Adivasis take the next step in ‘self-rule’

Officials explain limitations of village panchayat to first PESA committee constituted in Agency area

A first step, and perhaps a giant leap towards tribal development in accordance with their own culture and traditions as provisioned under the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA Act was taken.

The first ever gram sabha in the Agency area was held on Tuesday at Mallapur village, now in Sirikonda mandal, to elect its president and other office bearers, thereby fulfilling one of its basic mandates.

The newly constituted is gram sabha assumed critical importance as the Adivasis had declared ‘self-rule’ in their habitations quoting provisions of the PESA Act. The discussions went a long way in clarifying on the special powers and limitations of a gram sabha in the Agency areas.

Among the primary functions of a gram sabha is approving plans meant for their village. It is precisely for this purpose that the Adivasis of Mallapur had sought the conduct of gram sabha and election of PESA committee a few days ago.

Accordingly, the district administration organised the event which was attended by Project Officer of Uttoo or, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) S. Krishna Aditya, RDO Jagadeeshwar Reddy and DSP N. Venkatesh, among others.

It may be recalled that the villagers had appealed and staged protests many times demanding reallocation of their village to Indervelli as its alignment with Sirikonda mandal in September 2016 had posed serious logistical problems.

With no response from the government they tried to solve the issue through a gram sabha resolution which is considered to be binding on the authorities.

“We resorted to making a demand for conduct of PESA gram sabha believing it has the necessary power to revert our village into the limits of Indervelli mandal. We know that the government needs to take consent of the gram sabha before implementing any plans,” observed former sarpanch Pusam Anand Rao. First the PESA committee was elected by show of hands.

Sarpanch Madavi Kameshwaribai became the ex-officio president of the committee while village headman or patel Durva Raju was elected vice-president and Madavi Kalabai was elected secretary.

The ITDA Project Officer underscored the need for clarity on the provisions of PESA and the functions of the gram sabha.

He said clarity on the issue was the key to its success and all proceedings needed to be documented neatly.

“We will forward the resolution to the Revenue Secretary requesting him to take a re-look at the issue on humanitarian grounds,” assured Mr. Aditya. He, however, opined that a resolution on the given issue was not within the purview of PESA Act.

Earlier, Adilabad district president of Kumram Bheem Ashaya Sadhana Sangham Kova Doulath Rao talked about his experiences in making efforts to get the PESA Act come into force in the united district.

He was of the opinion that if properly implemented in terms of agriculture produce marketing nearly 70% of the Adivasis can benefit financially.