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Karnataka

## 'You are entering our ancestral land': Adivasis put up board outside Nagarahole Tiger Reserve

*On World Indigenous Peoples Day, the Adivasis of the Nagarahole forests staged a protest demanding recognition of their claims to the forest under the Forest Rights Act.*



About 100 Adivasis living in 26 haadis in three districts in Karnataka asserted their historical right to the Nagarahole forests and erects a sign board (on the right) declaring: 'You are now entering Adivasi ancestral land'. Anisha Sheth

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Published on: 10 Aug 2025, 1:48 pm



The tribal communities in the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve on Saturday, August 9, installed a board outside the reserve forest gates, proclaiming that people are about to enter Adivasi lands.

“The Nagarahole forests are the ancestral land of Adivasi clans. You are now entering the traditional boundaries of the Adivasi peoples of the Nagarahole forests. Nagarahole is a self-governing area of the Adivasi people. This land is the habitat of the Adivasi people. In these forests, the people, animals and the forests are equal. The customary laws of the Adivasi people and the special provisions of the grama sabha are applicable here. Your conduct here must be respectful and dignified.”

This is a translation of a board that the tribal communities erected outside the Nanachi gate of the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve in Kodagu district on August 9, also the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples.





entrance canopy, pointed to the arch announcing the entry to the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve and other smaller boards near the arch put up by the Coorg Wildlife Society, urging visitors to use dustbins and warning against the use of single-use plastics.

“You see this board saying Nagarahole Tiger Reserve; you will also see dozens of boards put up by organisations such as the Coorg Wildlife Society all over the forest. If they can put up their boards, why shouldn’t we? If we don’t put up our board, how will people know this is our jamma (ancestral land)?” he told TNM.



Sign boards at the Nanachi gate on waste disposal carrying the logo of the Coorg Wildlife Society and the Karnataka government. Anisha Sheth

This is the second time the tribal communities have put up a signboard asserting their historical and traditional claim to the Nagarahole forests. On May 14, after the 52 families returned to their ancestral village, Karadikallu Attur Kolli, inside the Nagarahole forest, the Forest Department put up a signboard saying that under Section 27 of the Wildlife Protection Act, their presence in the tiger reserve was an offence.

In response, a few days later, on May 20, the

...response, a few days later, on May 29, the Adivasis put up their own signboard right next to the one erected by the Forest Department. It said, "Under Section 9 of the Forest Department, *Nanga kaadu, nanga jamma, nanga aaLaku* (our forest, our ancestral land, our rule)."

The board then went on to mention all the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act and Forest Rights Act that the Forest Department itself had allegedly violated.



On the right, the sign board erected by the Karnataka Forest Department, and on the left, the one put up by the Adivasis of Karadikallu Attur Kolli haadi. Special Arrangement

## **Our land, our rule**

The protest, which started at around 11 am, continued until about 4.30 pm. Protestors held up placards saying, "It is we who are the children of the forest. It is we who are the kings of the forest", and 'Our forest, our ancestral land, our rule.'





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A woman holds up a sign saying 'Our forest, our jamma (ancestral land), our rule'. Anisha Sheth

During the protest, Nanachi gate rang out with songs and slogans, both in Kannada and the Jenu Kuruba language, asserting Adivasi rights to the forest and criticising the Forest Department’s conservation policy.

“Nagarahole Kadu,” Shivu called out, and the protesters replied with cries of “Ajjayyana beedu”, meaning that the Nagarahole forest was their ancestors’ home.

Virajpet MLA AS Ponnanna arrived at the protest site around noon and accepted a memorandum from the protestors.

Shivu read out some of the key demands of the tribal community.

Ponnanna said that he would raise the issues that were conveyed to him in the Assembly. “I am in no way saying that all your problems have been fixed. I want to remind you that it was the Congress government which passed the Forest Rights Act.”

He also said that the Siddaramaiah government stood with the poor and the oppressed. Sneaking to

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