and work of adivasi

# Bindu – a nurse for adivasi villages

Bindu

1 My name is Bindu. I am 35 years old. I live with my parents and my daughter in Pattavayal, a village in the Nilgiri hills of South India. My father is about 60 years old, his name is Kakku. My mother's name is Velachi. These are typical names of our community called Paniya. We belong to the adivasis, the indigenous people of India. My elder sister is called Malu, which is also a Paniya name. But my name and my daughter's name are not traditional Paniya names. My daughter's name is Vaishna. She is 15 years old. I was married, but my husband left me when Vaishna was still small.

My mother tongue is Paniya. This is the local language of our community called Paniya. I grew up talking Paniya and the local Indian languages Malayalam and Tamil. English I learnt at school. I am not very comfortable to speak English because I don't have much practise, but I can understand a lot.

10 My parents didn't go to school – they are analphabets. But my mother sent me to school, every day. I had to walk for 15 or 20 minutes to get to the primary school. After 5th grade I had to walk for half an hour to reach my secondary school in Ambalamoola. My daughter Vaishna attends the same school now, she is in 9th grade and has exams this year. My elder sister Malu went to school till 8th grade. Her husband works as agricultural day labourer. My sister is a housewife. She has two daughters and one small grandchild. I had one elder brother, but he died of Asthma when he was six months old.

At school I didn't have any problems with other children, all were nice. I liked to go to school, but I wasn't good at math so I didn't pass the 10th grade exam. When I visited my sister in Ayyankolli, I met a community worker of our adivasi organisation AMS, and he suggested me to join the health program. IO got a nurse training for two years at our adivasi hospital in Gudalur. After that, I came back to Pattavayal. Since then, I have been working as a nurse for the adivasi villages in my area.

I like my work, it is not only health work but also community work. I inform the people in the villages about their rights. I take them to the government office to get their documents and help them to fill in the forms. Sometimes some people don't come for an appointment, then I get a bit angry. But otherwise I like my work very much. Every month I have to visit each of 31 villages around Pattavayal. I go there to see the pregnant women, the babies, the elders, the chronic patients and any ill person. I am trained to give advice and medicines. In case of serious problems, we take the patients to hospital.

As a nurse trainee I got 500 Rupees and a free hostel accomodation, but I had to pay for my food expenses. I just had 200 Rupees as a little pocket money. Now I earn 12,300 Rupees a month – with every year of experience the salary gets raised. The school fees for Vaishna are only 500 Rupees per year because it is a government school. But every month I pay 400 Rupees for private tutions to ensure that she can pass her exams.

My mother is getting old, but she still does work. My mother is a day labourer. There is a law that the government has to provide 100 days of work in a year for every unemployed person. So every now and then, my mother goes to the administrative office in the morning where she gets some work for the day. She has to pluck tea leaves, clean the road or dig a whole for some construction work. Per day she gets 187 Rupees.

35 My father works on our own field. Earlier he used to go for agricultural labour work. But since he also gets old, he works on our field only. We own 1,600 m<sup>2</sup> around our house. At the time when my parents married, they lived in a nearby village. This land here was forest. My father cut down some trees and started planting. Then there were no neighbouring houses, all was forest. First he grew millets for their own consumption. Later he planted areca nut trees and coconut trees to earn some money. Today we have areca nut trees, coffee, pepper and tea plants. 40 Whatever we harvest we sell. For our own consumption we grow pumpkin, eggplant, beans, spinach, tomatoes and other vegetables. We also have two banana plants and a Jackfruit tree on our land. We are the only adivasi family here, but all neighbours are nice. We don't have any problems, all help each other.

From our land we get an income of around 35,000 Rupees annually. With this and my salary we can manage. Every month I save 2,000 Rupees in a welfare fund. When we need money urgently I give some gold jewelry to 45 the State Bank in Pattavayal and get it back later after paying 1% interest.

I wish to build a bathroom. So far, we only have a simple open air bathroom and toilet with just a plastic sheet around. Our new bathroom shall be a small brick building next to our house. But it will cost 50,000 Rupees. For that we have to save some more money.

50 My wish for the future is that my daughter Vaishna does well in her exams. She wants to become a doctor and work at the adivasi hospital in Gudalur. This would be great. Maybe she would be the first adivasi in our area to become a doctor. But for her studies we need money. And she has to perform well in her exams. Then she might get a stipendium.

