

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF
ODISHA

PROSPECTS & CHALLENGES

Volume 2

Manas Jena



PEOPLES LITERATURE PUBLICATION
2017

First published in 2016 by
PEOPLES LITERATURE PUBLICATION
<http://peoplespublication.com>
connect@peoplespublication.com

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Price: INR 499/-

ISBN 13 - 978-81-932525-2-9

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is the second part of Inclusive Development of Odisha. I have tried to explain some of the vital issues such as land and agriculture, exclusion in the areas of finance, industry, health, education, public infrastructure, judiciary and Governance, social security, poverty alleviation and also documented many ongoing social movements which are needed for an egalitarian society and develop the economy. In the context of the state of Odisha, there are areas of concern in the development process which shows a vertical and horizontal disparity across the region and among social groups. The process of exclusion and deprivation of marginalised has been continuing in spite of organised state interventions. Mainstreaming the development of marginalised need a proactive state intervention through a proper, planned, transparent, and tolerant intervention with commitment. It has been observed that lack of political commitment clubbed with colonial bureaucratic apathy and absence of organised and visionary political mobilisation in grassroots are most important reasons of such unequal backward development of the state.

This book contains four chapters, the first on Land and agriculture, second chapter covers the issue of exclusion of marginalised communities, third chapter highlights on social security, food security and poverty alleviation and the last chapter documented few social movements that have created hopes for the marginalised in Odisha.

Land and agriculture have been central to Odisha's development and the issues of land reform, sharecroppers, agricultural workers, small and marginal farmer rights to access to land, credit, irrigation, agriculture inputs, support price and social security of all people engaged in agriculture are featured.

There is need of inclusion of social groups especially, Dalits, Adivasis, SEBC, religious and linguistic minority and women, and girl child of the state in the budget, SCSP, TSP, business, judiciary, education, finance, employment and other state opportunities. People in interior parts and especially the project affected people in different areas having mega investment are being excluded in getting employment. Village infrastructure development is one of the important areas where the rural Odisha has been lagging behind. There is huge disparity observed in terms of investment in backward and forward Odisha. The available village development infrastructure is also not fully accessible to people and the most excluded group are the Dalits.

Odisha being a state of Dalit and Adivasis with extreme poverty is a late starter in Social security programmes, food and nutritional security provisioning and anti –poverty programmes. In addition to it the provisions of benefits also very less in terms of both quality and quantity. The implementation process is very poor which lacks involvement of the beneficiaries. The state Government has not made adequate arrangement to ensure the effective implementation of schemes covering all region and social groups.

The last chapter covers articles on social movements in Odisha as there have been inspiring Social movements for access to basic human rights, against liquor, the socio-legal movement against untouchability, caste-based discrimination and for the annihilation of caste in support of inter-caste marriage and many more positive people's initiative in the state. These movements are hope of inclusive development.

Most of the sources of data used in the book are from Government reports, Newspapers and Journals and study reports by CSOs and research bodies of Government and Non-Government. As an activist and columnist, I have the privilege of extensive travel within Odisha and outside and made interaction with a cross section of people on issues pertaining to development and marginalisation. It has immensely helped me to shape my ideas that have reflected in my writings. I have been engaged in interventions, in the issues of human rights and developmental issues of Dalits and Adivasis and other marginalised sections, to ensure access to justice, rights and entitlements guaranteed under the provisions of law and state programme. The civil rights of Dalits, problems of landless, sharecroppers, displaced people in mining and industrial areas and campaign for electoral reform keeps me engaged as a rights based activist and campaigner and helps me in gathering grass-root experiences of the struggle of marginalised people. I was also part of many important advocacy delegations to Govt. on behalf of the struggles and movements of the marginalised and had interaction with top bureaucracy, policy makers, ministers and party leaders on issues of development. I have been realised the need of sharing of information on developmental issues which is very less available in public domain in a comprehensive form from point of view of marginalised communities. I always felt that experiences of pain and suffering of discrimination, humiliation, exclusion and other social issues have not been shared and debated sufficiently in public and to a large extent it remains limited as sectoral and internal issues. I argued

for the provision of a representation of marginalised in all spear and for annihilating all forms of discrimination based on caste and gender without which their participation is not possible. The inclusiveness in social life will facilitate economic growth and bring equity without which it will perpetuate inequality and further segregation and backwardness continues.

The articles in the book are published in daily pioneer Bhubaneswar edition as regular columns in every Saturday under the title of social canvas and I have been getting emails, phone calls of appreciation and comments from many readers. I thank all of them for their feedback.

