

Our unity

Jobs in Chembakolli

Once the Adivasis were treated as outcasts. Now they are working for themselves.

- When the people of Chembakolli were given back their land, they had to decide what to do with it. They wanted to use the land wisely. This meant planting crops that would grow well, that would give them a good living, and provide the community with a secure future. After a lot of discussions, the villagers decided to work together to set up their own tea plantations.
- Today, there are more than 1,000 Adivasis who work in the tea industry. Tea is still picked by hand, and this job is usually done by women. Each tea picker's basket holds about 20kg of leaves – and most pickers will fill their baskets twice a day. After they have been sorted and weighed, the leaves are bagged up and sent to the nearby tea factory.
- There were three good reasons for choosing tea. Firstly, it is a crop that suits their landscape – tea has been grown there since colonial days. It is harvested all year round, which meant there would always be work for people to do. It is also the main product of the Gudalur valley, so the Adivasis would be contributing to the wealth and economy of the whole region.
- Here the leaves are processed and the tea packed up for sale. To make sure that they get a fair price for their tea, the Adivasis have formed their own trading society. Although tea is their main crop, they also grow pepper and coffee, and have set up a honey depot in the nearby village of Kanjikolly. Producing these crops creates even more jobs for the tribespeople.

- Traditionally, the Adivasis work on the land. But now, different kinds of jobs are available within their community. In the hospital, for example, young people are taught to be nurses and health workers – and at the Vidyodaya School, there are training programmes for teachers and classroom assistants. The people of Chembakolli say that if they work together, anything is possible.

Talking points

- The 'Our unity' section of the poster focuses on jobs. What does the word 'unity' mean?
- What other parts of the Adivasi saying shown on the front of the poster do jobs link to?
- How does working together help the Adivasis to change their lives for the better? Could they have been so successful if each person had worked by themselves?
- Why is it so important to create different kinds of jobs in the Adivasi community?



TEXT BY TERESA SAUNDERS. IMAGE © JEFF THOMAS

