

Tribals demand rural courts

Express News Service

Rajahmundry, Jan. 24: The tribals of Agency area are demanding revenue officers to hold 'village courts' for instant justice regarding land disputes.

There are several cases relating tribals, whose lands are occupied by non-tribals. There are cases of binami pattadars also who are occupying tribal lands.

If a non-tribal marries a tribal he get access to her property.

There are cases where non-tribals became tribals by getting caste certificates. This was done by bribing the mandal revenue officers. If these matters are reported, to the district head, the collector, he is in a helpless state. Influential landlords go to court and get a stay which prevents the officials from vacating the non-tribals from the lands.

In Paderu, two years ago, village courts were held in tribal areas where the revenue officials concerned held meetings of tribals and non-tribals belonging to a cluster of 15 villages.

The revenue officer then and there passed orders to hand over the land. Once the land was in possession of a tribal, he cultivates it and lives on it. Later the non-tribal may go to court and ask for justice.

The revenue officer who passes the order regarding the handing over of land to the tribal should see to it that revenue machinery is geared up to implement the verdict passed by the revenue officer or sub-collector or joint collector.

There is one special deputy collector for land transfers and regulations to look after land disputes for the entire Agency area. There are a number of stay orders pending in the High Court. The action on the part of the government to vacate the stay is not satisfactory. As a result the poor tribal is suffering for want of justice. There are cases pending in the High Court since 1970 relating to tribal lands.

The tribals are forced to engage a lawyer and shuttle between the court and his native village spending time, money and energy. To spend money on litigation again leads to indebtedness of the poor tribal.

Though the collector disposes of the case in favour of the tribal, the revenue machinery takes its own time to hand over the land to the tribal. Meanwhile, the non-tribal who is rich enough flies to Hyderabad and gets a stay order

in 24 hours. It takes years to vacate the stay.

In village courts the grievances of tribals are heard and the disputes are settled then and there itself.

The recent visit of ENS to Rampachodavaram Agency area has brought to light the main grouse of the tribals that is non-possession of land. These issues can be easily sorted out by village courts. The extremists also welcome such village courts as these measures are beneficial to the tribals.

The most unfortunate thing is lack of co-ordination among government departments. For example, the collector can recommend minimum wages for the forest department, but there is no machinery to implement it. The forest department is not paying minimum wage to its workers.

The IAS, the IFS the IPS each is a kingdom. In their own way they think that the highest officer is the supreme commander.

The Chief Secretary of State Government can call all the departments under one roof and sort out tribals problems.

If an enthusiastic and young officer takes initiative to do some good to the tribals motives are attributed to him.

The tribals do not know how much land is there in the village? Who owns it? Whether tribal? Or non-tribal? How much waste land is there?

The government conducted survey in 1974. The survey results were more favourable to non-tribals. The tribals who are illiterates do not know what is what. A fresh survey has been taken up now.

As one voluntary organisation leader working in agency area puts it, "Government should not monopolise the information. It should share it with the public. The Government should educate the tribals on the land position.

The tribals are always kept in the dark. Taking advantage of the situation the non-tribals are exploiting the tribals by all possible means.

If village courts are conducted non-tribals, binamidars can be easily identified.

Sakthi - a voluntary organisation is organising padayatra from Rajavommangi to Rampachodavaram [90 kms] next month, with tribals, demanding setting up of village courts. There are two more organisations 'Laya' 'Spandana' which may join the padayatra.