



## Performance of Gram Sabha in Fifth Schedule Areas: A Grassroots Level Analysis of undivided Andhra Pradesh, India

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### Abstract

The paper attempts to understand the performance of Gram Sabhas in Fifth Schedule Areas, which are meant for protection and preservation of tribal traditional identity and autonomy. In fact, the traditional and statutory panchayats are co-existing in these areas. A traditional panchayat has an informal mechanism for dealing with the daily lives of Scheduled Tribes based on their customs, traditions etc., whereas, on the other hand, the statutory panchayat is constituted with the help of voters of a particular segment, which is popularly known as Panchayati Raj Institution. In fact, Gram Sabhas are the foundations of the decentralised democratic system and play a crucial role in ensuring a transparent and accountable administration. However, the actual performance of Gram Sabha is different in Fifth Schedule Areas because of interface between traditional and statutory panchayats. Therefore, this paper sensitizes the actual scenario of Gram Sabhas in these areas.

**Keywords:** Gram sabha, Fifth schedule areas, Scheduled tribe, Statutory panchayat, Traditional panchayat.

### Introduction

**Scheduled Tribe:** Different scholars, particularly anthropologists, made constructive attempts to understand the definition of the tribal communities, in the Indian context. They have defined tribes and tribal communities in different ways. Some of them are presented below to understand the issue in a contextual manner, i.e., an Indian formal system.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's and Scheduled Tribe.

**'Aboriginal'** "relating to the original people, animals, etc., of a place and to a period of time before the Europeans arrived" Dictionary, (2010) has given definitions for the following terms, namely, aboriginal, aborigine, indigenous, tribe<sup>1</sup>

**'Aborigine'** "a member of a race of people who were the original people living in a country"

**'Indigenous'** "belonging to a particular place, rather than coming to it from somewhere else"

**'Tribe'** "a group of people of the same race, and with the same customs, language, religion, etc., living in a particular area and often led by a chief."

**'Scheduled Tribe'** (in India) "a tribe that is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and recommended for special help in education and employment"

Majundar D.N. defines tribe as: "A social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialisation of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognising social distance with other tribes or castes, without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalisation of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration"<sup>2</sup>.

Benedict Kingsbury<sup>3</sup> in a text titled "Indigenous Peoples in International Law," defines indigenous peoples as: Those which, have a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. At present, they form non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems."

The English term 'tribe' came from the Latin word 'Tribus,' which means a group of people living together in a particular place for certain time<sup>4</sup>.

Anthropologists used the term tribe to refer to two distinct, yet related, realities, field of facts. One is a type of society and the other is a stage of evolution - almost everyone uses the term to distinguish a type of society from others, one specific mode of social organisation from other modes of organisation in society

bands and states, etc. According to evolutionists, each state of evolution is characterised by specific mode of social organisation and they used the term tribe as a stage of evolution. Initially, Indian Anthropologists looked at the tribal as an archaic base of development of Indian civilisation. Later on, they were found to show more interest in the nature and type of the society in relation to the caste-based Hindu society in India. The tribe is, therefore, found to refer to a group of people who are characterised by a series of social and cultural features, distinct from those of the caste society.

It is understood from the above definitions, that the tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialisation of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognising social distance with other tribes and, above all, conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration. A tribe is a group of people with common race, customs, language, etc., and living in remote areas and not accessible to developmental activities and often led by tribal chief.

For hundreds of years, tribal communities lived in relative seclusion and isolation and in varying states of the economy. In spite of their contacts with the non-tribals, they maintained their separate identity. Every social group / community maintained its own socio-religious and cultural life and its political and economic organisations. Until the arrival of the British, the basis for production and subsistence of the tribals were land and forests. They had customary rights to use the minor forest produce, like firewood, flowers, fruits, leaves, honey, housing material, and medical herbs fashioned the essential things of the daily requirements of tribals. They used the forest for food, constructing homes and shifting cultivation. The forests provided them with security. Concerning the importance of the forests for the tribals, K.S Singh says: "They (Tribal communities) will, therefore, subsist on conditions within which members of those additional civilised races could not exist. When the crop fails, jungle fruits and vegetables of every kind are a valuable reserve. With the assistance of those they achieve development over the amount of stress that could play disturbance"<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the tribals practice weaving, basket creating, fishing, looking and food gathering. Their instruments of labour and sustenance are not adequately developed. Bows and arrows are the instruments of self-protection and hunting. The tribal communities have their individual chiefs and kindred councils (panchayats) to see them and manage their social, religious, and economic affairs of state. Every community allocates some quantity of land and manufacture to his/her respective chief. However, it is not mandatory; it is absolutely an ethical norm. The chief gets voluntary contribution in a similar way and a few days of free labour every year by the folks.

