

# Does Land Still Matter?

D BANDYOPADHYAY

The national economy is growing at near double-digit rates but neither industry nor non-agricultural activities in rural India have been able to provide livelihoods for millions of rural workers. It is this failure that underlies the spurt in rural violence that has highlighted once again the issue of the poor's access to land, water and forests. It is gradually being recognised that further deterioration of economic, social and political conditions of the rural poor can neither be arrested nor reversed without a significant policy shift towards a comprehensive land reform programme. Land reform means the disempowerment of a small but very powerful number of people. In a democratic society land reform can be undertaken sans bloodshed but not without tears.

This article is based on N P Sen Memorial Lecture delivered at the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad on January 12, 2008.

D Bandyopadhyay ([csdnl@del2.vsnl.net.in](mailto:csdnl@del2.vsnl.net.in)) is with the Council for Social Development, New Delhi.

**A**griculture in India is currently passing through a crisis. The annual growth of agricultural output decelerated from 3.08 per cent pa during the period 1980-81 to 1991-92 to 2.38 per cent pa during 1992-93 to 2003-04 and the growth rate of crop output decelerated from 3.19 per cent pa during the 1980s to 1.18 per cent pa during the latter period. Similarly, the annual growth of foodgrains output decreased to an all time low of 1.16 per cent pa. This annual growth is lower than the rate of growth of population of 1.95 per cent pa. Thus, in the post-reform period there had been a sharp decline in the per capita availability of foodgrains [Bhalla 2007: 67]. The signs are ominous. The disparities between the primary sector and the other two, viz, secondary and tertiary sectors, are growing alarmingly. That apart, at the margin of the primary sector a large number of households are either currently facing food insecurity or would be facing the problem in the near future, leading to enhanced morbidity and mortality.

In a vast country, macro figures tend to iron out many ugly regional features. Except Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh all the other states showed deceleration of growth in agriculture after 1995-96. Agriculturally developed states like Punjab and West Bengal were able to maintain a growth higher than the national average between 1995-96 and 2004-05. Andhra Pradesh witnessed a fall in growth rate from 3.18 per cent pa between 1984-85 and 1995-96 to 2.69 per cent pa between 1995-96 and 2004-05 [Ramesh Chand et al 2007: 2530-31]. A fall of about 15 per cent in the growth rate is quite significant, which did have deleterious social and political consequences.

There is a lot of literature on the present problems in agriculture including the several-volume report of the Swaminathan Commission. All the literature deal with techno-economic factors like the lack of

public investment in the primary sector, unfavourable terms of trade for agriculture, intensity of use or lack of use of chemical fertilisers, lack of institutional credit facilities and the like. Each factor is understandably important. But there has not been any serious discussion on the mode and relations of production in agriculture. If agrarian relations are not conducive to proper utilisation of the techno-economic factors, their mere availability might not solve the crisis. West Bengal is now recognised as an agriculturally advanced state. But from 1891 to 1981 the growth rate of agriculture varied between 0 and 1 per cent pa. The century old stagnation was able to burst asunder from 1982-83 due to the conglomeration of a number of conducive forces in production relations. This point is often ignored by the pundits of agriculture. Land reform in West Bengal did play an important role.

## Freedom Struggle and Peasants

There is a folklore that the whole concept of land reforms was brought to the fore in India by Wolf Ladejinsky (the World Bank consultant in India) who carried out drastic and radical land reforms in Formosa (now Taiwan), Japan and Korea under Douglas MacArthur during the period of the American occupation after the second world war. His famous report on the abuse of 'bataidari' system in north Bihar did shake the conscience of those in power at that time. But the concept of land reforms was a part and parcel of our freedom struggle. In Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography one gets a vivid account of the participation of peasants and agricultural workers in both the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1921 and Non-cooperation Movement of 1931. They took part in these movements in large numbers and suffered repression and police atrocities in the hope that political freedom would be accompanied by their emancipation from oppression and bondage of the taluqdars and zamindars who were the "lords of the land" and whom Nehru described as "the spoilt children of the British government". Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the first

president of the All India Kisan Congress (then a front organisation of the Indian National Congress), asserted in 1936 that “no compromise was possible between the peasants and the landlords except dispossession of zamindars of their land” [Bandyopadhyay 2007: 102].

