

Press Release : 25 July, 2013

Amrithmahal Kaval Hitharakshana Vedike

Chitradurga Deputy Commissioner Office Swarmed by Hundreds of Villagers and Thousands of Sheep

Protest against illegal diversion of Grasslands intensifies

- Over 1,000 people gather along with 4,000 sheep protest against handing over of Amrithmahal Kavals to DRDO, IISC, BARC and other institutes
- Noted Writer Banjagere Jayaprakash and others address the rally and condemn the government's move in illegally diverting Amrithmahal Kavals
- Residents of 80 villages threaten to boycott Lok Sabha polls if illegal diversion of Amrithmahal Kavals not reversed
- Memorandum submitted to DC highlighting severe impacts on rural life and asking for their rightful access to Kavals to be restored
- DC assures that until the cases are settled in the court, access to grazing, water and other needs in the Kavals will be reinstated

Background

The massive diversion of around 10,000 acres of Amrithmahal Kavals in Chalakere Taluk in Chitradurga District for a variety of industrial, defence, institutional and infrastructure developments by the Deputy Commissioner of Chitradurga since 2009 has caused widespread concern. The diversion has caused agony to thousands of pastoral and farming families dependent on the Kavals for their livelihoods, as various beneficiaries of land have begun project activities by building high walls and thus blocking access to the Kavals. These developments have been challenged before the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka and the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal (Southern Zone).



Massive Rally taken out in Chitradurga

The struggle to preserve the Amrithmahal Kavals in Chitradurga has intensified. Earlier this morning 1000 people from about 80 villages dependent on the Kavals for their livelihoods took out a rally under the "Bruhat Kurigala Pratibhatane" banner from the Government Science College to the DC's office in Chitradurga. In an unusual display of dissent, the shepherding communities brought along with them about 4,000 sheep for the protest reiterating the heavy dependence on livestock rearing in this region and the impact of cutting off access to the grazing lands crucial for their livelihoods.



Addressing the rally, **noted author Banjagere Jayaprakash** said that the State and Central Governments should reconsider the decision of diverting the Kavals and should take necessary steps to restore access for the communities. He said that the manner in which the lands have been given away has resulted in gross injustice.

Meese Mahalingappa, ZP member and President of the Nomadic Shepherds Association said that the struggle to preserve the Kavals will intensify until they get the Kavals back. **Karianna GP member from Dodda Ullarathi** said that false documents have been submitted in the court and previous court rulings have been flouted to approve these projects. He said the officials guilty of this should be immediately suspended. He also said that the people will continue to fight for what is rightfully theirs and the Government will be responsible for the unrest.

Muruga Rajendra said **Aditya Amlan Biswas, the ex-DC of Chitradurga who had falsely submitted facts in favour of the project should be suspended.**



According to the 73rd amendment of the constitution, the Gram Sabhas should have been consulted and their approval sought before giving away the Kavals and the DC is guilty of flouting this. He also said that the region has been suffering from prolonged drought and the people are heavily dependent on livestock-rearing. In the absence of alternatives, the struggle to secure the grazing lands will only intensify in the future.

Nilkantha Mama, an elderly nomadic shepherd from Belgaum also addressed the gathering. He said he has grazed his sheep in these kavals and has seen that they are rich in medicinal plant wealth. There are also several fruits and tubers that they would eat while grazing their sheep and he attributes his good health and the longevity of his ancestors to these foods. He extended his support for the campaign and said these kavals are crucial for their survival. Women from Dodda Ullarathi and Molakalmuru sang songs on the Kavals.

The rally concluded with a submission of a memorandum to the DC, Chitradurga. The DC accepted the memorandum from the people and assured that until the court orders are passed, access to the Kavals will be restored. He also said that no other Kavals in the district will be given away for development projects in the future. He assured that goshalas will be set up in order to address the growing fodder crisis.



Some of the main points of the memorandum were:

- * With the fodder prices sky-rocketing, and access to kavals cut off, they are unable to either maintain or sell off their livestock and are in a desperate situation.
- * About 70 of the *Devara Dana* have been lost
- * The state has flouted the forest conservation laws, violated human rights and the 73rd amendment of the constitution making a mockery of democracy
- * All the beneficiaries have begun work without obtaining any environmental clearances. By constructing high walls, they are restricting the movements of people, livestock and even wild animals, thus taking away their right to life
- * It is inhuman that the decision makers take decisions for the villages and kavals from their airconditioned rooms without even visiting them
- * If the government does not intervene and does not provide immediate relief, the

affected 80 villages will boycott the upcoming LS elections and the government will be responsible for the resulting chaos

The organizations which participated in the protests are – Karnataka Raita Sangha; Mahila Samakhya; Janamukhi Sanghatane, Chitradurga; Alemari Budakattu Mahasabha, Bangalore; Jilla Gollara Sangha, Chitradurga; Karnataka Banjara Janajagruti Abhiyana Samiti, Chitradurga; Chitradurga Jilla Valmiki Sanghatane; Satyameva Jayate Yuvaraksha Sangha; Chitradurga Jilla Pinjara Janajagruti Abhiyana Samiti; Jilla Kurubara Sangha Neeravari Horata Samiti; Bayaluseeme Grameena Abhivruddhi Samsthe; All India Kisan Sabha.

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1 The local communities rear native varieties such as Amruthmahal and Hallikar, another indigenous breed of cattle and crossbreeds of these. These pure breeds are known as "*Devara Dhana*" or "God's cattle". The females of these cattle are never given away; only the male calf is given away. This is done to preserve the breed purity. The families, which take care of the '*Devara dhana*' have been doing so for generations. They graze the '*Devara dhana*' in these Kavals. These families are custodians of genetic diversity of some of the last remaining pure breeds. Pertinently, after the diversion of these Kavals, the population of these *Devara Dhana* cattle have significantly reduced, due to the lack of grazing space.

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