

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE RURAL POOR IN

ANDHRA PRADESH

The conditions of the rural poor particularly the landless agricultural labourers remained miserable for a long time. The magnitude and widespread nature of poverty is widely reported by different research studies. The irrigated areas are no exception. The people have been suffering from it for a long time inspite of growth oriented development. G.N.Rao observes that, "in Krishna and Godavari districts between 1850 to 1890 the money wages had increased but they had been neutralised by an increase in the prices of foodgrains. It is further noted that agricultural growth and absence of any improvement of the conditions of agricultural labourers had gone hand in hand." This indicates that growth by itself does not result in distributive justice. The legacy of feudalism and colonialism continue to dominate our productive and distributive processes resulting in ubiquitous poverty.

During the post-independence period the wages of agricultural labourers, by and large, remained the same. It is reported that there has been no significant improvement in the wage structure between 1958-59 and 1975-76. Yet another study points out that money wage rate has more than doubled but the real wage did not increase. In the post-Green Revolution period also the wages have not risen. Over a period, it is noticed that the real wages came down from 11% to 25%. Thus, irrigation development and Green revolution have not made any difference to the wage structure of the landless agricultural labour.

A study points out that 50% of the households own no land or land below one acre". Another study on 'dynamics of transformation in the rural areas' points out "during 1956-1976 half of the rural households owned about 95% of the land while the rest only 5% of the land." This is a reflection on the way the land reforms are carried out.

C.Siva Rama Krishna Rao in his study on changing agrarian relations in Andhra Pradesh highlights that "while the abolition of zamindari can be hailed as a land mark ... the tenancy ~~and~~ reforms and ceilings on land holdings cannot be considered as a success and even the second round of land ceilings... have not helped much in lessening the socio-economic power of the landowning classes because most of them have managed to keep the excess land under their cultivating possession by resorting to benami transfers and other dubious methods."

M. Ramchander Rao in his study on "some Aspects of Implementation of ceilings on Agricultural land Holdings in Andhra Pradesh" observes that land reform legislations and their implementation was defective and tardy. This provided, according to the study, "ample scope to the unscrupulous land owners to circumvent the law with the connivance of corrupt and class conscious bureaucrats". The cumulative effect of all the factors defeated the purpose of land ceilings. For ceilings were imposed on the holdings of rich, but land could not be distributed to poor. In such cases where the land could be assigned they were not benefitted as no assistance was extended. Agro Economic Centre in a study on the problem maintained "allotment of unirrigated land with the absence of government assistance resulted in ~~meagre~~ meagre returns".

With regard to the levels of poverty based on 26th (1971-72) and 32nd (1977-78) rounds of National sample Surveys, it has been reported that during this period in the Coastal districts of Krishna, Guntur and West-Godavari the levels of living of bottom 30% remained the same. In the districts like Medak, Adilabad and Ananthpur it registered lower levels of living. The district wise poverty levels reveal very startling trends: in Karimnagar 77% of the people are found below the poverty line and from among the agricultural labourers 87% are below the poverty line, in the district of Warangal 70% are below the poverty line and from among the agricultural labourers the number below the poverty line is as high as 90%, in Adilabad it is 66% in the overall population and among the agricultural labourers it is 83%. The data conclusively indicates that the incidence of poverty is concentrated in the agricultural labourers. The other districts where more than 80% are below the poverty line include Srikakulam (85%), Ananthpur (86%), Hyderabad/Rangareddy (81%) and Medak (81%). It should also be noted that the entire brunt of poverty is borne by the tribals, scheduled castes and the services castes. In these districts the conditions of the marginal and small farmers is also no better. The present peasant unrest in these districts should be understood from this background.

THE TRIBAL SITUATION:

The history of tribals in general and the tribals of Andhra Pradesh in particular is an episode of deprivation and oppression. The tribals who continue to live in the forest made it not only a source of livelihood but their home. The tribal and the forest get so thickly interwoven

that it is difficult to separate them and their problems. Although many argue that tribals should join the 'mainstream' of the society, in concrete terms the system has not been able to design and open up any meaningful alternative to absorb them into the mainstream. The magnitude of their problem is associated with considerable oppression, both structural and ideological. Their problems acquired higher gravity as the outsiders ~~since~~ started encroaching into the forest. It became further complicated when the state itself started penetrating into the forest. In the process of interaction with the outsiders the land grabbers, money lenders, forest bureaucracy-their overall socio economic conditions started worsening. The worst outcome has been the problem of land alienation.

Land Alienation: The land is the only resource of the tribals especially in the Scheduled areas. In spite of the constitutional stipulation under the directive principles of state policy to protect the interest of the tribals, tribal land alienation ~~is~~ continues unabated. This, we view, as the most crucial question as 85% of the tribals in Andhra Pradesh depend on land for their livelihood. While about 36% of them are engaged as cultivators, about 49% are landless agricultural labourers. The ~~X~~ STs constitute the single largest group among the landless agricultural labourers in the agency tracts.

