

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

1.1 The strategy of rural development in India, often the changing its course, had been one that primarily accentuated trend capitalist development. This approach had brought to the fore a paradoxical situation : On the one side surplus raising peasants had been growing in number while on the other many households that practised subsistence farming had been either converted as poor peasants or agricultural labourers. Though the polarisation as such might not have resulted, in the growing strength of the proletariat, the differentiation of peasantry has been so variegated in nature that many whose peasant status in government records as stated as marginal farmers or small farmers are no better than agricultural labourer. The occupational distribution of labour force in the village had undergone a cataclysmic change with the entry of market force. Artisans and other occupational groups have been rendered jobless and they have been relegated to the status of labourers. Though it is agricultural labour who form the bulk of this labour force, a rural unemployed labour force can be discerned in every village.

1.2 Rural unrest, especially in Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh has been reported widely in the media over the last decades. It is often proclaimed by the state that the development process pursued will lead to an overall improvement in the living standards of the downtrodden sections in the society. On the contrary, the same developmental process pursued by the state has actually led to rural unrest as witnessed in some parts of the country, especially the Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh.

1.3 The terms of reference of the study are :—

- (i) The socio-economic causes for rural unrest in Telanga.
- (ii) The role of rural poor-oriented radical activist groups in channelising agrarian unrest into agrarian movements.
- (iii) The possible remedies in the socio-economic sphere to overcome the causes for unrest.

1.4 Rural Labour and Rural Unrest : A broad definition of rural labour would include as per census classification, those who work in agriculture either as family labour or wage labour, household industry, self-employed artisans other extractive industries, fishing and construction. These labourers are engaged in paid or unpaid work and in most of the cases the wages are paid partly in cash and partly in kind, though cash payment is slowly gaining precedence over

kind payment. A section of these labourers may possess land, either due to the inheritance or due to the distribution of surplus lands taken over by the Government as a sequel to the implementation of ceilings on land holdings, but they draw their sustenance mainly due to their wage labour.

1.5 The term rural unrest may connote a state of disequilibrium, if one considers equilibrium as a situation of tranquility. This term is interpreted by the State as a situation where law and order usually breaks down, but there are cases where even if law and order is not a cause of serious concern, there could be political overtones to it. Apparently, there may be serene situation for all outward appearance, but the discontentment may be brewing. In all these situations it can be predicted that unrest prevails, through there may be a degree of difference between one village and another village or between one region and another region. A delimitation of this concept can be that the state, which is often characterised by its class nature, perceives a threat to its class interest. This perception would often lead to state intervention and the state presents a view to the populace that it is trying to set right the situation which could often mean that it will protect the class interests. The term rural unrest would be periorative as the question one should answer is unrest for whom. In the perception of the state, it is unrest caused by the rural labour and other deprived sections in the society due to the airing of their grievances outside the norms considered by the state as legitimate.

1.6 The rural labour are basically an unorganised force and give, but there are certain areas where agricultural labour organisations or other organisations of peasantworkers solidarity have come up to project the demands of these poorer strata of the society. In order to understand the present rural unrest, one should not only try to understand the contradictions of the agrarian structure of Telangana region that have created a condition of unrest but one should also study the role played by some radical political organisations and activist group which have generated hidden tensions into open unrest through political mobilisation of the have nots.

1.7 In the limited time that was available to the study group, the study group could not undertake a detailed analysis of the causes for rural unrest in all the districts of Telangana region. In order to get a bird's eye view of the agrarian structure, the group depended on available agricultural census data of 1985-86 and the 1981 census. These sources are

dated and there are other limitations associated with the quantitative interpretation of data. In order to understand the gravity of the rural unrest the group concentrated mostly on all rural districts in the entire Telangana region. The districts are : Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam, Nizamabad, Nalgonda Mahaboobnagar, Medak and Ranga Reddy.

1.8 The primary sources in this quick study include interviews of the peasants in certain villages that had witnessed militant struggles. The secondary sources include published and unpublished studies. The members of the study team had stayed in the villages for the collection of the relevant material pertaining to the overall district studies.

## CHAPTER II

### AGRARIAN STRUCTURE IN TELANGANA

2.1 The Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh is the Telugu speaking region of the erstwhile Hyderabad State. It consists of ten districts viz, Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Nizamabad, Khammam, Wedal, Nalgonda, Mahabubnagar, Ranga Reddy and Hyderabad. In order to understand the present agrarian structure, a brief outline of the agrarian structure in the recent past is presented here.

2.2 The land tenures in the Hyderabad state, prior to the merger of this state in one Indian union, fall broadly under two different categories, viz. Ryotwari and Non-ryotwari. Under the ryotwari system, the ryot or the cultivator holds his land directly from the government. The ryot enjoyed all the advantages of a perpetual lease, without its disadvantages and responsibilities so long as he paid to the government his share in the produce that is the land revenue due from the land (C. H. H. Rao, 1965). In contrast to ryotwari tenure the Jagirdari system and other non-ryotwari tenures were of such nature, where the jagirdars and other sub-tenants were given rights to collect revenue from the land cultivation and keep a major share for themselves and remitting the remaining amount to the state. Thus, these jagirdars were the assignees of the land revenue and did not have any proprietary rights over the soil. Out of 53 million acres of land in Hyderabad state, about 30 million acres constituting around 60 percent of the total land were under the government land system called the Diwani or Khalsa area. About 15 million acres of land, that is about 30 per cent were under the Jagirdari system and the remaining 10 percent of land was under sarf-e-khas system, or it is Nizam's own direct estate. (YVK Rao, 1976).

2.3 The Jagirdar is a proto type of a feudal land and became landlords. In many cases, was under ryotwari tenure, the deshmukhs and deshpandes—merely revenue collectors—usurped land and became landlords. In many cases, they grabbed lands by fraud in countless instances which reduced the actual cultivators to the status of a tenant-at-will or a 'Dora' often a combination lord, addressed as 'Dora' often a combination of landlord-moneylender and village official, traditionally enjoyed several privileges, including the services of occupational castes in return for some payments either in cash or kind, but more often exacted these services without payment owing to his power and position. Such exaction had become legitimised overtime by what was known as the "vetti" system under which a landlord could force a family among his customary retainers to cultivate his land and to do one job

or the other to master. Most the agricultural labourers on whom the "vetti" obligations fell, were, from the lower and untouchable castes of malas and madigas (D.N. Dhanegare, 1969).

2.4 Some of the biggest landlords, whether jagirdars or deshmukhs, owned thousands of acres of land. Such concentration of ownership was more pronounced in Nalgonda, Mahabubnagar and Warangal than elsewhere. As per the administrative report of 1950-51, in the above three districts, the number of patta-dars owning more than 500 acres were about 550, who owned more than 60 to 70 per cent of the total cultivable land (P. Sundaraya, 1972).

2.5 The severe exploitation of the peasantry resulted in an upsurge of peasant movements directed against the government, landlords, deshmukh and their agents. By 1946, the movement became militant and this finally led to the Telangana armed struggle carried under the aegis of the Andhra Maha Sabha. (D N. Dhanegare, 1969).

2.6 To contain the agrarian crisis, the Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Land Act was promulgated in 1950. The implementation of this Act has been hailed as one of the most progressive pieces of legislation in the entire country (P. C. Joshi 1976). In the otherwise dismal record of land legislation in India the protected Tenancy Act had been implemented with moderate success (G. Parthasarathy & B. Prasada Rao, 1969). The implementation of this Act had been much better in the more conscious diwani areas than in the Jagir area, (A.M. Khurso, 1958). The Act pertaining to ceiling on landholdings had been implemented after 1972 and land transfer regulation Acts were also passed to protect the ownership of land by tribals in notified tribal areas. A perusal of the reviews on the implementation of these Acts shows that these enactments removed a tiny fraction of irritants in the agrarian system. Agrarian structure did not undergo any radical change due to the implementation of the various legislative provisions (P.T. George, 1969).

2.7 The changes that occurred in the number of cultivators and area of operational holding by different size classes between 1976-77 and 1980-81 will give an indication of the structural changes in the agrarian system. Between 1967-77 and 1980-81, 12 lakh hectares of area had been transferred. In the size classes of less than one hectare, 1-2 hectares, 2-4 hectares, there had been an increase in the area under operational holdings by 5 lakh hectares, 4 lakh hectares, and 3 lakh hectares respectively. Hence the

supply of land distributed to landless labourers can at best be 5 lakh hectares. Even in the implementation of the Act on ceilings on landholdings, the landlord's managed to keep the surplus land under their effective control, even though on record it had been shown as transferred to landless labourers. One mechanism had been to form a co-operative farming society for these labourers on paper, but effectually manage the land as it had been under their control in earlier times (Seetha Rama Rao, 1982).

2.8 The implementation of these Acts had led to a lessening of the concentration of land in a legal sense. It can be observed that a greater number of operational holdings operating relatively a larger area in the lower size classes can be observed in the districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Medak, while the number is increasing at a faster pace in Warangal

district. In the 4-10 hectare size classes, the number of peasants as well as area operated had gone down considerably in Adilabad, Karimnagar and Nizamabad districts. In the 10 hectares and above category, the percentage declined by number as well as area operated was considerably high in the case of Warangal, Khammam and Karimnagar districts. (F. Papi Reddy, 1990). Thus the concentration of land in the hands of a few which also leads to the exercise of control over village economic resources, still excludes the legal provisions.

2.9 In such a skewed agrarian structure, agricultural labourers are at the other end of the spectrum of agrarian relations, their number had been growing overtime in most of the districts. Table 2.1 shows the growth of agricultural labour force in the ten districts of Telangana between 1971 and 1981.

Table 2.1 - Growth of Agricultural Labour between 1971 and 1981.

Districts	Agricultural labour as a percentage of rural population		Percent change
	1961	1971	
Hyderabad*	16.77	17.70	-5.25
Nizamabad	16.77	13.90	+20.65
Medak	16.27	16.60	-1.99
Mahabubagar	18.21	20.00	-8.95
Nalgonda	18.81	17.80	+5.67
Warangal	18.93	18.40	+2.87
Khammam	21.26H	19.60	+8.47
Karimnagar	19.90	17.00	+17.06
Adilabad.	18.97	16.30	+16.38

Source : Census data 1971 & 1981.

\*-1 Hyderabad also includes Ranga Reddy district, as it was formed after 1971.

2.10 The table shows that Nizamabad, Karimnagar and Adilabad had registered more than 15 percent increase in agricultural labour force. All these three districts are also the districts wherein the rural unrest had been reported to be high. Even though a caution as such may not be established, growth of agricultural labour force is one of the factors that could have led to rural unrest.

