

Women-Lores from India's Pits

A quarterly e-newsletter



Picture: Adivasi women share their traditional knowledge of medicinal herbs during a knowledge-exchange workshop.

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter! In this issue, we bring you recent news on climate issues and latest judgements related to tribal communities and women. We also bring you updates on our programmes and share stories of women who are exploring local strategies to coexist with nature despite the environmental destruction from the outside.

IN THIS ISSUE

India News.....02

India at COP28.....02

State Elections.....05

**Stories from
the Ground.....07**

*Blueprints for
alternative living.....09*

*Reflections from the
youth course.....11*

India at COP28

India Skips Green Energy and Health Pledges

India abstained from signing two key pledges during the annual United Nations climate summit (COP28). Indicating that it would continue to use coal for electricity generation in the near future, India did not join the 118 countries to have signed the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge to commit to triple installed renewable energy capacity by 2030. Similarly, India also refrained from signing the Declaration on Climate and Health, which emphasises on the need to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions for health benefits.

[Source](#)

India Aims to Reduce Emissions by 45% by 2030, Sticking to 2070 Net Zero Target

Addressing the COP28 summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "India aims to reduce emissions by 45 per cent before 2030. We have decided to increase the non-fossil fuel share by 50 per cent and will keep moving forward towards the net-zero target by 2070."

[Source](#)

ONGC Signs Oil & Gas Decarbonization Charter

India's state-owned oil company ONGC was among the 50 companies to have signed the Oil and Gas Decarbonization Charter, a voluntary agreement to stop routine flaring of excess gas by 2030 and eliminate almost all leaks of methane.

[Source](#)

India Pushes for Global Green Credit Programme

Launching the official portal of the Green Credit initiative at COP28, India offered the concept to the international community. Hoping to create a global market for green credits, India argued that the purview of carbon credits is very limited and is commercial in nature. The Green Credits Programme was launched by India's Environment Ministry in October this year as a market-based mechanism designed to incentivise voluntary environmental actions.

[Source](#)





Govt Notifies Rules to Enact Amended Forest Conservation Act

The amendments to the Forest Conservation Act came into effect on December 1, 2023, as the Environment Ministry notified the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023. The new law, officially known as the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhinyam, 1980, prohibits non-forest activity in forest areas without prior clearance from the Ministry. The new amendment seeks to exempt certain categories of lands from the purview of the Act to fast-track projects of “national importance”.

[Source](#)

Tree-felling Begins to Clear Land for Mining in Hasdeo Forest

Authorities began felling trees for the Parsa East and Kanta Basan phase-2 extension coal mines in the biodiversity-rich Hasdeo Arand forest in Chhattisgarh's Surguja district, even as locals continued their protests against mining in the region, which is one of the last remaining unfragmented forest landscapes in central India.

[Source](#)

Police Arrest Protesters Opposing Iron Mining in Gadchiroli

At least 21 people, including prominent Adivasi leaders, who had been taking part in a protest against mining in Surajgarh hills of Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, were reportedly arrested by the state police. Residents of Todgatta and around 70 surrounding villages have been protesting for over eight months in opposition to six proposed iron mines, which they feel will harm their sacred lands, ecosystem and livelihoods.

[Source](#)

AP Tribal Women Stage Mock Suicide Over Land Rights

Several tribal women from Kavagunta hamlet in Andhra Pradesh's Anakapalli district staged mock suicide, demanding the government to revive their land ownership rights, alleging that their pattas (land titles), which they had for over five decades, were cancelled for granite mines in the area.

[Source](#)

Cabinet Approves ₹ 24K Cr Welfare Scheme for PVTGs

The Union Cabinet has approved the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN) with a total outlay of ₹ 24,104 crore, aiming to provide critical facilities like housing, water, education, health, and livelihood opportunities to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Two senior government officials explain how the scheme can help the PVTGs.

University on Aravali Forest Land Gets Ministry Nod After Forest Act Amendment

The Environment Ministry has given post-facto approval to a private university built on protected Aravalli forest land in Haryana. This is the first project in the state to receive post-facto environmental clearance under the newly amended Forest Conservation Act. Though the state forest department had earlier acknowledged that the university had violated the Act, the ministry gave its approval observing that the project envisaged access to education in the area.

[Source](#)

NHRC Seeks Report from Govt on Salwa Judum Displacement

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and six state governments to provide information on victims displaced from Chhattisgarh due to Salwa Judum, a militia that was mobilised to counter Naxalite activities in the state.

