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Voice of the Youth



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Last year, we participated in the inaugural Youth Eco-Feminist Community Action Course organised by Dhaatri, which transformed our perspectives on viewing society and the environment. In the four months following the completion of the course, we have made a concerted effort to drive change within our communities by closely examining the realities and challenges at the grassroots. Through these writings, we would like to share the new ideas, experiences, learnings and reflections we had in this journey

In this first edition of our newsletter, we are excited to share our experiences from our travels to Adilabad and Amrabad in Telangana. Through written pieces, stories, and poems, we aim to depict the culture, customs, challenges, and daily lives of the Chenchu, Gond, Kolam, and Naikpod Adivasi communities.

As youth in our villages, we engage in discussions with our communities about the changes we have observed and the developmental needs that must be addressed. Together, we explore ways to bring about this change through collaborative activities, emphasising the importance of recognising and empowering the economic and social rights of women. We are committed to conserving and developing our natural resources – such as land, water, and forests – while ensuring the protection of our rights related to education, health, environment, and climate. Our initiatives also include kitchen gardens, building awareness on the Forest Rights Act, and strengthening the Gram Sabha through various programmes. We have attempted to share all these efforts and updates through this youth newsletter.



EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS



Voices from the Forest: Chenchu Women on Education Challenges

As we made our way to Amrabad from Hyderabad, we couldn't help but admire the stunning Dindi River, surrounded by enchanting hills along the route.

This area is part of the Amrabad Tiger Reserve,

forest for generations. Jangamreddy Palli, located just 4.5 kilometres from Amrabad, is a place where we met members of the Chenchu community. When asked about their children's education, a woman shared, "I have three sons. My eldest son, who is 17 years old, is not in school anymore. He was doing well until the pandemic hit; when schools closed, he was left with no guidance and eventually started

The scenic beauty of Amrabad



Girls' High School (Ashram School) in Jangamreddy Palli

where tribal communities live in harmony with the Krishna River and the lush forests.

Several tribes, including the Chenchu and Lambada, have resided in the dense Amrabad

herding sheep instead. Although I urged him to continue his studies, he refused to go back. I didn't push him further; now he is working." This is not just his experience — many children from the Chenchu community here face similar challenges.

While conversing with students from classes 6 to 10 at the local girls' high school, we noticed that a greater number of



A group of women from the Chenchu community discuss the education challenges their children face.

students were from the ST Lambada community, while the representation from the Chenchu community was significantly lower. When asked the students about their aspirations, they were eager to respond, except for the Chenchu children, who appeared fearful and hesitant to speak. They looked visibly malnourished and lacked confidence, which affected their ability to read properly.

At the Government Primary School in Jangamreddy Palli, only two children from the Chenchu community are enrolled in classes 1 to 3. Remarkably, these two can read and write fluently in both Telugu and English.

The Chenchu community also resides in a village called Sarlapalli, where the educational issues persist. The mothers who struggle day and night to get their children educated shared that teachers frequently do not come to school, and there are no toilet facilities or proper water supply.



Pitlaguda primary school

reading skills were lacking and that teachers were not consistently present or teaching effectively.

During a village meeting centered on education, community members echoed these concerns. They noted that the teachers often disregard their responsibilities and there is no one to hold them accountable. The women in the village highlighted the absence of basic facilities at the school, leading to a collective decision to take serious action regarding education at the upcoming Gram Sabha.

Call for Change: Pitlaguda Demands Better Facilities

We recently visited a government school in Pitlaguda village, located within the Takkuguda Gram Panchayat of Utnur Mandal, Adilabad District, to assess the basic facilities available at the school. According to the Right to Education Act (RTE), schools are required to provide textbooks, uniforms, libraries, toilets, and resources for sports and assemblies, as well as committees for monitoring school development. However, our visit revealed that these provisions were not being implemented and makes it seem as though the school is almost non-existent.

