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Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area, Telangana

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This chapter examines the processes of dispossession and marginalisation faced by Adivasis and Dalits in Bhadrachalam tribal belt, located on the banks of the Godavari River in Telangana. To explore this issue, it analyses the two main factors that have impacted the lives and livelihoods of these historically disadvantaged groups. The first is the migration of dominant caste farmers from Coastal Andhra into the Godavari valley to acquire the easily accessible, cheap and fertile lands in the forested territories where Adivasis traditionally practised shifting cultivation for their subsistence. The second is the expansion of a paper factory run by the Indian Tobacco Company near Bhadrachalam town. It uses water from the Godavari for the paper production process, coal from the nearby mines exploited by Singareni Collieries, and it used bamboo from the surrounding forests till it was exhausted and replaced with imported wood from Southeast Asia and local eucalyptus plantations. The story here relates to some of the same processes that we explored in Cuddalore district in Tamil Nadu in the preceding chapter. In both cases a dominant farming caste group moved in and took over the agrarian lands, and in both cases this was followed, later, by processes of industrialisation. But here, near Bhadrachalam, all this took place in spite of the formal protection of Adivasi lands and forests under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.

The Bhadrachalam tribal belt is endowed with plenty of resources but its Adivasi population has become increasingly resource poor. The various laws that guarantee tribal land and forest rights in Scheduled Areas are not properly implemented by the state. It has abandoned its protective role to embrace a predatory one, leading to the expropriation of Adivasis in favour of private companies. Tribal land alienation in Bhadrachalam started with the arrival of Kamma settlers from the Godavari delta who introduced commercial agriculture, employing the local Koyas to clear the forests and local landless Dalits to work on the fields. Following this exploitation of their natural resources as well as their labour, Adivasi autonomy has been

progressively eroded and their customary rights undermined, while the dependence of Dalits on dominant castes has increased. The two main Dalit groups in Telangana are the Madigas, traditionally leatherworkers and agricultural labourers, and the Malas, who used to practise various occupations, including weaving and agricultural labour.

This chapter focuses on the power relations between the dominant Kammas on the one hand, and Adivasis and Dalits on the other. It is based on ethnographic research conducted between October 2014 and August 2015 in Bhadrachalam area, comprising a study of a village located near the Indian Tobacco Company paper factory. The quantitative data generated through the village survey were used to compare the socioeconomic status and inequalities between and within these groups, while the qualitative interviews tried to capture people's own analysis of power within the village and their assessment of external factors such as industrialisation and government interventions.¹ The first section presents the administrative history of the region to expose the dual role of the state in tribal areas. The second section analyses the results of the village study, while the last one goes beyond the village boundaries in order to look at the collective struggles around the paper factory.

PROTECTION OR PREDATION? THE AMBIGUOUS ROLE OF THE STATE IN ADIVASI TERRITORY

Telangana was carved out of Andhra Pradesh in June 2014 after decades of struggle. The proponents of this division argued that Telangana was a resource-rich region that remained underdeveloped because influential people from Coastal Andhra diverted its resources for their own benefit.² The formation of the new state created immense hopes for social justice and economic development, as promised by the Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, known as KCR, whose party, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) came to power after the bifurcation.³ However, as this chapter will show, the separation of the two Telugu-speaking states has not made much difference to people's lives, especially among the most oppressed sections of society.

The idea that 'development' would reduce poverty and inequality ignores the fact that it is precisely the neoliberal development model adopted in the mid-1990s by the united Andhra Pradesh that increased the social and regional disparities denounced by the Telangana statehood movement. The Telangana government has not challenged this model and its main objective is still to generate growth, not only through investments in Hyderabad, the capital city, but also through industrialisation of the most 'backward' areas, including Adivasi territories.⁴ Telangana is home to a sizeable Adivasi

population of around 10 per cent of the 40 million inhabitants of the state, most of whom are concentrated in Adilabad and Khammam districts. While the Gonds of Adilabad have attracted the attention of anthropologists since Fűrër-Haimendorf (1948), little has been written about Bhadrachalam tribal belt of Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district (part of Khammam district till 2016), which is mostly populated by Koyas.

The administrative history of the studied region is complex as Bhadrachalam used to be a *zamindari* estate falling partly under the Nizam's princely State of Hyderabad, and partly under British-ruled territory. From the colonial land settlement report, we learn that 'the estate of Bhadrachalam consists of 137 villages both on the left and right banks of the Godavari River. The Rani of Bhadrachalam traces her pedigree from Anapa Ashwa Rao, a Velama chieftain, who is said to have received the grant of the estate from the Emperor of Delhi in 1324.'⁵ The lands of Bhadrachalam located on the left bank of the Godavari were ceded by the Nizam to the British in 1860, the river thus serving as a border between Hyderabad State and the Madras Presidency. According to the colonial administrators:

the system of revenue collection previous to British occupation seems to have been both rude and oppressive. The Bhadrachalam zamindar always kept up a troop of Rohillas, who received very little pay for their services and lived chiefly by looting the surrounding country. The taluk was divided into 10 samutus, each of which theoretically contained 25 Koya villages and each of which had to supply for a month, without pay or batta, 100 Koyas to carry burdens, fetch supplies, etc. for the Rohillas, and 100 Madigas to act as horse-keepers. The Koya women were frequently stripped and then regarded as objects of ridicule.⁶

After being plundered by the Nizam's feudal regime, a portion of Koya territory was brought under paternalistic colonial rule. From the descriptions contained in the land settlement report, the indigenous people – men and women – continued to be regarded as 'objects of ridicule' needing the 'protection' of their new masters. Most importantly, they needed to be sedentarised so that revenue could be collected from their agricultural produce:

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, but on the banks of the river, there are numbers of them who have settled down and have accumulated some wealth, in flocks, herds and money. 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.⁷

Rice could only be cultivated on the alluvial and black soils near the Godavari, while millets were grown in the forested areas using the slash-and-burn method. These sparsely populated and fertile lands attracted farmers from the high-density delta areas who had become expert rice cultivators after the British constructed two big dams in Coastal Andhra, on the Godavari in 1850 and on the Krishna in 1855. Most of those Andhra farmers belonged to the landowning Kamma caste that benefited tremendously from the introduction of canal irrigation in the Godavari and Krishna deltas, where they started producing a double crop of paddy annually. Intensification of agriculture enabled them to generate surpluses that could be marketed. With the commercialisation of agriculture, land itself became a valuable commodity and the demographic pressure prompted enterprising Kammars to sell their small plots in the deltas to acquire larger properties upstream in the non-irrigated tribal areas of the Godavari valley. Some of them were even invited by the Nizam to develop settled agriculture and introduce cash crops like tobacco and chillies in the forested areas of his state.⁸

However, both the British administration and the Nizam realised that the growing penetration of Andhra farmers, traders and moneylenders into tribal territories, for which they were responsible, was causing social unrest among Adivasis. To avoid the spread of tribal rebellions that were taking place elsewhere in India (Bates and Shah 2014), in 1917 the British enacted the Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act, which sought to limit interest payable by Adivasis and to restrict land alienation, which was often a consequence of indebtedness. As pointed out by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Samata, the Simon Commission later justified the introduction of special laws in Adivasi territories:

There were two dangers to which subjection to normal laws would have specially exposed these peoples, and both arose out of the fact that they were primitive people, simple, unsophisticated and frequently improvident. There was a risk of their agricultural land passing to the more civilized section of the population; and, secondly, they were likely to get into the wiles of the moneylenders.⁹

Similarly, the Nizam's government enacted the Hyderabad Tribal Areas Regulation in 1948 to protect Adivasis from land alienation and exploitation from non-tribal settlers. Anthropologist Fürer-Haimendorf, who was appointed Advisor on Tribal Affairs in Hyderabad State, prescribed the

allocation of land deeds to the Gonds of Adilabad for the forest patches they were cultivating.

