

Farmers in Lohandiguda Receive 'Symbolic' Land Deed Certificates

(/farmers-lohandiguda-receive-symbolic-land-deed-certificates)

The Congress in its election manifesto has promised to return land, which was forcibly acquired from farmers in Chhattisgarh's Lohandiguda block for a Tata Steel plant in 2010, under the then BJP government.

Saurabh Sharma (/author/Saurabh Sharma) 18 Feb 2019




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For the past nine years, Backchand Baghel, a tribal from the Lohandiguda block of Bastar division in Chhattisgarh had been observing a fast every Thursday to get back his land that had been forcefully acquired from him. On 16 February, he ended this fast.

The Congress in its election manifesto has promised to return the land deeds of Lohandiguda's farmers — whose land had been forcibly acquired for a Tata Steel plant in 2010 under the then BJP government.

On 16 February, Congress President Rahul Gandhi was in Lohandiguda, where he gave away the symbolic land deed certificates to farmers whose land was acquired by the Tata Steel Plant.

 government in 2010 had acquired land in ten villages of the block — Badanji, Bade Paroda, Belar, Beliapal, Chindgaon, Dabpal, Dhuragaon, Kumli, Sirisaguda and Takraguda.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the then Raman Singh-led government of Chhattisgarh and Tata Steel came to an end in 2016. The industrial giant also washed its hands off of the project, given the continuing unrest among locals who were up in arms against the setting up of the plant on their land.

Baghel, for example, said he was hopeful of getting back the land as villagers in all of the ten villages had struggled for it and fighting with the government.

“Getting our land back is nothing less than getting our freedom. Earlier, our ancestors fought with Britishers, while we fought with our own government. We are farmers and land is everything for us,” says Baghel.

He adds that for tribals, land — whether fertile or infertile — is equivalent to the mother, and “no one sells their mother”.

This January, Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel had instructed his officials to complete the formalities of returning the land to tribals in Bastar and for bringing the proposal for approval before the first Cabinet meeting to be held after the oath-taking ceremony of his ministers.

This was confirmed by Vimlendu Jha, a farmer and a stringer for local newspapers.

“Although the land deed certificates distributed among the farmers by Congress president Rahul Gandhi were symbolic, I personally know that the officers have been instructed to start returning the land lease of all the farmers,” he told *NewsClick*.

Adding that the villagers had been awaiting this day for nearly a decade, he said, “We farmers are nothing without land. Land is everything for us.”

Lohandiguda is a development block that is home to more than 3,000 voters, most of whom are Madia and Moria tribals, and their primary profession is farming wheat, rice and tamarind.

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