While a new toilet has been constructed, it remains locked, which means the children have to relieve themselves outside. The students conveyed their struggles, stating that their

Visit to Vajjar School Reveals Critical Shortcomings

During our recent visit to a primary school in Vajjar village, located in Boath Mandal, Adilabad District, it became clear that the school is in a deplorable condition. Although pictures and letters of the alphabet have been painted on the walls, the structures are cracked and leak when it rains. Many of the wall hangings are torn, and the walls have not been properly plastered. The school lacks a compound wall, exposing children to danger from the main road nearby, which connects to various towns. In the absence of proper toilet facilities, students are forced to go outside when nature calls.

Additionally, there is no separate kitchen facility; meals are prepared in the home of the woman appointed as cook, and children are served rice and broth either there or occasionally at the school. There are 23 students from grades

Speaking with the teachers and students at the school

1 to 3, all of whom share a single classroom.

There is only one teacher assigned to manage the entire school, leaving them responsible for all aspects of education. This lack of resources has resulted in a decline in the quality of education provided to the children. At the time of our visit, it had been two months since school opened, yet children had still not received their books or uniforms. As a result, many were wearing old clothes. While some students showed promise in their studies, the overall lack of proper facilities is a significant barrier to their education.

Teachers are present only three days a week. As many parents are engaged in agriculture,

they are unable to monitor their children's school activities and homework. During our discussions with parents, it became apparent that, despite their children's big dreams, those aspirations are jeopardised. Without access to the basic facilities mandated by the Right to Education (RTE) Act, these children's futures are at risk.



GROUND REALITIES



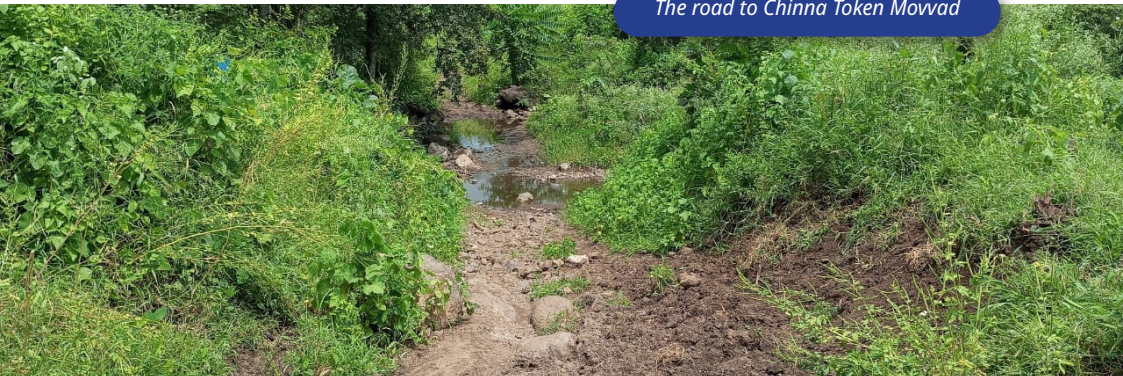
Life on a Bad Road: Chinna Token Movvad Struggles with Inaccessibility

In Chinna Token Movvad (Metu Bukka), part of the Babe Jari Gram Panchayat in Kerimeri Mandal, Asifabad District, residents are grappling with significant challenges due to

poor road conditions. The village is home to 12 families, comprising a total of 56 individuals, including both adults and children.

There is only one route connecting this village to the mandal center in Kerimeri, and it is not paved with concrete. A canal runs across this pathway, but there is no bridge to provide safe

The road to Chinna Token Movvad



passage. During the rainy season, the road becomes slippery and hazardous, making it particularly difficult for children to reach school. Consequently, many children in the village are deprived of their right to an education. The situation becomes even more dangerous during heavy rains, as lakes and canals overflow.

The elderly and women in labour face immense difficulties in seeking medical assistance. Although officials occasionally visit to assess the community's challenges and document their concerns, no effective solutions have been offered. The village remains without basic infrastructure, leading to frustration among residents as they see neighbouring villages equipped with proper roads.

