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Solution eludes land issue in Koraput

Correspondent

KORAPUT: The recent unrest among tribals and a section of non-tribals in Koraput district and more particularly in Narayanpatna block has received a great attention from the people in the State. Tribals under the banner of Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangh (CMAS) are reclaiming the land from the landlords of the area occupying around 5,000 acres of land in the block. Several non-tribal families have left their villages in fear of attack and the district is constantly getting drawn towards being called as a conflict zone by observers. However neither the issue of land movement nor the tribal uprising in this connection is new to this region, says Bidyut Mahanty, a social activist working on land and displacement issues.

Koraput region witnessed several kinds of uprising and violence in the past. But owing to the complexity of the land issue of the tribals of Koraput and the centuries-old negligence of the administration in the State, time has passed without bringing any substantial changes at grassroots, he alleges.

First incident

The first uprising after Independence came in 1951 in Gunupur area under the leadership of Biswanath Pattnaik, who is also known as Koraput Gandhi. After a long self analysis and reflection, Biswanathji had started Bhoo Satyagrah by mobilising tribals in 30-35 villages of Gunupur region. During the Bhoo Satyagrah, the satyagrahis used to approach the people who had occupied their land and had asked them to move from their land voluntarily. Failing which cases were filed against them. And only when the case was not resolved within two or three hearings, the tribals used to declare their ownership over the piece of land and occupy, Mr. Mahanty says.

Further, the Bhoodan Yagna movement was also initiated in 1955 in the district to bring solution to the problem of landlessness and as per government records, nearly 1,65,260 acres of land was donated by the landlords for the landless ones in the district. The Odisha Bhoodan Yagna Act 1953 was further amended to become the Odisha Bhoodan & Gramdan Act, 1971. However, in Koraput region, even this noble thought had failed to solve the land issue. During the settlement operations the land gifted to Bhoodan Yagna were not recorded in favour of the samiti following which in many cases the land donated in favour of Bhoodan Yagna samiti were re-occupied by the donors themselves.

The problems related to land had got compounded with the establishment of four mega dams (Machhkund, Kolab, Chitrakonda and Indrabati) and two industrial projects (HAL & Nalco) in the region, K. Anuradha, another social activist from Koraput, says. Lack of land-to-land rehabilitation policy in the State has increased the number of landless people in the region. Large-scale commercial plantation such as cashew, eucalyptus and sisal on the common property resources through different projects of the government, further

alienated the poor tribals from their land, she says.

In spite of legislations and schemes that are proclaiming successes in the records and files of the government, the situation might not be better for the tribals unless ground realities are taken into account while making plans for the future, says Mr. Mahanty.

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