**Call for Abstracts**

Samata is a social justice organization based in Visakhapatnam working for the rights of the tribal “Adivasi” people of Andhra Pradesh, India and for the protection of the natural resources and ecology of the Eastern Ghats (hills).Samata started working in a small tribal hamlet in 1987 with a group of tribal and rural youth, to mobilize tribal communities against exploitation by outsiders and by government. We fought a legal battle against the alienation of forest lands for private mining industries in scheduled areas which lead the historic ‘samata’ judgment pronounced by Supreme Court of India in 1997.

Samata is organizing a seminar on the theme of ‘***Impacts of mining on ecological sustainability in Eastern Ghats***’ and we seek participation from graduate students and young scholars.

Background of seminar: Eastern Ghats in India have huge mineral deposits including Laterite and Bauxite. For the past few decades any mining proposal initiated by industry has met with severe protest and criticism due to violation of rights of indigenous communities and anticipated environmental damage. Vedanta and POSCO cases in Orissa, calcite mining in Borra region by Birla group are few cases that acted as litmus test to our statutory institutions and governance – if they can provide democratic opportunity to engage on cultural and environmental issues. Samata judgment in 1997 and the Niyamgiri judgment in 2013 have provided such opportunities where the discretion to mine was left to adivasi gram sabhas. The voting against mining by the adivasi communities can be best described in Ramchandra Guha’s words as the ‘environmentalism of poor’. However if the judgments are re-read in the light of environment the issue may not cease to exist. The vested powers of discretion to Adivasi gram sabhas until now have been used to protect forests from alienation for mining, however the situation is gradually changing in small pockets where mining co-operatives are being formed. What if economic forces overtake the cultural integrity of adivais and if the forest based economies are transformed to mining economies? Is it fair to ask the adivasis to remain as savages for the cause of environment? The seminar would delve upon this thought to explore the identity of adivasis as the ‘noble savages’ and the transforming agency for environment. An understanding of ecological sustainability in Eastern Ghats will be produced in cultural, political, legal, and natural contexts.

Program description: The program is planned to spread over a period of six months and will engage a team of academicians and experts, and cohort of graduate students. A kick-off workshop will be conducted in Visakhapatnam, in the last week of April to initiate the project which will involve a brainstorming session and a short field trip to few mining sites in Visakhapatnam district. The experts will work thematic papers on linking their broad expertise with the issues in Eastern Ghats. Students will be asked to build specific case studies and may take up field research if needed. The thematic papers and the casestudy papers will be presented in a seminar tentatively scheduled towards the end of August, which will also include civil society groups working in Eastern Ghats region. A compendium book will be produced which will culminate the project.

Travel (upto AC 3-tier) and accommodation expenses will be covered. A modest support for conducting fieldwork will be provided.

Submission of abstracts: We invite abstracts from graduate students and young researchers who are interested in issues of environment and development. A 500 word abstract should be sent in one of the themes: **Environment and ecology, Culture and politics, Economics, Hydrology and water issues, Law and governance, Tribal rights perspective on land ownership and Gender.**  The abstract should be sent along with resume to egdesksamata@gmail.com with the theme specified in the subject. The last date for submission is 5th March 2014.