The British policies disturbed the traditional community systems. The group land system was marked by community ownership of the land and the absence of landlords. However, in

course of time, the land system of the tribes changed. The zamindari (landlordship) system was introduced in the area and Rajputs were brought into the group of Chotanagpur to perform military and other services. For their services, they were assigned zamindari rights on the land. The zamindars were perceived as outsiders by the tribals. The tribals were reduced to the position of tenants. The tribal councils were replaced by the councils of *Rajas*, consisting of their followers. The normal land system of a person was turned into an abidance system. At the same time, contractors (*Thekedars*) entered the tribal areas. The zamindars and *thekedars* introduced the land rent system in the tribal areas. Following the introduction of economy, a class of traders developed in these areas. The tribal tenants had to pay the rent in cash, borrowing from the moneylenders. Hence, a class of moneylenders came into being in the tribal areas. The isolated group communities were connected with the surface world, following the introduction of communication and transportation. The self-sufficient tribal economy was degenerated. The customary system of justice was replaced by the new system. The new legal system was not acceptable to the tribals. The tribals could not afford to use the new system, as they were not educated and could not afford the fees of the lawyers. Pretty soon, a variety of petty government officials and clerks established themselves in the tribal areas.

All these classes - zamindars, thekedars, traders, money-lenders, government officials - were not natives of the tribal areas; nor did they belong to the tribal communities. They could be Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs or Europeans. Hence, they were considered as outsiders - dikus- by the tribals<sup>6</sup>. These classes collaborated with the British administration for the purpose of exploitation and oppression of the tribals. The landlords extracted outrageous amount of forest resources from the tribals, evicted them from their land and extracted begar (forcible labour) from them. In case of defiance, the tribals were beaten up by the zamindars. The moneylenders exploited the tribals by charging outrageous amount of interests for them. For number of times, the tribes were forced to sell out their belongings and children and wives to satisfy the needs of the landlords and moneylenders. The government officials took advantage of their innocence. They were the allies of landlords, moneylenders, contractors and traders. The colonial system brought the tribes into the network of new policy and administration<sup>7</sup>. As a result of the new policy, the tribal communities were distributed in many parts of India. Different scholars have classified tribal people into different types. L.P. Vidyathi has classified them into six types i. North-Eastern, ii. Himalayan, iii. Central India, iv. Western, v. Southern, and vi. Island, on the basis of ecological, social, economic, administrative, ethnic and racial factors. The government of India identifies all the Scheduled Tribes as primitive races, which means original inhabitants<sup>8</sup>. Further, the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, in its report in 1961, stated that Scheduled Tribes are known as indigenous people at the international level.

The issue of development of the Scheduled Tribes in modern India emanates from Article 46 of the Constitution of the India, which reads thus, "the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation"<sup>9</sup>. Article 339 lays down that the President shall appoint a Commission at the expiry of ten years from its commencement to report on the administration of what are known as the Scheduled Areas (that is to say, areas which have a preponderance of tribal population) and the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in the states.

However, the word tribe has not been defined anywhere in the Constitution of the India. It states in Article 342 that the Scheduled Tribes are 'tribes or the tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities' which the President may specify from time to time by public notification. As these communities are presumed to constitute the oldest ethnological segment of the Indian society, the term 'Adivasi' ('Adi' means oldest and 'vasi' means 'inhabitant') is commonly used to designate them. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 107 held at Geneva on 5 June 1957 classified these people as indigenous.

The ILO Convention, held at Geneva on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1989, adopted new international standards for indigenous and tribal people in all regions of the world, and thereby removed the assimilationist orientation of the earlier standards. For instance, it recognised the aspirations of these people to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development and religion within the framework of the states in which they live. According to the policy of the indigenous and tribal people's conventions, 1989, India has been pursuing a policy of cultural pluralism since its independence. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, had declared, "We should help the tribal people to develop along the lines of their own tradition and genius, teaching them not to despise their past, but to build upon it" .

