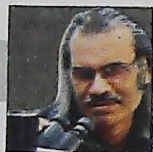


OPINION

Chimbel villagers defend heritage

Scholars have noticed that in the name of development, many villages with sizeable Adivasi populations have been targeted after liberation. This has now reached a cruel level



Dr. Nandkumar M. Kamat

This article presents a critical analysis of the factors driving the present movement, mainly led by the Adivasis (tribals) of Chimbel village in Tiswadi Taluka, north Goa, which is demanding the relocation of two massive government projects.

The Adivasis of Chimbel now have their demographic existence and ecological and cultural ethos threatened. The Adivasis of Goa include mainly kinship groups with Negrito, Austric, and Mediterranean genetic roots that settled during the prehistoric period, and include all kinship subgroups of Gavade, Kunbi, and Velips. Agro pastoral kinship groups called Goa Goulys and Dhangers, included as OBCs, have been awaiting inclusion in the central ST list since 1964.

Scholars have noticed that in the name of development, many villages with sizeable Adivasi populations have been targeted after liberation. This assault has now reached a cruel level, raising questions about the very future of Adivasis in Goa, which is administratively confined to only 1110 square kilometres, with a population of 16 lakh. All decisions and actions take place only in this one-third area of Goa. Chimbel, originally known as 'Chemulya' since the sixth century, is a small village of less than 400 hectares, and for at least 5,000 years it has been dominated by the farming and fishing community of Gawde Adivasis.

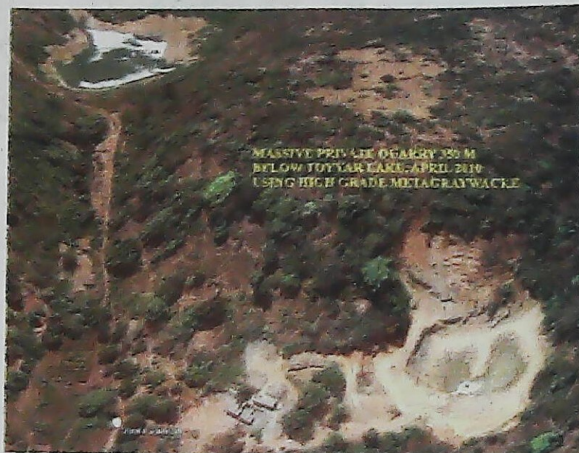
How did their demographic representation crash to just 18 percent in just 50 years. The answers must be

provided by the various political parties that have ruled Goa since 1964, as well as by the major landowner, the Communidade of Chimbel. The first determined assault on Chimbel came in 1973 when the government decided to relocate 350 families from slum-like areas in Panaji to Chimbel under the 20-point programme.

The Adivasis of Chimbel were not as united at that time and had no constitutional recognition as an ST community. Being a resident of nearby Bondir, Santa Cruz, I have witnessed the ugly, radical transformation of verdant Chimbel village since 1971. Having suffered the severe impact of forced demographic dilution from 1973, in the form of the establishment of a non-Goan, non-Adivasi 'village' within Chimbel, the remaining but united Adivasis of Chimbel are no longer in a position to welcome any further forced drivers of change or ecological and social impacts. This is the basis of their vehement and determined opposition to the government's two mega projects. PWD destroyed their ancient, fertile, productive creek known as 'Chimblachi Nhoy,' which originates in Mercas valley and joins the Mandovi estuary at Ribander Patto.

Hundreds of Adivasis depend on small canoe-based navigation and fish and shellfish harvesting from this creek. The revenue department allegedly joined hands with the town, country planning, and environment departments to promote illegal filling and reclamation of the low-lying fertile khazans in the catchment of Chimbel creek, which spread up to Panaji's KTC bus stand, which itself stands on reclaimed khazans, mangroves, and salt pans. From 1980, scrapyards began to appear between Chimbel and Mercas, and today, the fertile khazans, which produced three crops, lie uncultivated, with private parties and government departments tempted to convert these for various projects.

After dismantling the life support



MASSIVE PRIVATE QUARRY 350 M BELOW TOYYAR LAKE, APRIL 2010 USING HIGH GRADE MONTAGRA TWACKLE

systems of Khazans and the Chimbel creek, the Adivasis were left with the densely settled Y-shaped Chimbel structural valley, where, at its head, they had another ancient life support system called Toyyar lake. The government forgot that it is an important inter basin drainage area separating the Mandovi and Zuari river basins. The entire area descending into the Santan Talaulim valley is geologically unstable and prone to landslides. A major landslide could demolish the iconic Church of Saint Anne at Talaulim, a masterpiece of Indian Baroque architecture. The government removed almost one-third of the ancient commons of the Adivasis of Chimbel by establishing Indiranagar, a community of migrants who knew nothing of the local Adivasi ethos or the village's history. No doubt, no one from Indiranagar has been seen in the ongoing movement, as this colony is fully alienated from the original Chimbel inhabitants. They are willing to join hands with anyone in power or private capital to further dismantle what little is left of the ancient Chimbel village and fully convert it into a cosmopolitan suburb, later to be merged with CCP.

The last remaining Adivasis of Chimbel cannot be shifted by the government to another Indiranagar of Goan style, but I see that stage coming soon after minutely examining the land-use change since 1985 using satellite images. Less than 100 hectares of land is now left in Chimbel, most of which is a green landscape descending from the edge of the old Goa highway towards the Y-shaped Chimbel valley. The Goa State Wetland Authority came into the picture when large private townships were already established within the catchment area of the valley and Toyyar Lake. Only recently the Chimbel comunidade discovered the operation of an illegal stone quarry within 350 m of the Toyyar Lake.

However, my calculations based on local geology and satellite images showed that a private party excavated and sold building material worth Rs 500 crores in the past 25 years and recklessly left behind a dangerous abandoned quarry where two people had died due to drowning.

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