

Women-Lores from India's Pits

A quarterly e-newsletter



Women-Lores was created as a platform to tell the stories of women and children from the remote hills and forests of India. It is a space for sharing news, struggles, approaches and initiatives by women, and rural and adivasi communities. We hope this platform enables amplifying the voices of women caught in the politics of climate crisis, to bring sustainability perspectives from feminist landscapes.

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.

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Rs 82,000 Cr Collected Under District Mineral Foundation

The Mines Ministry announced that as of August 2023, Rs 82,370.79 crore has been collected under the District Mineral Foundation (DMF), out of which a sum of Rs 45,150.21 crore has been utilised. DMF is a non-profit trust established to benefit communities affected by mining-related operations. As of August, DMFs have been established in 644 districts in 23 states and Union Territories of India.

[Source](#)

Mendha Set to Get Gram Panchayat Powers

Mendha (Lekha) in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, which was the country's first village to secure community forest rights (CFR) in 2011, is set to get gram panchayat powers after the High Court directed the state government to issue a notification to declare it a 'Gramdan' village.

[Source](#)

Almost 10% of India's Land is Degraded: UN

According to data from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), 30.51 million hectares of land was reportedly degraded in India from 2015 to 2019. This means that 9.45% of India's total landmass was degraded as of 2019 - up from 4.42% in 2015.

[Source](#)

Govt Notifies Green Credit Programme

The environment ministry has notified the Green Credit Programme, a market-based mechanism designed to incentivise voluntary environmental actions. The green credits will be tradable, and those who earn them can put them up for sale on a proposed domestic market platform. The ministry said that draft methodologies for awarding credits have been developed and will be notified for stakeholder consultation.

[Source](#)

Telangana HC Orders Conversion of Tribal Hamlets Into Revenue Villages

The Telangana High Court directed the state government to take steps in accordance with the Forest Rights Act to convert Chenchu tribal hamlets into revenue villages within four months.

[Court Order](#)



Tribal Women in Tamil Nadu Get Justice After Long Legal Battle

The Madras High Court has upheld the convictions of 269 government officials from the forest, police and revenue departments of Tamil Nadu for the atrocities committed on the residents of Vachathi tribal village in Dharmapuri district during a 'raid' in 1992, including rape and ransacking of village properties. The court also ordered the state to pay Rs 10 lakh compensation to rape survivors, and collect 50% of the compensation amount from the convicts.

[Court Order](#)

Gram Sabha Consent Mandatory for Tribal Land Acquisition: Telangana High Court

Scrapping a notification seeking to acquire land for a new railway line to transport coal for the Bhadradri Kothagudem power project in Telangana, the High Court said that land in scheduled areas cannot be acquired without the consent of gram sabhas of tribal villages.

[Court Order](#)

Telangana HC Stays Gruha Lakshmi Scheme in Scheduled Areas

The Telangana High Court has put an interim stay on the state government's housing scheme Gruha Lakshmi in scheduled areas. The court was hearing a petition raising concerns that the scheme lacked safeguards specific to scheduled areas and violated land regulations as well as the PESA Act.

[Source](#)

Rajasthan Mine Workers Welfare Board Not Yet Functional

The welfare board for mine workers in Rajasthan, formed over a year ago and the first in the country, is still non-operational as the state government is yet to nominate members of the board.

[Source](#)

Jharkhand Announces Forest Rights Campaign

The Jharkhand government announced a special campaign Abuaa Vir Dishom Vanadhikaar Abhiyaan, aiming to constitute forest rights committees in over 30,000 villages and award individual forest rights (IFR) and community forest rights (CFR) to eligible forest-dependent communities.

[Source](#)

Ex-Civil Servants Challenge Amendments to Forest Conservation Act in SC

The Supreme Court has asked the Union government to respond to a petition filed by former civil servants challenging the Constitutionality of the recent amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act. The petitioners cited concerns that the Act violates several fundamental rights and potentially serves commercial interests at the expense of the broader public welfare.

[Source](#)

Cabinet Approves Royalty Rates for Lithium, REEs

The Union Cabinet has approved royalty rates for lithium, niobium, and Rare Earth Elements (REEs). This will enable the central government to auction blocks for lithium, niobium and REEs for the first time in the country.

[Source](#)

Odisha to Reimburse Fees of SC/ST Students in Medical, Engineering Colleges

The Odisha government announced that it will reimburse the entire course fees of eligible scheduled tribe (ST) and scheduled caste (SC) students pursuing higher studies in medical and engineering courses at various government-run institutions under the Mukhyamantri Medhabi Chatra Protsahan Yojana (MMCPY).

[Source](#)

Maharashtra to Set Up Tribal Commission

The Maharashtra government has approved the proposal to establish an independent Scheduled Tribes Commission in the state on the lines of the National Commission for STs.

[Source](#)

Separate Secretariat for Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka

The Karnataka government has announced the constitution of a separate secretariat for the implementation of welfare programmes for ST communities in the state.

[Source](#)



STORIES FROM THE GROUND

Youth Eco-Feminist Course: Empowering Adivasi and Dalit Youth for Change

Dhaatri recently inaugurated the first batch of the Youth Eco-Feminist Community Action Course with a diverse group of 15 young Adivasi and Dalit individuals from four Indian states. Developed in collaboration with Sakhi Trust and Keystone Foundation, this course aims to empower the youth by fostering discussions on culture, identity, and Constitutional rights, and by promoting a gender-just approach to their engagement with natural resources.