[Source](#)

Govt to Directly Sanction Exploration Projects to Notified Private Agencies

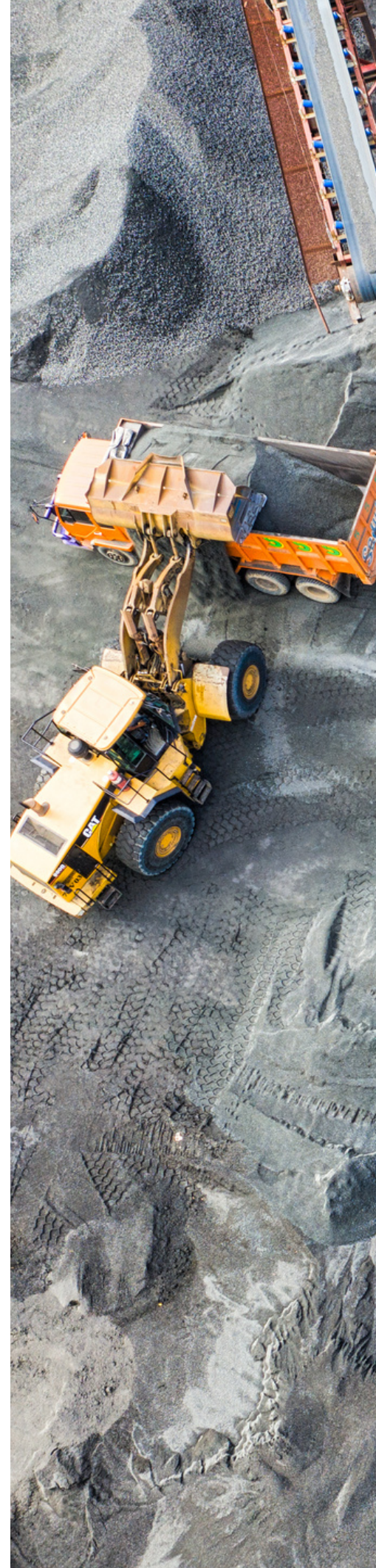
The Ministry of Mines has launched a new scheme to directly sanction projects for the exploration of critical and deep-seated minerals to notified private exploration agencies (NPEAs). The NPEAs have also been allowed to bid for auction for mineral blocks explored by them which was not allowed earlier.

[Source](#)

Govt Plans to Cap Mining Auction Securities

The Ministry of Mines has proposed an amendment to the Mineral (Auction) Rules, 2015 under which it plans to put a cap on the performance security and upfront payment for bidders in auctions.

[Source](#)

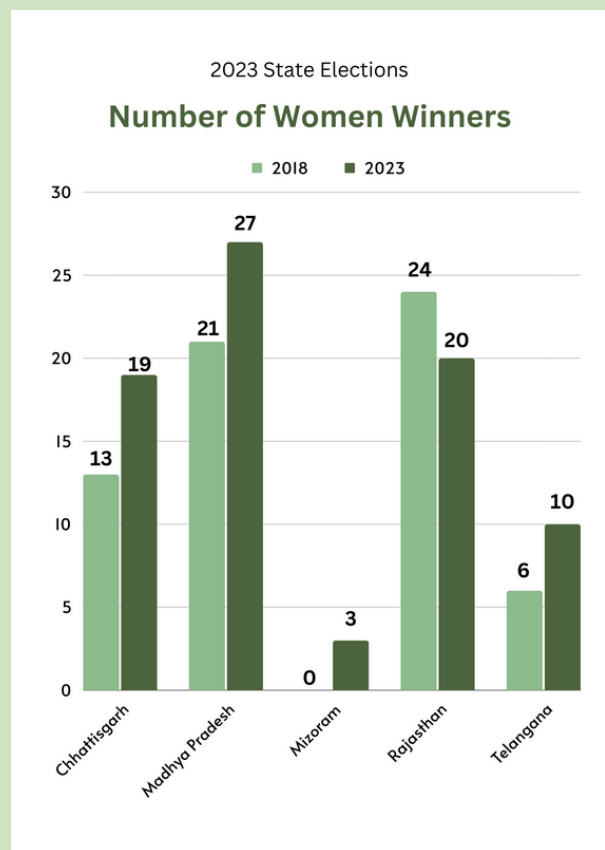
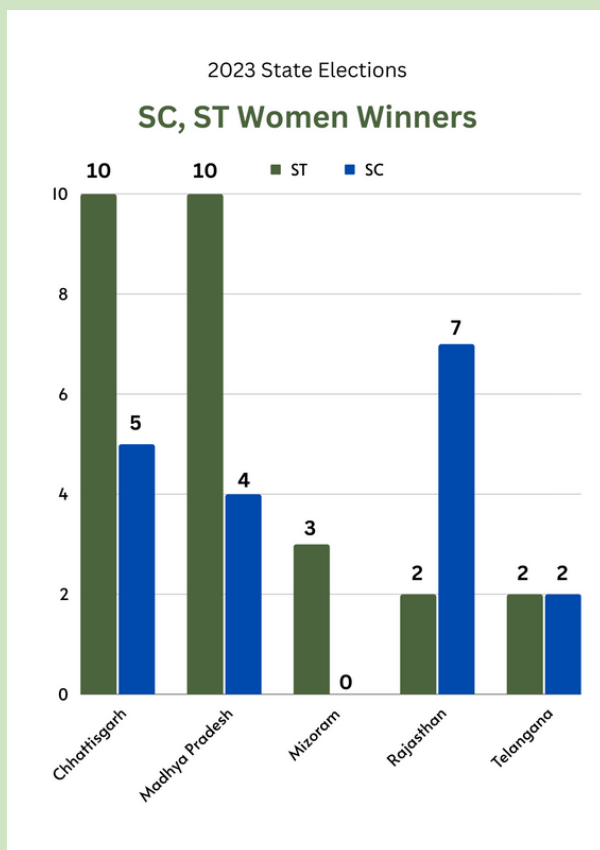


