Modern Asian Studies (2022), **56**, 1672–1690
doi:10.1017/S0026749X21000196

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Tribal land alienation and Adivasis' struggle for autonomy: The case of Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area, Telangana, India

Dalel Benbabaali

Department of Geography, University of Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens, France
Email: dalal.benbabaali@u-picardie.fr

(Received 11 March 2019; revised 21 April 2021; accepted 22 April 2021)

Abstract

Based on a case study of the Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area of Telangana, this article argues that the Adivasis of Central India seek autonomy as a response to their dispossession and to the accumulation of capital taking place in their resource-rich territories. The two main factors that have curtailed Adivasi autonomy through land alienation are analysed. The first is a process of agricultural colonization, wherein settlers belonging to agrarian dominant castes have moved into Adivasi territory and acquired tribal lands, thus dispossessing the original owners and reducing them to daily wage labourers. The second process is the industrialization of tribal areas where raw material is available and manpower is cheap, allowing for rapid accumulation through the exploitation of both nature and labour. Adivasis' struggle for autonomy is therefore a way to reclaim control over their own resources and to preserve their distinct identity.

Keywords: Adivasis; dispossession; autonomy; India; Telangana

Introduction

In the tribal Gondi language, '*Mava nate, mava raj*' ('Our village, our rule') expresses the long-standing demand for self-determination of Adivasis, the indigenous communities of India, a diverse population of around one hundred million that is mostly concentrated in the forested and hilly areas located in the central and eastern parts of the country. In pre-colonial times, Adivasis enjoyed a large degree of cultural and economic autonomy due to their geographical isolation and direct access to forest resources. However, the British Raj was synonymous with a 'fierce onslaught on India's forests' for timber export and military purposes such as shipbuilding and the construction

of the railways aimed at rapid troop communication.[1] The colonial government's restrictions on forest-dwellers' traditional subsistence economy, based on shifting cultivation and collection of minor forest produce, led to tribal rebellions.[2] Even in princely states like Bastar, which were not directly under colonial rule, it was the British interventions in forest policies that constituted the primary cause of tribal unrest.[3] While fighting the nizam of Hyderabad's regime, the Gond leader Komaram Bheem famously raised the slogan '*jal, jangal, zameen*' ('water, forest, land'), now widely used in Adivasi movements across India, even though indigenous mobilizations are far from being uniform in their aims and strategies.

Control over territory and natural resources formed an important material basis of Adivasi autonomy, which also helped them to preserve their culture. The contemporary dispossession of Adivasis by the state, private companies, and upper-caste settlers has further curtailed their autonomy, in spite of the constitutional provisions aimed at protecting tribal territories. Protective legislation was first implemented under colonial rule to pacify Adivasis fighting the growing penetration of agriculturists, traders, and moneylenders into their territories, a migration that had initially been encouraged by the British administration. After India's independence, the post-colonial state continued to implement ambivalent policies vis-à-vis Adivasis, oscillating between Elwin's isolationist approach[4] and Ghurye's assimilationist views.[5] The prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru decided to adopt an intermediary position when he laid down the *panchsheel* ('five principles') in 1957, fostering the integration of Adivasis in Indian society through development while safeguarding their distinct identity. Two types of protective discrimination were introduced for those categorized as Scheduled Tribes (STs): on the one hand, they can avail themselves of the benefits of reservations in education, in employment, and in elected bodies, proportional to their demographic weight (around 8 per cent); on the other hand, their territories are notified as Scheduled Areas with a different type of governance, according to the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution (applicable to central and northeast India respectively). It has been argued that while territorial rights enhance their autonomy, the quota system can actually undermine it through the incorporation of Adivasis into the mainstream economy and politics.[6]

The Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area of Telangana, where I conducted 12 months of fieldwork in 2015, has a complex administrative history as it fell

[1] Guha R., 1983, Forestry in British and Post-British India. A historical analysis, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 (44), pp. 1882–96, p. 1883.

[2] Bates C. and Shah A. (eds), 2014, *Savage Attack: Tribal insurgency in India*, Delhi, Social Science Press.

[3] Verghese A., 2016, British Rule and Tribal Revolts in India: The curious case of Bastar, *Modern Asian Studies*, 50 (5), pp. 1619–44.

[4] Elwin V., 1943, *The Aboriginals*, London, Oxford University Press.

[5] Ghurye G. S., 1943, *The Aborigines—'so called'—and their Future*, Pune, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics.

[6] Shah A., 2019, Tribe, Egalitarian Values, Autonomy and the State, in Srivastava S., Arif Y. and Abraham J. (eds), *Critical Themes in Indian Sociology*, Delhi, Sage, pp. 225–39.

partly under the nizam's princely state of Hyderabad and partly under British-ruled territory, with the Godavari river serving as a border. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Muslim princes of Hyderabad started to lease out forest land to British colonialists to generate revenue. Both governments encouraged farmers from the plains to migrate to the tribal areas to develop settled agriculture which could be taxed. While there were attempts to sedentarize Adivasis, they were subjected to taxation on forest produce and denied access to reserve forests, which became state property. These infringements on their customary rights led to various uprisings aimed at safeguarding their autonomy. As a consequence, in 1917 the British enacted the Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act which sought to limit interest payable by Adivasis and to prevent land alienation due to indebtedness. Similarly, the nizam's government enacted the Hyderabad Tribal Areas Regulation in 1948 to protect Adivasis from exploitation by non-Adivasi settlers. Today Bhadrachalam is a small temple town of around 50,000 inhabitants, most of whom are non-Adivasi immigrants, which serves as the headquarters of the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), in charge of implementing government schemes for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes. Based on a case study of land alienation among the Koyas, the main tribal group of Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area, this article analyses the various factors that have led to the dispossession of Adivasis and how their struggle for autonomy constitutes a response to it.

