Should the government clarify on the criteria in general and cut-off date in particular that need to be applied while issuing Scheduled Tribe certificates to Lambada (Lambadi or Banjara people) in Telangana in order to address the ongoing Adivasi-Lambada conflict? This is one of the demands of the aboriginal people who have started a movement seeking expulsion of Lambada tribe from the list of STs, alleging that their inclusion was illegal, and done through an incomplete process.

The clarification was in fact sought from the government by Adilabad district administration in December 2017 in response to a representation made by president of Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samiti, also known as Tudu Debba. The latter had alleged that the sitting Lambada MLAs of Khanapur and Boath ST Assembly constituencies were migrants from Karnataka and Maharashtra, implying that they cannot qualify as ST as their States of origin do not recognise their community as a tribe.

The Tribal Welfare Commissioner made a careful study of Article 342 (1) of the Indian Constitution under which the President made Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950 through which different communities were notified as STs in given areas and Amendments to it in 1956, 1976 (108 of 1976) and 2003 (10 of 2003). The official also studied the High Court order in the case of former Khanapur MLA Suman Rathod’s ST certificate allegedly being illegal, before clarifying on the issue.

The clarification says, “The Scheduled Tribes (Amendment) Act 108 of 1976, (through which the community in question was taken in as ST) is only applicable to those Lambadis whose ancestors or their offsprings are residents of the locality in a part of State of Telangana as on the date of Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950 came into force (on January 26) and not those who have migrated to Telangana after it.” A letter with the detailed clarification has been sent to Tribal Welfare Secretary in February this year.

The Commissioner’s clarification does not specifically talk about the status of the Lambadas who are born after the 1976 amendment and after March 22, 1977, when the amendment including them in the list of STs in Telangana came into effect. “It is understood that the same criteria and cut-off date as mentioned in the clarification is applicable to them,” an official opined.

“This clarification on accepting residence proof of pre-January 26, 1950 will have us better placed when issuing ST certificates to Lambadas. So far, we have been accepting residence proof from pre-1976 period,” revealed a Tahsildar, who is among those working in Agency mandals, and who is under tremendous pressure from Lambadas who are seeking ST certificates. Based on that, they would also get Local Scheduled Tribe certificate needed for government jobs in the Agency areas in Telangana. “The pressure is quite high as certificate verification for jobs of Forest Beat Officers and Teacher Recruitment Test is going on now. In most of the cases, fake documents with regard to proof for LST certificate are being submitted and the applicants are even threatening us to accept them,” another Tahsildar said.

The pressure being mounted on the Tahsildars, who are the designated authority for the purpose of issuing ST and LST certificates, had the district administration appealing to the Lambada elders not to do so. The Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC) would deal with the verification without causing any problem to the candidates, the elders were told, according to a source.