After Telangana was merged with Andhra in 1956 to form Andhra Pradesh, the first linguistic state of Independent India, the influx of capitalist farmers from the delta areas to acquire cheap lands in interior Adivasi territories became uncontrollable. The Bhadrachalam tribal belt, which was notified as a Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, was particularly affected by this phenomenon because of its abundant resources and its accessibility. As a consequence, in 1959 the Andhra Pradesh government passed the Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation, known as LTR. Regulation 1 of the Land Transfer Regulation Act, which was amended in 1970, prohibits land transfer from members of Scheduled Tribes to non-Scheduled Tribe people. What became known as the 1/70 Act is one of the most stringent pieces of legislation in India protecting tribal territories, as it presumes that in Scheduled Areas all lands belonged originally to Adivasis and should ultimately be restored to them by ensuring that immovable property be transferred only to members of a Scheduled Tribe or to cooperative societies composed solely of Scheduled Tribe members. Non-Adivasis living in Scheduled Areas bear the burden of proof and need to provide evidence that they acquired their lands before the act came into force.

There remained an ambiguity in this progressive legislation about whether the government could allocate land in Scheduled Areas to private companies. According to the Samata judgment delivered by the Supreme Court of India in 1997, in a case opposing the Government of Andhra Pradesh to an NGO contesting a mining lease, the government cannot transfer land notified under the Fifth Schedule or even lease it to private investors, unless the shareholders are Adivasis.¹⁰ Despite this clarification by the Supreme Court that reiterated the constitutional safeguards relating to Scheduled Areas, the state continued to assign government land to industries that were attracted to the resource-rich Adivasi territories, in the name of 'development of backward areas'. A top manager of the Indian Tobacco Company paper factory used this expression when I asked him to explain the choice of location of this industry. According to him, it was the government of Andhra Pradesh who encouraged industrial development in Bhadrachalam because of the 'backwardness' of this 'so-called' Scheduled Area. By not acknowledging that the factory was indeed located in an Adivasi territory protected by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, he brushed away accusations regarding the illegality of the establishment of this industry *ab initio*, as it was set up after the Land Transfer Regulation Act was adopted.

The Indian Tobacco Company was founded in 1910 as the Imperial Tobacco Company and took its present name after Independence. Its headquarters are still in Kolkata and it is now a major private conglomerate operating diverse businesses such as cigarettes, paper and packaging, stationery, agro-industry, hotels, information technology, personal care and other consumable goods. In 1979, it took over and privatised Bhadrachalam Paperboard Limited, which had been established in Sarapaka village of Burgampadu *mandal*¹¹ two years before. The government had allotted 220 acres of reserve forest and 290 acres of agricultural land to the company. In 1997, the Kamma Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, known for introducing neoliberal policies in Andhra Pradesh, alienated another 90 acres of land for the factory. This was challenged in court by the communist member of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Kunja Bhiksham, a Koya elected from Bhadrachalam constituency, which is reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates. Against his own party (the Communist Party of India, which was then allied with Naidu's Telugu Desam Party), the Koya leader accused the state government of being in collusion with industrialists 'with every likelihood of crores of rupees changing hands.'¹² In spite of the suspension of the High Court order due to these allegations of corruption and the unconstitutional character of the land transfer, the Indian Tobacco Company continues to illegally occupy that land to grow eucalyptus plantations.

To denounce this situation a tribal organisation called the *Adivasi Chaitanya Samithi* approached the government officer in charge of Bhadrachalam Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), a civil servant from the Indian Administrative Service, who decided to take action against the company. In April 2015, in her counter-affidavit to a petition filed by the company contesting her instructions to Burgampadu's mandal revenue officer to repossess the encroached land, she wrote that 'the management of ITC [Indian Tobacco Company] is trying to misrepresent the case by creating litigation being fully aware of the legal and constitutional violations involved in taking over possession of land by private non-tribal companies in Scheduled Areas.' Since it was unlikely that the company would close down its Bhadrachalam unit and vacate the site, the Integrated Tribal Development Agency officer asked the management to compensate for the 'historical blunder' of choosing a Scheduled Area for the establishment of this factory by providing employment to the local Adivasis. Unlike the public sector industries located in Bhadrachalam (like the Singareni Collieries coal mines and Kothagudem Thermal Power Station), Indian Tobacco Company is a private company and therefore does not have reservations for Scheduled Tribes. However, the Tribal Development Agency officer 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 work for local people.

According to the management, 17 per cent of the factory's casual labour force are Adivasi. Workers themselves put this figure much lower.¹³ They argue that out of the 4000 casual labourers (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) currently employed by the factory, only 8 per cent are Adivasis (200 Lambadas, 100 Koyas and 20 Konda Reddis), and 25 per cent are local Dalits (Madigas and Malas). There are also migrant Dalits from Odisha (Doms) who do not have Scheduled Caste certificates. Among the permanent labour force, the proportions are even lower: out of 1575 employees, 5 per cent are Adivasis (45 Lambadas and 30 Koyas) and 8 per cent are Dalits (70 Madigas and 60 Malas). The rest are castes of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) group, as well as dominant castes (mostly Kammas and Reddis), a majority of whom are from Coastal Andhra. Finally, among the 700 managers, none are Adivasis or Dalits, most of them being upper caste and outsiders. To understand this under-representation of local Adivasis and Dalits, it was important to interview the workers themselves, as well as the people living in a nearby village who could not find jobs at the factory or did not want to work there. When the government justifies industrialisation of tribal areas in the name of development, the question that needs to be asked is 'Whose development?' Similarly, the claim that industries provide employment needs to be qualified with questions such as 'Employment for whom? What kind of employment? At what cost?' The next section, based on understanding in-depth a multi-caste village located 7 km away from the factory, tries to explore these issues by looking at inequality and power relations among the villagers.

LAND, WORK AND POLITICS IN A KAMMA-DOMINATED TRIBAL VILLAGE

Located on the right bank of the Godavari, the village studied was under Nizam rule until 1948, and was part of Bhadrachalam estate, a portion of which, on the left bank of the river, was controlled by the British. According to the colonial land settlement report, the system of tenures in that estate was complicated because, 'in addition to the superior landholders, a distinct class of inferior holders have been found, on whom sub-proprietary rights have been conferred.'¹⁴ Though the successive zamindars of Bhadrachalam were local Velamas, some of the landholders just below them were Kammas from Andhra who had been called in by the Nizam to bring the forests under cultivation. One of those agricultural colonists was given 1800 acres on the right bank of the Godavari to collect revenue from. To clear the forests, he used local Koyas as manpower and brought Madigas from the surrounding

villages outside the forest area to work as agricultural labour, as well as service castes (now classified as OBCs, like carpenters, washermen, barbers and so on). The village was first established just next to the Godavari, but after a major flood in 1953, it was shifted 1 km away from the river bank.