Dispossession of Adivasis and accumulation in resource-rich tribal territories

Bhadrachalam ITDA is located in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district of Telangana. It used to cover 29 contiguous *mandals* (district subdivisions) notified under the Fifth Schedule, with an ST population of more than 50 per cent. In 2014, at the time of the Telangana state formation, seven tribal *mandals* of Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area were transferred to the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh state due to their location in the submergence area of the Polavaram dam under construction on the Godavari, which will drown more than 300 villages and 4,000 hectares of reserve forests.[7] Knowing that the dam will benefit the landowning farmers and industrialists of Andhra Pradesh, this administrative transfer was meant to avoid opposition to the project from the Telangana government which does not want to deal with the resettlement and rehabilitation of the 300,000 people to be displaced (a majority of whom are Adivasis).[8] Polavaram is just the latest in a series of mega-projects carried out since Independence to 'modernize' India, in accordance with the developmentalist vision pursued by Nehru, who famously told the Adivasis displaced by the Hirakud dam in Orissa: 'If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country.'[9]

[7] Umamaheshwari R., 2014, *When Godavari Comes: People's history of a river. Journeys in the zone of the dispossessed*, Delhi, Aakar Books.

[8] Benbabaali D., 2016, From the Peasant Armed Struggle to the Telangana State: Changes and continuities in a South Indian region's uprisings, *Contemporary South Asia*, 24 (2), pp. 184–96.

[9] Cited in McCully P., 1996, *Silenced Rivers. The ecology and politics of large dams*, London, Zed Books, p. 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In various development projects across the country, Adivasis have been made the sacrificial victims of the modern nation-state that considers their lives expendable, a contemporary illustration of *homo sacer* theorized by Agamben.[10] The capitalist logic of accumulation depends on their dispossession and displacement from the territories they inhabit, knowing that 90 per cent of India's coal, 80 per cent of its minerals, and 72 per cent of its forests are found in Adivasi lands. These resource-rich territories have been targeted by private and public investors, leading to tribal land alienation and armed conflict. They have become the stronghold of a 50-year-old Maoist guerrilla struggle, which has faced brutal state repression, especially since the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s and the government's renewed emphasis on growth. The Adivasi support for the Maoists, also known as Naxalites, has sometimes been interpreted as a consequence of the welfare state's failure to bring development to those who live in and depend on forests. However, one can argue that it is precisely the development-induced massive land grabbing that has led to increased insurgency. Located in northern Telangana, Bhadrachalam tribal belt borders Bastar, the southern region of Chhattisgarh which has been the epicentre of the Maoist conflict in the last decade.[11] Around 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been living precariously in illegal camps built in the reserve forests of Bhadrachalam since 2005, the year when a state-sponsored militia called Salwa Judum was created in Chhattisgarh, and whose violence triggered a massive exodus of Adivasis.

Apart from ex situ displacement, a physical dislocation, and forceful eviction from their territory, the decline of Adivasi autonomy is also a consequence of in situ displacement, defined as a critical impairment of social reproduction, rights, securities, and identities.[12] In other words, even when they do not immediately lose their habitat, Adivasis have been progressively deprived of livelihoods and entitlements, which might eventually coerce them to migrate. This kind of displacement can be observed in Bhadrachalam and is caused by two main factors that will be analysed successively in the following sections. The first is a process of agricultural colonization, wherein settlers belonging to agrarian dominant castes have moved into Adivasi territory and acquired tribal lands, thus dispossessing the original owners and reducing them to daily wage labourers. The second process is the industrialization of tribal areas where raw material is available and manpower is cheap, allowing for rapid accumulation through the exploitation of both nature and labour.

Bhadrachalam tribal belt is endowed with plenty of resources due to its location in the Godavari valley, where water, fertile alluvial soil, forests, and minerals are abundant. And yet, its Adivasi population has become

[10] Agamben, G., 1998. *Homo Sacer*, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press.

[11] Sundar N., 2016, *The Burning Forest: India's war in Bastar*, Delhi, Juggernaut.

[12] Feldman S. and Geisler C., 2012, Land Expropriation and Displacement in Bangladesh, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39 (3–4), pp. 971–93.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

resourceless and brutally impoverished as a result of 'accumulation by dispossession'[13] and 'dispossession without development'.[14] The capitalist mode of production, whether in the agricultural or industrial sector, has also led to a severe ecological crisis primarily affecting the people who rely on their immediate environment for their sustenance. Environmental destruction, land alienation, and proletarianization have undermined Adivasis' traditional way of life and free access to natural resources, which is highly detrimental to their autonomy, since they have become more and more dependent on daily wages provided by dominant caste farmers or industrialists for their reproduction.

Agricultural colonization and tribal land alienation by dominant caste farmers

The demography of Bhadrachalam and of the surrounding villages has changed tremendously since Independence, when the whole area was populated predominantly by Koyas, the main Adivasi group inhabiting that territory. Today they constitute only one-third of the million people living in this Scheduled Area, while another third is formed by Lambadas, a nomadic people from the plains who migrated in large numbers from neighbouring states to Bhadrachalam in the 1970s, after being given ST status by the government of Andhra Pradesh, in order to benefit from the advantages offered by the ITDA.[15] The Konda Reddis, classified as PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group), represent a tiny minority whose population is dangerously decreasing and who will be the most affected by the Polavaram dam, as they are concentrated in the hilly terrains to be submerged by the reservoir. Among non-Adivasi groups living in the ITDA are landless Dalits (mostly Malas and Madigas), Backward Castes (fisherfolk and various service castes), Komatis (trading caste), Rajus (warrior caste), Brahmans (priestly caste), and, most importantly, agrarian dominant castes such as Reddis, Velamas, and Kammas, who now occupy vast tracts of tribal land.

While the Reddis and Velamas are local landowning castes of Telangana, the Kammas migrated from Coastal Andhra in search of new lands along the Godavari river. When they started to settle in Bhadrachalam at the beginning of the twentieth century, the valley was covered with forests where Koyas practised shifting cultivation under a communal tenure system with no private property. Adivasis would mostly grow food grains like millets and would not use the slash and burn technique more than required for their subsistence, thus allowing for the regeneration of the forests.[16] These sparsely populated,

[13] Harvey D., 2004, The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by dispossession, *Socialist Register*, 40, pp. 63–87.