2.11 The table given below shows the composition of male and female agricultural labourers in the total work force.

2.12 The table shows that the percentage of female labour engaged in agriculture is the highest in Khammam. Incidentally the percentage of labour force engaged in agriculture is the highest in Khammam, though the overall ratio of agricultural labour to total workers is above 30 percent in all the districts. The percentage of male labour engaged in agriculture is

less than 30 in all the districts, except Khammam. Hence female employment is mostly in agriculture.

2.13 The pattern of employment in villages largely depends on the land use as agriculture still provides employment to a greater proportion of rural population. But the production relations had been slowly changing and the labour utilization is more in districts like Nalgonda, Karimnagar and Nizamabad where irrigation facilities have improved due to the major irrigation projects like Nagarjuna sagar and Sreeramsagar projects. The advent of new technology is not yet rampant, but the use of tractors had been mainly for transportation purposes (Laxmaiah, 1990; Murali 1991). These changes in the agrarian system have led to unleashing of productive forces but the agrarian social structure had been archaic in its nature.

2.14 The villages of Telangana are dominated by big landlords or doras whose writ runs unquestioned in

TABLE 2.2 Composition of Labour Force, 1981

District	Percentage of agricultural labour to total workers	Percentage of male agricultural labour to the total male workers	Percentage of female agricultural labour to the total female workers
Hyderabad . . . . .	33.83	22.00	53.69
Nizamabad . . . . .	31.71	24.20	38.60
Medak . . . . .	33.52	22.74	52.01
Mahabubnagar . . . . .	36.02	22.42	54.94
Nalgonda . . . . .	39.44	27.11	63.08
Warangal . . . . .	40.38	27.84	64.10
Khammam . . . . .	46.45	33.00	73.27
Karimnagar . . . . .	37.88	28.09	52.13
Adilabad . . . . .	39.52	29.89	56.44

his village or villages under his control. The remnants of old deshmukhs, deshpanders or maktendars who are still big landlords wield influence in the districts of Adilabad, Warangal, Mahabubnagar and Karimnagar. If these can be classified as first category of landlords, the second category of landlords own between 100 and 500 acres of land, who were earlier subordinate to some deshmukhs of maktendars. These landlords grabbed a lot of land, even exercising control over the commons in the villages and this type of landlords can be seen in most parts of Telangana, especially in Nizamabad, Nalgonda and Khammam, apart from the above districts. The third type of landlords is one who had only 50 to 100 acres of land. Such type of doras are present everywhere in Telangana but more so in districts like Ranga Reddy and Medak (T. Papi Reddy, 1990).

2.15 Caste and class go together as almost all doras belong to forward castes like Velama, Reddy, Kamma and Brahmin. Apart from the dora, there will be a few other big land owners and rich peasants in the villages. Between them they own or occupy all the best land in the village. Besides the patta land held by these classes, other middle and poor peasants, each normally contains a considerable amount of common property resources or public land within its boundaries ranging from 50 to 100 acres. Sometimes even to thousand acres depending upon the local topography. These common property resources are of three kinds : Cultivate wastes (Pramboke), Uncultivate Waste (Banjar) and tank-bed (Sikham).

2.16 In most of the villages in Telangana the use of common property resources are controlled by the landlords (Subba Rao, 1991). Even in those villages these resources are being customarily used by

barjans for raising crops or by fishermen for fishing purposes. The vested interests exploit the poorer sections of the society, especially, the labourers. In one village the fishermen who customarily used to fish with their own equipment have been transformed simply into labourers on the days of fishing operations by the contractors (A. S. Reddy & Girija Rani, 1991). In many villages, the porambokes were occupied by the landlords. Thus, the common property resources have become private property resources, where the use of such land of grazing cattle have to be done with the permission of dora and sometimes payments to be made for such use of land.

2.17 Each landlord usually has a battery of farm-servants or attached labourers working for him. They were paid an annual or monthly wage in cash and or kind, amounting to about Rs.1,000—1200 per year. These labourers are almost like bonded labour working throughout the day and late in the night. They cannot break their bondage since the miserable wage forces them to borrow and they are perpetually indebted to the landlord. Indeed many of them actually enter into this relation because of debts, selling one's labour and freedom as a farm-servant, as it is the only way of redeeming a debt which cannot be repaid in cash. He may not be exactly like a bonded labourer, but his low wages forces a situation where he is paid a substantial amount in advance at the beginning of the year and while this advance is usually interest free, his incapacity to repay it in the middle of the year keeps him tied to the landlord and also keeps him obedient to the landlord. Such a type of production as semi-feudal relations in his analysis of production relations in West Bengal. (Amir Bhaduri, 1973).

2.18 There are two forms of exploitation in Telangana—(i) exploitation in the production process and (ii) exploitation through other non-productive channels. As regards wage labour, the landlord demands certain form of vetti or else, he pays them much less than what the smaller landlords and rich peasants do. Women, for instance were paid about Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 per day for transplanting paddy. The landlord pay 50 paise less Vetti is nothing other than free labour service or corvee as it was called in European feudalism. In Telangana even an owner peasant, including rich peasant had to perform vetti demanded by dora.

2.19 Vetti expands to non-agricultural occupations and covers all the toiling masses. Normally the shepherds charge a certain amount of money to rest a flock of sheen in a peasant's field for one night. But dora demands that this should be done on vetti basis. The potter has to supply free pots; the carpenter has to do job-work free; the toddy tappers have to keep a certain number of those trees free to his family, the dhobi to wash the clothes freely. For household service the dhobis and barbers have to put in vetti labour and the madiga (Chamar) community has to supply one or two medigas in each year. The amount of vetti grows, Pari Passu with the area of land occupied by the dora. When the dora demands vetti from the different sections of the village society, the ostensible reason is that all of them use his land. Since dora exercise control over all the common property resources apart from his land, this is inevitable. Hence the occupation of uncultivable wastes has become a lucrative affair for the doras.

2.20 In general 15 to 20 per cent of the produce is handed over to the dora as vetti. The exploitation is accompanied by ruthlessness. Anyone who refuses to do vetti is thrashed by the private army of dora, maintained by him specially for this purpose. If someone refuses to acquiesce, he is driven out of the village and his property is confiscated, or in the worst case, he is killed.

2.21 In these extra-economic coercions, the dora is usually supported by the village administration. The patels and patwaris were subordinate to him. In certain areas, the dora himself was often the police patel and mali-patel. Even the Hindu caste panchayat which is usually an accepted authority for the arbitration of disputes, got transformed into one man panchayat. The dora arbitrates all disputes and judges all caste conflicts and nobody could escape his court not even if both parties to a dispute were willing to go it settled by themselves. This power of arbitration was, perhaps, the prominent source of social oppression by the feudals of Telangana outside that economic sphere. In the case of disputes, he would collect security money, often called as dangugalu from both parties, he would judge the case, decide the fine and collect it from wrong-doer. He would enrich himself by keeping the fines as well as the security money collected from both the parties. All agrarian social relations should come under his purview and this facilitates his ex-

ploitation in the social sphere. His autocratic rule pervades all corners of the social and economic life of the village, and this culture can be described as pethandari culture (Balapopal, 1984).

2.22 The agrarian social structure, that had its roots in the Nizam's agrarian system, is mainly an edifice to be found in plains areas. In the tribal habitats as in the case of districts like Adilabad or forest areas of Warangal and Khammam, a variant of the above production relations can be discerned.

2.23 The social relations in tribal areas have to be traced to the recent past. The early Nizams did not interfere in the affairs of the tribals. Only with the entry of the British, the survey and resettlement activities were taken up in these areas. This activity helped Nizam to regulate land ownership pattern. In the process, Nizam's state offered large tracts of tribal areas to others for lease in the latter year of the 18th century. Meanwhile, the Nizam ran into debts and he started opening up new avenues both in the land revenue and in leasing out a few areas to the British colonial trade interests, especially in the first regions of Adilabad, Warangal and Khammam where raw material was abundantly available. This process had facilitated the flow of colonial capital into the forest regions of Adilabad, Warangal and Khammam which had upset the tranquility of the tribals (Haimendorf, 1977).

2.24 In addition, with the introduction of the forest conservancy in 1920's and 1930's the acquisition and rejection of land became a problem for the tribals in general, and gonds in particular in Adilabad district and the tribals were not ensured by the state in granting of the permanent patta rights. This is due to the policy pursued by Nizam State, where it promoted the settlement of native non-tribal landed classes in these areas. A nexus was formed among the Indian trading class, the Nizam state and the British as the opening up of these areas for exploitation benefitted all the parties, though not to the same degree. A replica of the village structure in the plains areas was sought to be installed in these areas with the active connivance of the Nizam State. Certain factors helped such a process. Firstly, the trading class and absentee landlords infiltrated into these areas with the further abettment of the state which was pushing through juridical nature of property relations, quite alien to the tribals. Secondly, the setting up of Singareni Collieries by the colonial interests witnessed a remarkable growth of transport and communication facilities through which the immigration of non-tribal and non-cultivating peasant classes had increased further, leading to further alienation of land. Thirdly, the absence landlords along with traders have brought not only the cultivating peasantry but also other non-tribal service castes, poor peasants and agricultural labourers. The exploitative agrarian social structure had been transplanted here by making the tribals subservient to them. Fourthly, the area had been colonised leading to legislation of properties and resources under the ownership of non-tribals leading further to the decline in the ratio of tribal land ownership and transformation of

land, in certain areas, as a saleable commodity, which led to the alienation of tribals, the original clearers of the land (B. Janardhana Rao, 1987).

2.25 Tribal revolts occurred in Andhra Pradesh mainly to express the resentment that the tribal bear against the mechanisation of the colonial interests and also against, the Nizam State which protected these interests. The struggles were also directed against the exploitation of non-tribals as the tribals could not be benefited much from the various. Land transfer regulations which were originally intended to protect the interests of the tribals, but which, in fact, could not arrest the exploitation of the tribals by the non-tribals (V. Raghavaiah, 1967).

2.26 The forest policy of the government had been

further responsible for the exploitation of the tribals. The forest policies pursued by British government have restricted the utilisation of forest produce by the tribals. Further, the policy formulated in independent India was much harsher on the tribals who live in forests as the privileges accorded to them in 1885 were reduced to concessions. Forests are being indiscriminately destroyed for commercial purposes by the non-tribal encroachers, smugglers, contractors and other vested interests and the tribals undergo harassment by the Forest department and the police.

2.27 Thus, the agrarian structure in plains area, and tribal areas shows the skewed nature of land distribution and the monopoly of land control by a few doras who have become powerful and socially oppressed the toiling classes.