Radical land reform was accepted, as a post-independence programme of action by a large section of the Congress particularly those who described themselves as the “Congress Socialists Group”. Soon after independence, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) set up the Congress Agrarian Reform Committee, commonly known as the Kumarappa Committee. Among other measures the Kumarappa Committee proposed a fairly radical ceiling on land. The First Five-Year Plan generally endorsed the recommendations of the Kumarappa Committee and left it to the states to implement the ceiling provisions depending on the realities of each state. Since then land reform has been an item for action in all the five-year plans. In the Seventh Five-Year Plan there was a clear statement linking land reforms with other major programmes of the plan. It stated clearly:

Land reforms have been recognised to constitute a vital element both in terms of the anti-poverty strategy and for modernisation and increased productivity in agriculture. Redistribution of land could provide a permanent asset base for a large number of rural landless poor for taking up land-based and other supplementary activities. Similarly, consolidation of holding, tenancy regulation and updating of land records would widen the access of small and marginal landholders to improved technology and inputs and thereby directly leading to increase in agricultural production.

The short point was that this document, though late in the day, acknowledged the centrality of land reform in the whole process of rural development and poverty alleviation. After this late recognition came the tsunami of liberalisation which drowned all the issues of fairness and justice in socio-economic field.

### Favouring the Marginalised

Gone are the days of the 1950s and 1960s when equity, egalitarianism, socialism and social control of productive resources for common good were part of the thought

processes of leaders of almost all democratic nations. Die hard capitalist countries, barring a few, opted for welfarism. Others adopted various forms of socialism from the mixed economy of the Nehruvian variety to the puritan socialism of Mao Zedong. The commonality among all was the recognition of the interventionist role of the state to tilt the scale in favour of the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised segments of the society. The first flush of land reform in India particularly the abolition of zamindari was a product of that ambience, which was a carry over of the tradition of the freedom struggle. Then the Indian state felt and thought it had a direct responsibility towards the majority of citizens, particularly the rural impoverished masses, who had very low bargaining power in a market of unequal exchange.

Enthusiasm for land reform abated from the early 1960s when India faced a major food crisis, particularly in the eastern region. Naturally, the focus shifted from land reform to enhancement of foodgrain production and productivity. Land reform receded from the frontal visibility. But rural unrest in the late 1960s and early 1970s brought to the fore the issue of land reform. In 1972 prime minister Indira Gandhi convened a meeting of chief ministers to tackle the problem of rising rural unrest commonly known as “Naxalism”. In that meeting the then home minister Y B Chavan made that oft quoted famous statement “We would not allow the green revolution to turn into red revolution”. In that meeting a consensus was arrived at to reduce land ceiling and to introduce family-based ceiling on land, tenancy reform and other similar measures.

All the measures indicated in the national consensus were quite progressive not only in the context of the then prevailing situation, but the principles and philosophy behind them remain valid even today. The point to note is that at the height of the green revolution when the entire effort of the Indian state was to attain self-sufficiency in foodgrain production to shake off the humiliating shackles of the us Public Law 480, the government of India could think of drastically reducing the land ceiling for redistributive land reform. It did, for some time,

have some effect on reducing the intensity of rural violence.

### Seeds of Rural Unrest

However, things did not happen in the way one would have expected. Reviewing the situation almost a decade later, the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) observed:

If progress of land reforms has been less than satisfactory, it has not been due to a flaw in policy but to indifferent implementation. Often the necessary determination has been lacking to effectively undertake action, particularly, in the matter of implementation of ceiling laws, consolidation of holdings and in not vigorously pursuing concealed tenancies and having them vested with tenancy/occupancy rights as enjoined under the law (p 115).

One marvels at the naivety of the statement. Is not the bureaucracy an integral part of the system of governance which formulated the policy? If the bureaucracy failed, the policymakers were no less responsible. In this failure lies the seeds of further rural unrest which we are witnessing today.

In 1991, when the neoliberal economic policy hit India with a thunderous gale force, land reform went off the radar screen of the Indian polity. It became a forgotten agenda of state policy. Marketeers dominated all the segments of governance. It was repugnant to them to talk about land reform or to mention it in their polite society just in case the investors and other big operators in the market got frightened by any government intervention in the land/lease market. They were finding the existing land reform laws that were enacted on the basis of the central guidelines in the early 1970s not only unwanted road blocks but also obnoxious to the free play of capital in the land/lease market. Hence a strong lobby developed to scrap the ceiling laws, allow unfettered rights to lease markets,

