

Kerala: Trees they raised bring them windfall

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KOZHIKODE: The tribespeople of Vattachira colony in Kodenchery panchayat in the district have received a windfall from the Silver Oak trees they had planted on land assigned to them for their rehabilitation over three decades ago.

The 135 tribal families in the colony are glad that the forest department has finally decided to grant them their rightful due, though the department took a decade to give tribespeople their share of the money from selling the trees they had planted and raised.

As per the order of the state forest department, administrative sanction has been granted to use Rs 53 lakh (80%) of the Rs 66 lakh income received from sale of Silver Oak trees which were felled in 2010. The money will be transferred to the district collector for development of tribal

farmers who had planted the trees and for the comprehensive development of the tribal colony.

The tribespeople have been demanding their share earned by the government through the sale of trees since they had planted and raised the hundreds of Silver Oak trees in 94 hectares assigned through the Tribal Rehabilitation Development Mission in 1980s to set up a collective farm.

The Silver Oak trees were planted by the tribals under a project of the forest department's social forestry wing and the Silver Oaks were used as support trees for pepper. The tribal farm experiment didn't yield expected results and the land was divided and given to individual families in 2003.

"The decision to grant money to the tribals was taken in line with the 80:20 profit sharing ratio followed by the social forestry wing when it raised plantations in public land belonging to other agencies like PWD. As the land was assigned to tribals, they had a right over the income from the trees and now the money will be used for development of the colony," Kozhikode DFO M Rajeevan said.

Tribal chieftain of the colony Ayyppan Vattachira said that the move by the forest department to finally grant the money was a welcome decision which was long overdue.

"I remember my parents and others planting the trees. We were then promised that we would get income from the trees when they were felled. And when the trees were felled in 2010 we were told that the tribal farmers would receive money but it didn't happen for long. Now we are glad that the forest department has finally decided to give us our due," he said.

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