## CHAPTER III

### RURAL UNREST AND PEASANT MOVEMENT IN THE POST GREEN REVOLUTION PERIOD

3.1 In Telangana, the peasant movement in the late 1940's engulfed Nalgonda and to a certain extent, Warangal districts. But the feudal oligarchy remained powerful in the districts of Karimnagar, Adilabad. In the 1950's there had been an euphoria over land reforms and the peasants were optimistic about these reforms transforming the agrarian structure. The disenchantment with the land legislation by the government had been complete by the end of 1960's with the emergence of land grab movement and Naxalbari movement. The echo of Naxalbari movement had been felt in some parts of Andhra Pradesh, especially, Srikakulam district in coastal Andhra and in the forest areas of Warangal and Khammam districts. This movement picked up mainly among tribals as the unrest was more pronounced in these areas either due to the exploitative practices of money lenders and other outsiders or due to the forest policy by the government.

3.2 Impelled by the Naxalbari and Srikakulam uprisings, the agrarian discontent moved up to the Godawari Valley and spread into the plains of Karimnagar. At the end of 1973-74, under the leadership of some active peasant struggles were organised. But due to the proclamation of emergency in 1975, there had been a setback to their activities. In 1977, after the lifting of emergency, the Rythu-cooli Sangham, meaning Peasant-Labourers organisations, had been formed and struggles against social oppression and feudal practices were organised (Rama Melkote, 1980).

3.3 The peasant and worker's movements in these areas in the 1970's and 1980's can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, that is roughly between 1977-83, the movement could build up a strong resistance to the local vested interests; in the second phase, that is 1983-89, it had been mainly drawn into a direct conflict with the state in the third phase, it had quickly spread to the whole region and with government assuming a non-interventionist role, the movement could sustain its momentum.

3.4 In the early phase, the struggles were centred around Nymmappalli village in Sircilla taluk and Maddunur village in Jagdal taluk of Karimnagar district. The latent rural unrest in the villages of these two taluks had been a primary factor for the organisation of the Rythu cooli Sanghams (RCS) in these villages. The RCS in these villages had voiced the demands of the peasantry and the issues around which the movement had been built can be divided into two categories. One category consisted of refusal to yield to the landlord what was traditionally yielded

to him as vetti, mamools, dandugalu, right of arbitration etc. and the second category consisted of demands that are to be yielded to the people by dora-compensation for past exploitation, higher wages, return of land forcibly occupied etc. (K. Balagopal, 1984).

3.5 Peasant movements on a large scale in the villages of Karimnagar district had been organised where protests, demonstrations, gheraos, strikes and social mobilisation of the peasantry. In September 1978, a massive demonstration of 20,000 peasants and rural labourers was held at Jagdal town. In villages also strikes and social boycotts have led to the use of strong arm tactics by landlords to cowdown the demonstrating peasants. The resistance of the peasants led to perpetration of violence in all these areas. To quell this unrest, the state machinery has been deployed without taking cognizance of the roots for this tension.

3.6 The government had gone a step further and declared these two taluks of Karimnagar district as Disturbed area under "Suppression of Disturbances Act", 1948. Under the provision of the Act, "whoever in a disturbed area commits any offence punishable under Indian penal code may in lieu of the punishment to which he is liable under that code, will be punished with death." This Act armed the state with absolute and unchecked powers against the people [Mohan Ram, 1978].

3.7 The law and order machinery which should protect the rights of all the citizens who are equal before the eye of the law of the land did not exhibit the same impartiality in its actual operation and this further aggravated the tensions in rural areas. All the Fact finding committee reports confirm that the police camps in the villages are perpetrating large-scale harassments, torture, illegal detentions, implicating rural peasants and their leaders in fabricated cases. [PUCL, 1978, CPDR, 1978, OPDR, 1978]

3.8 The increasing organisation of the rural poor and their struggle against feudal oppression generated agrarian tensions. In the initial stages, these struggles are largely devoid of violence. Their main concern had been to free the agricultural labourers and poor peasants from the clutches of the landlords through social boycott of landlord as a tool to exert social pressure. But the landlords reaction had been to silence the organisers either through killing of the active organisers or by torturing the workers, raping of women and heinous act. [C.V. SUBBARAO, 1978]



3.9 The issues taken up by the movement in general can be divided into three categories. The first category of issues include the abolition of vetti and pethandari practices such as collection of mamools and fines. The second category is the economic issues like wages and wage rates and in the third category come issues pertaining to land distribution. As far as issues in the first category are concerned, an end could be put to such practices, through compensation for what was plundered in the past could be obtained only fractionally. Regarding the second issues, wage increases were obtained and such increases would become a regular feature. In certain areas, where wages were paid in kind, the labourers were cheated by the use of wrong measures. Hence the organisation has introduced a standard measure to put an end to such malpractices. The third category of issues are formidable in nature as the land question has many stands in it. Most of the landlords had large quantities of land under legal and benami ownership. In addition to this land, most of the landlords through dubious means (fines usury, threats, tampering of land records and physical assaults) had grabbed land from the peasantry. Only very small part of such land could be seized from the landlord and could be restored back to the peasants. Apart from land acquired through questionable means, the landlords had been utilizing common property resources in villages like cultivable waste and uncultivable land and it is for this land that the land struggle had mainly taken place in the first phase. [K.M BALAGOPAL, 1978]

3.10 During this period these struggles could achieve a sense of dignity to the rural poor in the village. The agricultural labourers could generally get certain wage increases. The wage rates for female agricultural labour had increased from Rupees 1.50 to 2.50 and from Rs. 4.00 to Rs. 6.00 for male labour. The annual wage for farm-servants increased from Rs. 850 to Rs. 1000 or Rs. 1200.

3.11 Another struggle organised in the forest areas has been around the rates for collection of beedi-leaves. Beedi-leaf grows wild in the forests and even children can pick the leaves. It is ripe for picking in the months of April and May just at the time when agricultural operations come to a stand still. All the middle and poorer sections of the population participate in Beedi-leaf collection. Since it is an unskilled job and requires only a lot of patience to go around the forest searching for the leaf. The monopoly right to purchase the leaf picked by the people is auctioned by the government in 1970's to contractors, the unit of auction being four to five villages in the forest. Each contractor bids for not just one unit, but for as many as his capital allows. Hundred beedi-leaves will be tied up in a bundle and the bundles will be purchased by the agents of the contractors at a spot called 'Kallam'. The minimum rate fixed by government for a bundle used to be 5 paise for a bundle in 1975. Even this was never properly given. The pervasive influence of feudal atmosphere has its impact here also as people would be forced to give few vetti bundles like the first bundle brought to the Kallam each day and one bundle in the name of local duties etc. In addition, the people would be plundered in a variety

of other ways. Many bundles would be rejected on the shay that they were spoiled or eaten away by insects and thrown to one side, but will be later used by kalledars or agents. The beedi-leaf struggle had been waged to put an end to vetti and harassment and increase the piece-rate. These struggles were mainly taken up in Manthani taluk of Karimnagar district.

3.12 The peasant struggles in Karimnagar district were generally carried under the overall leadership of Rythu-jooli sanghams formed at the village level and in many instances the success of one sangham in achieving its demands has a demonstration effect on other sanghams and the movements spread to the different parts of the district. The overall material benefits to the peasantry in general and labourers in particular can be observed in the case of a distribution of banjar lands to landless labourers; (b) restoration of lands of the downtrodden usurped by the landlords to the rightful heirs. (c) Enhancement in the wage levels for male and female agricultural labourers (d) fixation of fair rates for beedi leaves collection and (e) stoppage of vetti and other obnoxious forms of exploitation other social evils like untouchability, bhagela system etc.

3.13 In the tribal areas, especially in Adilabad district, the main conflict of the tribals in forest areas is with the government itself, particularly with its revenue and forest departments. There are other contradictions in the area, which are mainly between tribals and non tribal settlers, especially from either Andhra area as in the case of forest areas of Khammam and Warangal or Maharashtra as in the case of Adilabad district. The tribals in these districts had been robbed of the best land by the non-tribals and they are, therefore, in continuous search of new land. The only way tribals can acquire land is to cut-down forests. Ever since the Nizam government of Hyderabad introduced non-tribal settlers into the district and parallelly adopted a forest policy of growing teak, the tribals had been clearing forests.

3.14 The main conflict of tribals in general and tribal peasants in particular, especially, for those tribals belonging to Gonds, Kolams and lambadas is with the government itself particularly with its revenue and Forest Departments. Apart from this conflict, the native tribals have conflict with either the Andhra settlers or Marathi settlers who had grabbed their lands.

3.15 The tribal conflict with the Forest Department goes much deeper as tribals have a great attachment to the forest they inhabit. As part of government scheme for reserving forests for plantations, mostly teak and gym trees and afforestation, the Andhra-Pradesh government passed an order in 1972 declaring all occupations of forest land consequent to 1944 illegal. In pursuance of this, the government evicted 15,000 tribals from their occupied lands and this led to much discontentment among tribals. (T PAPI REDDY, 1990)

3.16 Unrest in tribal areas had also been due to the activities of trader-cum-moneylenders. He is often

called as DIKU, who starts his life as mobile petty trader selling essential items to tribals gaining control over economic life of the tribals. He is often the creature of the colonial system who performed a variety of functions as a middleman in administrative matters, as a money lender, as a trader, who controlled food-grains distribution through the system of advance credit and also as a land grabber. This moneylender-cum-trader system is a much faced depression in tribal areas, these moneylenders enjoy official support for their faulty deeds and illegal practices. Indebtedness of tribals is the major cause for tribals to mortgage their land selling away them to the plains people and getting depeasantised as in agricultural labourers. (B. JANARDHAN RAO, 932)

3.17 This process of depeasantisation can be comprehended by one typical case that had been reported among many such cases. A Gond had borrowed just Rs. 200 from the moneylender and five years later he had to transfer 14 acres of land in lieu of the principal and interest to be paid to the moneylender. This type of exploitation is a common phenomenon in Adilabad district (T. PAPI REDDY, 1990).

3.18 The genesis of the struggle in Adilabad can be traced to the incidents that had taken place in 1968. In this year, the Gonds, Lambadas and Marathi speaking peasants started cutting down forests in the sparse regions of Uttoor and Adilabad Taluks and they had occupied the lands cleared by them. The forest officials encouraged this and they took Rs. 100 per acre but the occupation of these lands by the tribals had not been legalised. Instead they were served court notices that they will be evicted from these lands. The peasants again paid Rs. 100 per acre but to no avail. Later, they paid the same amount again, but could not get pattas. Altogether Rs. 300 had been paid per one acre of land, whose market rate at that time was around Rs. 200, that is more than its market value. The eviction had been intensified during the emergency period and in the year 1975 many tribals were evicted. The resistance by tribals against such evictions had also been stiff leading to peasant struggle.

3.19 The forest officials eviction procedure is to use threat and physical force and it that does not work to set the tribal gudem on fire. The tribals had resisted such action and the intensity of the struggle can be grasped through the government's action in setting up 25 police camps in Adilabad, Uttoor and Both Talukas.