In India, tribes are categorised into the following categories: i. Hunter-gatherers and shifting cultivators living in hilly and forest areas, and are somewhat isolated. They are found in pockets in south and central India and in the Andamans. ii. Settled agriculturists, who are more techno-economically advanced than their neighbouring peasant communities and are not isolated from peasant communities. iii. Educationally, politically and economically advanced tribes; with some exceptions, in the north east, south east, North West and central India. iv. The industrial and urban unskilled tribal labour in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

Arup Maharatna argues that as part of the process of British colonial enumeration, religion was chosen as one of the basic criterion for categorising the Indian population. As part of it, tribes were categorised under 'tribal religion'. Later on, for the

first time in 1941, the Indian tribes were categorised based on their birth, rather than religion or faith. He further states that, in the course of history, the concept of tribe in the Indian subcontinent has neither assimilated nor isolated the tribes completely as to keep them quietly in an ambivalent situation<sup>10</sup>. Subsequently, tribal identity with legal perception emerged in the 1950s only. Later on, the concept 'tribe' assumed all spheres, as well as dimensions of usage like social, cultural, economic and political.

Relative deprivation among the Scheduled Tribes is one of the extreme phenomena, according to survey done by the NSS from four rounds of studies<sup>11</sup>. Further, it points out that the inclusionary economic growth process has left out the SCs and STs, driving them away from the mainstream society. Every Five-Year Plan has some sort of object about the development of tribes, but even after 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plans they continue to remain as the poorest of the poor in almost all the developmental dimensions. Poverty among the Indian tribes, for the year 2009-10, was 47.1 percent in rural areas and 28.8 percent in urban areas<sup>12</sup>.

The tribal communities used to function like little autonomous republics. In the process of modernisation, their autonomous system has been gradually becoming less important. In order to protect their social system, economy and culture, in general, and self-governing inherent rights, in particular, they have been launching protest movements. It appears that the government has been in the habit of enacting Acts for tribes in a perfunctory manner.

The Scheduled Tribes are highly concerned about the intervention of government system in their lives, which can be understood from the words of a well-known tribal activist, B D Sharma

*"God Created the Earth  
We Are the Children of God  
Pray, wherefrom has the Government Appeared?"*<sup>13</sup>.

As India conducts census every 10<sup>th</sup> years, it covers Scheduled Tribes also for designing suitable policies and programmes for their development. The uneven concentration of Scheduled Tribes across India indicates that they are spread across the country. Maximum tribes are concentrated in the central part of India and Northeastern states as well. If we examine the intra-state tribal population, Mizoram has the highest tribal population (with 94.50 percent), followed by Nagaland (89.10 percent), Meghalaya (85.90 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (64.20 percent), Manipur (34.20 percent), Tripura (31.10 percent) and Chhattisgarh (31.80 percent). Almost all northeastern states have a very high tribal population, relative to other states. Union territories like Lakshadweep (94.50 percent), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (62.20 percent) to have a significant tribal population. In contrast, lower tribal populations can be seen in Bihar (0.90 percent), Uttar Pradesh (0.10 percent), Kerala (1.10 percent) and Tamil Nadu (1.00 percent).

If we consider the tribal population of a state in relation to the total tribal population of the country, we can see that Madhya Pradesh (with 14.51 percent), is leading the pack, followed by Maharashtra (10.17 percent), Orissa (9.66 percent), Gujarat (8.87 percent), Rajasthan (8.42 percent), Jharkhand (8.40 percent) and Chhattisgarh (7.85 percent). Madhya Pradesh is perhaps one state which has both a very high share of tribals both in relation to the overall state population and the total tribal

population of the country. Another significant that emerges is that even the relatively high industrialised states like Maharashtra and Gujarat have a significantly noticeable tribal population. Yet another salient point that comes to the fore is that highly populous states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar need not necessarily have a high tribal population.