[14] Levien M., 2018, *Dispossession Without Development. Land grabs in neoliberal India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

[15] However, the Lambada presence in this area dates back to the early modern period, as shown in Bhukya B., 2010, *Subjugated Nomads: The Lambadas under the rule of the nizams*, Delhi, Orient Blackswan.

[16] Aiyappan A., 1948, *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras*, Madras, Government Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fertile, and accessible lands attracted Kamma farmers living in the high-density delta areas where two big dams had been constructed by the British in the mid-nineteenth century. This early introduction of canal irrigation in the Krishna-Godavari deltas led to the production of surplus and hence to the commercialization of agriculture. Land itself became commodified and the demographic pressure prompted enterprising Kammas to sell their divided plots in the deltas in order to acquire larger properties upstream in the tribal areas, where they introduced cash crops such as tobacco, chillies, and cotton.[17]

After the Telugu-speaking region of Telangana was merged with Andhra in 1956 to form the first linguistic state of independent India, the influx of rich farmers from the delta areas to purchase cheap lands in interior Adivasi territories became uncontrollable. This merger was disastrous for Adivasis as the Hyderabad Tribal Areas Regulation was not implemented in the unified state.[18] In 1959 the new Andhra Pradesh government hence decided to pass the Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation, known as LTR. In the late 1960s, Maoist insurgents fighting against upper-caste landlords for tribal rights prompted further amendments to make the law even more stringent. Regulation 1 of the 1970-amended LTR, known as the 1/70 Act, totally prohibits land transfer from STs to non-STs and presumes that in Scheduled Areas all lands belonged originally to Adivasis and should ultimately be restored to them by ensuring that immovable property can only be acquired by members of a Scheduled Tribe or to cooperative societies composed solely of STs. Non-Adivasis living in Scheduled Areas bear the burden of proof and need to provide evidence that they bought their properties before the Act came into force. However, legal protection against tribal land alienation had little effect: in 1979, the government of Andhra Pradesh declared that non-Adivasi landholdings in Scheduled Areas, up to a maximum size, were justified.[19] Not only was a very small part of the thousands of hectares of illegally acquired properties returned to Adivasis, but the most fertile alluvium lands stretching all along the catchment area of the Godavari, often benefitting from lift-irrigation schemes, are still occupied by dominant caste farmers.

For the settlers who migrated after 1970, there are various ways to circumvent the LTR and to cultivate tribal lands, by bribing the administration, manipulating land records, and through benami transfers. They can informally take land on lease from Adivasis through an oral contract (since even tenancy is illegal for non-Adivasis), lending them money at usurious rates—sometimes up to 6 per cent per month (72 per cent per annum), and then seize the mortgaged property as collateral when the indebted owners cannot repay their loans. Another fraudulent means to usurp tribal land is to buy a testament from an Adivasi landowner, since a will does not fall within the definition of

[17] Benbabaali D., 2018, Caste Dominance and Territory in South India. Understanding Kammas' socio-spatial mobility, *Modern Asian Studies*, 52 (6), pp. 1938–76.

[18] Bhukya B., 2012, The Eternal Colonial Legacy: Adivasis and land assertion in Andhra Agency, in Nathan D. and Xaxa V. (eds), *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion: Development and deprivation of Adivasis in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp. 63–80.

[19] Rupavath R., 2009, *Tribal Land Alienation and Political Movements: Socio-economic patterns from South India*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishers.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

transfer, or to arrange for a fictitious adoption by an Adivasi family. There are also cases of Kamma men marrying Adivasi women as first or second wives, or just keeping them as concubines, and in return for their maintenance, the women allow lands to be held in their names and cultivated by the upper-caste men.[20]

The village I chose for my in-depth study,[21] located ten kilometres away from Bhadrachalam town on the right bank of the Godavari, is entirely controlled by one Kamma landlord named Mr Rao. Since his father settled in that village in 1942, before the LTR was enacted, Rao claims that he acquired his properties legally. However, although he only inherited 50 acres from his father, he now occupies 300 acres, which amounts to a hundred times the average size of Koya landholdings in that village. He successfully accumulated land over the years, first through appropriation of his brothers' shares in the heritage, since one of them passed away and the other migrated to the United States, and then by encroaching illegally on tribal properties. While his brother returned to India to fight a case against him and recover his lands, it is difficult for Koyas to enter into litigation due to Rao's highly placed contacts in the police, the administration, and the judiciary. The visitor immediately gets a sense of Rao's wealth and power in the village after seeing the huge mansion that he built himself in the centre of it, contrasting with the Koyas' bamboo huts.

As Table 1 shows, STs (Koyas and Lambadas) form 60 per cent of the village population, but they own only 26 per cent of the land, while the dominant Kammas and Reddis (Other Castes), who constitute 12 per cent of the population, own 53 per cent of the village land. The Dalit Madigas (Scheduled Castes) make up 5 per cent of the population and own 1 per cent of the land. The BCs (Backward Castes) comprise 23 per cent of the population and own 20 per cent of the land.

The landlessness of the Madigas makes them extremely dependent on Rao's patronage for employment, whether on his fields (where mostly women work for less than Rs 150 a day) or in the nearby paper factory (almost exclusively male jobs paid between Rs 200 and Rs 400 according to skill level). As non-Adivasis living in a tribal area, the Dalits have no political power. Since it is reserved for ST candidates, the seat of the *sarpanch*, who is the head of the village elected body or *panchayat*, is generally occupied by Adivasis who are under Rao's influence and can convince others to vote for his party, the TDP (Telugu Desam Party). According to Rao, the Lambadas are more 'obedient' than the Koyas, who mostly vote for the Congress Party, because many of them received *pattas* (land titles) for the forest patches they were cultivating when the late Congress chief minister Y. S. Rajashekar Reddy decided to implement the 2006 Forest Rights Act.