I take the opportunity to acknowledge with thanks the support and cooperation of many of my well-wisher and critics in making me engaged with this creative effort in the interest of the people of Odisha. I sincerely thank Prasant Kumar Mallick for his committed effort in bringing this book to public domain. I request readers to critically comment and bring the mistakes with the book to my notice which will also help me to make necessary improvement in the next edition. Hope this book will be able to generate meaningful debate for the interest of the marginalised people of Odisha.

21, February 2016

Manas Jena

Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

CHAPTER-1

LAND AND AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT

LAND DISTRIBUTION, CREATION STILL NEGLECTED IN STATE AGENDA

The use of available land in the country and its ownership has been a matter of concern. The old Land acquisition law of 1894 has been changed in 2013 with the new law the right to fair compensation and transparency in land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement Act. The Government is going to amend it with six major areas which have been a matter of concern and the ongoing debate over land acquisition in the country has been engaged the policy makers and others concern on issues of land acquisition by the Government while the country is moving with agenda of rapid industrialisation following the path of many industrialize nations including China. There has been increasingly foreign direct investment (FDI) coming to India in a number of sectors which demands huge land.

It is not just the private land of farmers, but the land in mineral reserve areas, seacoast and other places are also to be acquired where there are people living without a legal title over the land and still struggling to get a title over the land. The last sixty-five years of independent has not been able to solve some of the structural issues relating to land ownership and there has been no substantial investment by the state in new land creation. There for the debate over land acquisition should include the question of land distribution and land creation in the interest of the landless poor and it should not be limited to the interest of farmers only. The people opposing land acquisition to save the land of the farmers should not be seen as they are opposing industrialisation; rather we should have a balanced policy which should be beneficial to both agriculture and industry putting the interest of farmers and industrial workers. The farmers know it that they are going to lose their productive assets forever and they cannot buy the same quantity of land by the price paid to them as compensation. It is also linked to their food security, housing and a life with the fellow community which will be no more available for them and which has been enjoyed by them since generations together. But we need industry and how we are going to meet both the end together?

The past experience in the country shows a disturbing picture that nowhere it is a better life of the displaced in new locations. There are many, missed in the process, remain dislocated, ruined, perished and pushed into the periphery. Many studies have established that the

poor and marginalized suffer the most in displacement and the displacement debate in the country remain more focused on land owning class and issues of compensation and rehabilitation remain land based while private land ownership remains a matter of concern for a majority of the people in the country, mostly for Adivasis, sharecroppers, Dalits and landless poor depending on Government lands.

The urban middle class gets a fair deal in industry and service sector in terms of jobs as educated and many of them get compensation for their land as an absentee landlord but people in rural agriculture sector remain as before. corporate and contract farming by market forces has been taking the space of small farmers with the increasing discourses of small farming is no more viable in a country of small farmers. It is the small farmers who have been contributing a major portion of food production of the country.

The State-sponsored food subsidy programme makes people dependent on State in the name of food rights without any productive engagement. The big farmers along with market forces remain major beneficiaries of the food subsidy programme. The people in hamlets and slums get very less from the state as food items. It is the small holdings which have been playing a vital role in maintaining food security of the family by multiple use of little available land in that context a reasonable land distribution among agricultural workers, sharecroppers can be more helpful in maintaining food security rather than spending on food subsidy. The small patch of land along with support under other development schemes can be linked to food production in rural areas. It has chances of increasing employment and controlling distress migration of poor to urban locations in search of livelihood. There are many examples in a number of countries where small farming has been proved successful. It has been very often argued in since the Fifties that land distribution is key to production and the historic struggles of Naxalbari, Tebhaga, Telangana, Bodhgaya and Bhoodan movement by Vinoba has contributed to allocation of land to the poor which has been still an unfinished task with Government and remain in insignificant attention of all including Government and others.

More than private land, the so-called Government land which includes land of the poor has been acquired by the Government and given to private bodies without concern for the poor who have been living there since generations without a title. There are millions of

sharecroppers, poor landless agricultural workers and communities depending on the various type of land, forest and water-based livelihood are out of the debate of compensation. The whole debate of compensation remains beneficial to landowners in the name of farmers, but all farmers are not landowners. There are farmers without a legal ownership over the land. Many of the landowners are absentee landlords without any involvement in agriculture who are looking for opportunities to dispose of their land with a better compensation. The ceiling-surplus land very cunningly went back to the fold of those new Zamindars, and the State patronage becomes reverse in favour of the landowning class. It was poor people's land named as assigned land which was supposed to be distributed among poor, but there has been very little hue and cry for poor on the agenda of land distribution and land creation. There has been growing land alienation in rural areas without any restriction on the land purchase.