## Tasks

1. Read the texts.  
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2. Answer the following questions:
  - a) Bindu's a nurse for adivasi villages. What is her function, what is she responsible for in the villages? → See lines 21 to 26.
  - b) In line 31 Bindu explains that her mother works as a day labourer. What does it mean?
  - c) Bindu's daughter wants to become a doctor. What is necessary to achieve that? → See lines 49 to 52.
3. Exchange with your fellow students what you found out.  
Get into an exchange with your fellow students about what you found out about life and work of adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Suggestions: Start with presenting the person interviewed here. Compare the information given and find similarities, for instance about the educational situation of the different generations.
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In what way has the life of adivasis changed? Explain what strikes you most. Which of the presented jobs you would like to do? Discuss what similarities and differences you find to your own life and living conditions. How does the adivasi organisation AMS work to improve the living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills?
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## Work of adivasis

In earlier generations adivasis lived as hunters and gatherers in and around the forests of the Nilgiri hills. Today gathering of forest products like bamboo, firewood, herbs, fruits and honey has been allowed again to adivasis, but hunting is prohibited.

As adivasis have been living with forest and nature for generations many know a lot about it and how to preserve it. This is why some adivasis work as elephant trainers or rangers for the forest department. There are also traditional healers who are experts on medicinal plants.

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## Adivasis' living situation

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## Adivasi organisation AMS

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## Computer work

There has been a huge change in the living situations of adivasis in the South Indian Nilgiri hills during the last two to three generations:

1. The elder adivasis, the grandparents of today's children, grew up with little or no formal education at all. They never went to school or attended only primary school for a few years. Many of them are analphabets and can hardly write their name. Some give a finger print when they have to give a signature. This lack of knowledge and their poverty made it easy for others to cheat them: Many adivasi families lost their land to migrants. Day labourers and farmers got less money for their work and products.

Today every adivasi child goes to school. Yes, some drop out of school again due to various difficulties. But the majority of adivasi children today finishes 8th, 9th, 10th or even 12th grade. In fact more and more young adivasis study at a college.

2. Earlier the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills used to live as hunters and gatherers and small farmers. They hunted deers, wild pigs, rabbits and birds. In the forests they collected wild honey, fruits, herbs, eatable roots and bamboo. Bamboo was used to construct a house, to plat mats, to make all kinds of basquets and even umbrellas.

Those professions are still there. Especially skilled adivasis make bamboo products or collect wild honey. Grandparents know which herbs to collect to cure a disease. And almost all children know how to catch crabs or fish. But hunting is not allowed by law. So the adivasis celebrate their annual hunting festival just as a ceremony and catch birds and rabbits only but no more pigs or deers.

3. Agriculture has been the main occupation for the majority of the adivasis: Grandparents, parents and young adults have been working as small farmers, as agricultural day labourers or as workers on one of the many tea estates in the area.

But with better education adivasis work today in various other professions also: as teacher, as nurse, as accountant, as ranger, as shop assistant, as carpenter, cook or tailor. Young adivasis get Bachelor degrees in various subjects. In a few years there might be adivasis working as doctors or lawyers also.

The adivasi organisation AMS offers various trainings and job opportunities for adivasis: It set up a hospital and a school. It established a company to market tea, coffee, pepper and honey produced by adivasi farmers. It developed a system of village health work. It runs village study centres. It manages a tea estate in the property of the adivasi organisation AMS. It started an ecotourism hotel.

In all these institutions the adivasis handle the administration and work with modern technology: They use tablets and internet to communicate health datas from the villages directly to the adivasi hospital. They use GPS to register adivasi land. They use Facebook to inform and Whatsapp to communicate and organise.

## Education and work of adivasis (indigenous people) in the South Indian Nilgiri hills

### Lalitha – an accountant

Lalitha and neighbour children in front of her house (photo: ATP)



Lalitha (photo: ATP)



Young accountants of the adivasi organisation AMS at work (photo: ATP)



Lalitha (right) gives a lecture to other accountants (photo: ATP)

## Education and work of adivasi

# Lalitha – an accountant

Lalitha

1 My name is Lalitha. I am 42 years old. I live in Gudalur, a small town in the Nilgiri hills of South India. I work in Gudalur as an accountant. But I grew up in Kappala, the village where my parents used to live with me and my two elder brothers Krishnan and Ashokan.

5 We belong to the adivasis, the indigenous people of India. My community is called Mullakurumba. My mother tongue is Mullakurumba, this is the local language of our community. I grew up talking Mullakurumba at home. I also know the local Indian languages Malayalam and Tamil. English I learnt at school.

10 My mother didn't go to school, she was an analphabet. My father went to primary school up to 5th grade. Both of my parents worked in agriculture. They earned money as agricultural day labourers. And they worked on our family land. Luckily my family never lost our land. No family in Kappala has lost its land – nobody in Kappala left, sold or lost the land. In other adivasi villages many people lost their land. My parents died when they were about 60 years old. My father died of stomach problems and my mother died of cancer.