**Table-1**  
**List of Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh<sup>14</sup>**

SI No	Name of the Tribe	SI No	Name of the Tribe
1	Andh	18	Koya, DoliKoya, GuttaKoya, KammaraKoya, MusaraKoya, OddiKoya, PattidiKoya, RashaKoya, LingadhariKoya (ordinary), KottuKoya, BhineKoya, Raja Koya
2	Bhagata	19	Kulia
3	Bhill	20	Malis (Excluding Adilabad, Hyderabad, Karimnagar, Khammam, Mahboobnagar, Medak, Nalgonda, Nizamabad and Warangal Districts)
4	Chenchu	21	Manne Dhora
5	Gadabas, BodoGadaba, GutubGadaba, KallayiGadaba, ParangiGadaba, KatheraGadaba, KapuGadaba	22	MukhaDhoraNookaDhora
6	Gond, Naikpod, Rajgond, Koitur	23	Nayaks (in the agency tracts)
7	Goudu (in the agency tracts)	24	Pardhan
8	Hill Reddis	25	Porja, Parangiporja
9	Jatapus	26	ReddiDhoras
10	Kammara	27	Rana, Rena
11	Kattunayakan	28	Savaras, KapuSavaras, MaliyaSavaras, KhuttoSavaras
12	Kolam, Kolawar	29	Sugalis, Lambadas
13	Konda Doras, Kubi	30	Thoti (in Adilabad, Hyderabad, Karimnagar, Khammam, Mahbboobnagar, Medak, Nalgonda, Nizamabad and Warangal Districts)
14	Konda Kapus	31	Valmiki (in Schedule Areas of Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, and West Godavari Districts)
15	Konda Reddis	32	Yanadis, ChallaYanadi, KappalaYanadi, ManchiYanadi, ReddiYanadi
16	Kondhs, Kodi, Kodhu, Desaya, DongriaKondhs, KuttiyaKondhs, TikiriaKondhs, YenityKondhs, Kuvinga	33	Yerukula, Koracha, DabbaYerukula, KunchapuriYerukula, UppuYerukula
17	Kotia, Benth Oriya, Bartika, Dulia, Holva, Sanrona, Sidhopaiko	34	Nakkala, Kurvikaran
		35	Dhulia, Paiko (in the Districts of Visakhapatnam and Vijayanagaram)

Source: <http://aptribes.gov.in/oldsite/tcrti/tribalgroups.html>

According to the AP Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute (TCRTI), Department of Tribal Welfare, Government of AP, there are 35 Scheduled Tribes in the state. Of these, 12 are categorised as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs). According to the 2001 Census, tribals constitute 6.59 percent of the total state population<sup>15</sup>. For the sake of convenience, the above Table has been arranged in alphabetical order. Some of them, like Lambadas, Gonds and Koyas, are dominant groups.

### Gram Sabha Functioning in Scheduled Areas

The term 'Scheduled Areas' has been defined in the Indian Constitution as "such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas". Paragraph 6 of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution prescribes following procedure for scheduling, rescheduling and alteration of Scheduled Areas<sup>16</sup>. These areas are meant for protection and preservation of tribal traditional identity and autonomy.

The traditional and statutory panchayats are co-existing in the Fifth Schedule Areas. A traditional panchayat has an informal mechanism for dealing with the daily lives of Scheduled Tribes based on their culture, customs, traditions etc. On the other hand, the statutory panchayat is constituted with the help of voters of a particular segment. The statutory panchayat is the part of PRI system. It usually deals with administrative and economic issues and consists of elected representatives and government officials. The *Sarpanch*s elected for a 5-year term. The AP Panchayati Raj Act defines a Gram Sabha (literal meaning - village assemble) as a body consisting of all persons

registered in the electoral rolls of a Gram Panchayat. All the registered voters within the purview of a Gram Panchayat are considered as members of 'Gram Sabha'<sup>17</sup>. Regarding Gram Sabha, Article 243 (D) of the Constitution of India, inserted by 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, describes the composition of Gram Sabha. According to the Article, a Gram Sabha is a body consisting of all persons registered in the electoral rolls of a Gram Panchayat. Article 243D also lays down that a Gram Sabha possesses all the powers conferred on it by various Acts and Rules issued by the state government. Thus, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts have provided an opportunity for persons registered as voters in the village to directly participate in the decision-making process. Gram Sabhas are the foundations of the decentralised democratic system and play a crucial role in ensuring a transparent and accountable administration by the Gram Panchayat.

