

Date:27/08/2009 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2009/08/27/stories/2009082755662000.htm>

[Back](#)

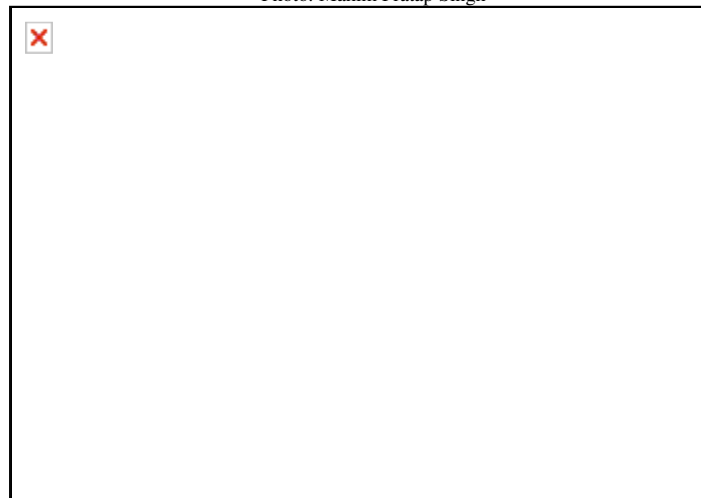
[Front Page](#)

Jhabua tribals denied land under Forest Rights Act

Mahim Pratap Singh

Only 120 claims were approved in the district

— Photo: Mahim Pratap Singh



Some of the affected farmers of Jhabua forest.

JHABUA (MADHYA PRADESH): In recent local media reports and a half-page advertisement carried in a national daily, the Madhya Pradesh government has claimed to be number one in implementing the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Evidences from the field fly in the face of this claim, suggesting that the State stands first in rejecting claims made by forest-dwellers.

Jhabua, where 86 per cent of the population is tribal, is also the district with the highest density of tribal population. As many as 1,645 individual claims and one community claim were received from the district, and of these, only 120 were approved by the district-level committee as on July 24 this year.

In Morjhariya and other hamlets of Mohankot village in Petlawad block, the committee rejected 228 claims without consulting the sub-divisional level committee. At Rasodhi in Rama block, all 380 claims were rejected. "I recommended that the claims of the Morjhariya tribals be approved, but the SDM and CEO didn't listen," says Kesar Bai, the only female member of the sub-divisional level committee. Moreover, the rejection letters issued to the claimants cited no reason, a serious violation of the rules and procedures of the Act.

The locals say the Revenue Department had acquired the land of the Bhil tribals for

digging an irrigation pond, paying them a meagre compensation of Rs.300-400 apiece. With their land taken away, the tribals started working in forestland 25 years ago. According to the Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006, all individuals and communities cultivating forestland on or before December 12, 2005, could claim the rights for the land.

Claimants “threatened”

Barely a month after claims were filed, Forest and Revenue Department officials, accompanied by 250 policemen, descended on the area and threatened the claimants. “They pushed us around, took away our beds and destroyed our ‘taprees’ (sheds),” says Viru Singh, one of the claimants. “They said, ‘*tum log chale jao yahaan se, ye tumhaari zameen nahi hai, na kabhi hogi* (leave this land, it does not belong to you and it never will)’,” he said.

Thereafter the Forest Department established in the area a vigilance chowki with a guard. A case of encroachment on forestland and collective nuisance was filed against the claimants. Those booked included women and children and a disabled woman. In another case, 39 people were booked for destroying grazing fields.

The “protected forestland,” which the officials claim has been encroached upon by claimants, does not have a single plantation, except rows of *Jatropha*. The government, however, vouches for the speedy implementation of the Act. “The Act is being implemented in good spirit across the State, and Madhya Pradesh has been very fast in the implementation of the Act,” says Jaideep Govind, Commissioner, Tribal Welfare Department.

Asked why so many claims from a tribal-dominated district were rejected, he said: “According to our analysis, there were a lot of spurious claims, and most of them could not provide the required documents for certification.”

The Morjhariya tribals, however, say they submitted all necessary documents, including the copy of an appeal sent to the Chief Minister in 1999, which proves that they were cultivating the land before 2005.

Of the 10 districts mentioned in the advertisement, only Shahdol and, to some extent, Rewa have a sizable tribal population. There is also a mismatch between data provided by the government and that laid out in the advertisement: in the Vidhan Sabha, the government put the number of approved claims for Indore, Bhopal and Gwalior at 39,274, 44,951 and 42,078, but the advertisement put these at 287, 1,010 and 163.

© Copyright 2000 - 2009 The Hindu