

Four TISS students fight for tribals' cause

Take up the issue of activating a canal in Mandvi division in Surat which has been dry since 1970

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Four students of Mumbai-based **Tata Institute of Social Sciences** who went to Mandvi division in Surat district to conduct a study on tribal population, have turned activists a la Rang De Basanti.

The students — Shonit Biswas, Pinky Pegu, Archana and Swarnjeet Kumar — have done a study on a dry canal on Ukai dam.

According to their study, the canal could have alleviated most of the problems of at least 40 tribal villages in Mandvi division if water had flown through it.

"We've called a meeting of local panchayats on Thursday. After the meeting, we'll submit a petition to the local administration in Mandvi demanding to activate the right bank canal. This is the most pressing problem of the tribal people here as most of their concerns can be addressed if this canal becomes operational," says Shonit Biswas.

The students, doing Masters in Social Work, have identified poor agriculture harvests, inadequate water supply, unemployment, migration, violation of human rights and exploitation of the tribal people by factory owners as the major problems of the tribals in the region.

They have decided to take up the issue of activation of the canal with the Narendra Modi government.

The about 36 kilometre-long right bank canal was to be made operational along with a left bank canal in 1970 from the Ukai dam.

While water was released in the left canal in the same year, the right canal had remained dry since then as it has to pass through a land belonging to the forest department.

The Gujarat government, according to Superintendent Engineer K G Dave in Ukai, has been trying to get the forest land transferred to it from the forest department for all these years but in vain.

Chief Engineer A N Mistris said that the state took up the issue with the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest two-and-a-half years ago but was yet to get a response.

The students, reached Mandvi division on March 26, have been camping in one village or other to get firsthand information on the problems of the tribals. The division has around 87 tribal villages.

Tribals of Mandvi have for long been agitating for the activation of the canal and raised the issue with various human rights fora.



The TISS team — Archana, Pinky Pegu, Swarnjeet Kumar and Shonit Biswas of Mumbai-based Tata