[20] Girgliani J. M., 2005, *Report on Tribal Land Issues in the Telangana Area*, Hyderabad, Government of Andhra Pradesh.

[21] Benbabaali D., 2017, Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area, Telangana, in Shah A., Lerche J., Axelby R., Benbabaali D., Donegan B., Raj J. and Thakur V., *Ground Down by Growth: Tribe, caste, class and inequality in twenty-first century India*, London, Pluto Press, pp. 115–42.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1: Statistical profile of the village

	Population		Land	
Caste	People	%	Acres	%
Koya (ST)	1,055	43	273	23
Lambada (ST)	425	17	42	3
Madiga (SC)	122	5	12	1
BCs	561	23	235	20
Kamma (OC)	252	10	262	22
Reddy (OC)	56	2	374	31
TOTAL	**2,471**	**100**	**1,198**	**100**

Source: Mandal Revenue Office, Burgampadu, 2015.

Despite the 'divide-and-rule' strategies used by Rao, who preferentially employs Lambadas in his fields, there is no enmity between the two Adivasi groups. The rivalry around reservations is not important in the village, as very few of them are educated enough to even aspire to government jobs. Intercaste marriages between them are rare (only two cases), but cultural differences are no obstacle to their daily interactions, especially while working together in the fields. During the cotton plucking season, I spent time with the women labourers who enjoyed singing songs in their own languages while harvesting, some in Koya, some in Lambadi. The Indian Evangelical Mission has recently converted 25 per cent of the village Koyas to Christianity, while others continue to worship their own deities or tribal saints like Saramma and Sarakka, the legendary female warriors who became martyrs fighting the imperial forces of the Kakatiya monarchs (a Telugu dynasty the Kammas claim to be descended from).

To maintain their autonomy, the Koyas avoid working for Kammas and prefer to cultivate their forest lands, even though they own only three acres per household on average. Even the landless among them prefer to work as agricultural labourers on other Koyas' fields to avoid being dependent on the dominant Kammas, towards whom they feel more suspicion than respect. While everybody else in the village calls Rao '*pedda*', a Telugu word that literally means 'big' or 'elderly', but which expresses deference (it can also be translated as 'important' or 'powerful'), the Koyas see him as a 'cheat' (they use the English word). When all the villagers attended Rao's brother's funeral to express their condolences, the Koyas ignored the ceremony and stayed at home. They would rather live on the little they have than do a job they dislike or ask Rao for favours. During the agricultural lean season, Koya men and women would sit idle outside their houses and drink palm wine (toddy) or *mahua* liquor together, with their children playing around. Compared to other groups, Koyas' gender relations are more egalitarian and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they have maintained a higher level of economic and cultural autonomy, which is slowly being eroded by processes of land alienation and incorporation into mainstream society as wage labourers.

While Koyas used to grow rainfed rice or other cereals for their consumption, many have been tempted to adopt genetically modified Bt cotton which was introduced in the area by the Kammas, who were seen prospering thanks to this cash crop. Bt cotton is not only harmful for the environment, as it requires large quantities of chemical fertilizers and pesticides as well as water, it also makes farmers dependent on the market and on loans for the poorest of them, who turned to commercial agriculture and now need cash to buy their own food. Telangana has one of the highest rates of farmers' suicides due to indebtedness, mostly in areas where cotton is grown. Among other grievances, supporters of a separate Telangana state have often argued that Andhra capitalist farmers 'imported' the Green Revolution and its negative ecological consequences from the deltas to the interior areas, leading to the destruction of the more sustainable type of agriculture that was practised in the Telangana countryside.

Kammas are also the main planters of eucalyptus, whose wood is used as raw material by the paper factory run by the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC). In spite of assured returns from the company that buys the bulk of the produce, only rich farmers can afford to invest in such plantations since the trees need four years to grow and generate an income. Eucalyptus plantations are highly unsustainable since they quickly deplete underground water and degrade fertile soils, leaving them sterile in the long run. The leaves, bark, and fruits of eucalyptus are useless for Adivasis and their animals, unlike local trees that generally serve various purposes. Eucalyptus does not provide shade, and repels birds, butterflies, and bees, causing pollination stoppage. Its slim trunk and narrow leaves are incapable of resisting wind, causing soil erosion due to direct exposure to sun and wind. During the monsoon, the exposed sandy upper level of the soil gets washed away into the river and the accumulation of sand keeps widening the riverbed, thus increasing the risk of floods.[22] Despite these adverse environmental impacts, eucalyptus plantations are expanding in the entire Bhadrachalam tribal area, due to the increasing demand for pulp production.

Industrialization, proletarianization, and the ecological crisis: The case of ITC

ITC Limited, first known as the Imperial Tobacco Company when it was founded in 1910, became the Indian Tobacco Company after Independence, with its headquarters still in Kolkata. It is a major private conglomerate operating diverse businesses like cigarettes, paper and packaging, stationery, agro-industry, hotels, information technology, personal care, and other consumable goods. In 1979, the Paperboard and Specialty Papers Division (PSPD) of ITC took over and privatized Bhadrachalam Paperboard Limited, which had been established two years before in Sarapaka village of Burgampadu

[22] Devi M., 1983, Why Eucalyptus?, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 (32), pp. 1379–81.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

mandal, on the right bank of the Godavari, just opposite Bhadrachalam town. The government had allotted 220 acres of reserve forest and 290 acres of agricultural land to the company. A top ITC manager I interviewed claimed that the company was encouraged by the state to invest in Bhadrachalam to help 'develop a backward area'. However, the most important factors explaining the choice of this location by the river are the availability of water, the presence of coal, also used for paper production, and of abundant forests that were providing bamboo until they were exhausted and replaced with eucalyptus plantations.

