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Forest-dwelling Adivasi communities in Nagarhole, Karnataka, Evicted

in Human Rights

by Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisation (CDRO)

20/06/2025



On the evening of the 17th of June 2025, 52 families belonging to the Jenu Kuruba tribe of Karadikallu Atturu Kolli Haadi in Nagarhole, Karnataka, received a notice from the Forest Department ordering the immediate removal of the newly constructed huts under Sections 27(3), 35(6), 35, 50, 51 and 55 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. By the morning of the 18th June, forest department officials arrived at the scene. A police check post was placed at Nannachi, the entrance of the Haadi, to prevent other Jenu Kurubas from neighbouring villages from arriving in solidarity and support. Unfazed by the threat, elders, women, men and children stood firmly at the entrance of the village to have a democratic discussion with the officials. However, some 250 personnel from the police department, the forest department and the tiger

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protection force, instead of discussing with the villagers, barged into the village from the rear end, forcibly dismantled six shelters and verbally abused, physically pushed and dragged away the protesting women who were trying to explain the need of the shelters to save the elders and children and their food from the ongoing heavy monsoon rains.

This inhuman act is the most recent action by the officials in the continued saga of gross violation of people's rights, rights of the forest-dwelling Adivasi communities, that is taking place in Nagarhole since 1985-86. It may be pertinent to point out here that in 1985-86, the then forest ranger had evicted the Kuruba tribe population from the villages of Karadikallu Atturu Kolli, Shantapura, Kanturu villages and forced them to stay inside the coffee plantation in abysmal conditions and denied their entry into the forest to collect jenu (honey in Kannada), medicines, fruits and other minor forest products as well as to visit their places of worship. Contrary to the claim of urban conservationists, it is these Kurubas who have an organic, cultural relationship and a strong emotional tie with the forest. This belief is best expressed by J.K. Thimma, a Jenu Kuruba leader, when he said, "We ask the Forest Department, since we worship tigers, snakes, peacocks and spirits in the forest, who do you think will take care of the forest better? Us, who worship the animals, or you, who see the animals as wild and are frightened of them?" (<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/jenu-kuruba>).

The beginning of this latest episode of violation of tribals' rights over the forest land initiated on the 5th of May 2025, when these 52 families of Karadikallu Attur Kolli village asserted their legal rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, which came into existence to recognise the inalienable rights of the indigenous people over their lands and resources. This assertion of their rights was a result of the tiger reserve authorities' repeated interference, successive governments' ignoring of the due process of law in recognising individual forest rights (IFR), community forest rights (CFR) and community forest resource rights (CFRR). On the 8th of May 2025, the Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF) had informed the villagers that a temporary injunction order was issued by the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka regarding the joint survey or any FRA-related activities and conducting sub-divisional and district-level meetings will be violative of the court order. It was later found to be a blatantly false statement (CNAPA, India Press Release on 19/05/2025). Braving all obstacles, these families had stayed in those shelters and ran a community kitchen. On the 20th of June, the historic Gram Sabha was held at Karadikallu Atturu Kolli Haadi for the first time in the last 40 years! Though the sub-divisional level committee (SDLC) initially recognised the rights of these 52 families, yet they yielded to the pressure from the Tiger Reserve officials and claimed that the village did not exist as per the satellite images available. As per Rule 12 (Amendment) and 13 of the FRA, read alongside a 2013 Gujarat High Court judgement, it is illegal to reject forest rights claims based only on satellite imagery. Elders' testimonies and the presence of burial grounds and sacred spaces at the site all count as supporting evidence for claims, which the families of Karadikallu had submitted and were conveniently ignored by the SDLC. Thus, it appears to be an accurate description of the situation when, after yesterday's violence and atrocity committed, one Jenu Kuruba elder commented "It is these officers who are encroaching into Nagarhole forests, which are our lands and not us. This is our ancestral homeland, and we have lived here for generations. How can we be called encroachers? It is a travesty of justice that our rights are being arbitrarily rejected, and for that, we should be the ones issuing notice to the officials for encroaching on our lands!"



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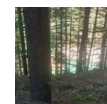
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Throughout India, as here in Nagarhole, we see the state machinery is busy trampling the rights of the Adivasi population, disregarding the provisions of the constitution and the acts laid down by the governments in the past. Sometimes it is to safeguard and promote the interest of the mining lobby in Chhattisgarh, and at other times it is in the name of conservation cartel and ecotourism in some other forest, as in Nagarhole. Though the erstwhile foreign colonial power, which started the plunder of the forest and destroyed the lives of the indigenous people 160 years back, had left the Indian shores in 1947, successive governments in independent India have done very little to restore the rights of these marginalised communities depending on the forest products.

Hence, the CDRO demands:

1. Restoring the rights of the Jenu Kuruba tribes over their ancestral land in the forest.
2. Rebuild the shelters destroyed by the officials yesterday and allow unobstructed access to the forest for honey and other minor forest products.
3. Take immediate action against the officials who had carried out this destruction and physical and verbal abuse of the women of the Karadikallu Attur Kolli village under SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
4. We demand that the Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka, initiate criminal proceedings against the ACF and Nagarhole Tiger Reserve Authorities under criminal law for perjury (lying under oath) and section 3 (g) of SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Asish Gupta, Tapas Chakraborty, Kranthi Chaitanya, Coordinators

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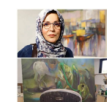
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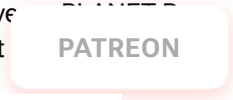
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