An indirect descendant of the original Kamma landlord, Mr Rao, who is now 90 years old, still controls the whole area. Born in a neighbouring village, his father moved to the current one with his five sons in 1942. Rao has always been active in politics and as the village leader he occupied the *sarpanch* seat for more than three decades till 1977, the year when *panchayat* elections were introduced and reservations for Scheduled Tribe candidates enforced. With new waves of Andhra migrants, the village now counts 84 Kamma households and 14 Reddy households, mostly from the Godavari and Krishna deltas. Population-wise, these groups are dwarfed by Adivasi villagers (210 Koya households and 100 Lambada households), Dalits (Madigas [30]) and OBC castes (185) (see also Table 5.1).

In terms of landholdings, even though Adivasis form 60 per cent of the village population, they own only 26 per cent of the land, while the dominant Kammas and Reddis, who are 12 per cent of the population, own 53 per cent of the village land. The Dalit Madigas constitute 5 per cent of the population and own 1 per cent of the land. The OBC castes constitute 23 per cent of the population and own 20 per cent of the land, which is almost proportional to their demographic weight. For the quantitative survey, I have excluded the OBC castes since my focus was on Adivasis and Dalits in comparison to the dominant Kammas (only four Reddy households were present in the village at the time of the study since most of them are absentee landlords living in the cities). I selected 100 Dalit and Adivasi households, including all 30 of the Madiga households, as well as a sample of 40 Koya and 30 Lambada households. Added to these were 50 Kamma households, which includes all those present in the village at the time of investigation. A total of 508 individuals (275 male and 233 females) were thus surveyed in the 150-household multi-caste sample.

The survey reveals that most of the land and wealth is concentrated in the hands of one Kamma family: Rao and his four brothers. All of them inherited 50 acres from their father, but Rao, the eldest, now controls 300 acres, even if on paper he only owns 80. He recently took over the land of his deceased brother, an anaesthetist practising in Bhadrachalam town who died heirless in February 2015. Before that he had grabbed the property of another brother who was away in the United States working as a paediatrician. Rao's children are also working in the USA: one son as a software businessman, one daughter as a neurologist and another son as a cardiologist. Rao was proud to tell me that the latter owns six hospitals and a private jet to fly between them, while showing me his family albums in his mansion (Photo

8) – with ten rooms, marble floors, teak furniture and crystal chandeliers, on which he spent 15 million rupees (1.5 crore). Though he studied only up to 7th grade, Rao dominates his brothers as well as the rest of the village because of his political power. Most of the lands he accumulated over the years – forest, government or Koya-owned – were encroached on after 1970, the year when the Land Transfer Regulation Act was enacted. The 300 acres he now occupies amount to 100 times the average landholding of a Koya farmer in the village, a clear example of 'accumulation by dispossession'.¹⁵ Unlike Rao's brother, who returned from the USA to recover his stolen land by filing a case in court, ordinary villagers find it difficult to fight injustice due to Rao's highly placed contacts in the police, the administration and even the judiciary.



Photo 8 Rao's village mansion, Bhadrachalam
Photo by Dale Benbabaali.

The Land Transfer Regulation Act explains why 40 per cent of the Kamma households do not own land, since they settled in the village after 1970 and were not allowed to acquire property. However, some of those who migrated recently managed to occupy tribal land which they cultivate without official titles (*pattas*). They can do so by informally taking 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 acquiring the property as collateral when the indebted owners cannot repay their loans. Another way to circumvent the law is to buy a testament from an Adivasi landowner,

since a will does not enter in the definition of transfer. Some Kamma men even marry Adivasi women as first or second wives, or just keep them as concubines, and in return for their maintenance, the women allow land to be held in their names and cultivated by the upper caste men. I have not come across such cases in the village but they are reported in official documentation about land alienation in the Scheduled Areas of Telangana.¹⁶

The average property size of a Kamma landowning household, excluding the 300 acres controlled by Rao, is 10 acres, which provides a sufficient annual income without having to work on other people's fields (see Table 5.2). Even the landless Kammas, thanks to other forms of ownership (like livestock, mostly buffaloes whose milk they sell), and thanks to caste status and privileged access to Rao, fare much better than the landless Madigas, who represent 85 per cent of the total Dalit households. The remaining 15 per cent own only half an acre per household after subdivision of marginal holdings, which cannot ensure their subsistence, and even less a marketable surplus. Few possess animals, and those who do use them for their own consumption of meat or milk.

More than 90 per cent of the Madiga men work as daily wage labourers, either in agriculture (47 per cent) or in industry (44 per cent), while the rest could either secure permanent employment in the paper factory or semi-skilled jobs (construction workers, tractor drivers) (see Figure 5.1). By contrast, 20 per cent of the Kamma men can rely on farming their own lands, and only 8 per cent work as agricultural *coolies*. Fourteen per cent of them work as casual labourers in the paper factory, and more than half are engaged in various businesses and professions, including Indian Tobacco Company contractors and permanent employees. Among the Adivasi groups, Koyas have remained much more agrarian than the Lambadas, who only acquired land in the area from the 1970s onwards: more than 90 per cent of the Koya men still depend on agriculture for their living (8 per cent on their own lands, 40 per cent as wage labourers, and 44 per cent combining both). Only 4 per cent of them are casual workers in the paper factory, against 31 per cent of the Lambada men. The Lambadas came to the village in different rounds, the first in the 1970s and the second in the 1990s. The second group came mostly for jobs in the paper factory so own less land.

Among the women, 57 per cent of the Kamma women are housewives, a traditional status symbol for upper caste women, while 12 per cent are agricultural labourers, and the rest work as tailors, beauticians, teachers, or sell vegetables and mangoes from their gardens in the market. On the other hand, three-quarters of the Madiga women work as farm coolies and one-quarter stay at home. While most of the Koya and Lambada women work in the fields (their own, for a small number, and/or other people's farms), two Koya women in the sample are tailors, another two have private

jobs, and three could benefit from Scheduled Tribe reservations: one is the village sarpanch, and two are government employees working as a school cook and a *crèche* (*anganwadi*) teacher (see Figure 5.2).

The correlation of occupation and education data from the survey points to the fact that, for the same number of years of schooling, Kamma men and women are more likely than Dalits and Adivasis to access non-farm employment, whether in the private or public sector, in spite of reservations, due to their social and financial capital. Kammas have the highest literacy rate in the village (around 70 per cent for both men and women), followed by Lambada men (66 per cent), whereas around half of the Madigas and Koyas have never been to school. Among Kammas, 26 per cent of the men and 18 per cent of the women have a degree, a much higher proportion than among Koyas (7 per cent of the men, 5 per cent of the women), Lambadas (7 per cent of the men, 2 per cent of the women) and Madigas (4 per cent of the men). The most common degrees found in the sample are BTech, BCom and BSc (including BSc nursing for girls). Less than 10 per cent of the boys across caste groups underwent vocational training in Industrial Training Institutes (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4).