It can be seen from the above table, meetings of the Gram Sabha are being organised at varying degrees of frequency in the three villages. It can be seen that the response 'Uncertain' was highly noticeable - 84.5 percent in Nuguru (Z), 23.2 percent in Nimmalapalem and 31.3 percent in Mannanur. As regards Nimmalapalem, majority of the respondents (61.6 percent) mentioned 'Every six months,' while the maximum number of respondents (54.5 percent) in Mannanur said that the meetings were being held once in three months. It is clear that 'once in a month' responses were very few (only 6.1 percent, overall). The lesson that emerges that not much importance is being given to holding Gram Sabha meetings at, more, regular intervals.

**Table-2**  
**Gram Sabha Meetings per Year**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Once in a month	--	14.1 (14)	4.0 (4)	6.1 (18)
Once in three months	3.0 (3)	1.0 (1)	54.5 (54)	19.5 (58)
Every six months	12.1(12)	61.6 (61)	10.1 (10)	27.9 (83)
Uncertain	84.8 (84)	23.2 (23)	31.3 (31)	46.5 (138)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

**Table-3**  
**Gram Sabha Participation among Different Education Levels**

	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	College	Professional degree	Research degree	Total
Yes	34.3 (102)	14.1 (42)	16.8 (50)	6.1 (18)	0.3 (1)	0.3 (1)	72.1 (214)
No	14.5 (43)	4.4 (13)	5.4 (16)	3.7 (11)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	27.9 (83)
Total	48.8 (145)	18.5 (55)	22.2 (66)	9.8 (29)	0.3 (1)	0.3 (1)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

Two things can be discerned from the above table. One, cutting across educational levels, those participating in the activities of the Gram Sabha are more in number than those not participating. This should be regarded as a healthy sign. Two, when one looks at the issue education level wise, one can find that the illiterate respondents (and those educated upto the primary or secondary levels) seem to be more enthusiastic about the Gram Sabha than their counterparts holding college, professional or research degrees. This is not considered a very healthy state of affairs, since participants who are more educated may be able to provide valuable inputs to the Gram Sabhas.

The issue of frequency of Gram Sabha meetings has already been discussed above. It would now be pertinent to examine the 'performance' of the respondents themselves in these meetings. Except Nuguru (Z) (where the 'Never' responses were as high as 48.5 percent), the largest proportion of respondents in the

other two villages stated that they frequently/often attended these meetings. However, these two villages exhibited different trends in respect of the 'extreme' responses. While 39.4 percent in Nimmalapalem said that, they regularly attended these meetings, which is as high as 40.4 percent of the respondents. In Mannanur said that they 'never' attended. It needs to be highlighted that Gram Sabhas can function effectively only when the members take more interest in its activities.

One possible reason for participation in the meetings of the Gram Sabhas, may be the low level of awareness of the residents about the importance of such institutions. This surmise is borne out by table 5.18, which shows that majority of the respondents in all the three villages stated that they did not know about statutory panchayats. In fact the figures were as high as 97.0 percent in Nuguru (Z) and 92.9 percent in Mannanur.

**Table-4**  
**Frequency of Respondents' Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Regularly	6.1 (6)	39.4 (39)	4.0 (4)	16.5 (49)
Frequently / often	44.4 (44)	53.5 (53)	52.5 (52)	50.2 (149)
If my family is involved in	1.0 (1)	--	3.0 (3)	1.3 (4)
Never	48.5 (48)	7.1 (7)	40.4 (40)	32.0 (95)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

**Table-5**  
**Awareness about the Statutory Panchayats**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Yes	3.0 (3)	33.3 (33)	7.1 (7)	14.5 (43)
No	97.0 (96)	66.7 (66)	92.9 (92)	85.5 (254)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

**Table-6**  
**Organising Statutory Panchayats**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Yes	10.1 (10)	44.4 (44)	6.1 (6)	20.2 (60)
No	6.1 (6)	3.0 (3)	73.7 (73)	27.6 (82)
DK	83.8 (83)	52.5 (52)	20.2 (20)	52.2 (155)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14. Note: DK stands for 'Do not know,' or can't say

Table 5.19 clearly brings out that residents of the three villages did not have much clarity about statutory panchayats, suggesting that they had greater faith in their community panchayats. The largest number of respondents in Nuguru (Z) (as high as 83.8 percent) and Nimmalapalem (52.5 percent) replied 'Do not know'/'cannot say', which indicates their disinterest about such panchayats. Yet, 10.1 percent and 44.4 percent respectively in these villages accepted that they organise such panchayats. On the other hand, 73.7 percent respondents in Mannanur gave clear 'No' responses.

