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17 families face threat of eviction

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Seventeen families of the Malekudis, (tribals of the Western Ghats) of Gundia Totha on the banks of Gundia River in Siribagilu village are living on the edge. A village accountant (VA) has just visited them and jotted down additional details of the people living in the village. They now fear that they can be evicted from their homes at any point.

“The VA visited us last month, and ever since we have been apprehensive. I don’t want to move out of my land. I am a small time farmer; I am completely content living here. Officials are trying to lure me and the other farmers with Rs 10 lakh per acre. But we have opposed the project,” says Lingappa, who’s been residing in Gundia for thirty years.

Gundia Totha, is on the foothills of Shiradi Ghats. It will be submerged once GHEP is implemented. As per the proposal, waters from the generating station will be let out into the Gundia River, which will swell and flood all the villages on the banks of this river.

The villagers are well aware of the adverse impacts of the project. “We are already suffering from the elephant menace, because of the railway project and the Kemphole Mini Hydel project. These two projects have disturbed the elephant corridor, and now we are dealing with crop damage and deaths,” says Jayakumar, another villager.

He adds that the Kemphole project has already cost many lives. “Every monsoon, the river swells whenever waters are let open from the hydel project without any warning. About 20 people have died in the past two years. If Gundia project is implemented then, all the villages alongside Gundia River will be badly affected,” he adds.

The fate now of these villagers rests on the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, and the Union forest minister Jairam Ramesh.

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