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Adivasis demand the self-rule promised by the Constitution.



The Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samiti (Tudum Debba) said they would begin their 'Self Rule' campaign in their villages from June 1 as announced earlier. Talks between the Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samiti (Tudum Debba), representing the Gond and other Adivasis of the erstwhile Adilabad district, and the Telangana government failed this week. Following this, "Tudum Debba" leaders said they would begin their 'Self Rule' campaign in their villages from June 1 as announced earlier. They are following what the Adivasis of Jharkhand have already put in motion.

The Munda Adivasis have begun Pathalgadi, literally

erecting a stone as a mode of protest against the state government's alleged anti-tribal policies, and to draw the attention of the community towards the rights of the tribals under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution and the supremacy of the gram sabha or village council. As a result of the movement, huge stone slabs inscribed with details of the constitutional provisions and laws that safeguard the rights of tribals over land, forests and other natural resources in Fifth Schedule Areas, written in Hindi and Mundari languages, have been erected in over 300 villages across five districts in Jharkhand. The migration of non-tribals is a long story. Way back in 1945 the Revenue Department of the Nizam's Government in Hyderabad commissioned the Austrian anthropologist, **Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf**, to study the condition of tribals in the state and make appropriate policy recommendations.

The four studies of the tribal groups in the northern areas of Hyderabad narrate how in the settled villages of the tribal areas outsiders owned most of the land under cultivation. A typical instance is the Koya (Gond) village of Ragleyanguda in Yellandu taluq. The total area under cultivation here was 1616 acres. Of a Koya population of 254 there were only five Koya

pattadars who together owned 24 acres in all. It is the same story today and the Adivasis have been pushed further into the remaining jungle or into menial existence while the land has been appropriated by settlers.

They are now the majority in only a fraction of their original homelands. The Gonds of Telangana effectively lost their only advantage in trying to protect their lands when the Banjara, a group of nomadic cattle herders that had been settling in Gond territory, were classified as a Scheduled Tribe in 1977. Their newly acquired tribal status made the Banjara, also known as Lambadi in AP, eligible to acquire Gond land 'legally' and to compete with Gonds for reserved political seats, places in education institutions, and other benefits. Because the Banjara are not scheduled in neighboring Maharashtra, there has been an influx of Banjara emigrants from that state into Andhra Pradesh in search of better opportunities.

Unlike the Gonds who are Adivasis, the Lambadas are Indo-Aryan tribals. The cornering of most benefits by the Banjara has further alienated the older Adivasi people such as the Gonds and Chenchus. The Banjara, who originally were from western

Rajasthan, are well represented in the Telangana Assembly and have a predominant share of government jobs reserved for Scheduled Tribes. The former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was reputed to be particularly fond of the Banjara and was frequently photographed in the traditional brightly colored costume of phetiya (skirt) and kanchalli (blouse). The dresses are embellished with mirror chips and coins. Banjara women also wear thick bangles and their other ornaments are made up of silver rings, coins, chain and hair pleats are tied together at the end by tassels called chotla.

All together it made for an attractive picture. But Banjaras/Lambadas are not Adivasis. Tribal people account for 8.2% of India's population. They are spread over all of India's States and Union territories. Even so they can be broadly classified into three groupings.

The first grouping consists of populations who predate the Indo-Aryan migrations. These are termed by many anthropologists as the Austro-Asiatic-speaking Australoid people. The late Professor **Nihar Ranjan Ray**, one of our most distinguished historians, described the **central Indian Adivasis as "the original autochthonous people of India"** meaning that

their presence in India pre-dated by far the Dravidians, the Aryans and whoever else settled in this country. The Central Indian Adivasis belong to this grouping. The other two major groupings are the Caucasoid and Sino- Tibetan or Mongoloid tribal people of the Himalayan and Northeastern regions who migrated at later periods. Clearly all Scheduled Tribes are not Adivasis.

Unlike the Adivasis the other two broad tribal groupings have fared better in the post-independence dispensation. Within them some, such as the Meenas and Gujjars of Rajasthan, and the Khasis of Meghalaya, have done exceptionally well, which should make us wonder if they should be eligible to claim benefits as Scheduled Tribes any more? It is with good reason that the Gond Adivasis of Telangana are aggrieved with all the ST reservation benefits almost entirely flowing to the Indo-Aryan Lambada tribals. They now want the Lambadas to be de-recognized as STs and all the Lambada government employees in Adivasi areas such as teachers, forest guards and policemen, withdrawn as they see them as usurpers and a manifestation of their exploitation and denial of what was promised in the Constitution.

We all now know very well that big government in the

absence of a responsive nervous system actually means little government, and whatever little interaction the people at the bottom have with the state is usually a none too happy one. Most tribal villages and settlements have no access to schools and medical care. Very few are connected with all weather roads. Perish the thought of electricity though all the coal and most of the hydel projects to generate electricity are in the tribal regions. The forests have been pillaged and the virgin forests thick with giant teak and sal trees are things of the past. At the national level 45.86% of all Adivasis live below the poverty line.

The Fifth and Sixth Schedules under Article 244 of the Indian Constitution in 1950 provided for self governance in specified tribal majority areas. The Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution ('the Fifth Schedule') provides for the administration and control of tribal lands (termed 'scheduled areas') within nine states of India. The Fifth Schedule provides protection to the Adivasi (tribal) people living in scheduled areas from alienation of their lands and natural resources to non-tribals.

The Governors have been endowed with certain special powers with regard the Fifth Scheduled Areas. The judicious use of the provisions enshrined in the

Fifth Schedule of our Constitution will certainly make a very positive impact on the tribals living in these regions. Under the powers conferred by the Fifth Schedule, the Governors can not only direct that any particular law or part thereof may not apply to a Scheduled Area that can also make regulation for good governance and peace in these areas. The Governors can intervene in areas relating to Prohibition or Restriction of the transfer of land by or among Scheduled Tribe members; regulation of allotment of land in such areas; and the regulation of money-lending activities.

The Governor has basically been given the legislative power to make regulations for the “peace and good government of any area which is a scheduled area.” The peace and good government are words of very wide import and give wide discretion to the Governor to make laws for such purpose. Without exception the Governors have failed to discharge their duties and fulfill their responsibilities.