

Task of Peasantry in Odisha to Combat the Imperialist Onslaught on the Agrarian Economy

- Dr.G.B. Nath

At the outset, I must, on the behalf of the Reception Committee welcome all the delegates of the ChasiMuliaSangha, Odisha, attending this State Conference. ChisiMuliaSangha in Odisha is an peasant organization which have fought many a struggle for right over land, forest, and water, for environment protection of the coastal belt, for the right of the small, marginal peasants and share croppers, for the right of the agricultural labourers, minorities and *dalits*. This conference is the result of their commitment to the cause of the peasantry of the state.

Agriculture is the main stay of the people of Odisha and the major source of income of the state. 85 percent of the people live in rural areas and 70 percent of them depend upon agriculture. This rural peasantry has participated in the freedom struggle with a promise to of land to the tiller after independence. In response to this, various land reform measures which included the abolition of intermediaries in land securities to the tenure, fixation of ceiling on land holding and the redistribution of ceiling surplus land were attempted. Accordingly the Land Reform Act 1960 was enacted and but the provision of distribution of ceiling surplus land to the poor peasant and agricultural labour was delayed. This part of the Act came in to operation in 1972 with a number of exemptions to the ceiling laws. The pronouncement of land reform measures and the delay in its implementation, particularly the ceiling provisions offered an opportunity in resorting to *benami* transaction, nullifying the provision of the acts. Thus when the ceiling Act was implemented there was virtually very little land for re- distribution. Whatever land was distributed were either not fit for cultivation or were taken back by the landlord. In certain cases the land has been allotted in pen and paper and has not been demarcated or possession right over the land has not been given. This is the historical root for which more than half of the peasantry in Odisha are marginal peasants and land less agricultural labourers. There number is also continuously increasing and most of them are from the tribal, *dalit* and minority communities.

When the peasantry was demanding structural change through land reform, state was initiating technological transfor-mation through Green Revolution technology which includes investment in irrigation, fertilizer, HYV seeds, pesticides etc. The3 peasantry was drawn to the orbit of the market forces and the traditional farming give rise to the commercial farming. This strengthen the hold of the feudal households for they had the political hold and economic strength to generate surplus and raise credit for investment in modern inputs. The poor peasantry and agricultural labourer par-ticularly the share croppers were the worst suffers for neither they have land of their own nor capital to invest in modern agriculture. The neo-liberal economic policies followed by the state after 1991 landed the state in to a new height of agrarian criss. This reform policy is basically a outward oriented, market driven, export led growth strategy. Liberalization, Globali-zation and Privatization were its fundamentals.The state agriculture policies of 1997, 2008, and20013 are based on the directives of the World Bank and World Trade Organization. Accordingly state started reducing subsidies on agricultural inputs, deregulated the grain market, scale down the government procurement opera-tion, freed the lease market; scrap the ceiling laws, encouraged cash crops, allowed contract farming, allowed the MNC to deal with the marketing of the agricultural inputs. The situation has been com-pounded, since government of India has been initiating the Second Green Revolution in Eastern India including Odisha. These economic policies of the state and central government have thrown the small, marginal, share croppers and agricultural labourers out of their land once again fending on themselves.

