The work of two anthropologists in the agency areas of former composite Adilabad district in the distant past has made them relevant in the Adivasi ethos. One of them is legendary Austrian ethnologist Prof. Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf and the other is his British student, Dr. Michael Yorke, for his role as an activist on behalf of the then administration in these parts.

Mr. Yorke, who was conducting anthropological studies among the Raj Gond tribe basing himself in the remote Ginnedhari village (now in Kumram Bheem Asifabad district) between 1976 and 1978, had helped poor, illiterate Adivasis in writing petitions on various issues and kept forwarding them to the Collector in Adilabad. The anthropologist remembers being asked to help out the aboriginal people by the then Collector C.D. Arha as they were not directly approaching the administration for getting their problems addressed.

The Hindu interacted with the 75-year-old lanky researcher, who is better known as a filmmaker in the West, at Utnoor where he is staying as part of his tour to the tribal land over four decades after he left the place. He explained various aspects associated with the ethnic people of erstwhile Adilabad, one of them being the applicability of proper research before designing programmes for development of the poor.

“Ethnography and folklore studies would be of help during designing of development programmes for underprivileged sections of society like the Adivasis. It will help in understanding how the people live, thereby becoming a guiding principle for designing any developmental activity,” he said.

**Needs of tribals**

He also discussed Prof. Haimendorf’s view on education. In his capacity as advisor to the Nizam’s government on backward classes and tribals in Hyderabad State back in the 1940s, the ethnologist had tried to address land problems of the Raj Gond and other tribes and even issued patta rights for about 1.6 lakh acres to 30,000 ethnic families in Adilabad. “Prof. Haimendorf was against over-educating and raising the expectations which could not be satisfied. He was for the kind of education that fits the needs of tribals and not the entrepreneurial side,” Yorke recalled.