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Patta gift for Bonda tribals

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Some of the villagers with their certificates. (Sanjib Mukherjee)

Bhubaneswar, Oct. 18: Members of tribal communities living in the hills and forests of Malkangiri in Orissa are a jubilant lot these days, as they have finally become owners of land that they and their ancestors have been living on for years now.

Cultivation being the main source of livelihood for them, possession of these title certificates for forestland (*pattas*) where they have been residing meant much to the Bondas, Koyas and Didayis.

As many as 5,113 tribals of different categories in the district have already received the provisional title certificates under Forest Right Act-2006 covering 14,175.18 acres of forestland.

The certificates for the Bondas became possible thanks to the joint initiative taken by the Malkangiri administration and Bonda Development Agency. Panchayati raj and NGO representatives along with block and *tehsil* staff have been on their toes trying to collect 100 per cent claims from those eligible in 32 villages home to 1,605 households and a population of around 6,085.

The certificate distribution was undertaken in two phases.

For the first phase, collector Nitin Bhanudas Jawale distributed provisional *pattas* to 314 Bonda families covering 774.00 acre of forestland on October 6.

Besides the Bondas, yet another primitive tribe, Didayi, was also given land *pattas* thanks to the initiative taken by Didayi Development Agency that had been working round-the-clock at Kudumulugumma block of Malkangiri for the right of the tribals.

The Diyadis are spread across 37 villages covering 1,633 households and have a population of approximately 6,545.

Here, too, the administration organised a drive to cover all of the beneficiaries for settlement of land rights.

NGOs working under the Orissa Tribal Empowerment and Livelihood Programmes helped in the drive, trying to raise awareness among people, collecting claims and preparing documents.

“All *tehsil*, block and gram panchatyat officials and panchayati raj representatives were a part of the drive to cover primitive groups according to instructions given by the government. Cent per cent eligible claimants will be provided title certificates for *pattas* by end of this month,” said Sunderlal Shel, the chief Integrated Tribal Development Agency.

A total of 221 Didayi families have received certificates covering 696 acres and many more will shortly be land owners, the officer said.