State Elections

ST and SC Women Make Strides in State Assembly Elections

A total of 45 women belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes emerged victorious in the recent assembly elections across five Indian states. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh elected 10 ST women candidates each, while Rajasthan saw the most SC women victors with 9. Overall, women made strides in increasing their representation in the Mizoram, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh state assemblies. However, Rajasthan experienced a decrease in the number of women winners compared to 2018. Notably, in Mizoram, which had an all-male assembly for the past five years, three ST women emerged victorious in the December 2023 elections.

[Source](#)



Impact of Tribal Parties in State Polls

Two tribal parties -- Gondwana Ganatantra Party (GGP) and Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) left a strong impact in the recent state elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan, winning a total of five seats and gaining a significant foothold in several other seats where they polled more votes than the victory margin of the winning candidate. BAP, which calls itself the first "environment-friendly party," won three seats in Rajasthan and one in Madhya Pradesh, while GGP won a seat in Chhattisgarh.

[Source](#)

Tribal Leader Seethakka Takes Charge as Cabinet Minister in Telangana

Congress leader Danasari Anasuya, fondly known as Seethakka by her constituents, has been elected as an MLA for the third time from Mulugu constituency in Telangana. Seethakka, who belongs to the Koya Adivasi community, has now taken charge as a Cabinet Minister for Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, Women and Child Welfare, and Rural Water Supply in the new state government. She had earned praise for her efforts during the COVID lockdown when she delivered essentials to Adivasi and migrant communities in the remote areas of her constituency.

You can read a profile of Seethakka [here](#).

*Below: Seethakka and her team walking towards a remote hamlet with essentials during the pandemic
(Source: facebook.com/danasarisithakka)*



STORIES FROM THE GROUND

Fundraiser Update: Schoolchildren in Ganj Basoda Get Cycles

Thanks to a successful fundraising campaign, Dhaatri was able to provide bicycles to 20 children in the stone-mining affected area of Ganj Basoda, Madhya Pradesh. The campaign aimed to alleviate the challenges faced by the children, who had to endure long and arduous walks to get to school. Many faced physical exhaustion and struggled to attend classes regularly, while dropping out of school became a harsh reality for some. With these bicycles, we hope to make their journey to school easier and more enjoyable, enabling them to fully embrace the joy of learning. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all our incredible donors who wholeheartedly contributed to our fundraising campaign.

To know more, click [here](#).



Combating TB and Silicosis Through Community-Driven Health Solutions



Women in Udaipur teaching children the recipe for moringa (drumstick leaves) tonic.

Adivasi women and youth in our field areas in Rajasthan's Udaipur, and Madhya Pradesh's Panna and Vidisha districts are taking proactive steps to address occupational health issues of tuberculosis and silicosis in their communities. Following a knowledge exchange workshop, these women have initiated the preparation of easy-to-make home remedies and are emphasising on the significance of forest resources in meeting the nutritional needs of patients. They have also been engaging in passing on this knowledge to other women and children, enhancing intergenerational knowledge sharing and fostering the community's ties with their traditional practices.