According to the landmark Samata judgment delivered by the Supreme Court of India in 1997, in a case of the Government of Andhra Pradesh versus an NGO contesting a mining lease, allocation of land by the state to a private company in a Scheduled Area is unconstitutional.[23] The leader of a tribal organization called Adivasi Chaitanya Samithi explained to me that the ITC paper factory is therefore 'illegal *ab initio*'. He decided to approach the project officer of Bhadrachalam ITDA, a civil servant from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), who agreed to take action against ITC by filing a case related to the encroachment on 100 acres of tribal land by the company to grow eucalyptus, and by asking the management to compensate for the 'historical blunder' of establishing a factory in a protected tribal area by at least providing employment to Adivasis.

Unlike the public sector industries located in Bhadrachalam ITDA, such as the Singareni Collieries coal mines and Kothagudem Thermal Power Station, ITC does not have reservations for STs. However, the IAS officer in charge of the ITDA tried to put pressure on the company to implement a quota policy on the grounds that the presence of the factory was responsible for the in-migration of outside labour that was providing most of the manpower at the cost of the local people. According to the management, 17 per cent of the factory's casual labour are STs, a figure that turned out to be inaccurate after personal investigation. ITC currently employs 4,000 casual labourers, of whom only 8 per cent are STs (200 Lambadas, 100 Koyas, and 20 Konda Reddis), and 25 per cent are SCs (mostly Malas and Madigas). Among the permanent labour force, the proportions are even lower: out of 1,575 employees, 5 per cent are STs (45 Lambadas and 30 Koyas) and 8 per cent are SCs (70 Madigas and 60 Malas). The rest are BCs (Backward Castes) as well as dominant castes (mostly Kammas and Reddis), a majority of whom are from Coastal Andhra. Finally, among the 700 managers, none are SCs or STs, most of them being upper caste and outsiders.

The underrepresentation of local Adivasis among ITC workers is not necessarily a sign of social discrimination. Though it is true that permanent jobs in the factory require contacts, caste networks, and wealth due to the corruption of the powerful Kamma and Reddy union leaders (who demand up to one million rupee bribes to recommend someone to the management, preferentially from their own caste), casual employment is available to all, skilled or

[23] Samata, 2000, *Surviving a Minefield—An Adivasi triumph. A landmark Supreme Court judgement restoring the rights of tribals*, Hyderabad, Samata.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

unskilled, but is rarely taken up by Koyas. According to the village survey conducted, only 2.5 per cent of the Koya men are casual workers in ITC, against 33 per cent for the Lambadas and 53 per cent for the Madigas. There are various reasons behind these differences. As explained in the previous section, the Madigas are mostly landless and therefore need to work as daily wage labourers on other people's fields or in industries. As STs, the Lambadas are allowed to buy land, but most of them settled recently in the village in search of work in the factory, which they managed to obtain with Rao's patronage, in exchange for political loyalty. As people from the plains, they are very different from the local Koyas who have always lived in forested areas and have been less exposed to mainstream economy and society. Though in Maharashtra they are classified as Backward Castes, Lambadas have been included in the Andhra Pradesh ST list in 1976 for electoral purposes, and they are now well connected since many of them have subsequently been elected from ST reserved constituencies as Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Less advanced educationally, Koyas were less successful in taking advantage of reservations, whether in colleges or in government jobs. For example, 80 per cent of the ST teachers in Bhadrachalam Scheduled Areas are Lambadas, while they constitute just half of the total ST population.

Most importantly, Koyas are not interested in industrial labour and would only work in the factory if they had no other option. When ITC started laying pipes through their fields to take water from the Godavari, many lost their lands and were offered permanent jobs as compensation. In the village I studied, the majority refused and opted for financial reparations instead. Among those who accepted, some lost their jobs due to absenteeism, as they found it difficult to cope with the strict schedules imposed by the managers and to work night shifts. As a Koya villager explained to me: 'We like freedom, we cannot be regimented. Also, it stinks inside the factory.' Among the younger generation, the few educated Koyas in the village do aspire to jobs in the paper factory, but probably due to the lack of alternative employment opportunities in the vicinity. When I asked Shanta, a 20-year-old Koya studying for a BTech in Bhadrachalam Government College, 'What do you think of the Indian Tobacco Company?', he replied: 'I don't like it, it created too many problems in our village.' Then I asked: 'Do you want to work there?' He said: 'If I get a permanent job, yes, because it is close to our village.' The Koyas' progressive loss of lands due to upper-caste settlers and to ITC's encroachments on their forests is slowly forcing them to take up industrial labour or to work as woodcutters in eucalyptus plantations. This proletarianization process is synonymous with a decline in their economic independence and cultural autonomy as they become daily wage labourers for a company whose expansion is moreover destroying their fragile environment.

Paper factories are big polluters of air and water, which of course has serious consequences on public health. According to the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment, most of the Indian mills do not have adequate technology to recycle their waste. Though ITC claims that the effluents it releases in the Godavari are treated and therefore 'clean', this is not the perception of the villagers living by the river with an open-air canal full of industrial

discharge running through their fields. The factory has outlets releasing polluted water with white slurry and black soot into residential areas as well. The people I talked to complained that it is a major problem during the monsoon, leading to flooding of their streets and a high incidence of dengue and malaria, while the poisoned underground water they drink from the wells causes diarrhoea in the children. The food crops they used to grow on the riverbank for their own consumption have also been contaminated. In fact, the rice they were eating has become so dangerous that many were forced to shift from paddy to eucalyptus plantations. As far as air pollution is concerned, the ITDA in 2015 conducted a health impact survey in the villages surrounding ITC and identified an unusual number of cases of cancer and lung diseases, although some people are hesitant to report their illnesses as they are afraid of losing their jobs in the factory. A majority of residents complained about skin infections, constant headaches, chronic coughs, asthma, and nausea due to the stench of the chemicals used by ITC that can be smelt at least within a five-kilometre radius of the factory and sometimes even further based on the speed and direction of the wind.