Community members have voiced their disappointment with local political leaders, noting that they only appear during elections and fail to take action regarding road repairs. Efforts by villagers to crowdfund road repairs have been met with resistance from the forest department. Tragically, several individuals have lost their lives during medical emergencies due to the lack of accessible roads.

Government Entitlements Elude Sirikonda Farmers Amid Challenges

Rythu Vedika, the Farmers' Platform in Telangana, is located just 1

km from Sirikonda in Adilabad District. Here, local farmers cultivate crops such as corn, maize, cotton, and millets during the rainy season. However, this year, heavy rains have devastated their harvests, prompting farmers to approach the forum for crop damage subsidies and assistance with the necessary supporting documents.

Farmers are also applying for insurance to provide for their families in the event of crop loss. Unfortunately, obtaining the required documentation can be a daunting process. The distance to the farmers' forum poses a significant transportation challenge; there are delays in auto services, forcing those without bikes to walk to the platform. Women, particularly single women, often rely on auto rickshaws for transport, but even those can be hard to come by. Many times, farmers are left trudging through the rain, only to find that officials have closed the office by the time they arrive.

Farmers sacrifice their day's work for grievance redressal at these fora. It is a laborious task given the lack of proper documentation. For these farmers, it is an uphill task to even enter the thresholds of these platforms designed to assist them in accessing their entitlements. This leaves them wondering: is there a viable solution to these challenges? Who is accountable for addressing the issues they face? Is it the community, the government, or others who should step in?



GIFTS FROM THE FOREST



Mahua's Cultural Role at Risk as Access for Gond Tribes Shrinks

Various tribal communities across Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana refer to the Mahua flower by different names. In Adilabad District, within Boath Mandal, lies the village of Nagaguda, home to the Gond tribal community. This flower holds great importance for them –

before collecting the sacred Mahua, they seek permission from other villagers and venture into the nearby forest.

The community picks both the fresh and dried flowers, as they are revered for their multiple uses. The Mahua flower is used as an offering to the Gods during festivals, in traditional cooking, and as a natural remedy for ailments, including pain relief and malnutrition. Occasionally, the flower is burned and shaped into small balls,



A man explains the uses of Mahua

There are various ways to consume Appagaddalu, particularly for women who have recently given birth. It is known to relieve body pain and fatigue after delivery. Though slightly bitter, there are two main methods to prepare it. One method involves cooking the tuber in ash; after boiling, it is rinsed in water, peeled, and can then be stir-fried. Consuming this tuber alleviates daily fatigue and revitalizes the body, making it a popular choice among postpartum women in the village. The tuber is embraced for its ability to enhance strength, and villagers,

especially adults, consume it with great appreciation.

As she reminisced, the grandmother recalled times when she would gather firewood while she fetched water. However, the situation has changed dramatically; she now has to walk three kilometers to the forest to collect logs. They are no longer permitted to enter the forest freely to gather essential natural resources.

Due to these reasons, the intake of Appagadda — so beneficial for their health — has significantly diminished. The grandmother expressed her concern that if this situation persists, future generations will be deprived of this invaluable natural resource.

or mixed with seeds of the 'punti' plant and also consumed as toddy. However, they can no longer gather these flowers as frequently as before.

There are several factors contributing to this decline of natural forests. As the population surrounding the forests continues to grow, many have taken up farming and work as agricultural laborers instead. Furthermore, strict regulations restrict access for the tribal communities that have relied on the forest for generations.

As a result, villagers must now trek 3-4 kilometers to reach the forest to collect Mahua, and the journey to the forest's edge can be daunting. Mahua-gathering has reduced drastically owing to the restrictions in access to forests. This flower, a vital symbol of tribal tradition, is at risk of disappearing from the community's cultural heritage if access continues to dwindle.

