

PEKURA NAAND

Voice of the Youth



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In the first edition of our newsletter, we shared our experiences from our visit to Telangana. Now, after several months of deeper engagement with the community, we, youth from Karnataka's Hosapete and Telangana's Adilabad, are excited to present the second edition. Our journey took us to Adilabad and Asifabad in Telangana, as well as Ganj Basoda in Madhya Pradesh, where we connected with 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.



EDUCATION FOR ALL



A Yatra for Adivasi Rights: Youth Advocate for Mother Tongue Education

To honour the legacy of educational reformers Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh, who championed the rights of women and marginalised communities, the youth of Dhaatri organised a Yatra through the Adivasi areas of Telangana's Adilabad district.

The campaign included visits to Ashram Residential Educational Institutions and the Zilla Parishad High School, emphasising the crucial need to teach tribal children in their mother tongue. Many students who speak their own Adivasi languages at home struggle with Telugu, the medium of instruction in schools.

Feedback from students revealed their challenges: "We struggle to read and write. Other children move ahead, but we are left behind. If lessons were taught in our language, we would also progress." Teachers echoed these concerns, noting that language barriers hinder effective teaching and learning.

Through engaging skits, the youth illustrated the significance of incorporating tribal knowledge into education. For Adivasi students, education transcends mere academic learning; it also involves upholding dignity, self-respect, and a profound connection with nature; alongside the safeguarding of their ancestral ecological knowledge.



Youth enacting a skit in front of students at a school (top);

Youth addressing the students as part of the campaign (bottom)

Educational Challenges for Sahariyas in Madhya Pradesh

During our field visit to Ganj Basoda in Madhya Pradesh, we first visited the Anganwadi in Nahariya village, where the assistant reported that 25 children were enrolled, but attendance dropped

when families migrated for wage labour.

Next, we spoke with a primary school teacher in Nahariya, who expressed concern about persistently low attendance rates. Despite providing books,

Children being taken to the primary school in Bhilai village

clothing, and meals, many children were not attending regularly, hindering their ability to acquire basic literacy skills.

In Bhilai village, home to many Sahariya (PVTG) families alongside

those from the Lodhi and Ahirwar communities, we noted stark disparities in attendance. While children from other communities regularly attended school and the Anganwadi, Sahariya children had significantly lower participation.

Several factors contribute to this issue. Many Sahariya families work as daily wage labourers, which often leads to migration, including children, to seek work in agriculture and mining. The current generation within the Sahariya community typically achieves only an education level of class five to eight, with no higher education among previous generations. As most families struggle below the poverty line, they prioritise immediate survival needs over education.

Additionally, the distance to higher schools presents a significant barrier. After primary education, students must travel far to mining areas, often facing poor roads and a lack of



transportation options, which discourages families from enrolling in high school.

Traditionally, children in rural India would assist with household and other work mainly during festivals. However, in these communities, children continue to work and migrate to various towns even after the festive season, preventing them from pursuing their education.

In Mohanpur village, also home to the Sahariya community, the absence of schools and Anganwadis is a serious challenge. Children must travel three kilometers to Bhilai for education, but inadequate infrastructure makes this difficult.

Although nutritious meals are sent from the Anganwadi to support children, lactating mothers, and pregnant women, many children still do not attend school. Factors such as lack of awareness and inadequate documentation further inhibit the community's access to education.

The primary school in Khajuri.



Dhaatri's Bal Angans Initiative

To support the children in the community, Dhaatri has established Bal Angans, where children gather to learn in an engaging environment. Here, they explore their natural surroundings — learning about plants, leaves, and the animals and birds of the forest — while also covering their regular lessons through storytelling and drawing.

This approach not only fosters an interest in academics but also deepens their connection to their culture and the forest ecosystem surrounding them. The children gain insights into the forest resources and understand how their communities have traditionally utilised them. Each day, they participate in lessons across various subjects; however, the learning extends beyond book knowledge. At Bal Angans, children grasp concepts practically through stories, poems, and art inspired by their surroundings.