The whole argument is built on the price of land and compensation, but what about the use of land for different purposes and ownership of land? The growing demand for land for different purposes should be focused with a scientific plan for land use. Land should not be given to private hands on demand without assessing the actual need of land for the project where the principles of minimum use of land can be the thrust.

Land creation has been equally important in the context of growing land use for different purpose. There is huge wasteland available without any productive use of that. The Government should make a plan for investment in land creation by making available land for use of different purposes. There are many abundant mining areas and huge wasteland patch in the country which can be developed for agriculture and industrial activities without targeting irrigated agricultural land. The Government should develop special zones for industries as well as for agriculture basing on the comparative advantage over the land. The balance allocation of land for different purposes is required for a holistic development with concern for people engaged there for livelihoods.

Saturday, 21 March 2015

STATE'S LAND POLICY PRO-RICH: NO JUSTICE FOR THE POOR

There seems to be a State-sponsored policy to vest land in the hands of a dominant few in Odisha. The Constitution of India puts land as a State subject; so any new law relating to land and its execution is the responsibility of the State. It is the duty of the State to ensure a record of rights and possession as well as the productive use of land for all, especially for housing, livelihood and public purpose and checks the concentration of land in the hands of a few.

The State has to also create productive land by developing wasteland and controlling land pollution. While the State is proactive in allocating land to the rich people for public and private purpose, the same spirit is not been reflected in providing land to the poor, landless and illiterate who are being historically marginalised and deprived of getting land in form of record of rights and necessary support for its use.

The role of the State is to conduct land survey and settlement and categorization of land for different purposes. This is to recognise the natural rights of the inhabitants over the land they are in possession since generations and once for all ensure the title of the ownership but unfortunately this has not been done by the Government in spite of staff and resources. People who are educated and aware about revenue laws have managed to get a record of rights over the land more than their possession and requirement.

The former kings, Zamindars, caretakers of mutts and temples have very well managed to retain back their land property by using the gaps in law as a result of which even today they are the owners of huge land property under their disposal. The Government has been making available huge land for the private companies and corporates in form of lease in the name of development projects. The State has introduced single window system for companies with a low premium, tax holiday and exemption from land registration fee etc.

Many industrialists are availing land lease along with other facilities in industrial estates developed by the Government. Added to this, housing societies mostly owned by builders, powerful

influential people in power corridor, ruling party MLA, MP, top bureaucrats, influential media brokers and others get land in prime locations with all other facilities of water and electricity connection, drainage line and all-weather road connections developed out of State fund. This has been continuing with successive democratically elected Governments. There are a number of private trusts, societies, non-profit making companies and family owned organisations who have been awarded land in subsidised cost in prime locations and these organisations have very limited public role in fulfilling the public purpose for which the land has been awarded.

They run hospitals, educational institutions and training centres for their private profit and there has been no social audit and monitoring. The Revenue Department has been showing all its commitment to private corporates and looks very much committed to discharging their duty in industrial corridors of the State, while the land problems of the marginalised communities and landless poor remain unaddressed.

Take the case of distribution of ceiling surplus land and Bhoodan to the landless in rural areas for agriculture purpose. Over last 50 years, there has been no attempt to take back the land under illegal possession by influential dominant people. The land is vital to production for household food security, employment and livelihood in rural areas.

The most popular land distribution as per law has not been achieved. The '*Mo Jami Mo Diha*' programme has created much hope to solve the land related dispute of poor people relating to possession, demarcation and restoration from illegal transfer but this has not created any desired impact in changing the land status of the poor people.

Take the example of the most popular homestead land distribution programme '*Basundhara*' which provides ten decimal of land distribution to homestead less family under BPL category for housing purpose. Many of the landless families have only land record but they have been waiting since long to identify their land and many households which have been staying for generations have not been given the record of rights in spite of their repeated attempt with applications and petitions to the revenue authorities.

The lack of title over land creates hurdles in getting residence and caste proofs for availing other entitlements such as housing and credit and link to development schemes. There are thousands of small habitations of poor which are not linked to the outside with all-weather road and other minimum space for a decent living. The habitations have no linking road, cremation ground, playground, parks, space for socio-cultural and socio-religious activities, religious village forest, grazing land, village forest and water bodies. It is a violation of socio-economic and socio-cultural rights of people of the land and depriving them of a life with dignity.