### Economic & Political WEEKLY

available at

#### Life Book House

Shop No 7, Masjid Betul,  
Mukarram Subji Mandi Road  
Bhopal 462 001  
Madhya Pradesh  
Ph: 2740705

open up the agrarian sector to the corporate bodies for capitalist farming and/or large-scale contract farming, to move away from traditional crop husbandry to export-oriented crop production and the like. In short to do away with the peasantry and the peasant way of life. To many, land reform had become totally irrelevant, an undesirable anachronism in the days of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

### **'Fish in Water'**

This is one side of the story. On the other side, according to our prime minister, Naxalism posed the most serious threat to the internal security of our country. The ministry of home affairs assessment in 2006 was that 120 to 150 districts in 12 states were "Naxal infested". Obviously, the normal writ of the state did not run in these areas. Thus a huge chunk of the mainland of India was being practically "governed" by extra legal and in some places illegal authorities. It also showed that militants, whoever they were, had established some rapport with the local population due to which they could move freely evading and avoiding the pincers and crab claws of law enforcing authorities. They were proving to the hilt the doctrine of Mao Zedong of the "Fish in Water" where fish were militants and water was the mass of disgruntled and disaffected peasantry and landless agricultural workers. If the disaffection of the latter could be substantially reduced, water would evaporate and the militants would disappear.

This thesis of Mao Zedong was demonstrated and practised in West Bengal by Hare Krishna Konar the revenue minister of West Bengal in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A massive operation was launched by the West Bengal government for vesting of concealed ceiling surplus land in 1967. Sharecroppers, agricultural workers and marginal farmers took part in tendering oral evidence facing sharp cross-examination to disprove well crafted false 'benami' documents. Around one million acres of good land was vested in the state. This led to their dis-engagement from the militants and brought them back to the mainstream. Naxalism disappeared from its state of origin. It is now flourishing elsewhere. The present spurt in rural violence has brought to the fore again the whole issue of the

poor's access to land, water and forests. Will there be a knee-jerk response from the state to administer some temporary palliatives or would there be a consistent long-term policy frame for land reform in all its different facets? That is the issue that confronts the intelligentsia today.

Rural violence that we are witnessing in India is not an isolated event totally indigenous in character. There are similar movements of violent nature in several countries of Latin and central America and in parts of South Africa, the Philippines and Indonesia. What these countries are witnessing in the form of a violent land movement is basically the "third wave" of left politics. When the agrarian crisis becomes more acute, the political vacuum in the countryside deepens. The traditional parties of the left which had a rather nebulous relationship with the dispossessed in the countryside have, by and large, succumbed to the logic of capital either to obtain power or after obtaining power, they have wanted to continue in power eschewing Marxian left policies, though many of them still carry the name of Marx. Some of these traditional left parties are openly and unashamedly promoting neoliberalism in its crude form discarding even the fig leaf of egalitarianism, not to speak of socialism. The third wave "virulent left politics" is the direct result of the traditional left's subservience to the needs of capital exhibited through their adherence to the neoliberal economic reform policies. So we have the violent Maoist movement in India, Zapatistas in Mexico, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Colombia, Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil and the Hook in the Philippines.

### **Market-Based Reforms**

In order not to rattle the landowners in the rural areas and to diffuse the growing rural uneasiness, which sometimes led to open unrest, a move was made to implement a market-based land reform programme. This was brought about through the financial and technical support from key international agencies and bankers with the aim of offering credit to poor cultivators for purchase of land. Although this approach might have helped a few poor peasants to access some land, in the

overall context it was not much of a success. In the first place sufficient land was not available in the market on a voluntary "willing seller willing buyer" basis to satisfy the land hunger of the land hungry poor peasants. Secondly, wherever the operation took place, land prices shot up favouring the landowner to the disadvantage of poor land purchasers. The procedure of land purchase and registration process were onerous for the poor and small peasants. Some independent scholars were quite critical of market-based land reforms arguing that it provided an easy escape route for the unwilling states to undertake redistributive land reform through state intervention. Market-based land reform did not succeed wherever it was tried and it has hardly any chance of success in India.

The early planners had high hopes that with rapid industrialisation of the country, the surplus labour force in agriculture would be drawn away and absorbed in the secondary and tertiary sectors. But this was not realised. At the end of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, almost 60 per cent of the labour force in India is still engaged in the primary sector contributing around 21 per cent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Industry employs 17 per cent of the labour force producing 27 per cent of GDP. What is happening in India is not anything unique. China which is today the third largest country of the world for manufactured commodities still has 49 per cent of its labour force engaged in agriculture producing 15.2 per cent of GDP. Industry engages only 22 per cent of the labour force contributing 52.9 per cent of GDP [*The Economist* 2007: 60, 66]. It shows that macroeconomic growth in both these contexts, has failed to create improved prospects for the rural poor to acquire productive assets, gainful employment or a significant increase in their income and quality of life.