Among Kammas, the younger generation is better educated as the children are generally sent to the Indian Tobacco Company English-medium school in Sarapaka and then study in private colleges, mostly engineering, medicine and commerce. By contrast, there is still a large proportion of school dropouts among Dalit and Adivasi youths. The village government school doesn't offer teaching beyond 7th grade and few Adivasis are willing to move to *ashram* residential high schools in the towns, even though they are fully funded by the state's tribal sub-plan. Koya girls are generally married off at an early age (around 18) and then work as agricultural coolies. Though reservations have helped Dalits and Adivasis to access higher education, very few in the village could get a government job, and those who have are now living in nearby towns. Some Koyas complain that the benefits of the Scheduled Tribe quota are cornered by the educationally more advanced Lambadas, though this is not confirmed by my village survey. At a larger scale, however, it is true that Lambadas are over-represented among government employees in Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area. For example, 80 per cent of Adivasi teachers in the Integrated Tribal Development Agency are Lambadas, though they form less than 50 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribe population.¹⁷

Lambadas are nomadic people from the plains who were included in the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Tribe list by the Congress Chief Minister Channa Reddy in 1976, during the Emergency, in order to get their votes and win the elections. Many Lambadas were subsequently elected from Scheduled Tribe reserved constituencies as Congress MPs and Members of the State Legislative Assembly. They are thus politically powerful and well connected.

Since the late 1970s an important influx of Lambadas from Maharashtra (which classifies them as OBC) has been observed in Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area, where their population has doubled since the 1991 Census. They came to benefit from various government schemes offered to Adivasis by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency and were allowed to buy land, unlike other settlers. Many Koyas resent their inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list and consider competition with them to be unfair since they are more exposed to the outside world, which gives them an advantage in terms of knowledge of the mainstream economy and culture. To protect Koyas' interests, a circular was issued in 2010 by the Andhra Pradesh commissioner for tribal welfare, making it compulsory to provide evidence of living in Bhadrachalam Integrated Tribal Development Agency since 1950 to obtain Scheduled Tribe certificates. One should be able to prove that one's name was on voting lists, or in land or school records since that year. However, as the officer heading the Tribal Development Agency explained to me, the Koyas who never went to school, have no land deeds, and have never voted, are not able to provide such evidence. The irony is that many Lambadas are able to fabricate evidence thanks to their connections in the administration, but not the Koyas for whom this circular was issued and which is in fact making their lives more difficult, as they now have to struggle to get Scheduled Tribe certificates.

The Koyas are still better off than the Madigas as two-thirds of them own land, for which some received pattas a decade ago when the Forest Rights Act was implemented in the state by then Congress Chief Minister Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy. Pushed by Indian Tobacco Company, a few Koyas have started to plant eucalyptus, though they generally hesitate to accept the saplings sold to them by the company because one has to wait four years for the trees to grow enough to generate an income from selling the wood to the factory. Rao and other rich Kamma farmers have always been the biggest eucalyptus planters in the village for Indian Tobacco Company, including on encroached tribal lands where Koyas were employed as wood-cutters, but as the company is planning to increase the capacity of its pulping unit, it is also encouraging small farmers to practise intercultivation. As an Indian Tobacco Company manager explained to me:

We need more wood supply but we cannot expand our own plantations since we can't buy land here, so we have to convince the local farmers to plant eucalyptus by selling them the saplings cloned in our nurseries at subsidised prices and by teaching them intercultivation: between two rows of eucalyptus, they can grow cotton which will provide them with a yearly income, and after four years, the income from eucalyptus comes as a bonus.

The Koyas' first encounter with the Indian Tobacco Company, more than three decades ago, was when the company was laying a pipe in their village to bring water from the Godavari to the factory. At that time, some Koya men were offered permanent jobs by the company to compensate for the loss of land, since the pipe went across their fields. Many of them were not interested in taking up such jobs and preferred to be given financial compensation. Among the few who accepted, only one is still in the village, as others either died or moved to Sarapaka, closer to the factory. He is the wealthiest in his community, with a monthly salary of Rs.25,000 two years before retirement and an attractive four-bedroom house. His son, one of the few educated Koyas from this village, works as a mechanical engineer in Bangalore. This family's upward social mobility alienated them from other Koyas who disapprove of the way the paper factory employee left his widowed mother, now 80 years old, to live a miserable life in a hut just next to his house. Her only possessions consist of a few utensils and one sari, and she mostly wears towels over her blouse (Photo 9).

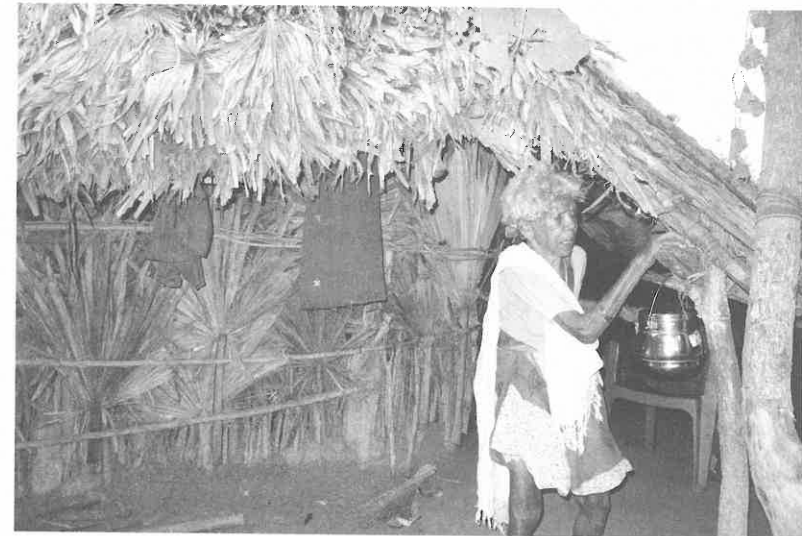


Photo 9 Koya permanent Indian Tobacco Company employee's mother
Photo by Dalel Benbabaali.

This case apart, there is a strong cohesion among the 1000 Koyas of the village, even if they are not all related like the 30 Madiga households, whose genealogies show that they are all relatives, and that their marriage patterns often involve the typical Dravidian cross-cousin or uncle-niece alliances. The Koyas are divided into exogamous clans and generally seek alliances from neighbouring Koya villages. Though Koyas and Madigas do not

intermarry and live in different 'colonies', they often work and eat together in the fields. Madigas feel that the Koyas look down on them, but when asked about it, the latter deny it. Untouchability against the Madigas used to be practised mostly by the Kammas, but also by some Koyas who would not enter their houses. Interestingly, it is the only Brahmin in the village who told me so, the retired headmaster of the village government school who lives half of the year with his software engineer son in Bangalore since his wife died. In his criticism of untouchability, he seemed oblivious that this practice was a consequence of the penetration of Brahminism into Adivasi territory, conveniently putting the blame on the 'uneducated Kamma nouveau riche':

I have no words to describe how the Madigas were treated when my father, a priest from Tirupati, came here in the 1940s to buy land. Everybody, including the Koyas, considered them Untouchables, and that continued till the 1980s. I'm an educated person, so I don't believe in caste, and as the village school headmaster, I am friendly with everyone. I am not into politics like this Rao who tells everyone that his children are earning millions in America but who doesn't give a single rupee to the poor except to buy votes.

