

CHAPTER SIX

PROBLEMS OF LAND AND AGRICULTURE

The basic data collected from the survey reports of the Special Multi-purpose Tribal Blocks indicate that more than 80% of the tribal people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The available Census figures (1951) reveal that out of a total tribal population of 2.35 crores, 1.73 crores are engaged in agricultural pursuits, while remaining are landless agricultural labourers. The highest concentration of Scheduled Tribe landless labourers is in Southern India (27.2%), Central India has 18.3%, Eastern India 10.5% and Northern India 1.7%. The land available is quite insufficient to provide a standard of living which bears any comparison to that enjoyed by other groups of people. Moreover, among the majority of the tribal people the practice is to have only one food-grain crop and that too through completely outmoded forms of cultivation.

The tribal is criticised for unauthorised felling of trees in forest areas for shifting cultivation, but he does so mainly because of unsatisfied land hunger. The availability of land is, however, strictly limited, particularly since in the national interest it is necessary to conserve the forest resources and take effective steps for checking soil erosion. However, all possible measures should be taken to distribute such land that is already available to the tribals in preference to others. In any such scheme of redistribution, land should be available under the following :--

(a) The Gramdan Programme.

(b) Surplus lands available with an imposition on ceilings and holdings.

(c) Lands available in the reclaimed and de-forested areas such as in Dandakaranya, or the Raima-Surma Valley of Tripura.

The economic stability of the tribals can be ensured only through agriculture and it is obvious that there can be no progress in agriculture without suitable land to cultivate. In some of the tribal areas such as Bastar, there seems to be no shortage of land at present but in many other areas there is real land hunger. The Renuka Ray Committee has studied the entire situation and, though we ourselves are concerned only with the Multipurpose Tribal Blocks, we cannot emphasise too strongly that their circumstances cannot be considered in isolation and indeed, our conclusions should have a bearing on the entire tribal area, in view of the fact that we hope that it will be completely covered with Blocks during the Third Five Year Plan period.

The Renuka Ray Committee has pointed out that 'the extension of the rule of law in the field of land rights has resulted in the progressive extinction of the original rights of the tribals which were their's, at least by virtue of the first occupation', and in an important sentence, with which we are in the strongest agreement, it declares that 'even if it is not possible to reverse this process there should be no doubt or difficulty about arresting it and in restating the rights of tribal communities in land in unambiguous terms'.

Some of the tribal people are still in the position of sub-tenants and are subject to threats of forced eviction under the pretence of 'voluntary surrenders'. Some are regarded as only crop-sharers. Where land has

been allotted to them, as the Research Unit of the Renuka Ray Team discovered, although in Rajasthan each received more than five acres, almost 50 per cent of the settlers whom they examined elsewhere got less than two acres of land. The quality of land allotted was often poor.

Throughout vast areas of tribal India, the last hundred years present a melancholy history of encroachment, alienation and exploitation. Even today it is doubtful how far the legislative measures that have been taken in most of the States with large tribal populations have been really effective. 'Ingenuous agents of exploitation' have all too often found loopholes to nullify their effectiveness.

In some of the Blocks visited by our Committee we had vivid evidence of the difficulty of making real progress in development so long as the land problem remains unsolved. In the Aheri Block, where we visited a fairly large number of villages in the interior, it was almost impossible to get the people to talk about development schemes. 'A school?' they would say. 'Well, yes, if you insist. A well? It is too much trouble—we have always had water to drink and, though it is not very good, we are still alive. Fertilizers? We suppose so, if you want to give them. BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR LAND?' The first, last and only word was LAND.

Similarly, we were informed that seventy per cent of the Koya cultivators in the Narsampet Block were in unauthorised possession of land, a fact which exposed them to petty blackmail by the low grade official staff and inspired them with a constant sense of anxiety about the future. Without possession of his land, no peasant will go to the task of improving it with enthusiasm. Many other Koyas are landless labourers or have very small holdings. The result is that the Koyas here are little more than a tragic parody of the Koyas of Bastar and Orissa. The constant encroachment of the forest boundaries has reduced their holdings and the ever-increasing number of animals has exposed what they have to the ravages of wild pig and bison. Independence, which has brought the glories and inspiration of freedom to millions, has given little to these poor people.

In Tripura the encroachment of refugees, which has presented the Administration with a problem of appalling difficulty, has, in spite of every effort, resulted in encroachment on the tribal land and here there has been no survey and some of the tribal people do not even know what land they have. In Paderu we received many complaints about the fact that there is still a Muttadar who controls 34 villages in which the people have no *pattas* and no proper right to their land. They frequently insisted that unless they could be given proper rights they would not be interested in improving their land, and feared that the opening up of communications might prove to be a curse rather than a blessing, for as more and more outsiders came into their territory they would gradually obtain possession of the tribal land. In the Bhuyanpirh Block the tribal people have no records of rights and they suffer from a similar anxiety. They are bewildered by the rapid changes all around them, and are apprehensive about their future. These are only examples of a widespread malady which demands urgent and effective cure.