In spite of protective legislation such as the LTR and the 1996 Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (referred to as PESA), which requires the approval of the *gram sabha* or village assembly for any project affecting common natural resources, the ITC factory has been able to continuously expand in the last decades, from one to seven machines, while the construction of the eighth one is planned for the coming years. This is partly due to the restrictions of the law itself, which grants limited self-governance to Scheduled Tribes, but also to corruption that prevents its proper implementation. The *sarpanch* of Sarapaka, an influential Lambada politician with various cases pending against him, has been instrumental in ITC's expansion as many believe he has been 'bought' by the company.

During the launch of the Telangana government's new industrial policy in 2015, Y. C. Deveshwar, ITC's chief executive officer, announced an investment plan of 40 billion rupees in Bhadrachalam to increase the production capacity of the paper unit. He explained this move by mentioning the competition with China in the domestic market: 'We are doubling the paper mill capacity to one million tonnes. But in China one single machine produces one million tonnes of paper.' The Bhadrachalam factory's eighth machine will be fully automated and therefore will not lead to job creation. The Telangana chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, known as KCR, has sanctioned the diversion of 1,300 acres of forest land in Sarapaka for ITC's expansion, but the company is yet to get the clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests in Delhi. If it obtains it, this will again be in total violation of the constitutional provisions related to Scheduled Areas.

Due to its insatiable demand for wood fibre, ITC has launched a campaign to convince local farmers to grow eucalyptus on their private lands, even if this has proved disastrous for the environment. The company is also using the Telangana's reforestation scheme called Haritha Haram ('Green belt') to plant eucalyptus saplings on government land in the name of 'corporate social responsibility'. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act passed in the Indian

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Parliament in 2016 allows the replacement of native forests with plantations of exogenous species. According to an officer from the Indian Forest Service whom I interviewed, eucalyptus counts as TOF ('Tree Outside Forest'), and what matters now for the government, more than forest cover, is tree cover that can be shown as afforestation through satellite images, even if it creates a totally different, much poorer ecosystem on the ground.

The Haritha Haram scheme has become a major threat to Adivasis who are cultivating forest land without official titles, as the Telangana government has decided to forcibly seize those plots and hand them over to ITC for eucalyptus plantations. In the surveyed village, 25 out of the 210 Koya households are implicated and are going to lose their only means of livelihood because of the scheme. While most Lambadas could obtain documentary proof under the Forest Rights Act thanks to their connections in the administration, many Koyas were unable to claim their rights and are now told that it is too late, since the chief minister KCR has instructed officers not to deliver any new *pattas* under the Act, even to people who are entitled to them. While claiming to care for the environment, the Telangana government is actually helping ITC to increase its paper production. Though officially concerned about deforestation, it has allowed the public company Singareni Collieries to destroy hundreds of hectares of forests in Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area and replace them with opencast coal mines for industries such as ITC and the new thermal power plant which is being built on tribal land in Manuguru against Adivasis' will.

Major protests have erupted in various tribal areas of Telangana against the occupation of their land, the destruction of crops, and physical violence unleashed by the police and forest officials against the people who are resisting the state's 'everyday tyranny'.[24] After being dispossessed by upper-caste settlers and industries, Adivasis are now being alienated in the name of forest conservation by the state which is constitutionally mandated to protect them. International organizations have recognized indigenous peoples the world over as the rightful owners and legitimate managers of the forests in which they live, since their own social reproduction depends on the regeneration of natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity. In India, this is what the Forest Rights Act has tried to convey by seeking to rectify the 'historical injustice to the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who are integral to the very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystem', even though the implementation of the Act suffers from several drawbacks.[25] But neither this law nor the Constitution go far enough to grant Adivasis real autonomy.

[24] Nilsen A. G., 2018, *Adivasis and the State. Subalternity and citizenship in India's Bhil heartland*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

[25] Ramnath M., 2008, Surviving the Forest Rights Act: Between Scylla and Charybdis, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43 (9), pp. 37–42.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Adivasis' struggle for autonomy: A fight for territory and identity

By opening tribal territories to outsiders, colonialism created a major disruption in the social and political organization of Adivasis. The indigenous tribes were considered 'wild', 'primitive', and 'child-like', and therefore unfit for self-rule.[26] The 1868 Bhadrachalam land settlement report contains very paternalistic descriptions of the Koyas:

> Like all wild tribes, they are timid, inoffensive, and tolerably truthful; their restless habits however do not admit of their settling down as good agriculturists; generally speaking they move from one spot to another once in every three or four years (...). Where they can cultivate rice, they are more attached to the soil, especially if a grove of *palmyra* be near, as like all Gonds they are fond of spirits.[27]

Although shifting cultivation practised in areas under low demographic pressure allowed enough time for the forests to regenerate, the British tried to sedentarize the Koyas to collect revenue from them, and encouraged groups perceived as expert rice cultivators, like the Kammas, to settle in tribal territories to develop modern agriculture. Adivasis put up a fierce resistance to this curtailment of their autonomy, such as the first Rampa rebellion of 1879 against the imposition of excise duties on palm wine (toddy), and the following ones in 1922–1924 against colonial forest policies and the imposition of forced labour to build roads.[28] While those revolts were brutally suppressed, the colonial rulers had to ensure social peace through protective legislation.

The legal framework applicable to tribal areas inherited from the British was consolidated after Independence in the Constitution itself. The Sixth Schedule grants much more autonomy to the peripheral tribal states of north-east India than the Fifth Schedule does to the heartland Adivasi territories. This has been justified by the fact that the northeastern tribes are geographically more isolated and socially more advanced than the Adivasis of central India, and are therefore able to manage their own affairs in relatively homogeneous states, whereas the areas under the Fifth Schedule have a large non-tribal population. Kurup argues that a major cause for the failure to devolve real decision-making powers to Adivasis and the perpetuation of government's authoritarian control over tribal territories resides in the Fifth Schedule's top-down approach to decentralization which, according to him, ought to be replaced with a bottom-up understanding of autonomy:

> The abrupt shift from traditional institutions to alien concepts of elected representatives and Panchayats has resulted in very low tribal

[26] Skaria A., 1997, Shades of Wildness Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56 (3), pp. 726–45.