Since the sarpanch seat is reserved for Scheduled Tribes, the Koyas can contest elections, unlike the Madigas. Their sheer numbers also give them political weight. Till recently, the condition for being elected was to be a member of the Telugu Desam Party, 'Rao's party', as the villagers call it. The current sarpanch is a Koya woman from this party whom Rao helped to win with his financial support and whose decisions he now commands. Telugu Desam is a regional party dominated by the Kammas at the state level, whereas the Reddis control the Congress. Rao, the president of the Telugu Desam farmers' union, has erected in the centre of the village a golden statue of 'NTR', the Kamma founder of the party and ex-chief minister of the state, before his son-in-law Naidu took over. However, since the formation of a separate Telangana State, Telugu Desam is perceived as an 'Andhra party', currently in power in Andhra Pradesh, with no chance of winning in Telangana. Rao is therefore thinking of supporting the Telangana Rashtra Samithi party, which is currently in power in Telangana. Although he has not left Telugu Desam yet, he is supporting his younger relatives Prasad, Ramesh and Prakash, three cotton traders living in the village, who have already joined Telangana Rashtra Samithi in anticipation of the next elections. The ex-Member of the Legislative Assembly of Khammam, Tummala Nageswara Rao, is also a Kamma who switched to this party in 2014 when the state was

formed in order to become a minister in the new Telangana government. Its pink flags are now flying at the centre of the village.

According to my village survey, 95 per cent of the Madigas support Telugu Desam, but only 45 per cent of the Koyas, the majority of whom vote for Congress since they received pattas for their forest lands under Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy's regime. Another reason for this political difference is that the Koyas can afford to disobey Rao's voting instructions as they are less dependent on him than the landless Madigas, who work on his fields and seek his help to get employment in the paper factory. The paper factory labour contractors in the village are all Kammas related to Rao and therefore select the workers he recommends, based on their political loyalty. This partly explains why very few Koyas work as casual labour in the factory, but they are also not interested in industrial labour. As they say, 'it stinks in the factory' – a foul smell that reaches even Bhadrachalam town and that everyone complains about – and the three-shift system is not to their liking either. Working during the night and being regimented through fixed schedules infringes heavily on their sense of freedom. In fact, some of them were fired because they attended work according to their own timings or took leave without asking for permission. Among the younger generation, the few educated Koyas in the village do aspire to jobs in the paper factory, but probably due to lack of alternative employment opportunities in the vicinity. When I asked Shanta, a 20-year-old Koya studying BTech in Bhadrachalam Government College, 'What do you think of Indian Tobacco Company?' He replied: 'I don't like it, it created so 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'. He was worried about not finding a job after completing his degree because he couldn't afford the Rs.10,000 industrial trip organised by his college to facilitate recruitment in various factories: 'My dad borrowed from relatives who gave up to Rs.200 each, but at the end he could gather only Rs.2000, which is not enough for the trip.'

The sarpanch of Sarapaka, an influential Lambada with corruption cases pending against him, is instrumental in Indian Tobacco Company's expansion projects since they need the approval of the *gram sabha*, as per the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act known as PESA. As the Lambadas of the village cannot expect much help from him, they seek favours from Rao, who generally obliges since 95 per cent of them vote for the Telugu Desam. Like for the Madigas, the Kamma leader's authority over them is strong due to the material conditions in which they find themselves. Though two-thirds of them own land, their plots are small (2 acres on average) and the soil of bad quality as they arrived relatively late in the village, when the best land had already been occupied. The first wave of

Lambadas settled in the Koya colony in the late 1970s and interact with the Koyas on a daily basis. A second wave came in the 1990s in search of employment in the paper factory and now live in a separate street, at the entry to the village, quite far from the other Adivasis.

In spite of the 'divide-and-rule' strategies used by Rao, who thinks of Koyas as rebellious and of Lambadas as obedient, hence preferentially employing the latter in his fields or helping them to get contracts in the paper factory, 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 coolie women who enjoyed singing songs in their own languages while harvesting, some in Koya, some in Lambadi, and others (the Madigas) in Telugu (Photo 10). They communicate with each other in Telugu, and the younger Koyas have even stopped using their dialect due to schooling in Telugu-medium, since the Koya language does not have a script. Twenty-five per cent of the village Koyas have recently been converted to Christianity by the Indian Evangelical Mission, 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).



Photo 10 Koya, Lambada and Madiga women plucking cotton on Kamma land
Photo by Dalel Benbabaali.

Only one Madiga man has a permanent job with Indian Tobacco Company which he obtained 20 years ago, 'after working hard as casual labour for ten years', and now earns a monthly salary of Rs.20,000, just a year before retiring. While everyone in the Madiga street, the last street of the village, has a concrete house from the Indiramma scheme,¹⁸ he built himself a bigger house with an extra room, where his deserted married daughter lives, and has a two-wheeler to go to the factory. Despite these visible signs of class differentiation, he shares a common trait with the paper factory casual workers of the Madiga colony – who earn Rs.3000 to 5000 per month and travel to the factory in auto rickshaws – which is a heavy tendency to drink bad quality country-made liquor after work to the point of being semi-conscious during all the time spent at home. It was difficult to interview these men as they were almost never awake, which I first thought was a consequence of their sleep deprivation due to the paper factory's three-shift system. I spent most of the time with their wives who did not seem to suffer from their husbands' alcoholism as is sometimes assumed (in terms of domestic violence for example – although, of course, the men's potential contribution to household income was diverted to drink), and were totally in control of the households since the men were always 'absent'. Their agricultural wages, of around Rs.130 per day, are almost similar to those of the men who do unskilled casual labour in the factory for Rs.200, from which they have to deduct Rs.50 for travel. Though extremely low, these wages give the Madiga women some degree of independence vis-à-vis their husbands, who, as said, spend most of their income on drinking, while the women provide for the household's expenses.

The gender-based division of labour that is found among Madigas and Lambadas does not exist among the Koyas since most of the men do agriculture just like the women. Couples and their teenage children often work together on their *podu* fields,¹⁹ growing rain-fed rice or Bt cotton, a genetically modified cash crop introduced in this village in the late 1990s by the Kammas, who occupied the best black cotton soils with lift irrigation from the river, where they could also grow tobacco, chillies and a double crop of paddy. The Koyas not only get less yield due to lack of irrigation facilities and mediocre soil quality, but the average size of their landholdings is only 3 acres, which is just enough for their subsistence.

Compared to other groups, the Koyas 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. Even the landless among them prefer to work as coolies 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. Gender relations are more egalitarian than among other groups and their way of sharing natural fermented drinks is very different from the alcoholism observed among the paper factory workers, whether Madigas or Lambadas. However, their progressive loss of land is forcing some of them to take up industrial work at the risk of alienation, or to become wage-earners by cutting eucalyptus in the Indian Tobacco Company plantations on cleared forests which used to be theirs. The expansion of the company is the major threat they will have to face in the coming years, but this will probably not happen without resistance, as the current struggles already show.