Take the example of Forest Rights Act (FRA) in ensuring individual and community right of tribal and other traditional forest dwellers of the State. Though the State claims to be number one in the country in terms of distribution of titles to more than three lakh households for over an area of about six lakh acres but it has just distributed land without demarcation. It is further found that this is the only State where the rights of other traditional forest dwellers are purposefully ignored in spite of provisions in the FRA. Many genuine poor, landless and forest-dependent households and communities are being deprived of their basic rights to livelihood and self-employment. It has been directly affecting food security and local employment opportunity and thus encouraging distress migration in forest areas of the State.

Take the examples of housing schemes for EWS groups and landless poor in urban areas. There has been no attempt to ensure land for urban poor and economically weaker section in providing land and housing facility as the number of the urban poor household has been increasing with the rapid growth of urbanisation.

Saturday, 24 January 2015

ODISHA ANTI-LAND GRAB LAW SHOULD LET OFF THE POOR

A recent ordinance by the Government of Odisha published in the Odisha Gazette on May 26 last, entitled 'The Odisha Land Grabbing (Prohibition) ordinance, 2015' has raised doubt among organisations engaged in land rights movements. The ordinance does not differentiate between potential land grabber and poor land grabber. The latter grabs a piece of homestead and agriculture land for a shelter and livelihood while the former does it for more prosperity and wealth. The apprehension is that by using the law a poor landless person occupying a piece of Government land may be arrested by police as the ordinance aims to prohibit activities of land grabbing in the State.

The Government land includes land of Government, local authority, and a statutory or non-statutory body, owned, controlled or managed by the Government, the Bhoodan Yagna Samiti, a religious or charitable institution or endowment including a WAKF. It is defined that land grabbing means every activity of grabbing of any land by a person or a group of persons without any lawful entitlement and with a view to illegally taking possession of such land. The ordinance has the provision of punishment for land grabbing with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than one year and may extend to seven years and with fine which may extend to Rs 20,000. There is a provision of a special court consisting of a Chairman, Judge of a High Court and four other members, two district judges and other two not below the rank of Collector. They all will hold office for a period of three years.

There is no need to explain how land is important for shelter, housing for life and for people dependent on land-based livelihood. It is the State Government which has to ensure an entitlement record over the land through survey and settlement by issuing *Patta* and allow possession through demarcation. It is evident that landless poor mostly belong to poor Dalit, Adivasi and other marginalised communities.

They have been staying over Government land since generations. Many of them are also cultivating Government land without a record of rights over the land. It is unfortunate that land being a State subject, in the last 65 years since Independence the Governments have

not yet ensured homestead land for lakhs of landless families across the nation. There has been no proper database about the volume of homestead-less families under different revenue circle in spite of regular circulars by the Revenue Department for enumeration of homestead-less families in both rural and urban areas. In a recent letter by the Revenue Department to all Collectors, the Department has raised the annual income ceiling from Rs 24, 000 to Rs 40, 000 for the purpose of the definition of homestead landless person under Odisha Government Land Settlement Act, 1962 (OGLS) and Rules, 1983 and Odisha Prevention of Land Encroachment Act (OPLE), 1972.

It has been instructed to all the Collectors to survey the homestead-less families in a campaign mode and identify eligible homestead-less families and also do the survey to identify leasable and non-objectionable Government land for settlement. The settlement of land for homestead purpose has to be maximum ten decimals in rural areas which have to come under the provision of OGLS and OPLE Acts and Rules. It is told that the whole exercise may be completed by October 31, 2015. It has been the demand of the people in anti-feudal and anti-British struggle that land rights should be given to all, especially the landless farmers, sharecroppers in rural villages. The post independent Governments have made provisions in the law to carry out the land reform agenda but unfortunately, the entitlement rights over land have not been completed till date. In Odisha, the process of homestead and agriculture land distribution was started since 1974-75 but unfortunately, this has been continuing with new deadlines in each few years of interval. Why our State Revenue administration is taking such a long time to fulfil its duty towards the landless poor?

Who are these landless poor? They are mostly the Dalit, Adivasis, displaced and migrant workers who are not aware and mostly ignorant about land laws and were never told about their land entitlements. They are landless because the State Government has not recognised their legal ownership over the land in spite of their self-declaration of continued possession over the land since generations. Even today lakhs of families have been staying over either Government land or private land of ex-Zamindars or landlords without a record of right.

