

**ADIVASIS IN THE EASTERN GHATS**  
**FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES AT THE CLOSE OF THE MILLENNIUM IN THE ERA OF  
GLOBALISATION**

Several Adivasi communities or indigenous people are spread over the Eastern Ghats across the southern and eastern region of the Indian sub-continent. It is the most tragical ironies of development that these adivasi communities are at their vulnerable worst at the end of this millennium. Our experience as a social action group, having worked with the tribal/adivasi people for over a decade has been a struggle for a right to human life with dignity, a struggle to fight the severest of odds in the face of "sustainable development" theories of the state.

The macro economic and political policies of the state with their active promotion of globalisation, have driven the adivasi people to the brink of survival. The effects of globalisation have had far reaching consequences in the Eastern Ghats, and some of the crucial issues with respect to this region can be analysed as follows :

**1. Economic policies of the state:**

With the advent of liberalisation, the Eastern Ghats witnessed a sudden invasion of macro economic forces for the exploitation of its rich natural resources. Virgin forests, with their enormous wealth of timber, mineral and non timber resources have been ruthlessly, unscientifically and irresponsibly tapped first by the public sector industries and from the eighties onwards, by the private and multinational industries. Of these the mining industry has been the most extensive in its spread and destruction.

Mining as the single largest industry has caused severe imbalances in the social, political, cultural and legal status of tribals. As a result, a distinct shift can be perceived in:

- Constitutional changes of the state-the protective legislations of the Fifth Scheduled (tribal) areas to safeguard the lands and resources of the tribals are under severe pressure of amendment for creating easy access to industries. So powerful are the lobbies that the state itself violates the laws for granting leases in tribal areas to private industries.
- This has further led to loss of control over resources, decision-making, social and cultural identity, displacement, loss of livelihoods and all the related evils of involuntary displacement and forced migration
- This coercive migration has made tribals minority communities in their own regions and deeply entrenched the non-tribals and commercial groups within the tribal belt
- Development interventions by the government and non-governmental agencies with the tribal people have been very skewed, shortsighted, welfarist and far from aimed at empowerment of people. Literacy levels continue to show extremely shocking results so much so that there is very poor awareness or accessibility to political, legal and economic systems among the tribals.

## **2. POLITICAL DARKNESS:**

- The tribals are so dispersed physically and psychologically that they do not have a strong political identity or representation either at the local, regional or national levels unlike the dalits who have built up a discernible political identity
- The non-tribal political forces, either of the left wing or the right have managed to disenable any form of leadership emerging from the tribal communities to take their issues forward
- Any political sympathies towards the tribals have been superfluous in handing over power and control to the tribals. On the otherhand, inane populist incentives are dangled at them while the real issues of control over resources, rights to self rule and constitutional protection are being actively suppressed.

## **SAMATA - ITS WORK AND CAMPAIGN IN THE EASTERN GHATS WITH THE ADIVASI COMMUNITIES :**

### **Background:**

Samata has worked as a grass-root community based social action group with tribal youth since 1989 to campaign for the rights of adivasi communities in the north coastal region of Andhra Pradesh. Our focus has been to organise the tribals

- to build up awareness of their rights and legal status
- to mobilise them to assert for their rights and control over resources
- to promote their traditional systems of natural resources management and explore alternate systems of development through ecologically friendly strategies

### ***The principal concerns addressed by Samata have been :***

- Land alienation through exploitation of non-tribal landlords and moneylenders, forest conflicts with government and protection of their constitutional status
- Displacement by industrial groups for mining and other commercial ventures
- Encouraging self reliant local institutions for addressing community problems through micro-credit, village banks, irrigation and agricultural associations, farmers' cooperatives,etc
- Alternate development programmes like eco-tourism, micro-hydel as energy systems for remote villages, alternate irrigation systems with traditional technology, etc

- Mining - the most serious problem tackled was the leasing of tribal and forest lands to mining industries through people's movement, legal and media advocacy, networking with other mining struggles and through lobby with government. The campaign resulted in a historic supreme court judgement striking down all mining leases as unconstitutional.(public interest litigation in the case of Samata Vs the State of A.P and Others - AIR 1997, SC 3297)

### **The Future Mandate for the Movement to protect the rights of Adivasis in the Eastern Ghats :**

#### ***Role of lobby and advocacy:***

Our experience in confronting macro political and development issues for adivasi justice has taught that an isolated movement would be ruthlessly suppressed. A perspective plan has been drawn up for the Eastern Ghats along with community based groups and organisations in the region concerned with the rights of adivasis to focus on the following thrust areas:

#### **a) A REGIONAL TRIBAL ADVOCACY&LOBBY CENTRE :**

A strong lobby and representation of Adivasi concerns needs to be urgently built up at the regional level. This group takes up advocacy of tribal issues from the local to national level, brings the attention of international media and concerned groups on the impact of liberalisation and globalisation. The lobby group will take up legal and media advocacy, network with other tribal groups and make a collective effort to influence policy on tribals and development

#### **b) CONSCIENTISATION:**

Build up literacy and awareness among tribals of their rights, laws, political and economic systems, strive towards infusing a sense of identity and voice to adivasis as a community and mobilise a collective movement for achieving the same by organising local tribal communities, networking with groups working with tribals at the regional level and extending support to small struggles.

#### **c) LEADERSHIP TRAINING:**

Build up the leadership capacities among the adivasis so as to represent their issues and concerns, develop a strong political identity and campaign for control over their resources and right to decision making on their lives. Encourage the tribal community to actively participate in reviving their customary social, legal and cultural practices and also acquire skills in facing the outside societies and environment without losing their unique identities.

## ***ROLE OF SAMATA AS A RESOURCE CENTRE FOR ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT TO ADIVASI EMPOWERMENT:***

From a community based social action group, Samata has developed into a resource centre for advocacy and support to tribal empowerment issues, since 1997. Perceiving the glaring vacume, Samata, with its skills and experience, has set up a centre for representing and lobbying for tribal concerns in the state of A.P, and at a wider level, the region of the Eastern Ghats along with community based groups and organisations working with tribals. Samata networks with these groups and through this collective might, plans to pressurise for justice to tribals.

### ***Strategies of Intervention:***

- Support local tribal campaigns and movements
- Support small community based groups working in the tribal belt through capacity building and skills development, legal, financial, information and other support
- Legal advocacy through writs and public interest litigations in the local courts, high court and supreme court
- Media Advocacy
- Information Collection, Compilation, and dissemination to tribal communities and local groups
- Coordinating with networks and alliances of various struggles in the country
- Linkages with international groups, alliances and institutions
- Tapping resources of technical experts, academicians and professionals
- Reaching out to general public and society at large on micro and macro issues
- Representing tribal issues to government and pressing for implementation of tribal area laws and balanced development policies
- Technical support for alternate development programmes
- Undertake studies, research and documentation on the problems and issues related to the tribals in the region

### ***Office and Team:***

Samata has its secretariat in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. It has a small team of activists with many years of experience of working with tribal communities. Besides its technical team, it also draws the expertise of professionals and technical persons from different fields thereby involving the larger society in taking up the cause of the marginalised.

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