

Decade Long Peasants' Struggle summed up in the Convention

As I travelled from Guntur in AP to Bellary in Karnataka, the vast expanse of parched lands has no state borders. The region is rain shadow area and chronically drought prone. Surprisingly, lush green vegetation greeted me when I reached Chaganur and Sirivari villages near the district headquarter town Ballari. The taluk of Ballari along with Hospet and Siriguppa are few taluks blessed with water when Tungabhadra dam came up. The lands turned fertile having two crops a year and even three.

The state government decided to build another airport for Bengaluru and notified the lands of these two villages. The people stood firm to protect their lands. The attempt at acquiring lands from the farmers by the government in 2009 led to the formation of Chaganuru - Sirivari neeravari Land Protection Committee. The resistance to land acquisition is going on since then.

"The decade long struggle for land-rights has taught us many things", said R. Madhava Reddy, leader of Karnataka Rajya Rytu Sangha (KRRS), "It has brought us many friends. Love for our lands has enabled us to face and bear with steadfastness, the many wounds inflicted on us, the many false cases foisted against us and the many humiliations hurled at us. We truly believe that practice of agriculture is a way of life and that it has led mankind into civilization and progress"

"We firmly oppose the anti-peasant policies of the governments and those who have tried to create a wrong impression that a peasant's venture is a wasteful exercise", said Mallikarjuna Reddy leader of the land protection committee, "We understand and believe that peasantry and the agricultural labour will not accept government's alms as charity and certainly will lead a life of dignity, based on the sweat of their labour in the lands of their own".

This spirit reflected in their multiple activities. Joining hands Land protection Committee and KRRS took up many programmes opposing introduction of Bt cotton, agitated against the move by the government to scale down the Ballari hospital and many other problems faced by the people. With the help from the irrigation experts, they studied the irrigation water scarcity and found that building sub-surface dams would conserve the water and planned utilisation of water flowing in Tungabhadra River would serve agricultural needs both in Karnataka and adjacent Rayalaseema in AP.

The KRRS and Land protection Committee jointly organized a two day convention on February 1 & 2, 2019 in Raghava Kalamandiram in Ballari town. The first day of the convention began at 11 am with bullock-cart rally by the peasants from Chaganuru and Sirivara. The Rally was flagged off by Jodalarasi Gutti Chandrasekhara Reddy, a literary person of repute both in Telugu and Kannada languages from Raghava kalamandiram. It passed through the thoroughfares of the town for three hours led by the Madhava Reddy and Mallikarjuna Reddy along with T G Vittal, agricultural scientist Nagaraju, Maruti Manpade and AIKMKS leaders Subodh Mitra and S.Jhansi.

The convention started in the afternoon at 2-30 pm which was presided by Ms. Khazabanu. The speakers consisting of Maruti Manpade, S.R. Hiremat, S. Jhansi, Subodh Mitra, C.Peddanna, Nagabhushan Rao and Madhava Reddy explained the problems that are being faced by the peasants and called upon the people to struggle against the anti-peasant policies of the government.

At 6 pm a session of solidarity to peasants by the writers and artists took place at the same venue. While Gutti Chandrasekhara Reddy presided the meeting, Prof. Rahamat Tarikere (Hampi University), Suryasagar of Janasahiti, Jan Nagaraju and Kalkura addressed the meeting. Describing the struggle for land by the peasants of Chaganuru and Sirivara, two books were released in the solidarity session – "*Namma Bhoomi; Namma Horata*" in Kannada and "*Maa Bhoomi; Maa Poratam*" in Telugu. The speakers at length described the difficulties faced by the Chaganuru and Sirivara peasants during their decade long struggle for their land and expressed their solidarity with their just cause.

On the second day, a meeting of the members of the KRRS was held to discuss the problems faced by the people in the district and to discuss the organization. The meeting discussed the working of the government hospitals in the area, starting of agricultural college in the district, how to overcome the drought situation prevailing in 12 villages of this area and other issues. Leaders, invitees and members participated actively in the discussion. The meeting passed a resolution affiliating KRRS to the AIKMKS.

As a conclusion, the Chief Engineer of Telugu Ganga Project, Er.Pratap, explained how the construction of sub-surface dams built on Papaghni River benefitted the farmers through power point presentation and promised to extend all his help in the case they plan to building of sub-surface dams on Hagari River.

All through the convention, members of Peoples Literary and Cultural Front displayed their adept skill by singing peoples' songs.

- Our Reporter