Over the course of 10 months, participants will gain practical experience and knowledge by visiting field areas where various organisations are working towards Adivasi and Dalit rights, women's rights, livelihood initiatives, and cultural knowledge practices. Many of these young individuals are already actively involved in their respective communities and are eager to enhance their understanding and gain fresh perspectives to further their local initiatives.

Find the latest updates from the course [here](#).



Participants speaking with an Adivasi farmer during an exposure visit (top); group discussion during a theory session; visit to a mine worker colony (bottom)



Constitutional Crisis for PVTG Gutti Koya Children: No Certificates, No Education

Narsinghpadu, a village located in the Alluri Sitharama Raju district that shares its boundaries with the states of Odisha and Chhattisgarh and Telangana in the north, is home to 28 Gutti Koya families. Gutti Koyas are a tribal community that migrated from Dornapal village in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh about forty years ago in search of land and labour.

At the time of initial migration, they were subjected to atrocities by the state officials and at times by the local community. Their houses and farms were set on fire and the men from the Gutti Koya families were incarcerated on multiple false charges.

At present, despite possessing ration cards, voter ID cards, Aadhar cards, and job cards, these families don't have Scheduled Tribes certificates in Andhra Pradesh. During interactions with Dhaatri, people mentioned that not being recognised as a ST community has translated into the families being completely excluded from all the social security schemes in Andhra Pradesh.

Absence of caste certificates has made it impossible for the Gutti Koya children to access higher education in government institutions. Given their poor economic status, enrolling the children in private schools and colleges is a luxury they cannot afford.

With no support from local political parties, the forest department and the local tribal groups, Gutti Koyas have not made any substantial progress in their decades-long fight to get a rightful ST status.



A small Gutti Koya hut in the village settlement (top); Gutti Koya women sloganeering about saving their Adivasi identity after a group interaction (bottom)

STORIES OF CHANGE

Embracing Nature's Wisdom and Advocating for Change

Nirmala Kerketta, an exceptional Adivasi woman hailing from Jharkhand's Chatra district, is more than a healer – she is a vocal advocate for women and tribal rights, representing her community with unwavering determination. Demonstrating the inseparable Adivasi bond with nature and a deep understanding of the ecosystem, Kerketta's expertise lies in healing, utilising her rich knowledge of flora and fauna.

Passed down through generations, this profound wisdom forms the cornerstone of the Adivasi way of life, centred around nature's conservation. Kerketta embodies the essence of ancestral forestry wisdom, which is intricately woven into the philosophy, cultural practices, and traditions of her community. These ancestral teachings find expression through folklores, festivals, rituals, songs, dance, art, craft, and their holistic lifestyle choices.

We have made an attempt to share a glimpse of Nirmala Kerketta and her community's profound wisdom and their protective relationship with nature. Through a [short video](#) and [illustrated publication](#), we aim to shed light on their invaluable knowledge and the urgent need for environmental stewardship.



Reviving Adivasi Languages and Culture the Youth Way

In our youth eco-feminist community action course, we are witnessing a novel initiative that aims to revive Adivasi languages and culture in an engaging and dynamic way. The enthusiastic participants have harnessed their youthful energy to create short videos, utilising them as a powerful tool to promote their ancestral languages. With creativity and passion, these young individuals have taken on the roles of scriptwriters, videographers, and editors to produce captivating videos. Their goal is to sensitise people to the vibrant Adivasi community and offer a glimpse into the richness of their unique languages and culture.

Join us in celebrating their efforts and [click here](#) to watch these captivating videos.

Mission Vijaya Vanithe to the Rescue of Ex-Devadasi Women in Vijayanagara District

The Vijayanagara district set up a special programme called the Mission Vijaya Vanithe in 2022 that is dedicated to the rehabilitation of ex-devadasi women and the protection of the rights of Devadasi women and their children, under the PMKKKY high priority category of utilising the funds from District Mineral Foundation Trust (DMFT).

Eight years ago, the help desk model was started as an effort by Sakhi to provide immediate relief to the ex-Devadasi women and their children in two talukas of Hosapete and Manavi.



Sakhi team conducting a survey of Devadasi women (top); the team of women working for the help desk in Vijayanagara district (bottom)

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*Inauguration of the Vijaya Vanithe programme (left);
Sakhi team handing over a representation to the Chief Minister for the setting up of Vijaya Vanithe in other districts (right)*

As a result of sustained lobbying by Sakhi with the government departments, a Help Desk has been set up as an extension of the district administration, in coordination with Sakhi with two of its staff members working closely with the Mission as District coordinator. Sakhi also took part as an implementation agency. The Help Desk provides 24/7 support to ex-Devadasi women. It provides facilitation support like applications for Devadasi certificates and all social security schemes and special schemes for ex-Devadasi women and their children.

The Desk coordinates with other district level departments, including the police, especially for prevention of dedication practices during festivals, vigilance at community level, creation of public awareness, legal support and counselling for women in distress. The Desk also provides assistance to children of Devadasis for education, counselling and career guidance.

While the NGO Sakhi provides the skills and training support to the Desk, the DMF funds have been allocated for the human resources, helpline and infrastructural support to the Vijaya Vanithe team. Through the Desk, other district level facilities like housing, toilets and MGNREGA employment facilities are also being streamlined.

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.

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