

An “occcupy movement” by the tribals of Alirajpur

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As “Occupy movements” are beginning to emerge as the latest form of protest across the world, tribals of Alirajpur have started an “occupy movement” of their own.

For the last three and a half weeks, over tribals displaced due to the Sardar Sarovar dam Project (SSP) have been occupying and tilling government land in protest against their not receiving land as compensation for their submerged lands under the dam project.

The Sardar Sarovar is one of the 30 large dams planned across the Narmada river and has been mired in controversy for decades over the slow progress of rehabilitation of the project affected families.

The “oustees” of the SSP say that they will continue with the Satyagraha until they receive their share of cultivable, irrigable and suitable land from the Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA).

The protestors have occupied lands belonging to the Jobat Agricultural and Seed Production Farm and started sowing maize on them.

The “Zameen Haq Satyagraha” (Land right movement) is the last resort after trying out 15 years of “dialogue and agitation” with the NVDA authorities and the Madhya Pradesh government, claim the protesters.

Way back in 1979, the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award was pronounced deciding the rights of people affected by the SSP and responsibilities of M.P. Maharashtra and Gujarat, according to which every Project Affected Family (PAF) that lost more than 25% land was to be given a minimum of 2 hectares of cultivable and irrigable agricultural land.

Thereafter, three SC judgments (1991, 2000, 2005) and several rulings of the Griveance Redressal Authority, M.P., upheld the right of the affected people to cultivable land as compensation.

“This satyagraha is only the beginning of another long-drawn struggle with the State, but what choice do we have?” says Baba Maharia of Jalsindhi village, a long time struggler in the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Over 120 families of Alirajpur and another 30 families of Barwani claim that they still have not received “cultivable, irrigable” land.

The authorities, including the NVDA and the district administration, claim these are inflated figures.

“Right now there are only 27-28 people left and all the others have accepted the Special Rehabilitation Package offered by the state government,” says Alirajpur collector Pushpalata Singh.

The figures claimed by the NBA and the administration are great variance due to the fact that most

affected families in Alirajpur have received ex-parte (one-sided) land based compensation.

“This means they have been compelled by the NVDA to accept land from the government land bank which is totally unusable,” says Shrikanth of the Naramada Bachao Andolan.

In April, 2000, the Madhya Pradesh Government, through an additional affidavit before the SC, furnished details of the Land Bank, which included private land and government waste land to be used for providing land-based compensation to the affected people.

However, the protesters claim that the land being offered to them from the government Land Bank is either rocky and uncultivable or has been under encroachment for the last two to three decades.

“We have tried talking to the protesters about that. The encroachments, if any, will of course be removed before giving possession. But most of the land in Alirajpur is anyway not good quality so there is not much that can be done about that,” says Ms. Singh.

P.S.

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