The Indian economy has been having nearly double digit growth rate for the last several years. In spite of this high growth rate, the secondary sector instead of drawing surplus labour force from the primary sector, is itself experiencing a downward trend in labour absorption. So the rosy dream of an El Dorado (the gilded one) put out by the neoliberal economists and

their noisy camp followers were not only not realised but were not realisable. Employment figures for the organised private and public sectors present a dismal picture. In 1991 total employment in this segment was 267.33 lakh. It went up to 282.85 lakh in 1997. Since then it has been continuously declining. In 2004 the figure was 264.43 lakh which was 3 lakh less than in 1991 when liberalisation started. Thus we are witnessing a gradual squeezing out of regular employment, increasing the pool of the urban unemployed proletariat. What is also happening is that regular jobs are being casualised in the organised sector. Casual employment is also getting “feminised”, putting greater burden on women for earning a livelihood and looking after the household. The International Labour Organisation has described the situation as “feminisation of poverty”.

### **Pressure on Rural Sector**

Under compulsion then a majority of the additional labour force in rural areas would have to be absorbed both in the

farm and the non-farm segments of the rural economy. It may also have to deal with the back flow of the urban labour of rural origin rendered unemployed through the process of jobless growth. Under these circumstances, it would not only have to provide some sort of livelihood to labour already attached to agriculture and allied pursuits, it might also have to take care of a segment of the surplus urban unemployed coming back to the rural areas for shelter and livelihood. Hence it is being increasingly recognised that further deterioration of economic, social and political conditions of the rural poor can neither be arrested nor reversed without a significant policy shift towards a comprehensive land reform programme. This programme should include (i) getting more land under ceiling laws for redistribution, (ii) security of tenure of tenants-at-will, (iii) poor’s access to the common property resources, and (iv) proper social and economic rehabilitation of the compulsorily displaced persons from the coercively acquired land.

The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in 1979 at Rome declared in its Peasants Charter that:

The rural poor must be given access to land and water resources, agricultural inputs, and services, extension and health facilities; they must be permitted to participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of rural development programmes; the structure and patterns of international trade and external investment must be adjusted to facilitate the implementation of poverty oriented rural development strategies. Growth is necessary but not sufficient; it must be buttressed by equity and above all by people’s participation.

The two subsequent world summits in the 1990s, the World Conference on Hunger and Poverty in 1995 and the World Food Summit in 1996, established a direct link between resource rights, particularly access to land for overcoming hunger and poverty. The summits of the 1990s examined the pending crises – the environmental development, energy and food. But deeper analysis would show that these were not separate crises. They were all one and the same.

The single most important cause and effect is poverty resulting from unequal access and use of resources. The call would be for action on the inequitable distribution of wealth, the lack of access by the poor to productive resources, insufficient participation by the poor in the decisions which affect their daily lives and the need for reform in the macroeconomic policies that adversely affect the rights of the poor.

### Revival of Agrarian Reforms

The interaction between poverty, food security and resource rights is starting to bring about a refocusing of national and international agendas on the revival of agrarian reforms and resource tenures for the agricultural communities as well as for the fisherfolk and coastal communities, forest dwellers, pastoralists and other traditional resource users. Agrarian reform is primarily about changing relationships. First, it aims to change access and tenure relationships. Second, it aims to change the current culture of exclusion so that the poor gain access to credit, technology, market and other productive services. Third, it aims for the poor to be active participants in the development of policies and programmes affecting their communities and their livelihood.

While we are talking about redistributive land reforms, coercive eviction from land and livelihood because of compulsory acquisition of land for “development purposes” is greatly aggravating poverty distress and landlessness of the project affected persons (PAPS). Walter Fernandes, estimated that between 1951 and 2005 roughly 55 million persons were forcefully evicted through land acquisition processes. Among the PAPS tribals constitute 40 per cent. The absolute figure would be around 22 million out of a total tribal population of little over 80 million. It appears that the main brunt of the adverse effects of development have had to be borne by the tribals who have the least sustaining power. It is estimated that only 18 to 20 per cent of the displaced tribals were properly resettled and rehabilitated. Thus a vast majority of displaced, homeless, landless and jobless tribals are roaming about as flotsam and jetsam of the cruel development process. They are depressed and dejected, annoyed and angry.