3.20 Another major event that evoked an intense protest and a protracted struggle had been the firings at Indiravelli in Uttoor Taluka of Adilabad district on April 20th 1980, the Girijan Ryothu-Cooli Sangam was to meet at Indiravelli for which the permission had been granted by police but later withdrawn and 144 section was clamped. The illiterate tribals were arriving at that place to attend the meeting and the police arrested them. Most of them were driven out of the village. When a large group of tribals showed resistance, the police opened fire on these tribals that resulted in the death of 30 to 40 tribals.

3.21 Apart from the struggle against the state, the struggle against illegal occupation of landlords, the struggle over the rates of beedi leaves bundles, the struggle for wage enhancements had been reported from the various parts of the tribal district like Adilabad.

3.22 The construction of an irrigation project had been the bone of contention for a major conflict in this area. The site of conflict was the Satnala dam, where some of the villages Satnala, Koyaguda, Jamini Madiguda and Mangrula were to be submerged. The tribals living in Mangrula and Kamini were agitating for proper compensation for the thousand acres of the land they would lose under the irrigation project on Sathnala stream. The state's dual nature is well brought out in this case. The compensation to be paid by the state is usually calculated according to the market value of the land. As this is a notified area where no transfer land is permitted, the only market value available is the value of land many years ago which is not higher than Rs. 25,000 per acre. But the cotton growing land in this area is worth at least Rs. 25,000 per acre roughly 5 times more than the value of the land as per the calculation by the government. When the tribals were voicing their dissent against the improper way in which compensation has been fixed, the police not only lathi charged the tribals, but they also arrested around 70 persons.

3.23 Another welfare activity undertaken by the government to help the tribals is also riddled with contradictions. The collection of gum is a major source of supplementary income to the tribals. The tribals are also undergoing ordeals due to the nationalisation of the forest produce run by the state, while the private traders pay Rs. 12 per kg. Apart from the underpricing of the minor forest produce, tribals are also undergoing ordeals due to the nationalisation of the forest produce. The nationalisation of forest produce is to bigger fraud on the forest dwellers due to the commercialisation of the forests that began about one and half centuries ago. Its purpose though often stated to be beneficial to the tribals is running counter to the interest of the tribals as the forests do not ensure in providing a decent livelihood to the tribals. The forest act new suiting the interests of propertied classes of the country. Hence, the tribals are revolting against the state and they know fully well who are exploiting the forest wealth in the name of state's policy of nationalisation of forest produce.

3.24 In the adjoining tribal area of Khamam district the land problem is the most serious one. Due to the connivance by the state, to a certain extent, large parts of tribal lands have passed into the hands of non-tribals. Some of the issues raised by the Girijan Sangham are : (i) the recovery of land illegally occupied by the land lords to the Girijans; (ii) distribution of the forest banjara lands to the Girijans; (iii) the abolition of all debts and arrangements for alternative loans; (iv) abolition of illegal payments to forest officials, patels and patwaries; (v)

abolition of vetti; (vi) payment of correct prices for Girijan producers; (vii) proper living wages to farm servants, agricultural labourers and workers in the forest areas.

3.25 In this district, a struggle had taken place on the use of common property resource, one landlord in Pandithapuram village extended his control over Shikham land (land which is fit for cultivation when water is exhausted in the tank) and this has been the source of constant tension in the village. In a neighbouring village, 16 acres of Shikham land is under the control of government, usually this land in every village will be under the control of government but in this village the landlord had usurped rights over that land. The agricultural labourers in this village were demanding higher wages and they along with other peasants, have formed a Ryothu-Cooli-Sangham. The landlord had planted black gram in 40 acres of Shikham land, which was ready for reaping. The Ryothu-Cooli Sangham expressed their resentment for the constant use of this common property by the landlord by not allowing the landlord to reap the harvest. As a part of implementing this decision the labourers took away a part of the harvest. This led to the arrest of two peasants by the police and the members of Ryothu-Cooli Sangham went in procession to demand their release and the police opened fire on villagers killing two of them. Thus the village experienced unrest for longer period. (fact finding committee report, 1979)

3.26 In most of the villages of the district struggles were mainly organised on either land issues or wage issues. In 1982 Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union (BKMU) had organised strikes in four hundred villages where ten thousand labourers had participated. The wages for attached labourers had been enhanced from Rs. 1800 to 2400, for casual labourers, the wages had gone up from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 for males and from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 for females. The monthly wages for attached labourers had gone up from a range of Rs. 140—Rs. 170 to Rs. 210-240.

3.27 In warangal district the struggles in tribal areas were mainly centered around the following issues. (i) recovery of land illegally occupied by non-tribals, mainly settlers from Andhra areas; (ii) Distribution of forest waste lands to the tribals; (iii) abolition of illegal payments to forest and revenue officials; (iv) abolition of vetti; (v) rectifying the malpractices that prevail in marketing of tribal produce and payments of market prices to their produce and (vi) abolition of age old fictitious debts and payment of proper living wages to farm servants and agricultural labourers in forest areas.

3.28 In many villages inhabited by the tribals the struggles were waged by them against the forest officials and they cleaned 1000 acres of forest land for Podu cultivation. Another issue on which tribals wages struggle, were against the vetti services to forest officials. The forest officials and contractors were extracting free services from tribals in the

form of vetti services and paid very low-wages the cutting loading and unloading of timber and bamboo. By their protracted struggles, tribals stopped doing vetti and they could also succeed in getting enhance rates for cutting timber. The rate increased from a range of Rs. 5-7 to Rs. 10-15.

3.29 Another struggle in this area is the tendu-leaf struggle. In the entire areas of Gudur and Narsampet Talukas, labourers had gone on strike in 1981 and could achievement an enhancement of wages from 2 to 9 paise per piece of bundle. In 1982 labourers in Mulug taluka had gone on strike and could achieve enhancement of wage from Rs. 2.50 to Rs. 3.50 for cutting tendu trees. In 1983 the wage per piece of a bundle had been enhanced from 15 to 18 paise per bundle due to dharnas, processions and meetings and strikes organised by the Ryothu-Cooli Sanghams.

3.30 In other districts, especially in Nizamabad and Nalgonda, struggles were organised by Ryothu-cooli Sanghams during the later part of 1980's on the same issues. Though the same issues had been highlighted, the change in the party that ruled the state had also changed the complexion of the struggles.

3.31 The drought situation in 1988 had led to a worsening of the situation in Adilabad district. This unhelpful altitude of moneylenders, lack of any drought relief activity undertaken by the government, forced the tribals to depend upon forest produce by the time winter had set in 1988. But even by October 1988, the Gondas, Kolams and Lambadas started attacking traders and moneylenders and kept up the attacks till the monsoon of 1989. During the period they were living on mahua flowers, bamboo-rice and poisonous tubes. These tubes require lot of washing and require a lot of boiling. Even then consumption of these tubes will be detrimental to the health of tribals. As the 1989's monsoon year came near, the attacks on traders and moneylenders became more frequent for two reasons, firstly, the need to prepare their lands for Kharif Crops and hence they could not any longer find the time to search the forests for mahua flower and tubes; secondly, they needed jowar seed to sow the crop and the easiest way was to steal it from traders. The announcement by the ITDA that jowar seed would be supplied on loan came very late, well after many raids had taken place. Here also the state's due role had come to the area. On the one hand it had taken its own time to react to ITDA's distress signals and under the head of relief had granted only Rs. 45 lakhs against the district collector's demand of Rs. 43 Crores. On the other hand the police moved in fast and started arresting hundreds of tribals under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA). The total arrests in connection with these raids had been around 600, while in with one raid, Dardepalli raid, 160 tribals had been arrested. By the time most of the arrest were made, the tribals lost their crucial weeks when he ploughing of the land and sowing takes place. Thus, if they had lost 1988

year's crop due to drought, they lost 1989's crop because of TĀDA[K BALA GOPAL 1989]

3.32 A change in the party in power in the fall of 1989 had created a situation when there had been lesser restrictions placed on mobilisation of peasantry. Among the Royuthh-Cooli Sangams, the People's war group had taken up a radical land distribution programme—land reforms from below. Hither to the people's war group and other [CPI (ML)] groups had been pleading the cases of illegal evictions of the peasants, the distribution of government land or the restoration of land usurped by the landlords from peasants. The party now had activity taken up the programme of taking away the surplus land over and above a ceiling limit, usually prescribed by the party on the basis of conditions obtaining in the village and distributed the surplus land to the landless labourers. The ceiling limits had been lowered even to 10 acres in certain villages and apart from the landlords and rich peasants, even middle peasants had to give away their lands if they possess land over and above the ceiling limit. The transfer of land to the landless had been done as per the legal procedure where the revenue officials were issued pattas in the name of the new owners. This programme had been taken up in all the districts of Telangana even though its intensity was felt in Karimnagar, Warangal, Mahaboobnagar, Nizambad and Nalgonda. Apart from this programme, the other programme taken up by the same group had been the closing down of liquor shops in predominantly industrial area like Godawarikhanni in Karimnagar district, fighting against illtreatment of women, especially those that lead to either dowry deaths or cases of divorces and also highlighting the concept of gender equality. People's Courts had come up to try some of the cases and do instant Justice [Fields study, 1990].

3.33 The land distribution programme initiated by the People's war group had created consternation among the landed gentry and state had reacted by resorting to encounter deaths of Naxalite activists as it did in the past. By the time the Naxalite movement gained deeper roots among the masses and its achievements, at least in some spheres like land question and fighting against social evils had their positive impact on the masses. The state is caught in a dilemma that worked among the masses and mobilised them in lakhs could not be exclusively condemned on grounds of violence as it did in the past, but at the same time it would like to tackle it as a law and order problem, though professed sometimes that it has its roots in the socio-economic structure. When state tackles it as a law and order problem it resorts to encounters and police camps were set up in the villages and the agricultural poor were being locked up, tortured, jailed on charges their houses and fields were being destroyed. Some of these facets of the state's nature in dealing with the Naxalite movements had been brought to limelight by the Civil Liberties Movement. Thus there are two facets of the state's role as it can be evidenced by the recent policy of the government. Firstly, when lesser restrictions were placed on mobilisation of masses by Naxalite groups and later when the revival of the encounters started mainly with the setting up of Peoples Courts and also the land distribution programme taken up by the party.

3.34 The reasons for rural unrest in Telangana area to be explained by not only referring to the semi-feudal nature of the agrarian system, but also by the role of the state either with regard to its development programmes or its land and forest policies in tribal areas.

## CHAPTER 4

### RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 An analysis of the causes that led to the rural unrest would lead us to trace the genesis of this unrest to the socio-economic systems. If the socio-economic system is inequitable, there will be discontentment, either overt or covert. One recommendation would be that the state should be bold enough—a tall task—to be demanded from the present political system—to put an end to this inequitable system and to radically restructure it. A land reform programme that would ensure land to the tiller has still a great potential to level out inequalities in the agrarian structure. The ceiling limit can be put at 5 acres for double cropped land and ten acres for single cropped land.