In addition to educational activities, nutritious meals are provided daily to ensure



that children remain healthy and ready to learn. This initiative represents a small yet impactful effort to encourage children's education. Many of the children at the Bal Angan express their aspirations with confidence, sharing dreams of becoming a collector, doctor, teacher, farmer, and more.

Mothers in Nahariya Want a Brighter Future for Their Kids

During our door-to-door visits in Nahariya village, we spoke to parents about their children's low school attendance. Many parents explained that they were busy with work, leaving children to play outside and complete household chores. When we asked the children why they were not attending school, they expressed that they had no friends and hence did not want to.

Recognising that this issue affected nearly every family, we organised a meeting with the mothers to discuss their children's education.

At the meeting, the mothers shared their struggles, noting that despite their efforts to encourage the children to go to the school and Bal Angan, many children were still unwilling. Some sent their children to study in other villages or reside in hostels. However, after our discussions, the mothers agreed to make a concerted effort to send their children to school during the day.

When I inquired about their work, the mothers explained that they used to work in mining, which

Our team visiting a home in Ganj Basoda.



Speaking with the mothers about the future of their children

closed two years ago. Now, they toil in the fields, planting cotton, weeding, and harvesting rice. The mothers emphasised their commitment to their children's education as a vital investment in their future.



GROUND REALITIES



Sahariyas Struggle with Sanitation and Safety in Ganj Basoda

The Sahariya community resides in multiple villages around Ganj Basoda, where they face significant challenges due to inadequate facilities. Although homes have been constructed under the Indira Awas Yojana, many remain unfinished, leaving residents without proper sanitation. Most houses lack toilets, and where toilets do exist, they often have no water supply, leading to open defecation.

The Sahariya community has attempted to build small toilets, but water scarcity remains a serious issue, forcing them to walk long distances to fetch water in buckets. Additionally, poor electricity infrastructure heightens safety concerns – residents fear snake and scorpion bites at night, particularly affecting women and the elderly.

In Lamaniya village, the lack of toilets is a major issue. While some families have constructed toilets, broken doors and a lack of water supply render them useless. Due to inadequate lighting and electricity, villagers often resort to open defecation. Fear of wildlife, including a nearby leopard, exacerbates the situation, as residents do not leave their homes after 6 pm. Those who must go out at night do so only with company, as children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to accidents and animal encounters.

Women and girls face additional challenges when using toilets due to insufficient lighting. The absence of water facilities and broken doors further complicates matters, making many reluctant to use the toilets at all. Consequently, they revert to open defecation, presenting the biggest challenge for the Sahariyas.

A toilet in a Sahariya hamlet.



Pittaguda Seeks Access to Water for Agriculture

On the outskirts of Pittaguda village in Telangana's Asifabad District, a water tank provides safe drinking water, which villagers primarily use for their cattle and goats. However, other than the villagers, local businessmen lease the tank for one to two years to farm fish for sale.



The water tank in Pittaguda

We have attempted to utilize the tank's water for irrigating our fields with the help of officials. Unfortunately, due to pressure from various sources, this initiative has not progressed. The villagers are now seeking opportunities to apply for government assistance or schemes to acquire wells, borewells, or other water resources.

Vajjar: Connectivity Crisis Hinders Development, Access to Essential Services

Residents of Vajjar village in Boath mandal of Adilabad district, Telangana, face significant challenges due to poor cellphone signal reception. Even after 75 years of independence, the village lacks the necessary connectivity, severely impacting access to government schemes. For instance, to receive PDS rice, villagers must travel to the PDS shop in Sonala, located 10 kilometers away. The absence of government transportation forces them to rely on costly auto rickshaws.

Additionally, students and competitive exam aspirants struggle to attend online classes and obtain essential information due to the weak signal. In emergencies, villagers must leave the area to make phone calls. While public representatives promise assistance, little has

been done to address these issues.