SOCIAL, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL STRUGGLES AROUND THE INDIAN TOBACCO COMPANY PAPER FACTORY

In February 2015, a major protest united the villagers against the Indian Tobacco Company, whom they accuse of taking water from the river near their village without connecting taps to the pipe for the people to drink. They only have hand pumps from which the water often comes out brown, mixed with mud, which gives the children fever and diarrhoea. Only the Kamma street has a tap for almost every house and a concrete road, built by the company with which Rao has excellent relations, since the company's executives used to stay in his house when the factory was under construction in the late 1970s. The pumping station by the river was built at that time, but recently the company started raising a water tower outside the village, barely 100 metres away from the Madiga street. As a Madiga woman complained: 'ITC is building its water tank right here, but it is not for us. ITC has done nothing for the village.' In a rare show of village solidarity, Madigas, Koyas, Lambadas, OBC castes and even Kammas without water access decided to march to the tower and to occupy the construction site. Some camped there for many days to prevent the work continuing. 'No party led the agitation,' an OBC man assured me. 'We were all having the same feeling: it is going to be summer and we will have no water, while ITC is here on the village land, building a tank for uninterrupted water supply.' The company asked the police to intervene when some villagers went to the pumping station in order to force the gates open and stop the pump machinery. There was no

violence as the police threatened to arrest the protesters if they destroyed anything but allowed them to camp near the gates. The agitation came to an end after a week, when the company signed a commitment in the presence of bureaucrats and politicians, which included providing drinking water to the villagers and building roads for the Adivasi and Dalit colonies.

When asked about this victorious outcome, Rao claimed that he was the main negotiator behind the agreement. Sensing that his traditional authority is declining (this was a village where the police never came as he used to settle every dispute), he knows that he can't just dictate rules and command people's votes without 'delivering' by keeping his promises of 'developing the village'. However, people are not duped any more and the success of their protest clearly showed that the village development is not a favour to be expected from Rao's bargaining power with the Indian Tobacco Company and the government, but a right that can be demanded through collective mobilisation. The agitation also helped the Madigas, Lambadas and Koyas, no longer divided into two categories of 'obedient' versus 'disobedient' subjects as perceived by the Kamma landlord, to realise the importance of unity to achieve common goals. Even the OBC groups, who are better off, were in solidarity with them and accepted that roads should be built in their colonies since the mud paths there were flooded every monsoon, whereas the majority of these groups live on the main street connecting the village to the paper factory, which is a metalled road. The most ardent opponent to Rao is an OBC leader from the Congress, a retired teacher who recently opened a marriage bureau in Sarapaka. When he was teaching in the village school he tried to convince the government to extend the classes to 10th grade, but was stopped in his endeavour by Rao who filed a fake case against him, as he didn't want the Dalits and Adivasis to be more educated than he was and to study beyond 7th grade.

Another major protest took place during one whole year starting from July 2014, on a stretch of bushy terrain belonging to the Forest Department, located midway between the village and the paper factory. Around 300 plastic tents were set up there and occupied by people from Sarapaka and other nearby villages who wanted this land to be given to them to build their houses on. Their argument was that the rents in Sarapaka had become unaffordable for the poor due to the rising demand for accommodation by people working in the factory, as it does not provide housing facilities, except for its managers. The average rent for a one-bedroom house in Sarapaka is now (2015) Rs.2000, while it was Rs.500 ten years earlier. Before the establishment of the paper factory, back in the 1970s, Sarapaka used to be a tiny village of a few hundred inhabitants. It has now become a small town with a population of nearly 20,000, even if it is still considered a panchayat and not a municipality, just like Bhadrachalam that has now

reached 50,000. Only 3 per cent of the population in Sarapaka are Koyas, as many were displaced by industrialisation. The rest are Dalits, Lambadas, upper castes, but also people from outside the state, mostly Tamils, Bengalis and Odias, who came to work for the company. This dramatic change in the demography of a tribal village was accompanied by rapid socioeconomic transformations, which mostly affected the poor, despite the company's claim of having 'developed' Sarapaka by making it a 'bustling town'. One of these adverse consequences is the rise in rents which pushed homeless people to participate in the protest camp asking the government for house sites. Many of them are from neighbouring villages and came to Sarapaka in search of work in the factory.

When I conducted a survey of the camp in June 2015, only 60 households were left of the original 300. Most of them had abandoned the fight due to the unbearable heat in the month of May, as it was hardly possible to live in plastic tents under 50° Celsius (Bhadrachalam area is one of the hottest places in India due to the coal mines and heavy deforestation). The following month, heavy rains totally washed away the ramshackle tents as the monsoon arrived unusually early. Their huts had already been destroyed several times by the Forest Department officials who wanted the protesters to vacate the land on which they were illegally camping. Their last intervention was particularly violent, as men, women and children were beaten up, which prompted a Koya woman to file a case under the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe Atrocities Act that was dismissed because the Forest Department officer she accused, a Lambada, was himself from a Scheduled Tribe. After this brutal intervention, the officer heading the Integrated Tribal Development Agency asked the Forest Department to allow the protesters to stay there until she finds a solution for them. She asked the mandal revenue officer of Burgampadu to list the names of all Adivasi people camping there and promised to give them house sites on government land if it was verified that they didn't own any property.

At the time of my survey, there were 17 Adivasi households (13 Koya and 4 Lambada), 24 Dalit (16 Madiga and 8 Mala), 14 OBC (11 Hindu and 3 Muslim), and 5 general castes (3 Reddy and 2 Komati). It rapidly became apparent that many of them were not eligible for allocation of a house site, not only because they were not from a Scheduled Tribe, but because they already had a house and were just taking advantage of the protest in the hope of getting more land. Most of them were from Sarapaka or other villages of Burgampadu mandal. Among the men, only six were casual workers in the paper factory, and others were agricultural coolies, drivers (auto rickshaw/taxi/ tractor), construction workers, or old people living on pensions. Most of the women were also coolies, or non-working widows who were apparently abandoned by their families. Apart from the harsh climate, the

living conditions in the camp were appalling: no toilets, no electricity and no water (they drank from a leak in the Indian Tobacco Company pipeline). Some children were not attending school, while others were sent to their grandparents in their native villages to be able to go to school. However, the better off among the protesters, especially the upper caste ones, didn't sleep in the camp as they had other places to stay and turned up only during the day.

The protesters formed two separate groups: one small group organised by a Madiga leader from the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, and a bigger group organised by an OBC leader from the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI (ML))-New Democracy (Photo 11). In July 2015, after one year of occupation, the protesters were asked to vacate the camp as the Integrated Tribal Development Agency allotted house sites to 65 households (44 Koya and 21 Lambada) who didn't own any property and who had annual incomes of less than Rs.48,000. However, the CPI (ML) leader refused to give up his demands for Dalits and OBC castes. Since the officer in charge of the Tribal Development Agency was promoted as joint collector of Khammam district, he asked her to provide house sites to non-Scheduled Tribes as well, in nearby towns that were not notified as Scheduled Area, like Palvoncha and Kothagudem. When I interviewed him, he argued that most of the people he was fighting for were casual workers in the Indian Tobacco Company and that he would help them get a wage rise, thanks to which they would be able to afford to commute from those towns if they could



Photo 11 CPI(ML)-New Democracy's organised protest for house sites
Photo by Dale Benbabaali.

build their own houses there. To date, his demands have not been satisfied and it is quite unlikely that the company will increase the workers' wages anytime soon.