Now my brothers work on our family land in Kappala. Our family owns about 3,500 m<sup>2</sup> of land. For sale they grow coffee, pepper, bananas and ginger. On a small part of the land they cultivate paddy for own consumption.

15 My brother Ashokan used to have an auto and work as taxi driver. Later he sold the auto; I never asked him why. Today my brother Ashokan works as agricultural labourer on other fields and as farmer on our family land. His wife is a housewife, she takes care for the two children, the cooking and the household. This itself is a lot of work with three cooked meals a day and without dishwasher and washing machine. Their daughter attends 8th grade and their son studies in 6th grade. Ashoka and his family stay in my parent's house.

20 My eldest brother Krishnan bought land and built his own house in Kappala where he stays with his wife and his two children. His wife is a housewife. His son Akilesh is 20 years old. Akilesh didn't finish his studies at a college in Ooty, but he got a job for the forest department in the nearby town Devala. His daughter Anupama attends 9th grade. Krishnan himself went to school till 10th grade, like Ashokan. Besides his farm work Krishnan works as a community worker for our adivasi organisation AMS. He is responsible for a number of villages around Kappala. He informs the villagers about their rights and their opportunities. Whenever there is a problem in the village he helps to solve it.

I also work for our adivasi organisation AMS. I am an accountant. I went to school till 12th grade. As it was a government school we had to pay only very little school fees. Like my brothers I walked to my school for about half an hour. All lessons at school were held in the local Indian language Malayalam. English was a subject. I had no problems at school - I had good friends and the teachers were nice.

30 After school I attended a government college in Ooty. Ooty is further away, about three hours by bus. But there was no other college nearby. For three years I stayed in a hostel in Ooty. One Mullakurumba girl from a nearby village stayed there with me. The other students were also nice, so we had a good time. My family could afford my education. As it was a government college we had to pay no school fees, only exam fees. And for all adivasis the government pays the hostel fees. Today many of the young adivasis study at college. I got a Bachelor in history.

35 After finishing college I was at home for one year. Then I started working for our adivasi organisation AMS. My brother Krishnan told me that the culture team was looking for staff. So I joined the culture team. We visited many of our adivasi villages to collect traditional stories and songs. We recorded the songs and even produced a CD. We also published a story book. We wrote down all stories in the local adivasi language called Paniya. The Paniya language doesn't have a script, so we used Tamil letters.

40 After two years I left the culture team and joined our office as accountant. At that time the manager called for help in the office. Initially I didn't know much about accounting. I got a good training at work. I have been working as an accountant for almost twenty years now. Everything I know I learnt through my job.

We are usually four or five people working in the office. We work well together and help each other to find mistakes in the accounts, to explain a software or to handle computer problems.

45 I like my work. From morning 8 am to evening 5 pm I am at the office. I enter data in the computer, check and correct the accounts of our organisation. Every month I give a one day training for young accountants from the villages together with my colleague Suresh. I like the computer work but I like to interact with people also. I have no plans to change my job in future. I want to continue this work. I like it. And so far there is nobody who is able and willing to take over my job, so I cannot leave it.

50 I get a salary of 10,000 Rupees a month. It is not a high salary, but I can manage. I am not married and live on my own in Gudalur. For my small flat I pay 1,500 Rupees a month. Every month I can save a small amount. Besides my rent I have to spend money on food, clothes, furniture and household items, electricity, TV, my phone and any travel expenses.

55 But I don't travel much. It has been a long time ago that I visited other places like Chennai, Trivandrum, Mysore or Ooty. Every second weekend though I visit my village Kappala. There I spend one day with my brother Krishnan and his family and one day with my brother Ashokan and his family. On Monday morning I return back to work. On holidays and for weddings and festivals I also go to Kappala.

60 In Gudalur I have a very close friend. She is also unmarried. Whenever I am in Gudalur on a free Sunday we spend the day together. In the evenings after my work I go to town for a little shopping. Then I watch TV and cook my dinner. I am happy in Gudalur.

## Tasks

1. Read the texts.

They give you an insight into life and work of indigenous people, the adivasis, in the Nilgiri hills in South India. You may choose which text to read first.

2. Answer the following questions:

a) Why many adivasi people lost their land? → See lines 9 to 10.

b) How could Lalitha's parents afford her education at school and college? → See lines 26 to 28 and lines 32 to 34.

c) Lalitha is a good accountant who gives trainings for young accountants. Where did she get her knowledge? → See lines 41 to 42.