This problem extends to all tribal villages in the region. While other communities progress and move towards development, our condition remains stagnant. Our people live honestly, but the lack of connectivity exacerbates their difficulties. It is common for youth to climb hills in the rain and sun just to find proper signal. Although efforts to establish a BSNL tower are underway, progress is hindered due to the village's proximity to the forest.

Resolving this signal issue is crucial for our development. Improved connectivity could significantly enhance our quality of life, and prompt government action could bring about meaningful change.



YOUTH COMMUNITY ACTION



Reviving Women's Groups and Promoting Kitchen Gardens in Telangana

Nagaguda:

A women's self-help group named "Rukmini" was formed in Adilabad's Nagaguda village 10 years ago, but it has been inactive for the past three years due to half of the members being

unable to pay their dues. Officials in charge of the group have been unable to address this issue. We encouraged the members to rejuvenate the group, offering our assistance, as having a functioning group would empower

them to request essential village facilities.

Currently, the group has 30 members. We discussed education, noting that although teachers regularly attend the school, both the school and the Anganwadi operate in the same room, leaving no separate space for cooking, which takes place in the classroom. We encouraged the members to use the group as a platform to voice their concerns to the authorities.



Additionally, we provided seeds for kitchen gardens to 26 families in the village. The seeds were initially placed in a box before being planted a month later. Many families reported that the kitchen garden has yielded vegetables for cooking, with some growing them in their fields and others in front of their homes. Despite water shortages, they have managed to grow vegetables, which has proven beneficial.

They expressed gratitude for the kitchen garden initiative, noting that it has reduced their need to travel 10 kilometers to Sonala village for vegetables. In the context of rising vegetable prices, they are now saving money, as the cost of purchasing vegetables has been eliminated. "We grow these crops well. This can improve our health situation, which is now in our hands," they stated, expressing a desire for continued assistance in the future.

Peddaguda:

A women's self-help group was established 15 years ago in Peddaguda village, Adilabad District, but it has not been active for the past ten years. Recently, a new group consisting of 18 families

has been formed, aimed at strengthening women's work and providing support.

We introduced the concept of kitchen gardens to the women, providing seeds for tomatoes, okra, chilies, cucumbers, pumpkins, beans, spinach, and brinjals. We emphasized that growing these vegetables can help villagers save money and improve nutrition, thus preventing diseases.

We also shared methods for preparing organic pesticides using natural ingredients like cow urine and lime, as well as smoke to combat pests in their gardens. Although we planned to create a rainwater harvesting soak pit, repairs were delayed due to issues with the borehole.

Water is supplied through Mission Bhagiratha in the village, but availability is limited to just two hours a day. When inquired about the Individual Forest Rights (IFR), villagers reported that only a few families have it, and officials stated they were unaware of IFR.

Community restoration efforts face challenges due to the lack of communal land in the village. Currently, only two elders receive pensions, while many others are in need, including a disabled woman who has not received any pension support.



Empowering Adivasi Communities: Athram Bheemrao's Journey

My name is Athram Bheemrao, and I live in Pittaguda village in Telangana's Kumuram Bheem Asifabad District. After completing my education up to Class 12, I struggled working various jobs. But my life changed when I joined the Youth Eco-Feminist Community Action Course, where I learnt about Adivasi rights and community development.

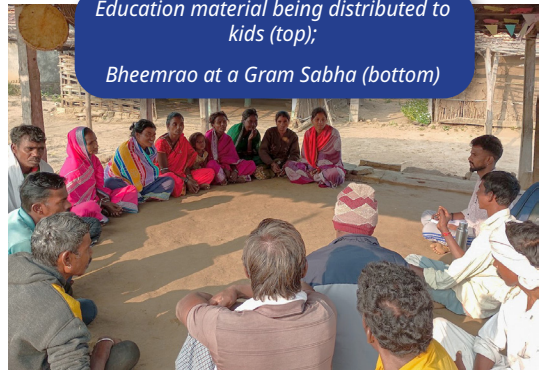
Through this course, we visited multiple institutions across four states, which ignited my passion to effect change in the community. I realised the need to serve others, even if just one person at a time. I assessed local issues in Pittaguda and made use of a fellowship opportunity with Dhaatri.