We recommend, therefore, that :

- (a) the States should take up as a measure of priority a survey of

- the tribal areas in order to discover the amount of cultivable land available and the extent to which the tribal people have no established rights in the areas they cultivate;
- (b) this should be followed by a vigorous and sincere attempt to establish the tribal people in their rights to the land which they have cultivated traditionally;
 - (c) Land Alienation Acts and similar protective measures should be carefully re-examined in the light of the present situation;
 - (d) the aim should be to ensure that every tribal has at least two-and-a-half acres of wet or five acres of dry land which he can cultivate, and in the establishment of colonies or in any scheme of settlement this should be regarded as the absolute minimum.

The tribal people are bound to their land by many and intimate ties. Their feeling for it is something more than mere possessiveness. It is connected with their sense of history, for their legends tell of the great journeys they made over the wild and lonely hills and of the heroic pioneers who made the first clearings in the forest. It is part of their reverence for the dead, whose spirits still haunt the countryside. The land is the mother who provides for them in response to the labours of their hands and who, when supplies run short, feeds them with a hundred natural gifts. It is the setting of adventure, in love, in hunting and in war, which can never be forgotten. The land is the foundation of a sense of security and freedom from fear; its assured possession is a lasting road to peace.

In each Multipurpose Block, there is a provision of Rs. 1.50 lakhs for Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Extension, in addition to a provision of Rs. 4 lakhs for Irrigation, Reclamation and Soil Conservation, thus making a combined provision of Rs. 5.50 lakhs. While the provision for Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Extension in the schematic budgets remains Rs. 1.50 lakhs in the Special Multipurpose Blocks of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura, the average provision has been increased to Rs. 3.89 lakhs in Assam, Rs. 2.31 lakhs in Bombay, Rs. 2.5 lakhs in Madhya Pradesh and Rs. 2.93 lakhs in Manipur.

A study of the progress of expenditure on these subjects, however, reveals that only 35.41% of the total provision has been spent in all the 43 Blocks from their inception upto 30th September, 1959. In other words, out of a total provision of Rs. 98,36,421, only Rs. 34,83,728 has so far been spent. On the allied subjects of Irrigation, Reclamation and Soil Conservation, out of a total provision of Rs. 1,65,14,788, the expenditure reported upto 30th September, 1959, is Rs. 54,58,265, a percentage of 33.05. The highest percentage of expenditure recorded in any Block on Agriculture and Animal Husbandry has been in Tamia (69%) and the lowest percentage is in Murkong-Selek (12.03%).

Under the combined programmes of Irrigation, Reclamation and Soil Conservation, the Barwani Block in Madhya Pradesh has recorded an expenditure of 104.76%: Rs. 4.19 lakhs is estimated to have spent upto 30th September, 1959, against a provision of Rs. 4 lakhs. The Peint Block in Bombay shows a figure of 98.24%. The Sukhsar Block in Bombay has spent 80.74%.

On the other hand, the Bhimpur (Madhya Pradesh) and the Adhaura (Bihar) Blocks have only shown percentages of 1.19 and 0.60 respectively,

The Saipung-Darrang and Murkong-Selek Blocks (Assam) have only spent 3·16% and 3·96% respectively.

There is no need for us to discuss the details of these subjects. The programme has been carefully worked out by experts and has recently been examined, with special reference to the inaccessible and largely tribal areas by the Inaccessible Areas Committee. The chief thing now is to implement it.

A comparative study of the statistics for all the 43 Multipurpose Blocks given in Appendix II is revealing. The lowest percentage of expenditure is on Rural Arts and Crafts, only 20·20%; the next lowest is on Co-operation, only 20·34%. The highest percentage is on Social Education (48·71%) which does not demand priority in a tribal area. The next highest is on Block headquarters—44·35%. Expenditure on Animal Husbandry and Agriculture (35·41%) and Irrigation etc. (33·05%) is exceeded, not only by these items, but by Education (39·60%). Yet if greater attention is not paid to Agriculture there may one day be few to educate and none to house. That the allocation, even in the revised budgets, for Rural Housing (91 lakhs) which, as this Report shows, is not a matter of high importance, should be almost equal to that of Animal Husbandry and Agriculture combined (only a little over 98 lakhs) shows a remarkable indifference to real priorities.

In many Blocks, where there was scope for increased expenditure under Agriculture and Irrigation, the Block officers were reluctant to spend larger amounts as they felt themselves (quite wrongly) tied down as a matter of routine to the schematic budget. The statement in Appendix II gives the financial provision and the expenditure upto 30th September, 1959, and the percentage of expenditure on schemes for Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Extension, Irrigation, Reclamation and Soil Conservation. We regret that the P.E.Os have not adopted a bolder and more imaginative attitude. The scope for flexibility in the schematic budget to suit local needs has not been fully explored. We hope that in the new Special Tribal Blocks to be opened in the Third Five Year Plan, much greater attention will be paid to these subjects, so vital to the happiness, health and progress of the tribal people.