[27] Glasfurd, C. L. R., 1868, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Upper Godavery District, Central Provinces*, Nagpur, Chief Commissioners Office Press, p. 26.

[28] Arnold D., 1982, Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem-Rampa risings 1839–1924, in Guha R. (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I. Writings on South Asian history and society*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> participation (...). Autonomy is an equity-facilitating step where the State accepts that *its* definition and vision of what a community can (or should) achieve does not necessarily reflect the aspirations of the target community.[29]

For many Adivasi groups, before the introduction of local elections, decision-making used to be a collective process based on consensus. According to some scholars, Adivasis uphold egalitarian values not only in their kinship and political organization, but in their production and consumption ethic, as well as gender relations. However, this egalitarianism is fading due to exogenous influences such as Hinduism and its idea of caste hierarchy, the monetization of the economy which replaced barter and mutual aid, and increasing class differentiation following the upward social mobility of a tiny elite that benefitted from reservations.[30] Other scholars have argued against the supposed statelessness of Adivasi societies, some of which not only maintained a hierarchical and patriarchal organization through their traditional headmen, but actively engaged with the modern Indian state.[31] Although deconstructionist scholarship considers Adivasi identity a colonial reification and a nationalist construction influenced by Orientalism that tends to homogenize very different realities,[32] a strategic essentialist approach to indigeneity understands 'Adivasiness' as a reference to a shared history of oppression and resistance claimed by people asserting themselves as Adivasis.[33] As noted by Steur, 'this approach warns that deconstruction can undermine the legitimacy of *adivasi* identity as a political discourse and thereby disempower the many democratic initiatives based on it',[34] a danger emphasized by the indigenist activists she interviewed during her ethnographic work on Adivasi movements in Kerala.[35]

One obstacle to Adivasis' self-rule is the presence in their territories of non-Adivasis whose interests would be impacted by the exercise of autonomous tribal governance. Since this coexistence is characterized by unequal social relations, the powerful upper-caste groups, who are well represented in the state legislative assemblies, are unlikely to allow any statutory reform that would institutionalize tribal autonomy. This is why many Adivasis feel

[29] Kurup A., 2008, Tribal Law in India: How decentralized administration is extinguishing tribal rights and why autonomous tribal governments are better, *Indigenous Law Journal*, 7 (1), pp. 87–126, 108–11.

[30] Shah, Tribe, Egalitarian Values, Autonomy and the State, pp. 225–39.

[31] Sundar N., 2013, Reflections on Civil Liberties, Citizenship, Adivasi Agency and Maoism, *Critique of Anthropology*, 33 (3), pp. 361–68.

[32] Bates C., 1995, Lost Innocents and the Loss of Innocence: Interpreting Adivasi movements in South Asia, in Barnes R. H., Gray A. and Kingsbury B. (eds), *Indigenous Peoples of Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 103–19.

[33] Xaxa V., 1999, Tribes as Indigenous People of India, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34 (51), pp. 3589–96.

[34] Steur L., 2010, Indigenous Identity: Burden or Liberation?, *Newsletter of the International Institute for Asian Studies*, 53, pp. 26–7.

[35] Steur L., 2011, Adivasis, Communism, and the Rise of Indigenism in Kerala, *Dialectical Anthropology*, 35, pp. 59–76.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that the only way to avoid exploitation by outsiders is to fight for the formation of their own states within the Indian Union. Interestingly, the movement for a separate Gondwana state, corresponding to the forested Dandakaranya region covering parts of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, is based on the memory of Adivasi kingdoms' past sovereignty, which is often recalled during Gonds' social gatherings.[36] However, these oral traditions tend to exaggerate the power that the Gond rajas used to wield in pre-colonial times. In that sense, the Gonds' reconstruction of a glorified past nurtures their vision of an autonomous future as an ideal to be recovered. Their remembered sovereignty is also used as a catalyst in Adivasis' mobilizations against the modern state to stake claims over lands and forests. According to Sondu Veeraiah, the Koya convenor of the Girijana Samkshema Parishad (GSP) whom I interviewed in Bhadrachalam, the demand for a separate Gondwana gained momentum during the 2006 protests against Polavaram dam. Reclaiming territory was then seen as an important step towards self-determination, which would allow local Adivasis to stop the project and prevent their forced displacement from their ancestral homelands.

In the context of Telangana's latest administrative reorganization, with the creation of new districts, the GSP also campaigned for the formation of an Adivasi district with Bhadrachalam town as its headquarters. However, it was the coal hub town of Kothagudem, a non-Scheduled Area, that was chosen as the headquarters of the new Bhadradri district carved out of Khammam. Another demand that has not been met is the introduction of the Koya dialect of the Gondi language as a medium of instruction in schools, instead of Telugu, the regional language of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, whose governments refuse to acknowledge Adivasis' right to be taught in their mother tongues, using the excuse that tribal languages do not have a script. As a result, the use of Koya is rapidly declining among the younger generation that cannot speak it well, reflecting a general trend towards the erosion of the Adivasi knowledge base and linguistic diversity.[37]

These territorial and cultural claims are generally expressed peacefully through petitions, marches, and *dharnas* (sit-ins), unlike the Maoist insurgency whose means of action is a 'protracted people's war'. While the Naxalites support the anti-dam movement in Polavaram and fight corporations harming Adivasi interests, their class-centric ideology differs from the identity-based assertion of territorial rights. Their ultimate aim goes beyond autonomy: as a self-proclaimed revolutionary vanguard, they want no less than the overthrow of 'the semi-colonial, semi-feudal rule of the big landlord-comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie classes, and imperialism that backs

[36] Bhukya B., 2017, *The Roots of the Periphery: A history of the Gonds of Deccan India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

[37] Abbi A., 2012, Declining Adivasi Knowledge Systems and Killing of Linguistic Diversity, in Nathan D. and Xaxa V., *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion: Development and deprivation of Adivasis in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

them, (...) by smashing the reactionary autocratic state'.[38] Territory does play a major role in the Maoists' strategy of expanding their spatial grip through 'liberated zones', but limited territorial sovereignty does not constitute an end in itself.