3. Exchange with your fellow students what you found out.

Get into an exchange with your fellow students about what you found out about life and work of adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Suggestions: Start with presenting the person interviewed here. Compare the information given and find similarities, for instance about the educational situation of the different generations.

4. Get into a discussion.

In what way has the life of adivasis changed? Explain what strikes you most. Which of the presented jobs you would like to do? Discuss what similarities and differences you find to your own life and living conditions. How does the adivasi organisation AMS work to improve the living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills?

5. Get into action.

Think what you could do to support good living conditions for adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Consider aspects of a sustainable lifestyle as well as specific actions for support. Plan a strategy what to do and present it together with your fellow students.

## Adivasis

India has a population of about 100 Million indigenous people. India's indigenous people are called „adivasis“. This Indian term means literally the „first inhabitants“.

There are many adivasi communities all over the country, all with their own language, belief and customs. Almost all adivasis live in rural areas, most of them in quite remote hill and forest areas.

## Nilgiris

The Nilgiris are a hill area in South India with large forests and remarkable populations of wild elephants, tigers and other wildlife. The Nilgiris are home to about 22,000 adivasis.

There they are today a minority among other Indian communities. For generations and especially in the last decades, people moved to the Nilgiris to work and live there. The main economy is tea cultivation. The tourism is growing and there is a lot of crop cultivation.

## Work of adivasis

In earlier generations adivasis lived as hunters and gatherers in and around the forests of the Nilgiri hills. Today gathering of forest products like bamboo, firewood, herbs, fruits and honey has been allowed again to adivasis, but hunting is prohibited.

As adivasis have been living with forest and nature for generations many know a lot about it and how to preserve it. This is why some adivasis work as elephant trainers or rangers for the forest department. There are also traditional healers who are experts on medicinal plants.

The majority of adivasis though works on tea plantations and in agriculture. Under British colonial rule large parts of the forests were cut down for tea plantations. Adivasis never officially owned their traditional land and a large number of adivasi families have lost their land to migrants and work today on their fields and plantations, often as day labourers.

## Adivasis' living situation

The living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills has been very difficult. They are not allowed to live in the protected forest areas and lack land titles of agricultural land. As the villages are remote health care and education are difficult. Without good education they get only basic jobs and less income, often on daily basis only. But money is needed for all aspects of life.

## Adivasi organisation AMS

That many aspects of life have improved for many adivasis in the Nilgiri hills has been the achievement of their adivasi organisation AMS. Volunteers and adivasi staff members work in the villages for land titles, health, education, better income and community life.

## Elephants in the Nilgiris

There is large number of wild elephants in the Nilgiri hills in South India. There are two main protected areas in the Nilgiri district – the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve and the Mukurthi National Park. But the animals live both inside and outside of the protected areas. Some elephants even live on tea and coffee estates. This is because elephants need large home ranges of about 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> and cannot stay in reserves like the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve which covers about 320 km<sup>2</sup>. Elephants need to be able to move between the protected areas and forest patches.

Now the areas outside of protected areas are getting highly fragmented, because of the growing population and increasing demand of land for agriculture and settlement. Elephants now find it difficult to move from one forest patch to another, as all their corridors are being cut off.

Elephants cause significant damage as they move through the area – they destroy crops, small bridges or houses. When they smell food grains or salt stored in houses for example, they often even kill people in accidents.

In the Nilgiri hills there has been considerable cultural tolerance to elephants in the past. The indigenous communities in the Nilgiris, the adivasis, have lived alongside the elephants and have evolved ways of coping and have much less trouble with the wildlife than others.

As elephants walk around certain passes as a routine, experienced adivasis know where and when to expect elephants and therefore avoid them. They can read the tracks in nature and smell if an elephant is around and know it is time to move out of the way of the elephant.

Many of the adivasis feel actually sorry for the elephant whenever one came to an estate or settlement. They understand that the elephant came out of the forest in search for food only. So they may just wait for the elephant to fill its stomach and go away by itself. In order to avoid damage to the house they may leave freshly harvested fruits and crops outside the house for the elephant. In some incidents adivasis have shown a lost elephant its way back to forest by laying out crops for it along the path.

But people who migrated into the Nilgiri hills show less tolerance for the elephants. It is interesting that more accidents with elephants happen in areas further away from the forests, where elephants are actually seen less, than in areas closer to the forests where people know better how to deal with elephants.

But with modern lifestyles the cultural tolerance of adivasis is breaking down too leading to more accidents with elephants.

