

State Development Projects Force Tribesmen to Flee Ancestral Lands

Around four Kurumba tribe settlements consisting of more than 500 families are under tremendous pressure to move from their birth place

by Anil S

Kochi: Tribesmen in the state are being forced to flee their forest abode as authorities are going ahead with various developmental activities in power, irrigation and tourism.

If illegal resorts in forest lands are a major issue at some places, proposals for setting up dams are costing tribesmen dear at some other places.

Around four Kurumba tribe settlements consisting of more than 500 families are under tremendous pressure to move from their birth place as the authorities are getting ready for a dam in the Bhavani river at Mele Thuduki near Attappady in Palakkad. Following this, the tribal families in the four settlements - Mele Thudukki, Galasi, Thazhe Bhoothar and Idavani - approached the Chief Minister with a mass petition.

"These are people from the primitive Kurumba tribe. They are under the threat of migration. However, after approaching the Chief Minister, the project is temporarily on hold. We are not sure whether they have actually decided to drop the project," tribal rights activist Rajendra Prasad, who runs the NGO Thamb for the welfare of tribesmen, said

In another incident,



around 300 families of Muduga tribe in three settlements got scattered to different parts of Palakkad district after the Valley Irrigation project in Siruvani river at Attappady.

"The project took off with a promise that it would provide clean drinking water and help our agriculture. But we are not getting the benefits of the project," Udayakumar of Muduga tribe, a victim of the project, said.

The project, which began around three decades ago, had displaced tribesmen in three settlements - Chittoor, Kattekkad and Kuravambadi.

However, the authorities gave alternate accommodation only to tribesmen in Chittoor. People in the other

two settlements are still facing the issue of rehabilitation. Though they have demanded for land under the Forest Rights Act, it has not yet been considered.

"Now there are many illegal constructions at the land which once belonged to us. Many settlers have come and constructed buildings there. We will wait for some more time. After that we are planning to take over our land forcibly," Udayakumar said. Adding to these issues are the non-environment friendly houses being built for tribesmen by various government bodies. There are allegations that the houses built under the Total Hamlet Development Programme (THDP) by the Attappady Hill Area Development Soci-

ety are not being used by the tribesmen as it does not suit their lifestyle.

In Agaly, a private resort built on 3.51 acres of land has been involved in a severe legal battle for a while. The resort at Veeranoor oor, near Chindakki, is built adjacent to a tribal settlement with around 49 houses. It is alleged that a part of the tribal land has also been taken for the resort.

Following complaints, the District Collector has ordered an enquiry and action was taken under an RDO. Interestingly, the issue still prevails.

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