4.2 Among other possible alternatives, Sen's entitlement approach merits attention. The entitlements of the poor should be improved either by providing them with a land base, if private ownership in Cooperative farming, though riddled with some issues, should be encouraged. Cooperative farming should actively be promoted through conscientisation process among these landless who could acquire land in the redistribution programme for improving their share which may not otherwise fructify through individual efforts.

4.3 To quell the unrest the Government should realise that it is not a law and order problem. The dangling of carrot and stick policy by the government should be replaced by gaining the confidence of rural poor through sincere efforts of implementing developmental programmes.

4.4 An essential feature for achieving better success in the developmental sphere is to transform the cultural norms of officials who implement the various developmental programmes. It is a sad commentary that even after 43 years of independence feudal and colonial culture dominates. The concept of Weberian rationality has not struck deep roots in the behavioural mores of the people engaged in different walks of life, nay in the administrative personnel. Many instances show how the illiterates, mainly tribals, are ill-treated by the officials. They are treated with either contempt or as a source for squeezing some money. Unless egalitarian values—again a tall order—or a culture based on democratic principles—not sham democratism—spreads through all walks of life, the dignity that is due to an individual—especially to rural poor women can not be re-

stored. An effort in this direction can be undertaken with right earnestness by the state in conjunction with the voluntary agencies. To start with, the frontal attack should be on the caste system as an ascriptive system, giving due recognition and reservation in jobs to those groups among the downtrodden who had been put to untold sufferings in the past.

4.5 In all these efforts, the measures—either ameliorative in nature or structural in content—should be implemented in such a manner that they can infuse confidence among the poorer sections that the efforts are sincere. If the efforts are sincere, and if the rural people feel that justice will be done to them, rural unrest can be controlled to a certain extent.

4.6 In the sphere of planning also the plans should be prepared at the village level. These plans should basically effect the aspirations of the poorest of the poor in the village. One mechanism is that a due weightage should be given to the voice of the poor in the Gram Sabhas. The composition of the Gram Sabhas should be tilted in favour of the rural poor so that they can be in a majority to enforce a decision democratically.

4.7 When new employment opportunities are created, especially in rural areas, the criterion for absorbing labour should be their entitlement level, that is poorest of the poor should be absorbed first; later other categories should be considered. The 'right to work' should be enforced so that every new entrant to the labour force can be absorbed in one kind of employment or other.

4.8 Employment opportunities in rural areas should be expanded by setting up of rural industries either by private entrepreneurs or by the state. Apart from employment opportunities, awareness should also be enhanced.

4.9 The permeation of democratic values can better be achieved through improving literacy levels. A pragmatic approach to raising the levels of literacy would be to rely more on voluntary organisations.

4.10 An essential concomitant for all these changes would be a political system that would lend strong support for the implementation of all the above measures. Changes in the political system though electoral reforms should be introduced to ensure a greater participation and entrusting of political power to the rural poor.

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**PART II**

Summary Report of the Quick Study

On

**RURAL UNREST IN BIHAR**

*By*

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March, 1991

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## CHAPTER-I

### INTRODUCTION

1.1 The present study on 'Rural Unrest in Bihar' is a part of quick expert technical study on 'Rural Unrest in India, sponsored by the National Commission on Rural Labour. This study consists of two Parts . the part one embraces three districts of Bihar—Gaya and Jehanabad, from the plains of Bihar and Ranchi from the South Bihar plateau and part two covers the two districts of North Bihar plains namely Darbhanga and East Champaran.

1.2 The study was started with an informal meeting in which, some experts from various fields of activities i.e. researchers, journalists, social and political activists, who have been seriously associated with the related issues and representatives of different Peasant-Labour Organisations, as well, which have their penetration in the flaming field of the State, took part. The selection of the areas, where unrest prevails was made in the light of the discussion and exchange

of views that took place in the meeting.

#### Methodology

1.3 We started field work from December 1990. Four kind of schedules have been framed, for getting relevant informations from different segments of agrarian structure. Schedule-1 has been framed for our main respondents i.e. rural labour (mainly agricultural labour), Schedule-2 has been framed for the employer, Schedule-3 has been framed for the Government machinery and Schedule-4 for the peasant-labour organisations working in the areas. These schedules are meant to provide qualitative facts for the report and not to generate any statistical estimate even for the local areas concerned. Apart from this, we studied and analysed a large set of informations from secondary sources and from persons involved in such activities and studies.

## CHAPTER-II

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILES OF DISTRICTS STUDIED

2.1 The three districts—Gaya, Jehanabad and Ranchi represent the two different socio-geographical regions. While Gaya and Jehanabad lie in the Centre of the South Bihar plains and are two of the seven districts declared to be areas of agrarian tension and unrest by the government, the third district Ranchi lie in the Jharkhand region where unrest has assumed the form of Jharkhand movement of the tribals. And, since these districts represent two different socio-geographical regions, these are the ideal samples to understand the causes and the features of the rural unrest in Bihar. The Darbhanga and East Champaran are also two of the twenty four districts declared tension-prone in the state. The Socio-economic profiles (Annexure I & II) of all the district under study are as under :

#### GAYA

2.2 Gaya district occupies an important place on the map of Bihar economically, socially, politically and even culturally. After Jehanabad subdivision of Gaya was carved out as a separate district in August 1986, there are two subdivisions in the present Gaya district namely—Sherghati and Gaya Sadar. There are altogether 18 blocks in Gaya district out of which, Bodhgaya, Manpur, Vajrganj, Atari, Fatehpur, Khijarsarai, Chandauti, Belaganj, Tekari, Konch and Paraia—11 blocks, come under Gaya Sadar subdivision and Sherghati, Gurua, Imamganj, Dumaria, Mohanpur, Barachattiad Aamas --7 block, come under Sherghati subdivision. The Southern part of the district is carved with forests and mountains and the rest Southern part is a part of the gigantic plains. Falagu, Yamuna, Dargha, Morhar, Baldaiya, Punpun and Sone are the main rivers. Punpun and Sone, however, now come around the Jehanabad district. Forests are also the source of Katha, Tarpin, seeds of sagwaan etc. Forests have been undertaken by the government and this has left the 'vanawasis' of the area to live in a state of utter poverty and misery.

#### AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

2.3 Land concentration is not huge in Gaya and this part of the state is in fact, the land of new-rich landlords. Their percentage is estimated approximately 10 followed by middle peasants, whose percentage is approximately 20. The rest 70 per cent, however, is constituted of poor landless peasants. Barahars and agricultural labour who depend mainly on their labour resource for their livelihood. The river

system is the main source of irrigation which overflow during rains. Irrigation is most dependent of traditional sources, which are mainly operative during rainy season, thus leaving the irrigation on mercy of nature.

#### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

8.0 The rural area of Gaya district is still dominated by the upper castes i.e. Brahmin, Bhumihar, Rajput, Kayastha, Pathan, Sheikh, Said, Kalal, Malik etc. Most of these are neo-landlords and rich peasants. This class of neo-rich landlord, has also occupied prominent places in government, bureaucracy, politics, business and other covered white collar jobs. The middle class among these high castes do occupy small chunk of land but they do not cultivate their land.

2.5 The upper caste hierarchy is still enmeshed in feudal values and assert their position as superior in the society. There also exist a small intellectual group within this upper caste, middle class and they have gradually adopted the capitalist values. Their womenfolks are often found working outside their houses, as teachers, nurses, accountants and clerks etc.

2.6 On the second ladder of the rural society there exist middle castes and the upper strata of this second ladder is relatively well off. These are by caste—Yadava, Kurmi, Bania, Teji, Lohar, Barhar, Kumhar, Momin etc., who also occupy small pieces of land and lower class services in different sectors. Their living standard is almost equal to those, of the middle class upper caste people, however, they are deprived of equal social status, because they are placed at the lower ladder in terms of caste hierarchy. This sense of deprivation has made them militant and asserting and they are consistently fighting for getting equal status in the society.

2.7 The poor and landless lot of this caste hierarchy still depends on landlords and moneylenders for its livelihood. The irony that makes their lives more miserable and pitiable is their middle class character, that prevent them to do all that, what a harijan or anyone belonging to lower caste does unhesitatingly. But this lot is at the same time sharply antifeudal in its character.

#### JEHANABAD

2.8 The epicentre of militant peasant struggle the small district of Jehanabad is located in the

Central Bihar Plains. (The district has been carved out from Gaya district in 1986, after the Arwal massacre and was declared as separate district in August 1980). There are 7 blocs namely, Arwal, Kairi, Kurtha, Jehanabad, Ghoshi, Kako and Maknumpur in Jehanabad district. Altogether 145 panchayats and 942 villages with 129910 households exist in Jehanabad. At present the estimated population is reaching above 12 lakh. In 1988, there were 36 Police stations but now there are 67 Police stations, outposts, camps and police lines. The district has in fact been administratively made a Police district.

## AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

2.9 According to some sources, the percentage of big landlords is 5 per cent, of rich peasants is 15 per cent, of middle peasants is 40 per cent of poor landless labourers is 40 percent in rural Jehanabad. The river system is mainly constituted by the Sone which forms the western boundary of the district and which is the main source of irrigation in Arwal block, the best irrigated block of Jehanabad. The Punpun is the only river in the district which retains water throughout the year and which is extensively used for irrigation. Thus the irrigational facility is inadequate.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE

2.10 The Traditional social hegemony of upper castes have broken down to some extent and middle castes have raised their social status. A few landlords of upper castes belonging to, Hindus and Muslims, both the communities have still their existence. But it is the middle castes, which dominate the rural society. Yadavas & Kurmis, of which Yadavas have recently superseded Kurmis, are the dominant castes but in class and these castes now represent the same class in a better way. However, a good number of poor lots, belonging to middle castes are still deprived and they are a part of that bulk of the rural work force which has nothing to lose but its barriers. Harijans and other dalits are mostly agricultural labourers and rural artisans.

2.11 The Ranchi district of now a days is located in the southern most region on the state and it comes within the South Bihar plateau region. Only the Central plateau that included the eastern part of the old Ranchi district, which consisted of three plateau, before the Lohardaga and Gumla district had been carved out as two separate districts, from the old Ranchi district. Administrative division also took place, accordingly, while the old Ranchi district had 43 development blocks, the new Ranchi has been left with 20 blocks only falling under two subdivisions—Ranchi Sadar and Kunti.

## AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

2.12 With the gradual deforestation of the district more and more land is being brought under cultivation, however, the average size of landholding is small. The cultivating status of the households when compared with the landownership status of the household shows that the household members work

mainly in their own land and occasionally on the owners land too. Thus the agrarian structure is quite different to those regions which highly skewed character of land distribution. The use of modern tools like tractors, trassers, power tillers etc. are meagre and the use of traditional agricultural implements is much common. Thus the agriculture is backward. Here we find money lenders as big land holders and as the main oppressor and Adivasis, non-advansi Harijans as the oppressed classes.