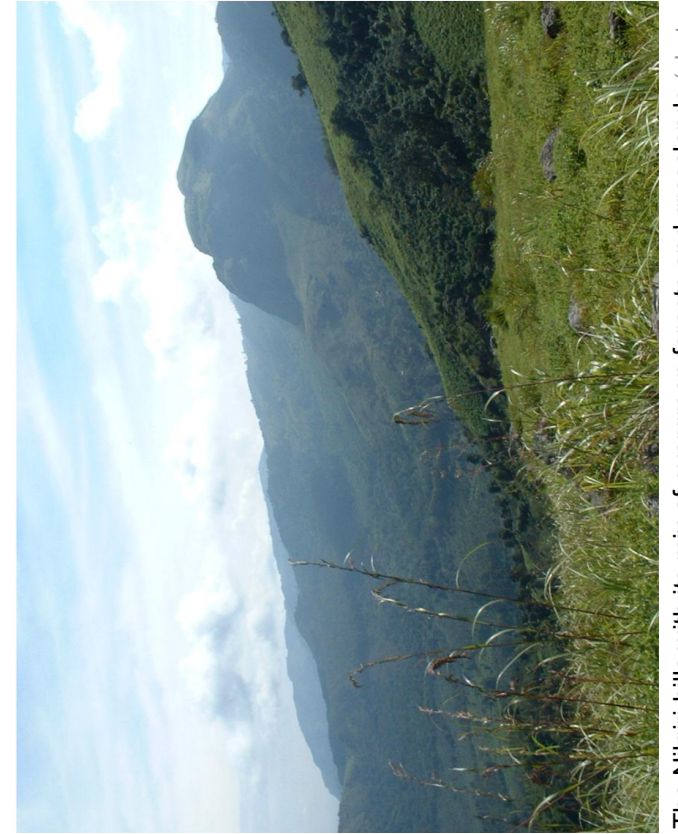
The Shola Trust is a young and small organisation trying to find solutions for a peaceful coexistence between elephants and men. They work to establish a warning system with light signals and SMS for the local people. The study the behaviour of individual elephants. They communicate the traditional knowledge how to live with elephants. And they bought land to increase the green corridors.

## Education and work of adivasis (indigenous people) in the South Indian Nilgiri hills

### Prakash – a geographer



A wild elephant strayed into a tea estate (photo: AMS)



The Nilgiri hills with its mix of evergreen forests and grasslands (photo: ATP)



Prakash (second from the right) with his family (photo: ATP)



A wild elephant strayed into human habitation (photo: AMS)

## Education and work of adivasi

# Prakash – a geographer

Prakash

1 My name is Prakash. I am 24 years old. I live with my family in Gudalur, a small town in the Nilgiri hills of South India. I am not yet married. I live together with my father Gangadaran, my mother Saraswati and my younger brother Prasad. We share a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. The first few years of my life I lived with my family in Nedungode, the village of my grandparents. We visit Nedungode whenever there are 5 holidays or festivals.

I know English, but at home we always talk Mullakurumba. This is the local language of our community called Mullakurumba. We belong to the adivasis, the indigenous people of India. I grew up talking Mullakurumba and the local Indian languages Malayalam and Tamil. I got my education in Tamil and English. So I can read and write in Tamil and English, but I cannot write in Malayalam. Tamil and Malayalam have different letters.

10 My mother is a nurse. She works at the adivasi hospital in Gudalur. This hospital is managed by our adivasi organisation AMS. My father also works for our adivasi organisation. He is a teacher. He completed 12th grade and got a Bachelor degree from a college in Coimbatore. Since then he has been teaching adivasi children in some villages and coordinating the educational activities in the villages. There are about 300 adivasi villages in our side of the Nilgiri hills.

15 My brother Prasad is 18 years old. This year he completed his 12th grade at a private high school here in Gudalur. Now he can go to college if he wants. I don't know what he wants to study. We didn't talk about it.

Till my 8th grade I attended our adivasi school in Gudalur. This school is also managed by our adivasi organisation AMS. It is a very nice school. We all loved to go to this school. But our school had only classes from first to eighth grade. As higher education was not possible there I continued at a government school in Gudalur. 20 There I completed my 12th grade. As a special subject I chose Geography.

After school I studied Geography at the Bharatiya University in Gudalur for three years. I got a Bachelor of Science. During my studies I worked part time for a local environmental organisation called The Shola Trust. For the last four or five years I have been working full time for The Shola Trust. I got the job offer from Tarsh who started this organisation. In The Shola Trust team we are five adivasi boys – Manikandan, Kannan, Ramesh, 25 Vishnu and me. We all know Tarsh since childhood and love to work with him.