On the top of this since no public sector banks or other institutional finances come forward to provide credit to share cropper, poor peasant, or landless labourer they are forced to borrow from the village money lender or from the input dealers with a promise to repay after the harvest is over, But when there is slight draught flood or attack of pest or any other natural calamities leading to the failure of the crops they were not in a position to withstand the shock of crop failure and mounting debt. Out of despire the peasants either has to go out of the village in search of job or to commit suicide. Consecutive years of draught in Odisha has forced many peasants from Balangir, Kalahandi, Rayagada, Koraput, Nayagarh to go as Dadanlabour to the neighbouring states and far of f places like AndraPradesh, Karkataka, Tamilnadu, Delhi, Goa etc. However the working condition is no better in such places and many of them return back. The drought, crop failure and mounting debt for second year in a row have caused the suicide of more than 100 farmers in the last part of 12015 and first part of 2016. However till date government of Odisha is denying this and falsely alleging that the death of the farmers are due to family quarrel, love affair, frustration, drinking , diseases etc. However, we, on behalf of *Ganatantric Adhikar Suraksha Sangathan*, Odisha, Conducted a fact finding study in eight districts of the state, visiting the homes of 36 peasant households where cases of suicide has been occurred. The principal occu-pations of the deceased peasants were agriculture and 34 of them were males and two of them were females. All the households either belong to ST / SC and OBC cast. Almost all the households were small and marginal farmers having in average 2.5 acres of land. Hence about 12 households supplementing cultivation with share cropping. Each household depend on the market for agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, bullocks, and other implements. All the households were indebted house-holds borrowing from multiple agencies. Thus 11 house-holds indebted to commercial banks, 12 households to co-operative banks, 10 households to self-help groups, 20 households to village money lenders, 13 households from friends and relatives, 9 households from shop keepers supplying agricultural inputs. Similarly multiple causes were responsible for the farmers to commit suicide. For 32 households the cause of suicide was due to crop loss, for 18 households due to indebtedness, for 8 households due to recurring draughts. After the suicide of the principal member of the households, 5 households have withdrawn their children s from the schools and colleges, 21 households have left cultivation, 17 households have sold the land to repay the loan and have become land less. They do not have anything except selling their labour in the labour market. As the rural distress is deepening the political parties are holding rallies to woo the peasantry and shedding crocodile tears. But the problems of the peasantry are mounting.

Development in Odisha is equated with establishment of multipurpose river dam projects, factories, mines, railways and high-ways. These projects have displaced a large numbers of households from their habitats. The river dam projects like Machkund, Hirakud, Salandi, Balimela, RengaliUperKolab, UperIndrabati, Subarnarekha are some of the projects which have uprooted a large number of people creating enormous difficulties in the matter of payment of compensation and rehabilitation. The recent ongoing construction of Palavoram project by Andra Pradesh would again displace a large number of tribes in Malakanagiri district of Odisha. The Zamindars and landed proprietors could able to get whatever benefit was accruing to them. Most of them could fight with the state in legal battle and have owned certain concessions. But the net loss to the STs, SCs, tenants at will, and agricultural labourer of their source of living and social standing are enormous. Virtually in the name of develop-ment they turned to destitute.

The forest laws passed during thr colonial period and continued inpost colonial period contributed on large scale alienation of land in Odisha. The forest policy of the state is based on the basic principle that the state is the owner of the forest, right to enter in to the forest should be restricted and forest is a source of raw material and revenue for the state. Thus the concept of state ownership of forest came in to conflict with the traditional rights and practices of the tribals and Dalits in Odisha. Hence the relationship between the state agency like the forest department and the tribals became antagonistic. State thinks the forest dwellers as the encroachers of the forest and they should be driven out.

The marginalized section of peasantry has launched revolts against various process of their marginalization in Odisha. Since the days of the Great Telengana Land Movement till today the communist revolutionaries have waged struggles in various forms in all most all the South-Western districts of Odisha keeping the land question in the fore front. This struggle of the peasantry against their dispossession and confisca-tion is in essence an anti-feudal, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggle even though state treats them as law and order problem. Be it the land grabs movement, or displacement and rehabilitation movement, be it the movement for the right to land water, and forest, or movement for the protection of ecology and environment the Chasi-MuliaSangha of Odisha is always in the forefront of these movements. I wish that all these glorious movement .would inspire us to build a stronger peasant movement in the state of Odisha against the anti-peasant policies of the central as well as the state government.

— This is the summary of the speech delivered in the State Conference of Chasi-MuliaSanga of Odisha on 19th November 2016 as the Present of the Reception committee.