Despite challenges, including walking six kilometers daily to remote villages, I established two Bal Angan centres for children where there had previously been no educational facilities. I organised training sessions and encouraged local youth to become educators, gradually building trust among the villagers.

I also initiated gram sabhas to discuss local problems such as road access and water supply, empowering residents to voice their concerns. I am dedicated to preserving Adivasi culture by documenting traditions and languages, and also encourage families to grow kitchen gardens.



Education material being distributed to kids (top);



Bheemrao at a Gram Sabha (bottom)

With my newfound confidence and determination, I want to continue advocating for education and social empowerment within Adivasi communities, making a meaningful impact on the lives of my fellow villagers.

Nagoba Mahila Sangam Advocates for Rights and Development

A women's meeting was held in Suryapet village, Adilabad district, where members of the Nagoba Mahila Sangam gathered to discuss their collective strength and commitment to village development. Active for 26 years, the group shared insights on their savings practices and the challenges they face, particularly regarding their rights. While some women were aware of their entitlements, many highlighted a lack of guidance on how to claim them. "Due to a lack of awareness about the forest rights processes, we don't discuss land-related issues," the women noted. They also expressed gratitude to Dhaatri

for providing seeds for kitchen gardens, recognising this support as beneficial for their families and the community.



Meeting of the Nagoba Mahila Sangam.

*Event commemorating the death anniversary
of Kumaram Surum*

Remembering Kumaram Surum: A Symbol of Adivasi Resilience

On October 22, the Kolam community commemorated the death anniversary of Kumaram Surum, a significant event that celebrates his contributions to the Adivasi struggle. A prominent leader from the Gond community, Kumaram Surum dedicated his life to safeguarding the rights of Adivasi people over "Jal, Jungle, Jameen" (water, forest, and land). His efforts were marked by strong resistance against exploitative landlords and officials, significantly empowering Adivasi rights. Kurum Surum's



leadership inspired many within the community, symbolising strength and resilience. The event drew attendance from former legislators, Kumaram Surum Committee members, village leaders, and local residents, all united in honouring his memory. Such initiatives play a vital role in preserving the community's history and struggles, passing down knowledge to future generations while fostering unity and solidarity among community members.

FRC Established in Adilabad's Pitlaguda Village

On November 28, a Gram Sabha was held in Pitlaguda village of Utnoor Mandal in Adilabad, focusing on the Forest Rights Act (FRA), forest resources mapping, land records, and boundaries.

Following the discussions during the meeting, a Forest Rights Committee (FRC) was established, led by the Gram Panchayat Secretary. Committee members, including a President and a Secretary, were appointed. The Panchayat Secretary also contributed valuable information to the

The Gram Sabha meeting in Pitlaguda.



discussions. Key participants included Hemanth Kumar from Dhaatri, Vitthal Rao from CCD, Alevelu Mangamma from CPF, local youth, village leaders, women, and community members. This meeting successfully raised awareness about the Forest Rights Act and forest rights while promoting community-led initiatives.

Youth Distribute Forest Rights Act Handbooks

Youth distributed handbooks on the Forest Rights Act to fellow youth groups and local communities. This initiative aims to enhance understanding of the forest rights act, raise awareness, and guide individuals through



Distributing the handbooks to youth in Adilabad District.

the claims process. The handbooks were distributed across the Adilabad, Asifabad, and Nagarkurnool districts of Telangana.

Prepared by Dhaatri and the Centre for People's Forestry (CPF), this handbook serves as a valuable resource for field-level practitioners, NGOs, tribal leaders, activists, Gram Sabhas, and Forest Rights Committees (FRCs) in the

Telugu states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh submitting claims under the Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006. The handbook simplifies the rules, procedures, and implementation methods outlined in the Act, making them accessible to local communities.