I started my work for The Shola Trust with setting up camera traps in estates and other places. There are tigers, leopards and many elephants here in the Nilgiri hills. They live in the forests, but when they don't find enough food in the forest and get lost they come to human habitations. It was my work to upload photos of the camera traps onto Facebook and to write e-mails to other organisations.

30 Later I started reporting incidents of conflicts between people and wild elephants with my team. Each one of our team is in charge for one specific area. Whenever we hear of some conflicts we go to the place to identify what has happened. When we have time we go together also. We talk to the local people and document the details of the conflict. Wild elephants can destroy plants, damage houses and even hurt or kill people. We use GPS to create maps of the conflict areas. We follow the movements of the elephants and study their behaviour.

35 We try to find solutions how elephants and humans can share the land without serious conflicts. The adivasis and other local people have lived together with elephants for generations and mostly accept them. They know how to spot and how to avoid them. In fact many of us feel sorry for an elephant when it runs into an estate or settlement. It means that the elephant didn't find enough food in the forest.

Many of the people who get into conflicts with wild elephants are from outside areas. They came here to work 40 on tea estates and the houses of the workers are close to the forests. Those people say we should capture all elephants and take them to another sanctuary. But the problem is the same elsewhere because everywhere the forests are shrinking. We try to find other solutions.

I get 400 Rupees for each day of work. There is enough work for me to work full time. But sometimes I take off to join cultural festivals or family functions in our village. If I don't work I don't get money. Now I have to be at 45 home for three months because I broke my leg in a road accident. So, now I don't get any salary. But when my leg is healed I will go back to work with The Shola Trust. The salary is not much, but whatever money I get is enough for me. I can manage. I do this job because I really like the work and our team.

My team went together to Kotagiri, a town in the East of the Nilgiri hills, a four to five hour drive from here. There we presented our work and met many people of other organisations. It was really interesting. One of my 50 team even went to Delhi to present our work at a conference. My team doesn't travel to tourist places for picnics, we travel only for work. Together with my friends we go to nearby places by bike. My friends all have their own bike, I go by my father's bike. We go to the view point near Gudalur or to the elephant camp in Theppakadu. We even went to Ooty which took us three hours to get there.

I have no plans or wishes for the future. I want to continue my work. I think we have to develop ourselves. We 55 have to work, to learn, to interact with people. Then only we can cope with the future. That's all.

## Tasks

1. Read the texts.  
They give you an insight into life and work of indigenous people, the adivasis, in the Nilgiri hills in South India. You may choose which text to read first.
2. Answer the following questions:
  - a) What wild animals come to human habitations in the Nilgiri hills and why? → See lines 26 to 28.
  - b) Explain what Prakash has to do to report conflicts between people and wild elephants.  
→ See lines 30 to 34.
  - c) What does Prakash like about his work? → See lines 46 to 49.
3. Exchange with your fellow students what you found out.  
Get into an exchange with your fellow students about what you found out about life and work of adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Suggestions: Start with presenting the person interviewed here. Compare the information given and find similarities, for instance about the educational situation of the different generations.
4. Get into a discussion.  
In what way has the life of adivasis changed? Explain what strikes you most. Which of the presented jobs you would like to do? Discuss what similarities and differences you find to your own life and living conditions. How does the adivasi organisation AMS work to improve the living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills?
5. Get into action.  
Think what you could do to support good living conditions for adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Consider aspects of a sustainable lifestyle as well as specific actions for support. Plan a strategy what to do and present it together with your fellow students.

## Adivasis

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There they are today a minority among other Indian communities. For generations and especially in the last decades, people moved to the Nilgiris to work and live there. The main economy is tea cultivation. The tourism is growing and there is a lot of crop cultivation.

## Work of adivasis

In earlier generations adivasis lived as hunters and gatherers in and around the forests of the Nilgiri hills. Today gathering of forest products like bamboo, firewood, herbs, fruits and honey has been allowed again to adivasis, but hunting is prohibited.

As adivasis have been living with forest and nature for generations many know a lot about it and how to preserve it. This is why some adivasis work as elephant trainers or rangers for the forest department. There are also traditional healers who are experts on medicinal plants.

The majority of adivasis though works on tea plantations and in agriculture. Under British colonial rule large parts of the forests were cut down for tea plantations. Adivasis never officially owned their traditional land and a large number of adivasi families have lost their land to migrants and work today on their fields and plantations, often as day labourers.

## Adivasis' living situation

The living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills has been very difficult. They are not allowed to live in the protected forest areas and lack land titles of agricultural land. As the villages are remote health care and education are difficult. Without good education they get only basic jobs and less income, often on daily basis only. But money is needed for all aspects of life.

