

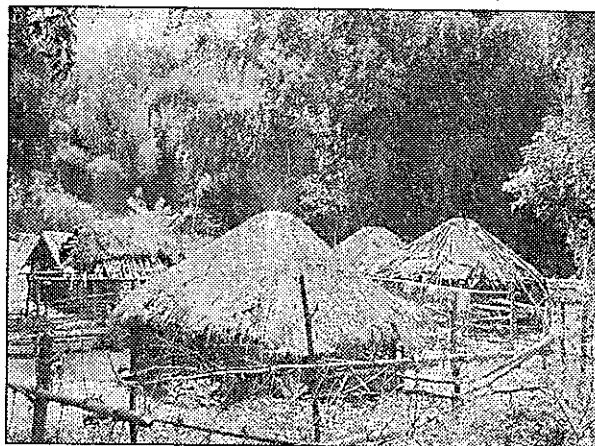
Tribal families in Nagarhole await relocation

By AMIT S UPADHYE

Nagarhole, Dec 11: Tribals living deep inside the Nagarhole National Park have only one prayer on their minds. They have been asking the State Government to rehabilitate them. But their pleas have fallen on deaf ears for more than a decade now.

In 1989, a census conducted by Forest department found 1,550 families in 55 tribal settlements. There were 900 families in Kodagu district and 600 families in Mysore district.

With tribals mounting pressure on the Government, around 600 families were relocated on 1,200 acres of fertile land in Virajpet taluk in Nemmale



A tribal settlement at Madnor in Anechowkur Range in Nagarhole Nation Park.

— Photo courtesy P M Muthanna

grama in 1995

In 1997-99, 50 families moved to Nagapura of Hunsur taluk. In 2000, 155 families moved in and

another 45 in 2001. This year, 30 families arrived and now only 1,270 families are inside the forest.

The process of reloca-

tion went on smoothly until the NGOs dealing with human rights intervened and stopped the resettlement, on the plea that tribals can co-exist with wild animals.

Today, the co-existence has cost the tribal families quite a lot. Most of them suffer from diseases like tuberculosis, skin disease, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), besides malnutrition. Their average life span has been reduced 50 to 55 years. Infant mortality rate has increased and they fall prey to wild animals in search of food.

A cluster of organisations including Wildlife First and Coorg Wildlife Society, led by Living Inspiration for Tribals (LIFT), have been

working for tribal resettlement in the Nagarhole forests for more than 15 years.

According to P M Muthanna, secretary of LIFT, around 500 tribal families are ready to move out. At Solleपुरa reserve forest, 75 houses have been built to accommodate the first batch.

"The relocation will benefit both tribals and animals. But the State machinery is moving at snail's pace making things difficult," he said.

According to Forest department officials, the proposal to appoint a Deputy Conservator of Forest (DCF) for relocation of tribals in Nagarhole forest, is pending before the Government.