2.13 Subern Kekha, north Koel Sankh and south Koel rivers constitute the river system of the district, and are the main source of irrigation, which is quite inadequate. These streams remain almost dry except in rainy season and do not offer as much scope for irrigation as the perennial rivers. Artificial irrigation facilities are meagre. The wells, springs and anars are the only traditional sources of irrigation.

2.14 The social structure of Ranchi district represents a peculiar society, in which, there are two broad classes—one of tribes, the original inhabitants and another of non-tribes the outsiders or 'Dikus'. This is the simplest way of social division but, the complexity of the social structure also prevails as there are upper castes with their hegemonic role backward castes with their subordination, Harijans—with their deprivation and ultimately 'Adivasis' whom the 'Sawarn' Hindus use to call Vanvasis' given their total alienation from their own land and own say.

## DARBHANGA AND EAST CHAMPARAN

2.15 The agrarian society in Darbhanga and East Champaran, like in other parts of Bihar is dominated by big landlords belonging to upper castes. While in Darbhanga it is mostly the Rajputs, Bhumiars and Brahmans who comprise the big landlord class, in Champaran it is the Rajputs, Bhumiars and Kayasthas who are most numerous in this class, and get their land cultivated by employing agricultural labourers and poor peasants. The landlords owning more than 25 acres of land can be classified as big landlords. The handful of big land lords, rich and middle peasants, as we have seen, not only command one-third of the land but also use their social clout and political influence to corner the bulk of other productive resources, agricultural inputs and funds provided for the rural poor by the government. They also perpetuate different type of oppression on the rural poor, sexual exploitation of the rural poor womenfolk, arbitrating in disputes between them and imposing enormous fines on them so as to push them into indebtedness and bondage and of course, denying them even the minimum wages which are not even subsistence wages. In Central Bihar there has been marked decline in such oppressions perpetrated by the landowners but not as in Darbhanga and East Champaran.

2.16 Next comes the rich peasant class or those owning ten to twenty five acres of land unlike in South Central Bihar where in many areas, Yadavas and Kurmis have emerged as rich peasants, in Dar-

bhanga and East Champaran this class is still dominated by upper castes. Among the backwards it is mostly the Koeries and in a smaller number Yadavs and Kurmies who have enhanced their status as rich peasants. This class of landlords do quite often participate in the agricultural operations the overwhelming greater part of which is done by hired labourers. The class indulges in usurious moneylending also. Indeed usury is an important method used by this class to exploit the poor peasant and labourers.

2.17 Next in the hierarchy comes the middle peasantry who own about five to ten acres of land. besides this they take land of others on sharecropping or other terms. They cultivate their land by employing family labour and at times by hiring labourers also. They are mostly backward castemen, Koeries, Kurmies, Yadava etc. Like in other parts of the state, this class is closer to poor peasantry in terms of economic status but strives to go higher-up in the socio-agrarian hierarchy and so does not extend its support to the poor peasants who are mostly scheduled castes with growing prosperity an increasing number of middle peasants have succeeded in transforming themselves into rich peasants.

2.18 Next comes the poor peasant who own and cultivate less than five acres of land. This class not

only cultivate the land held by it but also sales its labour power to keep its body and soul together. Poor peasants mostly comprise scheduled castes and in a lesser number backward castes. As far as landholding goes, some upper caste men may also qualify to be placed in this class but what distinguishes them from poor peasants is the fact that they have other sources of income and what this more important neither till the land nor sale their labour power.

2.19 At the lowest in the socio-agrarian hierarchy are the landless agricultural labourers who do not possess any land and eke out a living by selling its labour power. During lean agricultural season they employ themselves in construction works, brick kilns or migrate to cities in Bihar and increasingly to far away places like Punjab, Assam and other states. While in Darbhanga they are about forty eight per cent of the rural workers and in East Champaran a little over forty seven per cent. Denied of even the minimum wages fixed by the government which are not even subsistence wages, they have to live in abject poverty, malnutrition, perpetual indebtedness and bondage. They are again mostly scheduled castes and in a lesser number backward castes.

## CHAPTER—III

### RURAL UNREST : WHY AND HOW

3.1 Generalising from the agrarian situation of three districts of Gaya, Jehanabad and Ranchi, it can be said that at the root of the rural unrest is exploitation and oppression of the vast toiling landless masses by the handful of exploiting landlords. But while the phenomenon of exploitation and oppression has deep roots in history, what is new in the social situation today is the phenomenon of the landlessness, the growing 'consciousness' and 'aspirations. Mass aspiration has been raised by the progressive laws framed by and the programmes announced by the government itself and mass 'consciousness' has been aroused by several factors but most importantly by the various political organisations and activist groups which are operating in the rural areas. It has also been aroused by the government controlled electronic media and finally by the English and vernacular press. Combining together, the growing aspiration and consciousness have motivated the hitherto exploited and oppressed to left out the flame burning in their heart into the open, to revolt against their oppression and exploitation.

3.2 The attempts by the exploiting lords to suppress such revolts for 'justice' by 'bullets' which they have in plenty—about 3.75 lakhs licensed and the same number as unlicensed—has given violent turn to the unrest simmering for centuries. And, the process started from Rupaspur, Chandwa in Purnea to Danwar Bihta in Bhojpur is still continuing. Our society which is based on exploitation and is broadly divided into two, the tiny lot of haves and the huge masses of have nots—is at the foot of the unrest and the issues which we enlist and enumerate here as the cause of unrest are merely the stem and branches of this root which is deep, very deep rooted in our system.

3.3 Our finding is that unrest is because aspiration is, consciousness is, resistance is, conviction is to get all that has been promised by none other but the government itself to them but has been denied to them.

3.4 The field study reveals that the main causes of the rural unrest are almost the same in all sample districts. Everywhere it is the age old exploitation and oppression of the rural poor by rich landlords and Kulaks (the rich peasantry) which is at the root of the unrest. Only the form of exploitation differs. Before proceeding further it would be proper to put forward the main findings of the field study regarding the cause behind the rural unrest.

Gaya :

- (i) Non-Payment of minimum wages as fixed by the government to the agricultural labourers and stone quarry workers.
- (ii) Illegal capture of the landlords over Gair-majarua and Bhoodan land and ceiling surplus land.
- (iii) Illegal capture of the landlords over village ponds, ahars and pynes and denial of fishing and irrigation rights to the rural poor.
- (iv) Gobbling up funds meant for rural poor by the contractor-bureaucrat-politician nexus.
- (v) Various forms of social oppression like forced labour, beating, sexual exploitation and so on.
- (vi) Illegal capture of the landlords over village ponds, ahars (reservoirs) and pynes (small canals or channels through which the water reserved in ahars is channelled to the fields for irrigation) and denial of fishing rights in the ponds and irrigational rights over the ahars and pynes to the poor peasant.
- (vii) Rural poor's resistance against their social oppression—beating, sexual exploitation of women folk abuse and other harassment by the landlords.
- (viii) Opposition by the rural poor against the opening of liquor shops, dacoity and theft of cattle by criminal gangs propped up by the landlords and Kulaks.
- (ix) Resistance by the rural poor to the onslaughts of the private armies of the landlords and Kulaks.
- (x) Opposition by the rural poor to the plain loot of government funds meant for them, by the contractor - bureaucrat - politician nexus.
- (xi) Resistance by the rural poor to the system of forced labour, bonded labour, demand for better terms of employment and resistance to illegal exactions.
- (xii) Rivalry and confrontation between the different organisations active among the rural poor.

- (xlii) Denial of voting rights to the rural poor by the feudal lords and Kulaks.

**Ranchi:**

- (i) Illegal capture of the landlords over the vested land and communal land and tanks.
- (ii) Utter lack of irrigation facilities, the district being entirely dependent upon the rainfall for irrigation, that creates tension.
- (iii) Usurious exploitation of the tribals by moneylenders.
- (iv) Police repression and anti-social activities of the goondas, abetted by landlords—moneylenders.
- (v) Non-payment of minimum wages to the labourers.
- (vi) Payment of less wages and exploitation by contractors in works done in the forests.
- (vii) Distribution without actual possession of government land and ceiling surplus land among the landless.
- (viii) Social oppression in general and sexual oppression of women folk (Harijan and adivasis) in particular.

3.5 As can be seen from the above, the causes over which rural unrest has been simmering and the articulation of which has led to rural tension are more or less similar in all the three districts. Non-implementation of the minimum wages Act, for instance, has been universal feature of Bihar. And as pointed out, here above, has been the dominating factor behind the rural unrest in Jehanabad and Gaya and an important factor in Ranchi. In Jehanabad till the labourers began to demand they were being paid just 1.5 kg of rice and a little bit of breakfast as wages. Though after prolonged wage struggles there has been some enhancement in the wages, yet at the end of 1988-89, as Table—1 and Table—2 shows, the minimum wages were not being paid in as many as 785 villages out of the total 923 villages in Jehanabad and in many as 157 villages where the government fixed wages were not being paid the actual wages were found to be as low as 1.5 kg. of rice and a breakfast. It was only in 138 villages i.e., not even the one fifth of the total that the government fixed farm wages were being paid.

3.6 And these 138 villages were those which had seen fierce struggle on the issue of raising of farm wages. Since all the villages selected for this study happen to be the focal points of unrest, it is hardly surprising that all the respondents said that they were being paid relatively higher wages, but still lower than the current minimum wages, i.e., Rs. 16.50. But, as table—1 and table—2 shows, such villages were less than 20 per cent of the total in a district like Jehanabad which has been

unprecedented and unparallel, mobilisation of rural poor, in Bihar. If this may be the situation in Jehanabad, that in the other parts of the state can well be imagined. Be it the stone quarry workers of Gaya or the tribal labourer engaged in forest cutting in Ranchi, the wage being paid to them is still below the minimum fixed wages. On the other hand, only in these regions where there is pension wage is relatively high. This had been admitted by the respondents in all the districts.

3.7 The second most important cause behind rural unrest is the illegal capture of the gairmajarua land by landlords. Though given the limited nature of this study the illegal capture could not be estimated, nor such information was readily available in the district headquarters. It is a well known fact that the bulk of gairmajarua land continue to be under illegal capture of the landlords. Again, if we take the Jehanabad figures, at the end of 1986-87 not even two fifth of the total estimated gairmajarua land had been distributed among the landless. Almost all the respondents, be it, the labourers or the leaders of the peasant labour organisations and political parties listed among the two most important causes behind the rural unrest.