## Adivasi organisation AMS

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## School problems

Education is a human right. And school has been compulsory for any child in India at least up to the age of 14 years. But education has not always been possible or easy for adivasis to get it. About one third of the adivasi men in India and half of the adivasi women in India are analphabets and can't read and write according to the Census of India 2011.

Today more and more young adivasis pass 10th or even 12th grade successfully and continue even for higher education at one of the local colleges. Their parents work hard to pay their school uniforms, books, transport or hostel charges and school fees.

But besides this development many adivasi children still struggle to attend and pass school at all due to various reasons:

- Children live in remote villages in the Nilgiri hills. To walk to school or main road through jungle is dangerous. Tigers, leopards, wild elephants and poisonous snakes live in the forests. When there is a wild elephant around the child has to return home and cannot go to school on that day.
- Sometimes the child needs to help at home and doesn't go to school on that day. It may have to take care for younger brothers and sisters, assist in farming or household duties.
- Many parents work as day labourers and have little income only. Poor families can't afford the expenses for school uniform, books and travel even though government school itself is free of cost.
- Many children find it difficult to study at home: Their houses are small with no or little electric light and sun sets early evening. Parents often can't help their children in their studies.
- The adivasi mother tongues are not spoken at school. The classes are big and children with difficulties are sometimes left out. When a child can't cope anymore and fails exam it drops out of school.

The adivasi organisation AMS in the Nilgiri hills addresses these difficulties by various efforts:

- There are study centres in several villages where the children can get help and tuitions offered by adivasi teachers. These teachers know their families and problems and speak their mother tongue. They especially help the children to prepare for the school exams.
- Trained teachers and social workers from the adivasi community visit the school children and their families at home. Hereby they follow up how the children manage at school. So they get to know immediately if the child or family needs support.
- In remote villages volunteers from the village (mostly elderly people) accompany small children through the jungle. They are experienced how to spot wild elephants and how to avoid them.
- The adivasi organisation AMS set up two schools. One school teaches especially adivasi children who dropped out of their school. At the adivasi schools there are small classes, adivasi teachers and a friendly atmosphere. All students here study well.

## Education and work of adivasis (indigenous people) in the South Indian Nilgiri hills

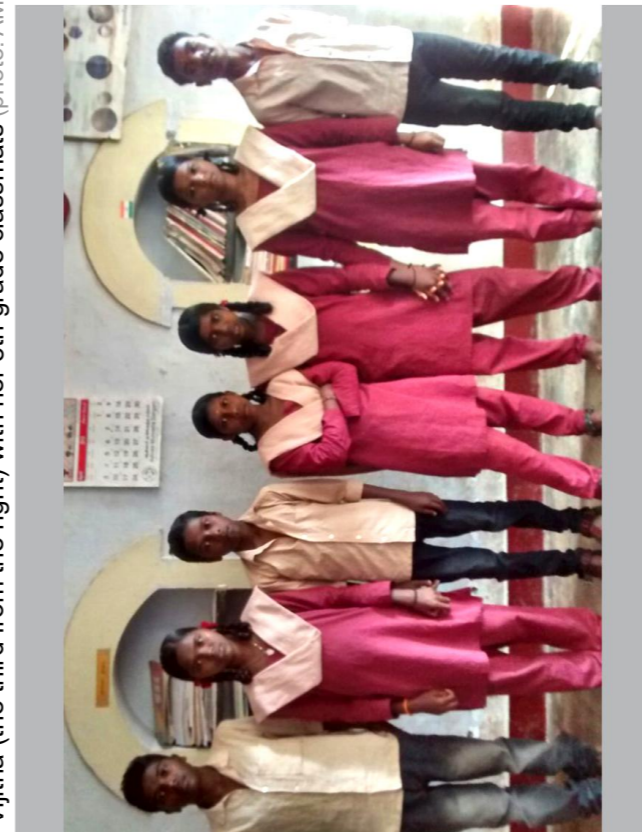
### Vijitha – a student



Vijitha and other students are playing on the schoolyard (photo: ATP)



A village nurse weighs a child in an adivasi village (photo: AMS)



Vijitha (the third from the right) with her 8th grade classmates (photo: AMS)



Vijitha and her classmates visit Kottamangalam and other villages (photo: AMS)

## Education and work of adivasi

# Vijitha – a student

1 My name is Vijitha. I am 14 years old. I live with my father, my mother and my elder brother in Kottamangalam, a village in the Nilgiri hills of South India. My father's name is Chikunan. My mother's name is Shakuntala. My brother's name is Vishnu. He is 15 years old.