### Performance of Community Panchayats

The earlier surmise about greater faith in the community panchayats is borne out by the fact that a very large proportion of respondents in Nuguru (Z) (70.7 percent, Nimmalapalem (80.8 percent) and overall (62.6 percent) expressed faith in their present Sarpanches. The negative perceptions were found to be

almost negligible in all the three villages. Understandably, the 'non-committal' responses were found to be quite low in all the three villages. Interestingly, in Mannanur, 50.5 percent of the respondents chose the option 'Anybody'. It must be mentioned here that most of the people in the study area preferred to have a person belonging to their own community as their head and were generally not inclined to accept a non-trial as their chief. It is only in Mannanur that a significant number of respondents were prepared to have any person as their panchayat head.

The greater degree of enthusiasm for community panchayats mentioned above is borne out by the fact that an overwhelming number of respondents (Nuguru, 94.9 percent, Mannanur, 92.9 percent and overall, 83.8 percent) spoke in favour of organising community panchayats. Even though the positive responses (64.6 percent) were the highest in Nimmalapalem, the degree of support was not as strong as in the other two villages.

**Table-7**  
**Perceptions about the Community Sarpanch**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Believe in	70.7 (70)	80.8 (80)	36.4 (36)	62.6 (186)
Do Not	3.0 (3)	1.0 (1)	3.0 (3)	2.4 (7)
Anybody	16.2 (16)	3.0 (3)	50.5 (50)	23.2 (69)
DK	10.1 (10)	15.2 (15)	10.1 (10)	11.8 (35)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

**Table-8**  
**Organising Community Panchayats**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Yes	94.9 (94)	64.6 (64)	92.9 (92)	83.8 (249)
No	5.1 (5)	35.4 (35)	7.1 (7)	16.2 (48)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

**Table-9**  
**Preference of Panchayats**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Community panchayats	90.9 (90)	45.5 (45)	96.0 (95)	77.4 (230)
Statutory panchayats	9.1 (9)	54.5 (54)	4.0 (4)	22.6 (67)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

Almost similar trend of overwhelming support for community panchayats, noticed in the case of Nuguru (Z) and Mannanur, can be seen here. It is only in Nimmalapalem that 54.5 percent of the respondents preferred the statutory panchayats. This suggests that despite the government initiatives to strengthen and empower PRIs, many tribal continue to have greater faith in their traditional self-governance institutions.

Generally, in rural societies, especially in tribal ones, (unlike their urban counterparts), there is scope for occasional disputes among the members. When it is difficult for the two parties to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution, the parties involved have the choice of approaching the community panchayat, the statutory panchayat or the police authorities. The above table clearly brings out that seeking the help of the police was not a popular option. In fact, in Nuguru (Z) and Nimmalapalem, none of the respondents spoke about approaching the police. As in most other cases, an overwhelming number of respondents in Nuguru (Z) (100 percent) and Mannanur (90.9 percent) expressed full confidence in the community panchayat. It was only in Nimmalapalem that close to 55 percent of the respondents stated that they approached the statutory panchayat to resolve their disputes and other problems.

It is one thing to establish institutions like the ITDA and another to ensure that the concerned officials visit the tribal areas to

perform their assigned duties. Table 5.24 presents a very dismal picture about the attitude of ITDA officials. Even though the proportion of negative responses may be varying from more than 94 percent (in Nuguru (Z) and Mannanur) to close to 56 percent in Nimmalapalem, the picture that emerges is that the concerned officials are not taking their responsibilities seriously.

Tribal Sub-Plan is the backbone for the overall development of tribal communities. However, it is observed that the many tribals in Fifth Schedule Areas are not aware of the Plan. In all the three sample villages, majority of the respondents expressed their ignorance about the TSP. It was only in Mannanur that about 33.0 percent of the respondents were aware of the Plan. When the majority of the intended beneficiaries are ignorant of the schemes intended for their welfare, to what extent they are going to benefit is a question mark?

