

(4)
165

them for the fresh encroachment through their activities. They always have been using pressure tactics on Taluka and District Administration by organizing huge Morchas of Tribal community and Gherav to Tahsil office as well as District Collectorate etc.

Gross misuse proved by scientific survey conducted by the Govt. Maharashtra

The Maharashtra Government had, a few years ago, relaxed the measurement for land claimed by tribal people and this has caused discrepancies in settling claims under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA). A study done by a private company in 2012, at the behest of the State Forest Department, used a database from the Tribal Research and Training Institute (TRTI), Pune, and the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), Hyderabad. Satellite maps and GPS data were collated to examine changes after 2005 in tree cover, vegetation and land-use in forest land under forest rights (FR) claims and those which have recognized rights of cultivation.

TRTI has the data of 1, 89,400 forest plots under Forest Rights (FR) claims, which are measured using GPS and uploaded on its website. Each land under claim has a unique 13 digit code comprising alpha numerical identification for district, tehsil, village and initials of the claimant.

Of the 3, 44,330 claims received in Maharashtra, 2, 34,242 claims were rejected, according to latest data from the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs website. Only 1, 05,930 claims have been approved, of which 99,368 titles were distributed for about 2, 50,000 hectares. Activists and tribal people have been contesting the delay in allotting rights and the high rejection of claims.

However, Thane district, with one of the highest number of claims in the State, did not provide details of the 13 digit-code for all claimants, and in fact, cleared cases without GPS measurement, the study says. The government blames the high rate of false claimants for the rejections. Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, Nasik, Raigad, Gondia and Bhandara districts also provided little data. Overall, data only for 40,428 approved cases was made available for the study from 19 districts covering 1705 villages.

In 2,433 cases, out of a total of 36,640 cases analyzed, there was a road/ river/nallah within the plot. The highest number of such cases is in Dhule and Nandurbar districts. As seen on 2005-06 satellite images, about 15 per cent approved cases are on lands having forest or no agriculture. Data using Cartosat-1 satellite images of 2005-06 and 2007-08, shows that in 789 cases out of 35, 044 approved FR cases, land-use changed between the years 2005-06 to 2007-08. Large numbers of such cases with land-use change are in Jalgaon, Nandurbar, and Dhule. Out of 539 FR cases from Jalgaon district, 321 cases are from three villages of Chopda Taluka — Umarti (118), Satrasen (113) and Melane (90).

The data reveals that there was a huge trend of putting barren forest land to agriculture between 2005 and 2008 to stake claims. About 37 per cent of barren area was converted into agriculture and 33 per cent was converted from forest cover to agriculture. Jalgaon has the highest area so far of forested areas and barren forest land converted to agriculture. An analysis of 5,373 FR cases on satellite images of 2007-08 shows that in these 789 approved FR cases, land-use change occurred after 2005. The study says this implies that people first claimed rights of cultivation, irrespective of the fact whether it was under cultivation on December 13, 2005 (as mandated by FRA) or not and later that forest land was cleared for cultivation. Though the