The situation is getting further aggravated by the almost mindless “land grab” in the name of special economic zones. It is grabbing of poor man’s land by the rich for the rich. It is difficult to keep track with figures as they change every day. But this new land grab gave rise to sharp popular resistance as witnessed in Nandigram in West Bengal and Jagatsinghpur in Orissa.

Half way across the world in the Chiapas region of southern Mexico, indigenous people declared in 1980:

We demand absolute respect for our communitarian self-determination over our land, over our natural resources and over the forms of organisation that we wish to give ourselves... We are opposed to have our natural resources plundered in the name of a supposed national development.

Our scheduled tribe (ST) leadership had been demanding almost the same. And partly in response to that the central government enacted provision of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) in 1996 giving substantial power to the gram sabha and other tiers of panchayats in the Fifth Schedule Areas. Unfortunately, state governments are observing the law more in breach than in adherence aggravating the anger of the tribals against the establishment.

### Common Property Resources

The common property resources (CPR) where every member of the community had easy access and usage facility used to be an integral part of the social and economic life of the village poor, particularly, for the landless and land poor households. Among the landless, a vast majority belonged to dalit groups. For sheer survival they had to depend heavily on the CPR. A study in seven states in semi-arid areas indicated that CPR accounted for 9 to 26 per cent of household income of landless and marginal farmers, 91-100 per cent of their fuel wood requirements and 69-89 per cent of their grazing needs.

However, CPR is getting increasingly scarce through takeover by the state or privatisation including corporatisation. In different states, corporations are being given huge tracts of the so-called waste land, degraded forest land and semi-arable land which constituted CPR for the dalits and the village poor. This has severely

affected the economic positions of these people. Neoliberalism has put the dalits and the agricultural workers under the triple jeopardy of social, economic and political exclusion. Exasperated and desperate the dalit groups constitute the tinder dry flammable substance waiting for a spark to ignite.

Expropriation of CPR for handing over land to the corporate sector for agri-business or industry has caused depeasantisation among farming communities and accentuated immiserisation of the already poor landless and marginal farmers most of whom belong to dalit groups. Depeasantisation directly increases landlessness and acute poverty coupled with assetlessness and debt bondage.

The third wave of left politics often violent in nature is looked upon by the establishment as a challenge and/or a threat to the stability of the state. There is no denying that there is widespread discontent in rural India. But no flaming bush fire is taking place because the poor are fragmented along caste, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other divisive lines. Moreover, the land struggle tends to differ for different interest groups. Landless strive for land ownership. Tribal groups aim at protection and preservation of their traditional rights on forest and other livelihood resources. Marginal farmers try not only to retain their minuscule holding but also to make it more productive and acquire more land and strive for more social recognition and political influence. Thus with disaffection all around, with no coalescing of interests and objectives, no combined and determined movement could be developed to seriously threaten the establishment.

### Introspection

One could look at the “third wave left politics” also as an opportunity. It provides for an occasion of deep introspection regarding what we had been doing, why we had been failing, could there be a course correction to avoid the past mistakes and to do things properly for the landless, the assetless, the evicted, the dispossessed and the marginal farmers who are eking out a life of misery at the margin of society. The third wave left politics has given us an opportunity to frame a third wave of agrarian reform policies as

the second wave of left politics gave Indira Gandhi the chance to formulate the second wave of agrarian reform policies in 1972.

The operation of ceiling laws in the country during the last five decades has resulted in vesting of 7.43 million acres of land of which 5.70 million acres were taken over and 4.34 million acres were distributed among roughly 5 million beneficiaries. The total area vested is less than 1 per cent of the total area of 812.63 million acres of the country and barely over 2 per cent of the arable land area. Not only that, National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) survey of land ownership pattern in 2003 shows very skewed landholding position. At the all India level marginal and small owners constituted 90.40 per cent of the total number of owners. But they owned only 43.43 per cent of land whereas the medium and large farmers who constituted only 9.60 per cent of landowners owned as much as 56.21 per cent of land. In Andhra Pradesh the corresponding figures were that marginal and small farmers who constituted 91.80 per cent of landowning community owned 41.82 per cent of land whereas 8.40 per cent of medium and large owners had 58.12 per cent of land. Thus the argument that there would be no land available for the third wave of operation for acquisition of ceiling surplus land is not correct.