In a number of cases, their applications for an entitlement record have been purposefully delayed and many dishonest revenue officials from top to bottom asked them for a bribe to settle the land. There is evidence of harassment in a number of cases. Many poor people have

been unnecessarily harassed in revenue courts and not getting the desired support in terms of legal aid to present their cases.

The mega projects in the State have been directly and indirectly displacing lakhs of families from their homestead land-based livelihood and in the process, many become landless migrant workers. There has been huge distress migration of poor to urban locations where they land in slums without a shelter. They do not have the capacity to purchase private land or take a house on rent and are forced to occupy the city outskirts area as a shelter in sub-human condition.

It has been observed in mining and industrial belts that the Revenue Department has been more alert in responding to the needs of the corporate and busy in giving possession and demarcation of the land to companies. But the same spirit has not been exhibited for the landless poor people who have been routinely visiting Revenue Inspector and Tehsildar offices to get a Patta and demarcation of their land.

The landless rural poor are mostly illiterate and unaware of their rights and entitlements. The political parties and CSOs, while opposing land acquisition of people with land, are not so active in the same way for the cause of landless visibility to the cause of the landless poor and land distribution in their favour.

The land distribution agenda of the landless poor has been downsized as agenda of few poor social groups and remain unattended in order to give the issue a political visibility in legislative bodies. The Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India has made provision of financial support to the State to purchase private land to distribute among homestead landless families but unfortunately the Government of Odisha has not yet implemented it in any tehsil whereas many other States have used this opportunity to getting land for the landless by utilizing central assistance.

The Government of Telangana has allocated Rs 1,000 crore to purchase homestead and agricultural land for landless Dalit families. It is the duty of the Revenue Department to ensure land for landless while protecting Government land but, as evident from everyday media reports, in spite of favourable land laws, the SCs and STs have been brutally evicted in many parts of the State.

Saturday, 04 July 2015

MANAGE LAND, WATER SCIENTIFICALLY TO BOOST FARMING

Inclusive and sustainable economic growth of the State is possible by changing traditional backwardness in agriculture to increase production. Besides, adequate public investment in building agricultural infrastructure and ensuring the social security of the farmers and agricultural labourers is highly needed.

It has been observed that the status of agriculture in the State has not been changing much as well as the condition of people engaged in agriculture, especially small farmers and agricultural labourers. It has been reported in the State Economic Survey-2014-15 that the contribution of agricultural sector is only 15 % to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) but 60 % of the population depend on it. The recent trend in agriculture sector shows a negative growth in production of cereals, rice and wheat in 2013-2014. The land available for agricultural purpose has been decreasing.

The yielding rate of food grains of Odisha is below the national average which is 2,125 kg per hectare and 1,696 kg per hectare in Odisha whereas in States like Haryana it is 3,698 kg per hectare for the year 2012-13. The cropping intensity has been lower than Punjab, West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh though little higher than the national average. The area under paddy cultivation constitutes about 80 % of the total cultivable area and out of this, 64 % are non-irrigated area. Cropping intensity is lower due to dependency on rainwater and non-availability of irrigation facility for raising a number of crops from the same field in an agricultural year. States like Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have achieved irrigation facility with more than 60 % irrigation facility for all crops whereas Odisha remains below the national average of 45 %. For last ten years, the fertiliser consumption has very marginally increased from 46 kg per hectare in 2005 to 57 kg per hectare in 2013.

The fertiliser consumption by States such as Punjab and West Bengal is 250 and 164 kg per hectare respectively and the rate is 128 kg at the national level for the same year. Odisha needs to improve production of food grains, vegetables, pulses, spices, fruits, eggs, fish and livestock for meat and milk to meet the increasing food requirement of

the people of the State without depending on neighbour States such as West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) says the four major vegetables i.e. potato, tomato, onion and brinjal constitute 60 % of the total vegetable production in India. Odisha features among major vegetable producing States such as West Bengal, UP, Bihar, AP, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as India is the second largest vegetable producing country next to China with 48 % of the world production. The productivity of vegetable in India is less than the world average and the productivity in Odisha is below the national average. Odisha requires about 10 lakh MT potato annually but the production in the State is less than one lakh. The total area under potato cultivation is less than one percent of the total cultivable area. The State Potato Mission with budget allocation may take steps in increasing potato production by involving farmers in production.