Identity-based struggles have often been criticized for ignoring internal stratification within communities and for breaking the unity of the oppressed classes. In Mexico, for example,

> Movements for indigenous rights and autonomy (...) are said to 'divide the popular movement' and deflect attention from more general class issues. To the extent that indigenous leaderships are willing to settle for cultural rights (and resources for cultural programmes that have little impact on poverty and may even increase community socio-economic differentiation), they are often seen as playing the neo-liberal game, a reflection of their dependence on foreign NGO sponsors and the need to practice 'grantsmanship'.[39]

Besides, the autonomy debate raises the question of exclusionary territorial rights and of 'the distinction between projects that propose "self-determination" at the local or communal level and those that advocate models of autonomy that apply to regions, including multi-ethnic regions'.[40] The choice of scale (local or regional) and of target (single community or multi-ethnic territory) reflect various conceptions of autonomy. For the Ostula, a Mexican indigenous community, 'sovereignty over a territory and all its resources defined the identity and integrity of the unique human group that occupied that cosmologically ordered and intimately known and "dwelt in" space'.[41] On the other hand, the indigenous and Afro-descendant groups of the Colombian Pacific Coast have always lived in a 'pluriverse of culture' and respect differences both among themselves and in relation to Colombian society, while 'the oppressor, the colonizer, the dominant seek to occupy the time and energy of the subaltern to preclude difference from becoming an active social force'.[42]

In a place like Bhadrachalam, what would happen to Dalit groups who consider themselves as 'local' as Adivasis, though deprived of land rights, in an autonomous district demarcated as exclusively 'tribal'? Anthropological research suggests that almost all races that have lived on the subcontinent

[38] Communist Party of India (Maoist) Central Committee, 2004, *Party Programme*: http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Founding/Programme-pamphlet.pdf, [accessed 24 May 2022].

[39] Gledhill J., 2001, Autonomy and Alterity. The dilemmas of Mexican anthropology, Anthropology-Bangladesh blogspot, http://anthropology-bd.blogspot.com/2008/07/autonomy-and-alterity-dilemmas-of.html, [accessed 24 May 2022].

[40] Gledhill J., 2014, Indigenous Autonomy, Delinquent States, and the Limits of Resistance, *History and Anthropology*, 25 (4), pp. 507–29, p. 513.

[41] Ibid., p. 522.

[42] Escobar A., 2008, *Territories of Difference. Place, movements, life, redes*, Durham, Duke University Press, p. 18.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are in some respect indigenous.[43] Moreover, indigeneity movements raise apprehensions of further divisions of society fuelled by ethnic separatism.[44] This is why the Maoists insist on the solidarity of the oppressed in order to focus on the propertied classes. As my previous work on Kammas has shown,[45] the territoriality of dominant groups is totally different from that of Adivasis, for whom territory evokes a deep sense of belonging and identity. Kammas' territoriality is about the economic appropriation of space which requires continuous mobility to expand. In other words, while a Kamma colonist would claim that 'this land belongs to me', Adivasis would say: 'We belong to this land.' Conflicts arise from these divergent worldviews due to asymmetrical power relations more than to opposition between locals and outsiders. Adivasis' territorial demands are not directed against other marginalized groups: they become exclusionary when they need to defend themselves against domination and oppression, since the state has failed in its protective role in tribal areas and embraced a predatory one.

Conclusion

The dispossession of Adivasis is not a collateral damage of development, an unintended consequence, but a way to undermine their cultural and economic autonomy in order to forcefully integrate them into Indian mainstream society. This is what some economists call 'adverse incorporation', a process that consists in bringing marginal groups within the fold of capitalist development, but not on favourable terms, as their incorporation is synonymous with impoverishment and loss of autonomy. For Sanyal, 'dispossession and rehabilitation are the two contradictory forces that together define the economic landscape of post-colonial capitalism' in India.[46] The so-called rehabilitation of Adivasis who will be displaced by the Polavaram dam is nothing but adverse incorporation, which first requires their expropriation from their lands and forests. The principle of compensation can be seen as a tool to break Adivasi resistance, since it is used by the state to coerce people into accepting dispossession from their means of livelihood, the disruption of their communities and social ties, and the loss of a way of life attached to the river and the forests that no amount of cash or land elsewhere can replace.

Autonomy rests on both material and ideological bases, as it implies the freedom to access local resources and to preserve one's identity. The opposite of autonomy is alienation, when one is deprived of the means of social reproduction, and a different set of values is imposed from outside or above. In Bhadrachalam, the ecological crisis generated by intensive commercial agriculture and industrialization, as well as the collusive dispossession of the Koyas by

[43] Bates C., 1995, Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India: The early origins of Indian anthropometry, in Robb, P. (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

[44] Karlsson B. G., 2003, Anthropology and the 'Indigenous Slot': Claims to and debates about indigenous peoples' status in India, *Critique of Anthropology*, 23 (4), pp. 403–23.

[45] Benbabaali, Caste Dominance and Territory in South India, pp. 1938–76.

[46] Sanyal K., 2007, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive accumulation, governmentality and post-colonial capitalism*, Delhi, Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dominant caste settlers, corporations, and the state, have led to their proletarianization by reducing them to mere wage earners in their ancestral lands. Territorial rights might not constitute a revolutionary solution, but they surely carry a strong emancipatory potential: granting Adivasis greater autonomy would allow them to determine their own future instead of being made the perpetual victims of the government's neoliberal agenda, while environmental justice would not only restore their life-support systems, but benefit all the communities of this shared fate, including non-Adivasis.

Competing interests. None.

Cite this article: Benbabaali, Dalel. 2022. 'Tribal land alienation and Adivasis' struggle for autonomy: The case of Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area, Telangana, India'. *Modern Asian Studies* 56 (5), pp. 1672–1690. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000196