The e-version of the handbook is available on Dhaatri's website: www.dhaatri.org.



ADIVASI FESTIVE SPIRIT



Adivasi Dussehra: A Cultural Celebration of Hope and Harmony

The Dussehra festival begins with the village elders — Katodak, Patak, Delak, Naikund, Karbari, and Tarmakar — inviting everyone to celebrate. They gather to select a suitable date for the festival, taking a collective proposal from all members. Once a date is agreed upon, each household contributes between Rs 100 to 500 based on their financial capabilities. The elders then compile a list of materials needed for the celebrations and invite family and relatives to join.

On the day of the festival, the community first visits the temple, where they stand before the deity with folded hands, symbolising their challenges while expressing hopes for prosperity and good crops. After cleaning the space and offering Daribelli turmeric, they hoist a new flag. Women then pour jowar at the feet of the deity and present monetary gifts according to their means.

A priest, or Katodak, conducts the rituals. Participants wash their feet, stand before the deity, and offer incense. They use locally sourced rice or jowar as *akshintalu*



Members of the community praying to the deity (top);

Getting the flag ready for hoisting (bottom)



(Grains used for blessings), placing them before the deity.

Chickens are slaughtered as part of the rituals, which includes washing their legs, applying a drop of water, and feeding them seeds. It is believed that if the chicken eats, it signifies positive omens. If not, villagers inquire the reason. When the reason is correct, the chicken will eat the seeds. Chicken legs are prepared for communal consumption when fulfilling desires, with some blood sprinkled on the deity.

After the communal meal, women sing traditional songs while escorting participants back to the village. The day concludes with gatherings at the Patel's house or in the village, where they sit in the presence of the deity before returning home.



Women offering jowar to the deity

Honouring Goddess Etmasur: Diwali Traditions of the Gond Adivasis

The Diwali festival in the Gond Adivasi community begins in July and revolves around the worship of the goddess Etmasur, particularly in the evenings. Known as *Akadi*, *Pura*, *Akurpok*, and *Divadi* in the Gondi language, this festival features the lively Kolatam dance, which is performed daily for four months. Lakshmi Puja is also conducted during Diwali, celebrated over two days. The first day marks the Bhogi festival, where everyone dons traditional Gussadi costumes and engages in joyful dances. Girls perform the Gussadi dance, known as Pori, typically in groups of four to six.

The festivities extend to surrounding villages,



The Kolatam dance



The colourful Gussadi costume.

where the community plays Kolatam, fostering relationships and camaraderie. Traditional deity worship ceremonies are integral to the celebrations, honouring tribal customs.

An essential aspect of Diwali is the ritual after the Gussadi dance; participants bathe in the river before returning home for puja. This festival signifies more than just spiritual observance; it reflects the rich culture and traditions



of the Gond Adivasi community. These cultural celebrations hold a special place in the hearts of the people, reinforcing their identity and communal bonds.

Let's Be Ourselves

*Let us be ourselves, let's get ready
For the festival of light in the forest,
As we search for the flower of laughter.*

*Carrying the Gusadi, adorned with blooms,
In colourful attire, we gather as one,
Singing songs in our own tongue,
We bow to the clan deity, and wish for a boon.
Dancing to the rhythm of joy,
With women singing on the village path,
Let us come together to celebrate,
Let us be ourselves.*

*We worship Etmasar,
From dawn till dusk,
Dancing in the streets,
Singing and moving with joy,
Embraced by the cool breeze of Mother Earth,
Harmonising with the sounds of nature,
Let us be ourselves.*

*In the lap of Mother Earth,
On this occasion of the Gusadi festival,
Let us unite,
And cherish the innocence of nature.*

This edition of the newsletter was authored and compiled by youth from Telangana and Karnataka. Originally written in their native languages, 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.

Please write to us at news@dhaatri.org or contact us at +91 40 29552404.



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