According to a manager of Indian Tobacco Company, one of the reasons why the company wants to expand its Bhadrachalam paper unit, rather than its West Bengal one, is that 'people never go on strike here.' It is true that this factory does not have a particularly remarkable history of labour struggles, but this is not due to distinctive traits of Telangana workers, supposedly 'less combative' than their Bengali counterparts. The explanation most probably lies in the corrupt character and upper caste leadership of the factory unions. The four main unions are the TNTUC (Telugu Nadu Trade Union Council), affiliated to the Telugu Desam Party and headed by a Kamma who won the last elections; the INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Council), affiliated to Congress and headed by a Reddy; the AITUC (All India Trade Union Council), affiliated to the Communist Party of India and headed by a Kamma; and the CITU (Central Indian Trade Union), affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and headed by an OBC leader. The Kamma and Reddy union leaders are known for interfering in the job selection process by recommending people from their caste in exchange for a sum that can go up to Rs.1 million (10 lakhs). Without caste-based patronage and money it is now impossible to get a permanent job in the paper factory, since employment opportunities have become scarcer. The managers are aware of these practices, but, by turning a blind eye to the unions' corruption, they ensure that no strike will be organised and no wage rise will be demanded. This is how social peace is bought.

On 12 June 2015, during the launch of the Telangana government's new industrial policy which promised 'zero tolerance to corruption', Y.C. Deveshwar, the CEO of the Indian Tobacco Company, announced an investment plan of Rs.8000 crores in Telangana, half of which will increase the production capacity of its Bhadrachalam paper unit (the other half will go to luxury hotels and a 'world class' food processing plant in the chief minister's home district of Medak, from which he was elected). Deveshwar justified his company's investments 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.'²⁰ The Bhadrachalam unit has seven machines producing half a million tonnes of paper per year, and the plan is to build an eighth machine which will be fully automated in order to allow 'rationalisation' of the manpower. In other words, the factory will occupy more land in the Scheduled Area without creating new jobs for the people who will be affected. According to one employee:

We are around 1500 now and they want to reduce the permanent workforce by 200 in the next two years. They won't fire us, but they will not replace the people who retire. They are saying: if you're going to invest, invest in new technology, not in workers. For technology, you pay only once, for an employee you must give promotions and salary increments, so it becomes very expensive after a few years.

While the Telangana chief minister agreed to sanction the diversion of 1300 acres of forest land in Sarapaka for the Indian Tobacco Company, in spite of a petition filed by an Adivasi organisation, the expansion has not happened yet because the clearance was denied by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in Delhi as it goes against the Conservation of Forest Act. The ministry also argued that the planned eighth machine was not site-specific and could be built elsewhere. Moreover, the company had offered compensatory afforestation in Anantapur district, which is now part of Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana will therefore be losing forest land without it being replaced in the state. Not discouraged by this temporary setback, the company is now trying to convince the government to consider 'tree cover' instead of 'forest cover', arguing that the company is promoting plantation of eucalyptus, which are TOF ('trees outside forest'). While tree cover is often shown as afforestation through satellite images, the plantation ecosystem on the ground is much poorer than that of a forest.

To increase its production, the factory will require more and more raw material, hence the intensified campaign to convince local farmers to grow eucalyptus, even if this has proved disastrous for the environment. The Indian Tobacco Company benefited from the farm forestry programme introduced at the national level in 1988 as part of the National Forest Policy, which aimed at increasing the forest cover to reach 33 per cent of the total land area. With their insatiable demand for wood fibre, the paper mills were seen as responsible for the fast-depleting forest cover and were encouraged to take up farm forestry, where small growers supply wood in the open market, instead of the mills using forest land for raw material sourcing. But eucalyptus plantations created a new ecological problem as they are highly unsustainable: they quickly deplete underground water and exhaust fertile soils, leaving them sterile in the long run. The leaves, bark and fruits of eucalyptus trees are useless for Adivasis and their animals, unlike other local trees that are traditionally used for 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, so the soil becomes eroded 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 river bed, thus increasing the risk of floods.²¹

The company took advantage of Telangana's *Haritha Haram* ('Green Belt') reforestation scheme to offer 10 million eucalyptus saplings to farmers at Rs.1 each as part of corporate social responsibility. Not only will selling those saplings bring 1 crore to the company, but this massive plantation will make the price of eucalyptus wood fall. It is therefore a clever strategy to cheat the farmers who will ultimately sell the wood to the company at a low rate due to increased supply. The *Haritha Haram* scheme is threatening Adivasis practising agriculture on forest land without pattas, as the Telangana government has decided to recover those cultivated plots from anyone who is unable to show land titles. In the studied village, 25 Koya households are concerned and are going to lose their only means of livelihood because of the scheme. In 2008 the previous Congress Chief Minister Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy decided to implement the Forest Rights Act and organised a massive programme of forest patta distribution to attract Adivasi votes before the State Assembly elections. However, the allotment of pattas was done in an arbitrary manner and was probably influenced by political connections and corruption. Shanta, the Koya B.Tech student who was one of my main informants, told me that his father could not get a patta for his 3 acres of forest land on which the whole family depends, 'because he doesn't have money and connections'. According to him, 'Koyas are innocent, but Lambadas are shrewd, so they all got land titles in our village'. The only solution for him and the other 24 Koya households in the same situation, is to apply for a fresh patta under the Forest Rights Act, but the chief minister has instructed the state's administration not to deliver any new land titles under that act, arguing that Telangana has to achieve the 33 per cent mandatory forest cover.

Paradoxically, the Indian Tobacco Company is praised by the Telangana government for its efforts in planting trees, notwithstanding the fact that eucalyptus is harmful, while Adivasis are blamed for deforestation on the grounds that many continue to practise shifting cultivation. The government is especially targeting the Gutti Koyas, who are displaced Adivasis from the conflict-torn neighbouring Chhattisgarh and who are treated as illegal encroachers on government forest land.²² They are denied Scheduled Tribe status and the benefits of the Forest Rights Act, and they are constantly harassed by the Forest Department as well as the police, who accuse them of being Maoist sympathisers since they fled the Salwa Judum, an anti-Maoist militia. At the same time, the Telangana government gave away to Andhra Pradesh seven tribal mandals of Bhadrachalam Integrated Tribal Development Agency that will be submerged by the Polavaram dam on the left bank of the Godavari, so that the rehabilitation and resettlement of the

displaced people becomes the responsibility of Chandrababu Naidu, whose state will get irrigation from the dam, as well as water for the industrial coastal corridor. By not opposing the construction of the dam, the Telangana government is *de facto* agreeing to the loss of 4000 hectares of forests and to the displacement of 400,000 people, two-thirds of whom are Adivasis and Dalits. The Indian Tobacco Company has been prompt to see an opportunity there: since the dam will not be completed within the next five years, the company is planting eucalyptus on the lands of the expropriated Adivasis living in the submergence area, who were given compensation to resettle elsewhere.²³ Various Adivasi organisations are trying to build a resistance movement against the dam, some of them even advocating the creation of a separate tribal state where Adivasis would reclaim their autonomy through self-rule instead of being the perpetual victims of the Telugu States' development and industrialisation projects.²⁴

The last form of mobilisation observed around the company concerns health and pollution issues. According to the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (n.d.): 'most of the Indian paper mills do not have adequate technology to recycle their wastes. Effluent treatment plants (ETPs) are capable of handling discharges and emissions emerging from single-product paper plants only. With an increase in the types of paper produced, the efficiency of the ETPs plummets.' Though the company claims that the effluents it releases into the Godavari are treated and therefore 'clean', this is not the perception of the people living in the village by the river, where an open canal carrying industrial waste runs through the fields, just a few kilometres away from Sarapaka. Not only is their drinking water contaminated, but also the paddy they cultivate on the riverbank. They realised that the rice they were eating had become so dangerous for consumption that it was safer to grow eucalyptus instead of paddy. The sarpanch of that village, a Lambada woman, fought back against the company by making a list of demands under its corporate social responsibility obligations, which included drinking water taps for every house. She also approached the Tribal Development Agency officer who instigated a civil suit on public nuisance against the company and asked the company to provide a clearance from the Telangana State Pollution Control Board, which the well-connected managers were able to obtain within two days.