5 My mother tongue is Paniya. This is the local language of our community called Paniya. We belong to the adivasis, the indigenous people of India. At home we talk Paniya. At school and in town I talk Tamil, the local Indian language here. I learn English at school. I can read and write in English quite well, but talking in English is difficult for me.

My father finished 8th grade, my mother left school after 6th grade. Both work as tea pluckers on a tea estate. We have our own house in the village, but no farm land. My family has little income only.

10 I attended a government school in Erumadu, a town near my village. After 7th grade I stopped going to this school. I didn't like it there. I couldn't follow the lessons. And I didn't like the teachers there. So I didn't want to go to this school anymore. For a few months I was at home without going to school at all.

15 Now I study at a different school in Gudalur, a small town two hours away from my home. I am in 8th grade now. This school is managed by our adivasi organisation AMS, but the government gives the funds for our education. All students here are adivasis. We all have dropped out from our previous schools. Some children dropped out of school very early. The youngest children are second or third grade only. The eldest study in 8th and 9th grade, like me.

20 The community worker of our adivasi organisation AMS had told my parents and me about this school. He had suggested that I come here to study. As my village is too far away from Gudalur to travel every day, I stay here at the school's hostel with all the other students. Because, when we stay in the hostel we have got more time to study. Our parents don't have to pay anything for our accomodation, food and classes. They only pay for our personal expenses like for instance new dresses. But during classes we wear our school uniform. Our parents come and visit us on weekends, and sometimes we go home. I don't feel homesick, nobody feels homesick. We all love to be in this school.

25 I like everything about our school here in Gudalur: I like the other kids and that I have good friends here. We are seven students in my class – three boys (Sunil, Rajesh and Vishnu) and four girls (Sandhiya, Reshma, Priya and me). But I like the other children also. I like the games we play in the evenings and on Sundays. Often we play frisbee, volleyball and football on the schoolyard. And I like our school exkursions. Every now and then we go on a day trip to some adivasi villages. There we have a nice time. We visit the families of other students, chat and have picnics. But we also learn about farming and other things during these exkursions. We went to my native village Kottamangalam, too.

35 And I like the teachers here at our adivasi school and the lessons. Now I can follow the lessons. My class is small and our teachers are patient and explain everything well. The lessons are in Tamil, but I can talk in my mother tongue also. Some of our teachers are adivasis and therefore know our different adivasi languages themselves. Our subjects are Maths, Science, Social Science, Tamil and English. We also have lessons in crafts and agriculture in the afternoons. Our school has a small school garden where we grow vegetables and spinach. In our crafts classes we paint and design pictures and postcards with paper ornaments. When we sell the pictures and postcards we can earn some pocketmoney for us. So far we students together got 5,000 Rupees from our sale.

40 Now I study well. I just wrote my 8th grade exams; I hope I have passed. After my 9th grade at this school I want to participate in vocational training and tutions at this school for one more year. Then I plan to write my 10th grade exams.

My brother studied till 10th grade in Erumadu, at the same school where I studied earlier. But he didn't pass his 10th grade exams. Now he goes to tutions which are carried out by adivasi teachers of our adivasi organisation AMS. He will write his 10th grade exams again next year.

After school I want to become a nurse. I want to participate in a two-year training offered at our adivasi hospital in Gudalur. Then I want to work as a nurse in the villages around my home village. Money is not my motivation. I want to be a nurse, because I want to work for the health of my community.

50 As a village nurse I will be responsible for about 30 villages. Each village I will have to visit at least once a month. Regularly I need to do a health check of the pregnant women, the newborn babies and small children, the elderly people and the chronicle patients. I will be trained to give medicines and do basic treatments. For serious health problems I will have to refer the patients to hospital.

## Tasks

1. Read the texts.

They give you an insight into life and work of indigenous people, the adivasis, in the Nilgiri hills in South India. You may choose which text to read first.

2. Answer the following questions:

- Why Vijitha initially stopped going to school after 7th grade? → See lines 10 to 12.
- Explain what Vijitha likes about the school she attends now. → See lines 25 to 34.
- What would Vijitha like to do after school? → See lines 46 to 52.

3. Exchange with your fellow students what you found out.

Get into an exchange with your fellow students about what you found out about life and work of adivasis in the Nilgiri hills. Suggestions: Start with presenting the person interviewed here. Compare the information given and find similarities, for instance about the educational situation of the different generations.

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In what way has the life of adivasis changed? Explain what strikes you most. Which of the presented jobs you would like to do? Discuss what similarities and differences you find to your own life and living conditions. How does the adivasi organisation AMS work to improve the living situation of the adivasis in the Nilgiri hills?

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