

Report from Odisha

Protest Movement on the Rights of Share Croppers

The share croppers in Odisha are in a pathetic state. They are a major part of the peasants here who are helplessly committing suicides crushed under the wheel of debt burdens. The share croppers are not legally identified. The agreements between the share croppers and land owners are generally made orally without fixing a reasonable duration of time. Even the written agreements are not registered. There is no legal protection to the right of share cropper to get the first priority to buy the land when the land owner intends to sell away the leased land. As a result, the share cropper who had been tilling the land for years will be forced out of it. There is no legally defined method to divide the share of produce between the share cropper and the land owner. So the share croppers are left to the mercy of land owners who dictate the share by their whims and wishes. As the share croppers are not legally entitled for loans from Banks and Co-Operative institutions, they are forced to depend on usurious mahajans for loans to meet the costs of cultivation. The share croppers suffer most and get ruined whenever they are hit by droughts, floods and cyclones, as they are not entitled to get debt reliefs, compensations and other supports from the govt and it is the land owners who corner these benefits. It, is therefore necessary to lift the share croppers out of this pathetic situation by providing them proper legal rights and protections. Many peasant organisations and well wishers of share croppers in Odisha realise it. For some time, they are engaged in organising the share croppers on their problems at the state as well as local levels.

Recently, the Odisha state govt has begun an exercise, seemingly, to protect the interests of share-croppers. But In reality, it is an undeclared and camouflaged attack on the rights of share croppers. The govt seeks to consolidate the land basing on the big land owners and corporatize the agriculture.

On April, 30, 2016 the Principal Secretary to the govt has issued a draft agreement and a questionnaire to be filled by the farmers/ share croppers. The Tahasildars were asked to interact with a minimum of 50 farmers in each Tahasil and collect their opinions on the questionnaire and submit the same to the Collectors by a specified date. But the peasants organisations and the well wishers of share croppers saw this move as just a formality and an eye wash as it neither provided enough time nor scope for the large masses of share croppers, peasants organisations and well wishers to thoroughly debate and give their well considered opinions.

Yet, the Bhoomi Adhikar Andloan (Land Rights Movement), Odisha-an United Action Forum of various Mass Organisation like AIKS, CMS-Odisha affiliated to AIKMKS, AIKMS, ABKMS, AIPF, ABKS and some democratic persons held a State Convention at Bhubaneswar on May 23, 2016 on the rights of Share croppers. More than 600 people from different parts of the state have taken part in the convention. Leaders from different organisations and prominent persons including Sri Panchanan Kanungo, ex-Minister of Finance spoke in the Convention critically analysing the govt's policy and focussing on the problems and demands of the share croppers. There was a Key Note before the Convention. At the end, the Convention has decided to present a Memorandum to the govt. Com. Srikanth Mohnaty and Com. Basu Dev Dash, the leaders of CMS, Odisha affiliated to AIKMKS spoke in the Convention and made their proposals for the inclusion in the Memorandum decided to be presented to the Govt.

The Chasi Mulia Sangha, Odisha, affiliated to AIKMKS, an active participant in the land rights movement, has organised rallies, protest meetings and submitted memorandums to the authorities in Puri, Ganjam, Koraput, Bhadrak and Keondujhar districts. In Soroda, Jagannathprasad and Sannathamundi in Ganjam districts in Brahmagiri in Puri districts, in Dolasahi, Tiridi and Bhadrak in Bhadrak district in Koraput, in Hatadi in Keondujhar district hundreds of people have taken part in the rallies and protest meetings and presented memorandums to the Tahsildars or the Collector under the leadership of CMS, Odisha affiliated to AIKMKS. They were addressed by leaders like Com. Srikanth Mohanty, Com. Basu Dev Dash, Com. Nirakar Naik and other. These programmes were preceded by the campaigns in the villages. Though the state govt is as usual, seeking to wash off its hands by its ritualistic exercise, the Bhoomi Adikhar Andolan, the mass organisations including CMS, Odisha, affiliated to AIKMKS and those who are serious about the rights of share croppers are determined to continue their efforts to unite, organise and move more wider sections of share croppers into protest action to realise their just and democratic demands.