The State has an advantageous position in ginger and turmeric production, especially in Kandhamal district but adequate State investment has not been made to tap the potential.

Agriculture being a State subject, the State Government should have a specific programme and targeted policies for the development of agriculture putting small farmers in the centre. There are a number of Central sponsored schemes on agriculture which are very loosely implemented in the State to improve production of rice, oilseed, pulse, oil palm, maize, cotton, jute, fruit and vegetable and integrated schemes such as Rashtriya Krusi Vikas Yojana with major central assistance. There has been a lack of inter-departmental planning to ensure irrigation, electricity and infrastructural facility for agriculture development of the State. The latest separate Agriculture Budget by the State Finance Minister has not exhibited that synergy and integrated effort of the departments like Power, Irrigation, Revenue, Panchayatraj and ST and SC Development Department in targeting agriculture development and there has been no focused plan for small farmers.

There are also major structural and legal issues relating to land ownership which has been discouraging potential farmers to get fully involved in agriculture. In order to improve production, the Government has to ensure land for farmers especially for sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers, tribal and Dalit farmers who have very marginal holding and many of them have no legal

ownership over the patch of land they have been cultivating for generations.

There has been the existence of a skewed distribution of land holding with a large presence of absentee land owners. The agriculture sector has been managed with a large presence of sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers and agricultural workers. The poor infrastructure in agriculture and lack of social security of the people engaged in agriculture has been a matter of concern. The agricultural credit, subsidy, crop insurance and social security policies in terms of wage and pension of the State Government have not been favourable to the socio –economic development of sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers. The subsidy provided for agricultural equipment such as a tractor, power tiller, pump sets, hydraulic trailer, harvester, and power operated implements have not been much helpful to small farmers.

The subsidy on manually operated implements has been supported in a small way. The subsidies have been mostly used for non-agricultural purpose with subsidy of farmers. During the year 2013 -2014, Rs 277 crore has been spent as subsidy to farmers in the State. The cooperative banks with large coverage of agricultural families as members of primary agriculture cooperative societies have financed crop loan of Rs 7,097 crore during the year 2013-2014. There are also term loans and paddy procurement and marketing. It has been observed that the sharecroppers and small farmers have been not benefited by such credit programmes. Though the State Government has started credit programmes for share croppers and oral leases for agricultural operation in the group in the name of credit linkage to tenant farmer groups and credit linkage to share croppers and oral lessees through liabilities groups which are very insignificant, they have not covered many potential beneficiaries requiring agricultural credit. These cooperative banks are largely dominated by local politicians of ruling parties and the real farmers have no participation in the affairs of banks.

The public investment in agriculture should include people engaged in agriculture, not just in production but the well-being of the farmers and farm labourers. States like Kerala have made provision of pension of Rs 600 for farmers and agricultural workers. The National Commission for Farmers has recommended Rs 3,000 pension per month for farmers and farm workers and many farmer organisations have been demanding social security for farmers which has been

neglected by the Government. Needless to say, the social and economic wellbeing of farmers and farm workers will boost the production.

The National Agricultural Insurance Scheme for all farmers irrespective of their size of holding with 50 % central assistance needs to be implemented by the State with full coverage of all farmers. The Biju Krushak Kalyan Yojana as a health insurance scheme for farmers has been introduced in the State which promises insurance coverage of one lakh annually to five members in each family. But it has not yet become fully operational with coverage of all farmers.

The United Nations has been internationally promoting family farming to eradicate poverty and ensure food security, nutrition, strengthening livelihood and bringing improvement in environment in the rural area. Odisha with poverty, hunger death, distress migration and malnutrition should focus on food production by scientific land and water management and utilise the unemployed human resources. The land distributed to STs under Forest Rights Act 2005 can be developed under land development programme with irrigation, electricity, crop insurance, agricultural equipment for the agricultural activities especially to grow fruits and vegetables to meet the demand of the State.

Saturday, 28 February 2015

SHARECROPPERS SHOULD BE TREATED AS FARMERS IN ODISHA

Odisha is passing through a tremendous crisis in its agrarian sector with huge crop losses, exorbitant rise in input costs of agriculture and incidences of suicide by farmers in different parts.

A vast majority of our rural population depends on agriculture as a primary source of livelihood and continues to contribute to State food production and State GDP as an important sector of the economy. With inherent backwardness of low irrigation potentiality and poor water management, the agriculture sector has been continuously facing natural disasters, flood, cyclone and drought every year and still it is dependent on monsoon.