In Sarapaka the Dalit colony called Gandhi Nagar and the Odia Camp, where migrant workers from Odisha live, are the most affected neighbourhoods. Although the factory has its main outlets releasing effluents into the Godavari, there are pipes releasing dirty water 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. Their only source of drinking water is open wells, which also

get polluted and give the children diarrhoea. The Odia camp dwellers are the most marginalised people in Sarapaka, and no politician is listening to their complaints. They are mostly Doms, a Dalit community of Odisha that is not on the Scheduled Caste list of Andhra Pradesh/Telangana. The administration refuses to deliver caste certificates for their children unless they provide proof with proper documentation from their district of origin (Malkangiri). Since most of them left their native villages 30 years ago, none of them can provide such evidence. They first crossed the Odisha/Andhra Pradesh border to build the Sileru dam, and then moved to Sarapaka to build the paper factory. They are considered to be 'hard workers' who can do any kind of heavy construction work, unlike the local Koyas. Since they didn't have land back in their villages they were forced to migrate and do this type of work, whereas the local Koyas can survive on their forest lands. Even today, the Doms do all kinds of manual labour, but most of them are casual workers in the paper factory. The younger generation is still mostly uneducated, and the lack of Scheduled Caste certificates hasn't helped. The school dropouts are now working as labourers or auto drivers.

The Integrated Tribal Development Agency has conducted a health survey in the villages surrounding the paper factory and has identified an unusual number of cancer cases and of lung diseases due to air pollution, though many people are hesitant to declare their illnesses as they are afraid of losing their jobs in the factory. During my fieldwork, I met the family of Nagaraju Koppula, a Madiga journalist from Sarapaka who was treated in Hyderabad for lung cancer and whom I visited several times in the city before his death in April 2015, at the age of 32. A non-smoker, he himself alerted me to the probable connection between his cancer and industrial pollution. Some of his activist friends intend to file a Public Interest Litigation to enquire about health issues related to the paper factory. The 'Justice for Nagaraju Koppula' campaign is also denouncing what many perceive as a case of caste discrimination by the newspaper for which Nagaraju was working, since he was fired as soon as the management came to know about his cancer and was not given any financial assistance to pay for his chemotherapies. Nagaraju comes from an extremely poor family in Sarapaka. He was the first Madiga in Telangana to be offered a job by an English-language newspaper, in a country where Dalits are severely under-represented in the media, and totally absent from the newsrooms' key posts.²⁵

Nagaraju's personal trajectory of upward social mobility against all odds is quite exceptional. He was born in Gandhi Nagar, the Dalit colony of Sarapaka located just next to the factory. His father went missing when he was a child; he was brought up with his four siblings by his mother, a daily wage labourer who took part in the construction of the paper factory in the 1970s. She was a casual labourer in the paper factory even as she was pregnant with

Nagaraju, and he himself worked there for five years as a board painter to pay for his studies. He studied in Bhadrachalam Government College in Telugu-medium. He wanted to become an Indian Administrative Service officer but ultimately received a scholarship to complete a Master's in journalism at Hyderabad University. The most educated Madiga of his village, he was the pride of his family, and the main breadwinner. His funeral in Sarapaka was attended by a huge crowd of people from neighbouring villages, who came to pay their respects to the 'English Sir' (as some called him because of his command of the English language). I attended the ceremony that was organised in his memory in Sarapaka community hall, built by the Indian Tobacco Company as part of its corporate social responsibility work.

UNEQUAL LIVES, POWER RELATIONS AND STRUGGLES OF DALITS AND ADIVASIS

The four groups I have studied in this chapter – Koyas, Lambadas, Madigas and Kammas – have distinct histories and social trajectories. As original inhabitants of Bhadrachalam area, the Koyas have been the most affected by processes of dispossession through the loss of their lands, forests and water, which progressively undermined their economic and cultural autonomy. Latecomers, the Lambadas benefited from their inclusion in the state's Scheduled Tribe list, which allowed them to buy land to some extent and take advantage of various government schemes under the tribal sub-plan. As Dalits, the Madigas living in this tribal area have mostly been landless and cannot claim rights over immovable property since land transfers to non-Scheduled Tribes are prohibited in Adivasi territories. Because of their landlessness, they are even more marginalised than the Adivasis in that area. At the other end of the social hierarchy, the Kammas became the most dominant group after acquiring vast properties at the cost of the original landholders, and continued to prosper even after the protective legislations were enacted.

With the setting up of the Indian Tobacco Company paper factory the main landlord and other Kamma landowners became part of a new, wider process of capital accumulation – just as the Nadar landlords in Cuddalore district, analysed in the preceding chapter did with the arrival of the bone factory. It is also striking how, both in the Bhadrachalam area and in Melpuram in Cuddalore, local Dalits became informalised, insecure workers in the factory while Adivasi groups did not do so, although in Bhadrachalam the Lambadas, whose Scheduled Tribe status is recent, have also joined as workers. But while the processes of dispossession and industrialisation have similarities in Bhadrachalam and Cuddalore, they also played out in different ways. For example, the fact that the Koyas have some land has enabled them

to maintain a degree of autonomy unheard of in Cuddalore. I have shown how, in Bhadrachalam, the protection offered by the Fifth Schedule in many instances has been brushed aside by powerful landed groups and industrialists, but it nevertheless provides some defence for the Adivasis compared to what is available to Adivasis and Dalits in Cuddalore.

As with the rest of the chapters in this book, looking at unequal lives and power relations in a particular setting has provided empirical evidence for the arguments made in this chapter. I have tried to explain how the Adivasis and Dalits living in a resource-rich territory have become increasingly poor. Their impoverishment is primarily a consequence of wealth capture and capital accumulation by the dominant castes who migrated to that area. This chapter also illustrates how corporate interests under the patronage of the state plunder natural resources in a collusive alienation of Adivasis from their lands. In this sense, resource capture is a euphemism for the theft of the commons. Historically, it is the quest for resources and cheap labour that has led to the penetration of Adivasi territories by the state, industries and agricultural colonists belonging to the dominant castes, whose feudal oppression progressively gave way to capitalist exploitation. The government's rhetoric about economic development and job creation purposefully ignores the human, environmental and social costs of such 'progress' that benefits only a small section of the population while others pay a heavy price for it, thus deepening the gap between rich and poor. The constitutional safeguards that are supposed to protect Scheduled Areas remain a dead letter when huge industrial investments are at stake. This is why the people who are deprived of their means of livelihood and deliberately kept at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy need to resort to collective struggles to assert their rights.