The achievement so far is hardly anything to write home about. There are wide variations in the ceiling provisions in different states. Many state laws deliberately provide loopholes to enable big land owners to evade the law. It is common knowledge that in many states through benami and clandestine transactions large areas have been stashed away beyond the ceiling limit. There is enough evidence world over to prove that self-cultivation of small farms yields a significantly higher level of productivity than large farms cultivated by tenants or hired labour. Thus, equity and efficiency demand that the ceiling limit should be drastically reduced to the level of five to 10 acres per family. Since various classifications of land give enormous opportunity to landowners to evade ceiling laws should provide for one simple definition of land as given in the standard English dictionary. In one stroke many of the escape routes would be blocked. Moreover, law

should provide for cancellation of all benami and 'farzi' documents retrospectively, since these are proven cases of large scale fraud on this count.

### Empowering the Powerless

On the tenancy front the picture is quite dark. The NSS figure of 6 to 7 per cent is generally admitted to be an underestimate. Tenancy being illegal in many states respondents often do not disclose the truth. Many micro-studies indicate that incidence of tenancy could vary between 15 per cent and 35 per cent. These are all concealed tenancies with very exploitative terms of oral contract. Moreover, the emergence of the phenomenon of reverse tenancy is also a matter of serious concern. Hence while discouraging the earlier system of rent seeking sub-infeudation, leasing-in and leasing-out of land for the purpose of cultivation should be permitted within ceiling limits. All such non-owner crop sharing tillers of land should be recorded, prescribing a fair sharing of crop at 75 per cent (for the tiller) and 25 per cent (for the owner) and they should have heritable rights of cultivation without title to the land. The moment such recorded sharecroppers get certificate of sharecropping, they would become bankable. It would infuse institutional credit to augment both production and productivity.

At last, after a long delay the forest dwellers' law was notified with effect from January 1, 2008. In the PESA area it should be implemented by the gram sabha and the appropriate tier of panchayat. In the non-PESA area it should be done through committees consisting of the beneficiaries, NGOs, panchayat representatives and the like. In no case this should be left with the former poachers now turned conservationists who are more interested in protecting species of the animal world than fellow homo sapiens.

Other points to be considered could be: (i) A massive operation should be undertaken for restoration of alienated tribal lands to the rightful tribal owners; (ii) appropriate amendments be made to the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act of 1957 in tune with PESA; (iii) issue of "user patta" in the names of women and men for use of CPR "including tree patta

for forest dwellers and water pattas for the fisherfolk for CPR water bodies inland or coastal; and (iv) setting up of dispute settlement machinery at the gram panchayat (GP) level with GP members and representatives of beneficiary groups with the representative of the bureaucracy as the member-convenor to keep the records and to explain the legal position.

Land reform in reality means disempowerment of a small highly empowered caucas and empowerment of many powerless persons by the transfer of land resource from the former to the latter through state intervention. In a democratic society it can be done without bloodshed but it cannot be without tears. There is bound to be strong resistance from vested interests, particularly from the landowning classes. The key to success lies in building up strong organisations of prospective beneficiaries vociferously demanding change in their favour and backed up by equally forceful political will of the state to intervene in favour of the rural poor and the dispossessed. The birth of a better social order will have its birth pangs. It is unavoidable.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave, a staunch Gandhian and a social activist who launched the Bhoodan Movement in India used to end all his prayer meetings saying: "Land belongs to Gopal and all his children have equal right to its produce". This is the universal ethical basis of land reforms anywhere and everywhere.

### REFERENCES

- Balagopal, K (2007): 'Land Unrest in Andhra Pradesh Ceiling Surpluses and Public Land', *Economic & Political Weekly*, September 22-28.
- Bandyopadhyay, D (2006): 'Is Land Reform Still Relevant?', *Yojana*, August.
- (2007): 'Land, Labour and Governance', *World View*, Kolkata.
  - (2007): 'Rural Unrest', *Yojana*, February.
- Bhalla, G S (2006): *Condition of Indian Peasantry*, National Book Trust, New Delhi.
- (2007): *Indian Agriculture Since Independence*, National Book Trust, New Delhi.
- Government of India (2006): *Report of the Working Group on Land Relations for the Formulation of Eleventh Five-Year Plan*, Planning Commission, July 31.
- IFAD-UNRISD (2001): 'Whose Land?' in Krishna B Ghimire (ed), *IFAD*, Rome.
- Sam, Moyo and Paris Yeros (2005): *Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, Zed Books, New York.
- Ramesh Chand, S S Raju, L M Pandey (2007): 'Growth Crisis in Agriculture: Severity and Options at National and State Lands', *Economic & Political Weekly*, June 30-July 6.
- The Economist* (2007): *Pocket World in Figures*, A Concise Edition, London.