This year drought has severely affected major parts of the State. The farmers with huge crop loss and debt from non-institutional sources with higher interest rate, along with other reasons, have been passing through a very distress condition and are committing suicides. It is found that a majority of the farmers are sharecroppers and borrowers of private lending and also belong to the socially marginalised sections such as Dalits, Adivasis and socially and educationally backward classes who are otherwise resourceless in terms of land, education and finance capital and have been living in meagre income without social security. The institutional credit facilities available by Regional Rural Banks and farmer cooperatives are availed by the land-owning farmers, but not by the sharecroppers. Even it has been difficult for the sharecroppers to sell their paddy in Government Mandis where the farmers have to identify themselves as land owners. It is revealed from a private survey that out of total 61 farmer suicide cases during the last two months, 70 % belong to SCs and STs. Region wise there are reports of more deaths from the western parts of the State. The social and economic backwardness of farmers in backward regions is more acute.

In spite of demand from many quarters for a long time, the sharecroppers are not being recognised as farmers to avail a host of benefits including the compensation for natural calamities such as drought and disaster provided by the Government. The Central and State Governments have announced drought relief package which includes compensation for crop loss, subsidy and loan facility for Rabi crop and other host of benefits but as in the past all these benefits

from the State treasury go to the land owning farmers. The sharecroppers and agricultural labourers are major losers in this respect.

For legal reason, sharecroppers are not officially recognised and thus the sharecroppers do not exist but everybody knows it that about more than 60 % of our farmers are sharecroppers. Land ownership is very central to production relation in agriculture as it is an important means of production. Many of the Government programmes for agriculture development are directly conditioned with land ownership.

The non-implementation of land reform laws, specially land distribution programme in the State, has been badly affecting the landless poor all over the State, including coastal and tribal areas where mostly the Dalit farmers are landless and in the tribal areas still majority of the Adivasis have no record of rights over the land they have been cultivating for generations. The other most vulnerable section in agriculture sector is the agricultural labourers who virtually become unemployed in the harvesting period this year due to crop loss and the MGNREGA programme is not going to meet their distress. Leave apart corruption and use of the machine, it has been proved in the past that the State Government has very poorly managed the employment creation opportunities and heavily depends on central resources for rural employment. The ongoing process will further encourage distress migration, hunger death and suicide in the State in the absence of protective measures. It will have also wider impact over food production and economic growth.

The directive principles of our constitution say there should not be a concentration of means of livelihood in the hands of a few and it should be equally distributed for common good. Sharecropping is one of the most labour exploitative systems in a feudal agrarian economy that needs to be arrested for protecting the rural labour as entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector. The second one is the weakening the economic status of sharecroppers will have wider impact on agriculture production and the overall economy because it is fact that the sharecroppers constitute a major chunk of the farmers and without ensuring their basic rights over State sponsored subsidy in agriculture during natural calamities it is not possible to increase agriculture production and food security in an agriculture dependent backward State like Odisha.

There are States such as Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal where the sharecroppers have some kind of rights and security ensured in agriculture sector which needs to be studied in the context of Odisha's peculiar situation in agrarian sector and State revenue laws in relation to land ownership and sharecropping. In Odisha, we have about 44 % of the total geographical area which is scheduled area where tribal enjoy a right over land but their entitlement has not been recorded and survey and settlement have not been done in many parts of the State.

In the present context, the State Government should immediately identify sharecroppers by involving Panchayat Raj institution, Revenue, Agriculture and Cooperative department officials and must bring an amendment in revenue laws to allow a formal agreement between landowners and sharecroppers. The sharecroppers should be recognised as farmers and Government should extend all possible support that includes compensation for crop loss, loan from farmer cooperative, crop insurance, seed, fertiliser, pesticide and all other agricultural inputs for the development of agriculture to generate employment and income as well as agricultural production. Along with social security for sharecroppers and agricultural workers, the Government should ensure minimum wage and minimum 200 days work for agricultural workers linking to agricultural infrastructure development in rural areas.

The long pending demand for progressive land reform, distribution of Bhoodan, ceiling surplus, waste land, forest land to ensure homestead and agriculture land for the landless and sharecroppers should be carried out by the Government by which many farmers will be directly benefited by the process to become land-owning farmers. The implementation of private land purchase scheme for distributing homestead and agriculture land to the landless sharecroppers has not been implemented though there has been the provision of financial resources from Union Ministry of Rural Development, NABARD and other Agricultural Development Banks. It is unfortunate that the Government and banks are not implementing the scheme in the State. In order to facilitate the process, a State level committee involving all concerned departments and experts from different walks of life should develop a State-specific mechanism to address the issues of sharecroppers.

