

Tension building up in tribal villages

#11200
26-10-88
24/10

By Our Staff Reporter

DAMMAPET (Khammam dt.), Oct. 25.

Tension is building up in the scheduled area villages of Dammamet and Aswaraopet mandals with tribal groups visiting the fields once again, warning farmers against putting up tobacco barns. They resumed the practice of raiding the farms and gardens wherever the crops are turning ripe. With the harvest season approaching, the tribals are turning hostile to non-tribal farmers.

A group of tribal activists led by Mr. Soyam Bojji and Mr. Punem Ramesh organised meetings in the habitations around Malkaram village and warned farmers against harvesting the crop in the disputed lands without an amicable settlement. In Pedagollagudem village, a non-tribal leader was asked to pay a penalty of Rs. 1000 for claiming to have bribed the tribals for buying their silence. Another farmer, who was all set for moving to market the crop from the banana plantation this week, was prevented from doing so.

The tribals, despite differences within their leadership, seem to be acting as per a strategy. They allowed the farmers to make investments as usual in kharif crops raised on both the patta lands and Government lands in their occupation. They extended all cooperation to the officials in identifying the lands in illegal occupation of the farmers. They also helped the officials in identifying the tribal families with zero holdings in the villages for land assignment.

At the crucial stage, however, the tribal leaders made it clear that they would not settle for anything less than distribution of total land under illegal occupation by the non-tribals. What really spurred the tribal leaders back into action is a virtual split in the volunteers of the Sakti organisation working in the district. Mr. Soyam Venkateswarlu, who has so far led the tribal agitation in the area, is at loggerheads with another group of tribals led by Mr. Punem Ramesh and Mr. Soyam Bojji.

While Mr. Venkateswarlu is close to the ruling Telugu Desam Party, Mr. Punem Ramesh and Mr. Bojji are trying hard to disprove the allegations that they are acting at the behest of Congress leaders, particularly the Jalagam group in the district. Mr. Ramesh said he had been in the Congress once upon a time and that at present, he had nothing to do with any political party.

Resenting the announcement made by Mr. Soyam Venkateswarlu expelling him and his supporters from the Sakti recently, he said he had for the past one year been working only for the cause of the tribals and would continue to do so in future as well.

A meeting of supporters of both Mr. Venkateswarlu and Mr. Ramesh held in Rasurupalli village last week witnessed trading of charges. The leaders decided to part ways and concentrate on their respective areas without hampering the interests of the tribal community. Subsequently, both groups stepped up their activities in the villages to assert their importance in their respective areas. They were busy demarcating patta lands and government lands in illegal enjoyment by planting palm twigs.

Yet another tribal group, which also owed its allegiance to the Sakti, is being headed by Mr. Soyam Chandrasekhara of Kotturu village. Mr. Chandrasekhara, who in the very beginning of the agitation incurred the wrath of police in the process of organising the tribals of the Malkaram area, has been maintaining a distance from all political parties. Mr. Chandrasekhara was given about 4.5 acres as part of the land distribution programme but it did not silence him.

He said the land given by the administration would be enjoyed collectively by landless tribals until the land problem was solved permanently. The Sakti, which has been making all out efforts to reorganise itself in Khammam district, is planning to bring him into the forefront of the agitation along with some women leaders.

Counter-measures

Meanwhile, the Police and Revenue departments initiated counter-measures to pacify the tribals. The land survey, which almost came to a standstill in certain pockets, was resumed only on Friday and Saturday. A "Praja Darbar" was organised by the officials at Maddikonda village, of Aswaraopet mandal. The revenue officials read out the land records thus making public the names of the farmers enjoying the land in each survey number. They also assured the tribal volunteers to furnish copies of the land records so as involve them in the identification of land for distribution.

The Mandal Revenue Officer, Mr. Kumaraswamy, assured the tribals that the administration would not spare any farmer found to be enjoying Government land illegally. Such cases would be referred to the legal cell constituted by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency for a final settlement by the court.

The tribal leaders, Mr. Punem Ramesh and Mr. Bojji, who took part in the meeting, wanted the non-tribal farmers, who have purchased lands in the scheduled area villages with the permission of the District Collector before 1970 to prove their legitimate rights over the land by producing the relevant documents in the revenue office.