3.8 What further had added to the unrest is the fact that even though certain pieces of land has been distributed, to the landless, the landlords have not let them occupy the same, which has created serious tension and lead to violent manifestation time and again.

3.9 Similar is the case of the distribution of ceiling surplus land. The government's performance on this score is dismal to say the least. According to a very liberal preliminary estimate, not even two fifth of the possible ceiling surplus land could be acquired in Jehanabad and not even one third could be distributed. In the case of Ranchi not even 6 per cent of the estimated surplus land could be acquired and not even 4 per cent could be distributed. And more often than not, the redistribution of ceiling surplus land has been on paper, i.e., the landless have been given title deeds if the land but not provided actual possession. In Jehanabad alone the district administration is reported to have compiled a list of 174 such cases in which actual possession of the redistributed surplus land had been denied to the beneficiaries. Almost all the respondents interviewed, listed this as a major issue behind the unrest.

3.10 The third major issue over which unrest has been simmering among the rural poor is the social oppression of the rural poor by the upper caste landlords. This has assumed many forms, abusing and beating of the labourers and poor peasants of lower castes, raving of their womenfolk, to not letting them sit on the cot, or to put on bright colour cloths or forcing them to talk with head down, subjugation of lower caste women by land-downing upper castemen in festivals like Holi and so on. With the growing awakening and organisation among the rural poor, they began a fight for

attaining social dignity as well, since they realised that the social oppression is a means of perpetuating their economic exploitation. According to the representatives of the peasant organisation, at many occasions it were the issues related to social oppression, particularly related to the dignity of their women, that acted as the prime mover in mobilising the rural poor.

3.11 For the oppressors, also the strong resistance put by the rural poor, signalled that the rampant exploitation now cannot go unchallenged and so any semblance of such resistance was sought to be suppressed by deploying the brute force of their private armies and the police and paramilitary forces.

3.12 The violent suppression by the landlords and police evoked counter violence by the Peasant Labour Organisations, that resulted in the chain of violence and counter violence. This is equally true in case of all the three districts covered here, as all the respondents listed social oppression as a major cause behind rural unrest

3.13 The fourth major issue is the illegal capture of the village ponds, ahars and pynes—traditional sources of irrigation—by the landlords and denial of fishing and irrigational rights to the rural poor. Many killings have taken place on this issue in Gaya & Muzaffarpur. In Ranchi also this has been a contentious issue.

3.14 Besides, these issues, the question of a fair share in the produce for the bataidars (sharecroppers) the dominance of the neo-rich, contractors and corrupt bureaucrats nexus over the administration and politics of the rural areas and the gobbling up of development funds, by this nexus have also given rise to rural unrest but in our area of study the rural poor have not succeeded in protesting against these types of exploitation.

3.15 But, all these are issues and not the basic reason over which the unrest has led to tension and ultimately its violent manifestations. The basic cause is the outmoded land-relations, to be more clear the semi-feudal production relation, in which agriculture in Bihar continue to remain enmeshed. Despite four decades of progressive land-reforms we are faced with a situation in which, the operational landholdings of less than 2.5 acres, though accounting for the overwhelming majority of the total number of holdings, share hardly one third of the total land, and have an average size of just a little over 1 acre; those handful, owning big landholdings though hardly one fourth of the total share as much as two third of the land with average size of around 40 acres each.

3.16 A direct concomitant of inequitable land-holding pattern in improper utilisation of the productive forces of the land, that leads to inefficient cultivation by the landlords. Side by side, this phenomenon goes the distinctive advantage in production enjoyed by the small size farms. The technological

development in agriculture, as is now well known, has remained size-neutral.

3.17 A field survey conducted jointly by the International Labour Organisation, Geneva and A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, has shown that the productivity of land is highest in the size class owning land between 1 to 2 acres. The productivity of ownership farms with sizes between 1 to 2 acres was found to be higher by about 20.4 and 40.8 per cent respectively than ownership size class 2 to 10 acres and more than 10 acres. Its productivity was also marginally higher by about 0.4 per cent than the size class owning less than 1 acre of land which has a large contingent of very poor tillers who cannot afford even the base minimum essential inputs needed for cultivation. Let alone the productivity even the utilisation of the land for cultivation and utilisation of the irrigation potentials happens to be highest in the size class below 2.47 acres as general rule.

3.18 It is the area under landlords cultivation which generally report lesser and lesser percentage of area sown and are irrigated as the size of farm increases. As a result of the inequitable landholding pattern, therefore, full potentials of the land has not been utilised and agricultural production has been low. But, at the same time pressure on agriculture has gone on to increase as can be seen from the declining land worker ratio since employment opportunities for rural workers outside agriculture are barely available.

3.19 It is this failure in utilisation of full productive forces of land leading to a low productivity combined by increasing pressure on agriculture, that lead to intensification of the exploitation, already discussed hereabove.

3.20 In the present phase, in some areas tension may have been built up by the confrontation and rivalry among the different peasant-labour organisations pursuing slightly different line of action as some respondents in all districts reported. But, such confrontation and such tension represent a different case and are bound to take place if two or more organisations are working in the same areas over the same issues. The attempt to take the struggle of the exploited and oppressed from the fields and villages to the legislatures sought to be done by Indian Peoples Front (IPF) and the deployment by the ruling classes of all means to counter IPF may also have led to tension but this attempt is only a logical step in the fight to end the dominance of the ruling classes and in the fight to gain dignity.

#### *Darbhanga and East Champaran*

3.21 The districts of Bihar Darbhanga and East Champaran from north Bihar are like the other three from Central and South Bihar mentioned earlier, listed by the state government among the 24 affected by tension and unrest districts of the state deeply. However, what distinguishes these districts from the earlier ones is that the latter two are not listed among

the 'sensitive' districts. What this distinction implies however is that the level of mobilisation and organisation of rural poor in Darbhanga and E. Champaran has not been as widespread and has not reached as high as in Gaya and Jehanabad. This is why, feudal exploitation & oppression of the rural poor is still rampant in Darbhanga and East Champaran.

3.22 In the earlier study based on sample villages from Central and South Bihar districts we had argued that what distinguishes the present phase of rural unrest from earlier phases is the heightened level of consciousness and awareness brought about by the mobilisation and organisation of the rural poor at a scale and of a magnitude, unprecedented so far. Since the rural poor in these two districts are still not organised barring in a few areas, the feudal exploitation & oppression still go unchallenged and hence for the outside world it appears as if everything is calm & quiet on the rural horizon in Northern Bihar.

3.23 The fact however is that these two districts have been smouldering with simmering rural discontent and muted struggle of rural poor are going on in several parts of these districts. The main cause of rural discontent in these districts also are the same, the age old exploitation & oppression of the rural poor by the big landowners and Kulaks—the forms however may differ. Before proceeding further, it would be proper to put forward the main finding of the field study in districts of Bihar the causes being rural unrest.

- (i) Non-payment of minimum wages fixed by the government to the rural labourers.
- (ii) Illegal occupation of the landlords and Kulaks over gairmazarua, bhoodan and ceiling surplus land.
- (iii) Debt bondage and tenancy bondage of the rural poor by the landlords and forced begar.
- (iv) Denial of irrigation rights to the rural poor over village pond, ahars and pyne.
- (v) Loot of funds meant for rural poor by the rural rich.
- (vi) Untouchability, denial of temple entry to scheduled castes, sexual assaults on rural poor women.
- (vii) Denial of political rights to the rural poor.
- (viii) Atrocities perpetrated by the police at the behest of landlords.

3.24 We take each of these issues one by one in the following paragraphs.

#### *Minimum Wages*

3.25 As has already been mentioned in chapter III the wages paid to the rural labourers working on the agricultural fields in Darbhanga was found to be Rs. 10—15 as 2.5 to 3 kg. of rice, maize or wheat besides a little breakfast. Clearly this wages rate is

far short of the minimum farm wages as fixed by the government. None of the labourers interviewed during the field study revealed his or her awareness of the minimum wage rate fixed by the government.

3.26 In Purbi Champaran, the wage rate paid to the rural labourers was even lower than that in Darbhanga, as they were paid R. 6 in cash or 2.5 to 3 kg. of paddy or maize. What is more, the female labourers were being paid even less than that.

3.27 It is well known that the government fixed minimum farm wages is not even subsistence wages. Recently it has been pointed out that nothing less than Rs. 20.32 can be subsistence farm wages. So even if the labourers are paid the government fixed minimum farm wages, they will continue to live under subsistence for whom farm labour is the most important source of livelihood are not paid even that minimum wage, as is found to be the case in both Darbhanga and Purbi Champaran districts. Then the gap between the what the rural labourers require for their survival, what the government has fixed for them and what they actually get after a hard day's labour is sufficient to arouse them to rebel out against the existing order.

#### *The Land Question*

3.28 To break the stranglehold of semi feudalism acquisition of land owned by feudal landowners, of gairmazarua land illegally captured by them and redistribution of the same among the landless is a must. But the government's record on this score is dismal to say the least, as Table-1 shows. According to a very liberal preliminary estimate, not even half of the possible ceiling surplus land has been acquired and only one fourth distributed among the landless in Purbi Champaran.

3.29 And more often than not the redistribution of ceiling surplus as well as gairmazarua land has been on paper, i.e., the landless have been given 'parchas' (title deed) of land by the government but have not been allowed actual possession of the concerned land by the landowners. Of the eleven labourers interviewed by us at village Golma in Benipur block of Darbhanga district, as many as ten replied that they had been given parchas of land but the landowners in collusion with the police have not allowed them to till the land.

3.30 A direct concomitant of the non-implementation of land reforms and the inequitable landholding pattern has been the improper utilisation of the productive forces of land, that leads to inefficient cultivation by the landlords. Side by side this phenomenon goes the distinctive advantage in production enjoyed by the small size farms which we have already referred to in our earlier study. The agricultural census data for Gaya, Jehanabad and Ranchi has also shown that percentage of area utilised for sowing is highest in size class below 5 acres. In the case of Darbhanga and Purbi Champaran also this appear to be the general rule though with some qualifications.



For instance in the case of Purbi Champaran it is the size class 4.94 to 7.41 acres which report the highest sown area as percentage to total area. Similarly in the case of Darbhanga, it is the size-class 49.4 to 74.1 acres which report the highest percentage of net area sown to total area. Again in the case of Purbi Champaran, the size class below 1.24 acres report a slightly lower percentage. But this is only a reflection on the fact that the small cultivators are not in a position to afford even the bare minimum of inputs needed. But with these three qualifications the higher utilisation of land in smaller size classes appear to be the general rule.

3.31 But the really important phenomenon is that net area sown a percentage to total area has declined in almost all the size classes in both the district barring size class 49.4 to 74.1 acres in Darbhanga.

