
Horrible Conditions of Drought in Anantapur

A 9-Member Committee led by S. Jhansi, President ,RCS (AP) has visited several drought affected villages in Kadiri and Rayadurgam areas of Anantapur district on Mar 31st and April 1st of 2017 to probe into the drought conditions there. The Probing Committee is composed of : 1)S. Jhansi, President, RCS(AP), Convenor; 2)C. Peddanna, AP State President, AIFTU(New); 3)S.M. Basha, Leader, Human Rights Forum; 4)Purendra Prasad, Professor, Central University; 5) Surya Sagar, Rtd. Teacher; 6) Prasanna, Jana Sahiti;7)BajiSaida, State Secretary, PDSO; 8) Singamaneni Narayana, Veteran Writer; 9) B. Timma Reddy, Vice President, RCS(AP).

The Committee met many peasants, agricultural labourers, dalits and women who are mainly dependent on agriculture.

The Committee visited 9 villages in Kadiri area. Here the people said that they saw no drought of this magnitude in the last 40 years. Even many Sarpanches and MPTC members have migrated to Bengaluru and other cities to escape the death – trap of drought. The AP Govt. has declared 63 Mandals of Anantapur district as drought affected areas. But it provided no relief whatsoever for the affected people. In several areas, the peasants have dug up bores as deep as 1000 feet. But they found not a drop of water. Added to this, the peasants are burdened with crores of rupees debts barrowed from money lenders. The Govt. has declared some as “black areas”. It prohibited digging bore wells in these areas. But it made no alternative arrangement to supply at least drinking water for the people as well as their cattle folk.

The peasants in this area cultivate the ground nut crop. But the failure of rains and consequent drought has completely failed the crop. The Govt. has publicized with much fan-fare that it has supplied water to the agricultural fields in Rayadurgam area throw rain guns, and it has spent several crores for this. But, in reality, it was a big flop show. The gun water did not reach the starving fields. The Probing Committee saw a pathetic scene in the villages of this area where the peasants taking their cattle to slaughter houses for want of fodder and drinking water. The peasants are unable to use one or two cows they are left with for milk as they cannot feed them.

In some areas, peasants owning 10 acres are compelled to spend not less than 100 rupees per day for drinking water. The villages present a deserted scene with all, excepting the old and children, migrating to other cities in search of livelihood. Some have gone to distant and unknown places like Kerala and are engaged in begging there. There are instances where the big farmers owning 40 acres of land are working as security guards. The buses are making three trips a day to Bengaluru to take migrating people from Kadiri area.

No work is provided in this area under the MNREGS. The laboring masses have told the probing committee that many of them are yet to get the wages for the work done by them six months back. The women of this area are going to far away areas near Chennai for work. Every day, they start from their homes at 4-AM and are able to return to their homes as late as 1-AM in the night. They cook and carry the food to their work places. Some women are working as ayas in the houses or cleaning the utensils in Kalyana Mandaps in Bengaluru. Some women are said to have become prostitutes to feed their families. The agony these women are experiencing is difficult to imagine and explain.

The migrating people having the ration cards come to their villages on to collect the ration from the shop and give it to the family members who are staying back in the villages. Acquiring a ration card, retaining it and getting the ration continue to be a difficult and costly job for the poor. Many are opting for simple and common marriage functions as they find it difficult to bear the costs individually.

Even two per cent of peasants were not freed from debts. Majority of peasants have taken loans from private money lenders. But the Govts' debt relief will not apply to the loans of this kind. These peasants never get the seeds in time. Sometimes, the crops like tomato and maize are getting destroyed by virus. We witness the educated youth roaming in the streets finding no job or are turning into migrant workers.

The urge for water is quite stronger among the rural masses. The probing Committee found that the claims of govt. that it had provided sufficient irrigation water to the people of Rayalaseema and particularly Anantapur district through Handrineeva project are false. The canals, tanks and bore wells are empty. The peasants and rural masses as a whole say in one voice that the irrigation water alone can be an immediate solution to the problems of their lives.

The Probing Committee demands immediate steps by the government to address the problems of drought – affected people of Anantapur district:

Here are the DEMANDS:

1. Drinking water be arranged to all villages on a war footing. Arrange the Water Grid for Anantapur district and supply the drinking water to the entire district;
2. The Govt. must take up the drought relief works immediately in all 63 Mandals declared as drought affected;
3. Fodder be supplied for the cattle;
4. Prevent migrations by providing the work;
5. Supply the drinking water and also water for irrigation and other uses as an alternative for the people in the areas declared as 'black areas';
6. Implement the employment guarantee schemes for all the people and ensure the immediate payment of wages in cash form then and there;
7. Provide the facilities to the peasants to produce crops that require less investment. The govt. to take the responsibility to supply better seeds;
8. The Councillings Centres be set up in every Mandal and the morale of the peasants be raised not to commit suicides;
9. The irrigation water be provided through Handrineeva project sub-channel; tanks be filled. This project be completed on a war footing. Atleast, Rs 2000 crores be immediately allotted to this project;
10. Medical teams be sent to the villages to help the people in withstanding the heat of summer;
11. All the school fee be cancelled in the drought affected areas.