Appagadda: The Bitter Blessing for Adilabad's Adivasis

In Kothapalli village, located in the Gadiguda Mandal of Adilabad, a 75-year-old grandmother smiles as she reflects on her secret to a long and happy life: Appagadda (*Dioscorea bulbifera* L. (Dioscoreaceae)). This tuber, extracted from the earth, is renowned for its numerous medicinal properties and is believed to contribute to the good health of the Adivasi community in the region.

Appagadda





FOREST TALES



When I sit down and reflect on my experiences in the forest, I realise that it has taken me months to translate those reflections into stories. After four months, I made an effort to present my narrative, and writing these will not be daunting anymore. The tales I wish to share encompass the beauty of the forest, the daily lives of the people who inhabit it, the deep bond they share with the land, and the coexistence of the tribal communities and forest animals. These stories capture the joys, pains, and struggles of both the wildlife and the people. This piece represents my small attempt to bring to life the essence of the forests in Amrabad and Adilabad.



The Butterfly's Dance

In the heart of the forest, where nature flourishes, resides a being adorned in shades of black, white, and red — cherished by all who encounter her. Through her eyes, she sees a world that transcends caste, religion, community, and colour; her presence captivates everyone alike. She dreams of coexisting harmoniously with nature, embodying the strength to traverse vast distances in her fleeting life. The game that children play in search of her is not merely a race; it is a joyful quest. Let me introduce her to you all: she is our "butterfly," or as we affectionately call her, "Sitakoka Chiluka."

In the dense forests of Amrabad, she flits

gracefully through the trees, observing the tribal children immersed in their games. They tie bundles of herbs and gather fruits from lush green plants, dancing beneath the waterfalls and singing their hearts out. As the butterfly dances above, she watches the scene unfold with delight, momentarily forgetting herself in the magic of the moment. Then, the children notice her, their faces lighting up with joy as they call out, "Butterfly, come join our game!"

With a joyful flutter, the butterfly descends among the children, sharing stories of the flowers she encounters: their colours, names, and even their flavours. She teaches them how to extract the sweet nectar of each blossom, captivating them with tales of her life among the petals. As they listen in wonder at her life immersed in nature, the children become enlivened and exclaim, "How beautifully this small creature has woven herself into nature!". They revel in the beauty of nature, flying and playing like the butterfly, cherishing every moment they spend in this vibrant tapestry of forest life.

*For hills and forests,
We stand as guardians.*

*"Jal, Jungle, Zamin (Water, Forest, and Land)" is
our heritage —*

*Let us proclaim, we are Adivasis! Jai Adivasi! Jai
Jai Adivasi!*



RESILIENCE IN RHYTHM



We Must Dare to Dream

*We must dare to dream,
For if we do not,
Our people drown in the poison of caste.
In times of communal riots,
When lines are drawn to kill,
O my people, we must be vigilant.*

*We must dare to dream,
It is time to teach a lesson
To those men,
Who in the name of protection,
Violate and rape pained women
O my like-minded folks,
We must be cautious*

*We must dare to dream,
Or else for the unemployed,
Injustice is prevailing.
Fooling us in their business,
Of investigating scams.
O people of my generation,
We must be alert*

Is it Wrong to be Born a Female?

She wept in a darkened room

*Hiccups echoing, tears flowing in
silence.*

Is it wrong to be born a female?

*The demon of lust ignored her pain,
His laughter mocking her very
existence.*

Is it wrong to be born a female?

*Society watched,
Her cries unheard, falling on deaf ears.
Is it wrong to be born a female?*

*Unbeknownst to him, the love of a
mother,
The bond of a sister.
Is it wrong to be born a female?*

*Shame on such a demon —
Let her rise and find justice.*

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This edition of the newsletter was authored and compiled by youth from Vijayanagara District in Karnataka. Originally written in their native Kannada, the content has been translated into other languages by various translators.

For future editions of this newsletter, we invite contributions from youth in communities and local groups. We encourage young and barefoot researchers to join us in sharing stories and compiling data. You can submit your photos and stories in any Indian language.

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