The government may, in good faith, release adequate funds for the various tribal welfare schemes. The wily government functionaries may be able to 'produce' records that these funds were utilised, without actually spending these for the intended purposes. The widespread ignorance of the potential beneficiaries is providing tremendous scope for misappropriation and siphoning off the funds elsewhere.

**Table-10**  
**Preferred Agencies for Resolving Disputes**

Response	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Community panchayat	100.0 (99)	45.5 (45)	90.9 (90)	78.8 (234)
Statutory panchayat	--	54.5 (54)	2.0 (2)	18.9 (56)
Police station	--	--	7.1 (7)	2.4 (7)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

**Table-11**  
**Frequency of ITDA PO Visit**

ITDA PO visit	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Yes	5.1 (5)	44.4 (44)	2.0 (2)	17.2 (51)
No	94.9 (94)	55.6 (55)	98.0 (97)	82.8 (246)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

**Table-12**  
**Tribal Sub-Plan**

TSP	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Know	---	9.1 (9)	32.3 (32)	13.8 (41)
Do not know	100.0 (99)	90.9 (90)	67.7 (67)	86.2 (256)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14



**Table-13**  
**Using Forest**

Using forest	Nuguru (Z)	Nimmalapalem	Mannanur	Overall
Easy	7.1 (7)	--	5.1 (5)	4.0 (12)
Not easy	92.9 (92)	100.0 (99)	94.9 (94)	96.0 (285)
Total	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (297)

Source: Field study conducted during 2013-14

Forests are the bread and butter for the tribal communities. However, due to issues like reserve forests and Tiger Reserves, tribals are finding it increasingly difficult to gain entry into forests which have all long provided most of their sustenance needs. An overwhelming number of respondents, in all the three villages, said that the entry into the forests is no longer an easy task for them.

### Conclusion

It is observed that the meetings of the Gram Sabha are being organised at varying degrees of frequency in the three villages, which can be seen that the response 'uncertain' was highly noticeable – 84.5 percent. It is clear that 'once in a month' responses were very few. The lesson that emerges that not much importance is being given to holding Gram Sabha meetings at regular intervals. Regarding Gram Sabha participation among different education levels, this is not considered a very healthy state of affairs, since participants who are more educated may be able to provide valuable inputs to the Gram Sabhas.

Further, frequency of participation in Gram Sabha meetings needs to be highlighted that Gram Sabhas can function effectively only when the members take more interest in its activities. Awareness about the statutory panchayats, may be the low level of awareness of the residents about the importance of such institutions. This is majority of the respondents in all the three villages stated that they did not know about statutory panchayats. In fact, the figures were as high as 97.0 percent in Nuguru (Z) and 92.9 percent in Mannanur. With perceptions about the community sarpanch, the earlier surmise about greater faith in the community panchayats is borne out by the fact that a very large proportion of respondents expressed faith in their present Sarpanches. The negative perceptions were found to be almost negligible in all the three villages. Understandably, the 'non-committal' responses were found to be quite low in all the three villages. Interestingly, in Mannanur, 50.5 percent of the respondents chose the option 'anybody'. It must be mentioned here that most of the people in the study area preferred to have a person belonging to their own community as their head and were generally not inclined to accept a non-tribal as their chief. It is only in Mannanur that a significant number of respondents were prepared to have any person as their panchayat head.

Organising community panchayats, the greater degree of enthusiasm for community panchayats mentioned above is

borne out by the fact that an overwhelming number of respondents spoke in favour of organising community panchayats. Even though the positive responses (64.6 percent) were the highest in Nimmalapalem, the degree of support was not as strong as in the other two villages. And preference of panchayats is almost similar trend of overwhelming support for community panchayats, noticed in the case of Nuguru (Z) and Mannanur, can be seen here. This suggests that despite the government initiatives to strengthen and empower PRIs, many tribals continue to have greater faith in their traditional self-governance institutions.

Generally, in rural societies, especially in tribal ones, (unlike their urban counterparts), there is scope for occasional disputes among the members. When it is difficult for the two parties to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution, the parties involved have the choice of approaching the community panchayat, the statutory panchayat or the police authorities. It is clearly mentioned that seeking the help of the police was not a popular option. In fact, in Nuguru (Z) and Nimmalapalem, none of the respondents spoke about approaching the police. As in most other cases, an overwhelming number of respondents expressed full confidence in the community panchayat.

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