Our barefoot health volunteer giving pipra-honey mix to a patient in Ganj Basoda (above); discussion on TB awareness at a village in Panna. (top)

We have made efforts to integrate this knowledge exchange with our existing health programmes in Panna and Vidisha, where barefoot health volunteers complement modern medical treatments with these traditional remedies. Over the past year, the programme has involved diligent monitoring of medication, nutrition, and recovery progress of patients, along with awareness campaigns.

Dhaatri has also been registered as a Ni-kshay Mitra under the national TB-eradication campaign, wherein we will continue our collaborative work with the district health authorities to ensure comprehensive treatment. To further support patients, monthly nutrition kits have been provided to supplement their nutrition, ensuring that they have access to essential dietary supplies and fresh vegetables sourced from the kitchen gardens of Adivasi women.

Blueprints for Alternative Living from Kerala

Archana Women's Center: Laying the Foundation of a Gender-Just Society One Brick at a Time

When the first batch of women trained as masons by the Archana Women's Centre (AWC) visited a site for the construction of a toilet, they were met with disbelief and questioning eyes from the employer who opined that a toilet constructed by women was fated for an eventual fall. It took the women years of passing off as labourers at construction sites to be finally taken seriously as skilled masons—a recognition that even now does not come easily.

Based in the Kottayam district of Kerala, the Centre trains women in a good many livelihood skills which have been traditionally male-dominated including masonry, carpentry, bamboo and Ferro-Cement Technology, plumbing, electrical, and bricks manufacturing.

Besides the livelihood skill training, the organisation also focuses on creating community action groups bringing women together and training them to lead social enterprises for economic self-reliance with activities such as coil making, laundry, stitching, cake baking, umbrella making, and cow and goat rearing.

Emphasis is also laid on not only building an understanding of the gender roles existing inside and outside the domestic world but also equipping the women with skills necessary for 'advancing gender equality in their daily lives and work' through street plays, workshops and training sessions.

Read the full piece [here](#).



Our team in conversation with Radhika and Geeta who are trained in masonry (above); a welder constructing a chicken coop at the centre (bottom).



Farmer's Share: In Pursuit of a Quiet Making and Living with Nature

Nestled peacefully on the banks of the river Bharathappuzha also known as Nila, Kerala's second-longest river, Farmer's Share is an initiative grounded in communal and deliberate living, challenging the prevailing consumerist culture with its philosophy of 'Love Make Live.'

At the heart of Farmer's Share lies an emphasis on local self-sustenance, and a redefined approach to the essentials of life which is evident in the ways life happens every day at the farm.



Of utmost importance at the farm is the need for the creation of a dignified local livelihood which is harmonious with nature. For this, there is a small handloom unit run by women from the neighbourhood. The raw material for the food prepared at the farm is sourced from local farmers, thus initiating a circular economy in the area.

Everything that has found a place at the farm from the cycle rims and guitar fretboards used in the construction of the place to the sun-dried and honey-dipped mangoes sold in the store run by the group, has had an eventful journey worth knowing.

Read the full piece [here](#).



Muthuvar Women on the road to a GI tag for their Kannadi Paaya

Starting in 2017, Forest Post takes forward the idea of utilising what forests have to offer without exploitation of resources and, by centralizing the traditional knowledge of communities who, by virtue of living in close harmony with nature, have historically preserved it.

As a social enterprise, it works with women's collectives from forest-dwelling communities such

Left: A Kannadi Paaya (Source: Forest Post)

as Muthuvar, Malayar, Kadar, and Hill Pulaya to create products by value-addition to minor forest products (MFPs) collected by women, and linking them to the relevant markets. The products include a wide variety of self-care products like beeswax-based skincare creams, herbal hair oils and rubs, bamboo crafts such as baskets and mats and value-added wild food like preserves and pickles.

Interestingly, the Kannadi Paaya floor mats made by the Muthuvar women are in the middle of getting a Geographical Indications (GI) tag.

The legend has it that the mats were part of the royal celebrations and were frequently given as presents to the kings. The GI recognition will introduce the handiwork of Adivasi women to a larger audience and the hope is that it will help craft-making become an economically sustainable livelihood for them.

Read the full piece [here](#).

Reflections from the Youth Eco-Feminist Community Action Course

Hangati: A Tale of Women's Social Empowerment Through Cooperative Societies

In Narukot, a women's cooperative society, Hangati stands as a symbol of social change and financial empowerment for the women of the Gamit adivasi community in South Gujarat. It began as an effort of a catholic missionary to address issues of health and impoverishment among the women. From a self-help group where women scrambled together their savings by rearing hens and selling eggs, they have taken the shape of a cooperative society that is a formidable social presence enabling women a bargaining power with local governance and district administration bodies.