3.32 The utilisation of irrigation potentials which was found to be higher in smaller size classes in Gaya, Jehanabad and Ranchi is not found to be so in the case of Darbhanga & Purbi Champaran. Indeed utilisation of irrigation potential happens to be higher in the higher size-classes and this may be due to the fact that the big landowners owing to their economic power, social dominance and political clout have captured to bulk of the limited irrigation facilities provided by the government.

#### *Usurious Exploitation*

3.33 Usurious exploitation of rural poor by the landowners is rampant in the villages of Darbhanga and Purbi Champaran. All the forty labourers interviewed by us in the five village of these two districts listed usurious exploitation as one of the forms of economic exploitation. The rate of interest charged by the moneylender-landowners happened to be anything between 100 per cent to 150 per cent. The high interest rates was coupled by the condition of working in the field of the moneylenders' lands and failure to pay the usurious interest resulted in the capture of land and crop of the indebted poor by the moneylender lord.

#### *Bondage*

3.34 Besides debt bondage, bondage of other kinds are also prevailing in these districts, like employment on terms that make the labourer bonded to the employer landowner or tenancy arrangements on terms that require the tenants to firstly perform labour on the landowners other pieces of land and so on.

3.35 Bondage of all types, debt bondage, employment bondage and tenancy bondage is fairly prevalent in the villages of Darbhanga and Purbi Chambers, going by the version of the labourer, activists and politicians interviewed by us.

3.36 Since bondage implies curbs on the freedom of the individual if naturally creates discontent and

unrest in the heart of the bonded, more so, when the bonded sees for him elf that while he is suffering from the worst pangs of hunger and slavery his masters are fattening and flourishing.

#### *Social Oppression*

3.37 Social oppression of the rural poor, who also happen to be dalits in caste hierarchy, by the landowning upper castes is still the order of the day in the villages of Darbhanga and Purbi Champaran and a major factor that has generated unrest among the rural poor. These are the regions where forces of Brahminical order are still dominating. The upper caste landowners still do not allow the scheduled castes to draw water from the village well while an upper caste person is drawing water. Temple entry is still prohibited for the dalits as almost all the labourers and activists interviewed by us reported. Dalit women are still being subjected to abuse and sexual assaults by the upper caste landowners. Begar is still the order of the day and beating and abusing the rural poor by the high and mighty still goes on unquestioned.

#### *Loot of Funds Meant for the Poor*

3.38 When questioned what the government has done for them, the only answer preferred by the rural labourers was—nothing. Indeed many of the activists and leaders of organisations, active among the rural poor listed loot of funds meant for the rural poor by bureaucrats, politicians, contractors and engineers and cornering whatever incentives the government provides by the rural rich a factor behind the simmering rural unrest.

#### *Denial of Political Rights*

3.39 Significant finding of the field study carried by us is that while around eighty five per cent of the labourers interviewed by us reported that they were being denied their political rights, most importantly voting rights, by the rural rich around fifteen per cent reported that during the last Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections, they cast their first ballots in life.

#### *Police Atrocities*

3.40 Atrocities committed by the police on behalf or at the behest of the rural rich also emerged as a factor due to which unrest is simmering in the hearts of the rural poor. Many labourers said that whenever they tried to till and sow the land distributed to them by the government the landlords called police which beat away the landless. In some cases when the labourers succeeded in sowing the land the landlords forcibly harvested the same with the help of the police

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 From what has been discussed so far, the gist of the study may be now put forward :

- (i) The rural unrest in Bihar is almost synonymous to the agrarian unrest. At the root of prevailing agrarian unrest, is the stranglehold of semi-feudal production relations, the most significant aspect of which is that, land does not remain in the hands of the actual tillers but with the handful of non-cultivating landlords.
- (ii) Since, the vast bulk of land in Bihar does not lie in the hand of the actual tillers, the productive potentials are not fully utilised that leads to poor agricultural production.
- (iii) Since, employment opportunities outside agriculture are very limited, the rural workforce have no option but to depend on agriculture for their sustenance. Thus, more than 85 per cent of the rural workforce eke out a living from agriculture.
- (iv) Poor agricultural production and an increasing number of hands naturally lead to struggle among the agrarian classes for a larger and larger share of the agricultural produce.
- (v) Denial of minimum wages to the labourers, capture of Gairmajarua land and ceiling surplus land by the landlords despite the redistribution of the same among the landless, denial of fishing and irrigational rights, forced labour and so on all are the mechanism of the landlords and rich peasants to expropriate a larger and larger share to the agricultural cake. And since, now the exploited class has begun resisting these age old mechanism, hence is the tension and since the landlords have tried to crush such resistance by bullets, hence is the violence in rural Bihar.
- (vi) That there is no violence and everything appears to be calm & quiet in Darbhanga and Purbi Champaran barring some areas does not imply that there is no rural unrest. The fact is that unrest is very much there. The only difference is that this unrest is yet to be articulated as the rural poor are yet not organised the way they have been in central and South Bihar.
- (vii) At the root of the unrest is, the firm stranglehold of semi-feudal production relations,

the most significant aspect of which is, that land does not lie in the hands of the actual tillers but in those of the handful of non-cultivating landlords who cannot utilise the its potentials, leading to poor agricultural production.

- (viii) As employment opportunities outside agriculture are not available more than 87 per cent of the rural labour force in Darbhanga and East Champaran has got no option but continue to depend on agriculture even though it means a life of deprivations & miseries.

*Recommendations*

4.2 Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations can be made to deal with the rural unrest :

- (i) Immediate and firm steps are required to be taken to implement land reforms with the aim to give land to the tiller .
- (ii) Immediate and firm steps are further required to spread out irrigation network throughout the state through small and medium irrigation projects. The irrigational infrastructure is extremely low and undeveloped in the state.
- (iii) Rejuvenation of the traditional system of irrigation by repairing the ahars and pynes which still account for the largest share of the irrigated land.
- (iv) A system of incentive and technological help to the actual tillers, whatever possible.
- (v) Immediate steps to release all type of gairmajarua land from the illegal capture of the landlords and its redistribution among the landless.
- (vi) Incentives and help to the rural artisans communities, who due to decline of their traditional occupation have fallen back on agriculture for their sustenance, should be provided.
- (vii) Immediate and firm steps to implement land reforms with the aim to give land to the tiller. This would not only lead to better utilisation of the productive potentials of land but of the agricultural workforce as well.

- (viii) Upward revision of minimum wages to Rs. 20.50 to make it subsistence wages and backing it up with strengthening the implementation machinery.
- (ix) Since irrigational infrastructure is starkly inadequate and under developed in these two districts, spreading out irrigation network through small and medium irrigation projects should be given top priority.
- (x) The traditional rural system of irrigation still accounts for the largest share of the irrigated land so rejuvenation of this system is urgently called for more so, since this is a low investment but high & quick results yielding field.
- (xi) Incentive and help to the actual tillers of the soil as also to the rural artisan communities who due to decline of their traditional occupation have fallen back on agriculture, should be provided.
- (xii) And lastly attempts should be made to encourage the mobilisation and organisation of the rural poor to generate sufficient pressure from below for the government to act and enable the rural labourers to defend their own right given by the law but denied by the rural rich. It is the lack of such an organisation in North Bihar due to which the sway of the otherwise declining feudal order is still firm there.

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**ANNEXURE I**

*Area, Population and Main Workers (1981)*

S. No.	District	Area (In Square Kms.)			Population			Total	Rural (As% to Column 9)	Urban (As% to Column 9)
		Total	Rural (As% to Column 3)	Urban (As% to Column 3)	Total	Rural (As% to Column 6)	Urban (As% to Column 6)			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.	Gaya . . . . .	4975.7	4914 (98.76)	61.7 (1.24)	2150406	1855037 (86.26)	295369 (13.74)	681039	609304 (89.47)	71735 (10.53)
2.	Jehanabad . . . . .	1569.3	1549.1 (98.71)	20.2 (1.29)	983769	939134 (95.46)	44635 (4.54)	284622	274110 (96.31)	10512 (3.69)
3.	Ranchi . . . . .	18266	17904.4 (98.02)	361.6 (1.68)	3070432	2428023 (79.08)	642409 (20.92)	1059777	892208 (84.19)	167569 (15.81)
4.	Darbhanga . . . . .	2279	2259.8 (99.16)	19.2 (0.84)	2008193	1831892 (91.22)	176301 (8.78)	550319	510296 (92.73)	40023 (7.27)
5.	East Champaran . . . . .	3968	3921.6 (98.33)	46.4 (1.27)	2425501	2312628 (95.35)	112873 (4.65)	734424	704382 (95.91)	30042 (4.09)
	<b>Bihar . . . . .</b>	<b>173877</b>	<b>170678.5 (98.16)</b>	<b>3198.5 (1.84)</b>	<b>69914734</b>	<b>61195744 (87.53)</b>	<b>8718990 (12.47)</b>	<b>20753128</b>	<b>18501502 (89.15)</b>	<b>2251626 (10.85)</b>

Source : Census of India 1981.

**ANNEXURE II**

*Indicators of Condition of SCs and STs*

S. No.	Indicators	Gaya	Jehanabad	Ranchi	Darbhanga	East Champaran	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Literacy Rate	(i) General	28.13	34.33	31.32	23.87	18.96	
	(ii) SC	7.75	11.12	18.6	7.6	7.1	
	(iii) ST	24.64	7.34	23.2	89.3	14.2	
2. Cultivators (as % to main workers)	(i) General	41.70	46.24	61.51	37.28	42.78	
	(ii) SC	14.07	8.50	38.36	7.17	9.91	
	(iii) ST	10.36	0.96	72.82	—	19.01	
3. Agricultural Labourers (as % to main workers)	(i) General	38.86	38.79	14.25	44.55	32.29	
	(ii) SC	78.83	84.10	28.05	81.08	83.51	
	(iii) ST	11.23	85.58	14.87	—	42.56	
4. Manufacturing, Processing, Servicing, Repairs (as % to main workers)	(i) General	2.44	2.80	2.83	2.72	1.50	
	(ii) SC	1.12	2.26	9.36	2.11	1.92	
	(iii) ST	0.52	..	1.71	..	5.17	
5. Other workers (as % to main workers)	(i) General	17.10	12.17	21.4	15.45	9.81	
	(ii) SC	5.98	5.13	24.23	1.92	4.66	
	(iii) ST	77.89	13.46	10.13	100.00	33.26	
6. Marginal Workers (as % to total population)	(i) General	2.03	1.37	2.08	1.50	1.01	
	(ii) SC	2.64	2.12	7.01	2.53	1.54	
	(iii) ST	2.49	1.83	9.24	..	0.69	
7. Non-Workers (as % to total population)	(i) General	66.30	69.70	58.25	71.09	68.71	
	(ii) SC	55.20	58.58	55.67	63.63	61.69	
	(iii) ST	41.99	50.46	53.71	57.14	57.48	

Source : Census of India , 1981.

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