A study on the changing land ownership of tribal and non-tribal households over a decade (1978 to 1988) highlights very shocking trends. In a village ^{Narnar} ~~Narnar~~ (Adilabad), 29 tribals and 9 non-tribal

households held 89.7% and 10.2% of the total land respectively in 1978. In 1988 the land held by the tribals was reduced to 20.6% while that of the non-tribals rose to 79.4%. In Beyagutta village of Khammam 26 tribal and 11 non-tribal households held 86.1% and 13.8% of the land respectively in 1978. In 1988 it got changed to 42.7% and 57.2%. In Royyur village of Warangal the 19 tribal and 7 non-tribal households held 83% and 16.9% of the land respectively in 1978. By 1988 the land held by the tribals become 23.3% and that of the non-tribals 76.7%.

The other studies also highlight the question of land alienation. The census figures between 1971 and 1981 reveal that the number of cultivators decreased from 58% to 54%. Further according to 1981 census 40% of the Scheduled Tribe population in the tribal sub plan districts are agricultural labourers. In the districts of Srikakulam and West Godavari the agricultural labourers constitute more than 50%.

The land alienation caused by the people who came from outside had not been checked by the officials inspite of a law protecting their land. The various methods used by non-tribals for circumventing the laws for acquiring tribal lands are as follows: a) benami transfers; (b) transfers to non-tribals in the form of lease or mortgage; (c) transfers in the name of concubines and tribal servants who may work as bounded labourers; (d) marital alliance with a tribal lady for the sake of transfer of tribal land in her name; (e) transfer of tribal land in the name of tribals adopted fictitiously;

(f) transfer of actual possession of land without any record in lieu of loan; and (g) encroachment of tribal land by force. There are also other reasons which include: (a) delay on the part of the government in settling land alienation cases; (b) failure of the tribals to protect and establish their right over land due to low levels of education; (c) construction of hydro-electric projects or heavy industry in tribal areas resulting in their displacement.

The land alienation is caused by high incidence of indebtedness. A ~~case~~ case study reveals that on an average a tribal household ^{is} ~~is~~ indebted to the extent of Rs. 1717/-. The purpose of borrowing indicates that 44% amount was borrowed for consumption purposes, 42% for agricultural purposes. The rest borrow either for marriage or other miscellaneous purposes. That almost half of the tribals take the loans for consumption purposes indicate the low incomes and the helplessness of the tribals. These loans, in most of the cases, are raised from the private money lenders who charge 25 to 50% for cash loans and 50 to 100% for loans in kind. This indebtedness is not only resulting in loss of the land but in attached or bonded labour.

If we look at the data on the legal litigation and protection of the land, it is equally ineffective. The data available on land alienation in tribal areas till the end of 1986 shows that out of 42235 cases registered involving 1,82,392.96 acres, only 34370 cases involving an acreage of 153171.90 have been disposed. From this they could restore only 70201 acres of the land. Almost one third of the cases

are decided against the tribals. Thus the legal protection or relief is not prompt and effective .

THE INCOME AND PER CAPITA EXPENDITURE:

The data on monthly income and per capita expenditure reveals that 39.36% of S.T. households are found in the income slab of less than Rs.40 per capita per month against 17.2 per cent of the general population in this income bracket. In the income slab of Rs.125 and above, the S.T.s constitute about 6% while it is 23% in general population. In the case of per capita monthly expenditure about 26% of the households are under the slab of less than Rs.40 and their per centage is just seven in the slab of more than Rs.125 . This indicates how the deprivation and presently tend to be more in the case of the tribals.

Education:

The education levels is yet another indicator of tribal backwardness. This percentage of literacy among Scheduled Tribe is about 8% as against 30% in the state. The female literacy is just 3.4% while it is 20% in other categories.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMMES:

In view of these appaling trends the government, of course, has been treating tribals as a separate target group for developmental purpose . The ITDA and S.T Corporation have been undertaking certain schemes with an objective to help them cross the poverty line. The studies on these programmes reveal that the funds allocated for this purpose are inadequate and in the case of minor irrigation they are awfully inadequate.

S.K. Pachauri a government official in his study observes that " In Andhra Pradesh ~~Government's~~ tribal Welfare Policy has undergone changes especially in the context of naxalite uprising from 1968-1972. Although the measures were initiated, there was no corresponding changes in the quality of life in these areas. The government faced a hostile population who had lost faith in its exhortations and actions. Owing to centuries of long neglect and exploitation by landed interests and deprivation of forest rights and increasing awareness as in the case of Srikakulam it led to an explosion of emotion and pent up anger which resulted in a major Girijan revolt" .

The developmental programmes have not been percolating to the tribals ^{as} is evident from the fact that right now a larger number of tribals in Adilabad are passing through an acute famine. The Government and its machinery failed so miserably that quite a number of the tribals are eating poisonous ~~things~~ ^{tubers which} are boiled six times for three ~~two~~ weeks. They are also eating leaves and ^{flowers} ~~peas~~. A large section sold away their cattle, ^{cooking} vessels and other possessions to meet their day today consumption needs. A few officers ~~were~~ who are sensitive to the situation expressed their helplessness in meeting this grave situation. The Adilabad famine should not be considered as an isolated event. It brings out the deep malaise underlying the socio-economic structure. The people who are pushed to such a

helpless corner~~ed~~ do search for alternatives. The
unrest in the state, in our view, is not a law and
order ~~question~~ but a ^{question} of their ~~continued~~ survival
and dignified existence.