Below: Participants of Dhaatri's youth course interact with Hangati on their exposure visit to Gujarat



Gamit women in the interior villages of Panch Mahal district of Gujarat were mainly occupied in working in their farms and rearing animals. There was a need felt to organise the women and raise their concerns on health, children's education and money for agriculture and create a platform where they could collect their savings and gain financial independence that would help address most problems rooted in a lack of control over domestic finances. It also created a space to freely express themselves and challenge societal norms of women's mobility. Recounting how they would play games, sing and dance, the women shared that the desires they could not fulfill in their own homes due to familial restrictions and inhibitions, were met through creating a space for themselves through their women's group.

The women stepped out of the thresholds of their homes to make transactions in the bank and gained financial literacy. Jibes were hurled at them by men in the neighbourhood for going out to work in the cooperative society bank while their husbands washed clothes at home. They have created a shift in the narrative as the men now avail loans from the bank run by the very women they once taunted. Local administrative bodies also consider the women of Hangati as a force to reckon with, due to their assertive actions in trying to arrest bribes and commissions in local government offices. The women are active in protecting their land rights and were part of the protests against the proposed Vedanta's zinc smelter plant in Doswada of Tapi district in 2021. The local community alleged that it was sanctioned without consultation with the gram sabha and a violation of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996.

Reflecting its meaning of a "woman companion", Hangati has played an instrumental role in strengthening women's participation in the public sphere, providing them a safe space for addressing their grievances and in shifting power through the access to social and financial capital.

Below: Women of Hangati share the history and experiences of organising Gamit women into a cooperative society



Adivasi Academy Continues to Stand as a Knowledge Centre for Tribal Languages and Culture

As dawn broke out in Tejgadh, a group of excited youth began their trek to a centuries old cave painting in Koraj Hills. This prehistoric rock painting that is considered to be 12000 years old was what led Dr. Ganesh Devy to establish the Bhasha Trust when he first visited the hills in the Chhotaudepur district of Gujarat in 1996. On their exposure visit as part of the Youth Eco-Feminist Community Action Course, the participants stepped out of the campus of Adivasi Academy, and entered a rocky road with bamboo trees lined on either side that gradually made way for corn fields.



Cave painting at Koraj Hills in Tejgadh (top); participants closely examining an exhibit at Vacha museum in the Adivasi Academy (bottom)

Crossing an occasional hut, an algae-filled pond and snaking through thickets of tall, dried grass, the outline of the hills began to appear in the horizon. After a short trek through the rocky hills, sliding their way into the narrow opening of a small cave, a series of fading paintings that seemed to depict a war was brought to view. It had resemblances to Warli art in the picturisation of humans and horses and is said to be a precursor to the Pithora painting made by lakharas of the Rathwa community of Gujarat. Marveling over a relic from thousands of years ago, this kindled a spark of desire in the youth to re-discover any





*Enroute the trek the youth discuss adivasi identity and heritage (left);
Participants viewing traditional kitchen equipments amongst other displays at the museum (right)*

such cultural heritage in their own villages, to preserve and document their indigenous languages and re-think on what it means to be an adivasi.

With the belief that “When a language dies, something irreplaceable dies.”, the Bhasha Research and Publications Centre continues to be instrumental in reviving and documenting traditional knowledge, cultural practices, art and crafts of indigenous communities. The one of its kind Vaacha: Museum of Voice presents an example of decolonizing knowledge through its unique curatorial practice of letting the visitors touch, play and examine closely the exhibits that are collected from the margins and peripheries of society. It breaks the binary of a subject and object that has long exploited and othered indigenous communities with a gaze that either exoticizes or antagonises them. Through their numerous workshops and studios, they have created a space for reviving traditional weaving practices, use of locally harvested natural dyes, documented and mainstreamed forgotten adivasi songs in traditional musical instruments. The Bhasha Van associates every language with a tree that provides a scannable code to listen to the phonetics and description of a language. By intertwining a tree that has deep roots and grows into space to a language that has a rich history, culture and knowledge system associated with it, Bhasha is packaging a message for the conservation of languages and forests integral to adivasi life.

For each edition of this newsletter, we invite contributions from communities and local groups. We also encourage young and barefoot researchers to join us in compiling stories and data. You can send your photos and stories in any Indian languages.

Write to us at: dhaatriweb@gmail.com