Saturday, 07 November 2015

BOOST SMALL FARMERS, PROVIDE THEM BASIC INPUTS

Odisha has been importing major food items such as fish, banana, egg, chicken, potato, onion and vegetables from Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Jharkhand to meet the everyday consumption need. The dependency has to be mitigated by increasing production of these items within the State.

The per capita consumption of vegetables, milk, egg, fish and meat in Odisha is less than the national average. Similarly, production is also very less in comparison to the neighbouring States. This is a major factor which has been influencing the price in the market with a burden on poor consumers appearing very high. The yielding rate of food grains in Odisha is below the yielding rate in some of the major States. For the year 2012-2013, the yielding rate of food grains at all India level was 2,125 kg per hectare (ha) and highest 3,698 kg per ha was reported in Haryana. But in Odisha, yield per ha was just 1,696 kg.

There has been a decline in the net sown area. Though cropping intensity has increased and it is higher than the national average, but it is far behind Sikkim, Punjab, Haryana and West Bengal.

Fish, meat, milk and vegetables are produced by the small and marginal farmers and landless labourers, Adivasis, Dalits and minorities in rural areas. A majority of them are not supported with basic infrastructures such as land, water, power and credit. The Government institutions like OMFED, OPOLFED and FISHFED have not reached to the small farmers from marginalised social groups. Many of the prospective producers are in need of support to engage in production which can also potentially contribute to generate employment and income for the rural poor families. This can also contribute to a condition in achieving price control with food security and added nutrition value with decreasing dependency on the neighbouring States.

Take the example of fish. During the year 2012-2013 about 21,217 MT of fresh water fish was imported through private trade channels from the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh because Odisha has not enough fresh water fish even to meet the domestic market though during the same period Odisha exported about 111.85TMT fish to other States and foreign countries and about 60 % of export constituted marine

products, frozen shrimp, ribbon fish etc. These were mostly exported to Japan, China, USA, UK, UAE, Indonesia, Canada, Germany, France, Nederland and Hong Kong etc. The export of marine products to foreign countries has been increasing every year. In last ten years, it has increased about three times. The value of the marine products was about worth Rs. 1,700 crore for the year 2013-2014. China is the highest fish producing country of the world which is contributing 34 % of the total world fish production. In India Andhra Pradesh tops the list of fish producing States followed by West Bengal and Gujarat. Fish Farmers Development Agency, a centrally sponsored scheme, functions in every district and provides financial assistance for pisciculture development. The Revenue Department of Odisha provides a lease of brackish water areas in the coastal districts in the State to BPL families, woman self-help groups, cooperatives, educated unemployed persons, fishermen and landless persons having income not more than Rs 40,000 per annum. A lessee can use land as collateral security in any bank for availing necessary finance. But many of the State efforts are not reaching to the socially marginalised groups.

The National Horticulture Mission was launched in 2005 to promote horticultural crops, including fruits, flowers and vegetables in the State and the crops selected under the scheme include banana, litchi, mango, and citrus. In spite of the Central grant, there has not been enough cultivation of banana to cater to the need of the State.

Similarly, farmers are being supported with quality seed materials of potato, spices, onion and vegetables mini kits in subsidised rate for cultivation, but the effort has not been able to meet the demand of the State. In spite of huge potentiality in tribal areas of the State, the horticulture has not improved at desired level. The livestock population such as cattle, buffaloes, pigs, sheep, goats, poultry and duck etc in the State has not been increasing like in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal. It is reported that about 85 % of the livestock is owned by landless marginal and small landholding households. The production of milk, egg and meat in the State has marginally increased during last ten years. The per capita availability in the State is far behind all India and world average.

Why has Odisha not invested in the livestock sector which can directly give benefit to the poorer section as well as increase the production of milk, egg and meat? The Central Government has been supporting the livestock development schemes in a number of ways, but the State has

not effectively implemented them. The livestock insurance scheme with 50 % subsidy has been implemented in all 30 districts and the entire cost of the subsidy is being paid by the Central Government, but the scheme has not covered all the livestock population. There are eight poultry farms and duck breeding farms functioning under Central assistance but Odisha is not able to produce half of the demand for eggs in the State. The national project on cattle and buffalo breeding, a programme of Centre and implemented by Odisha Livestock Resource Development Society, besides the Kalyani project with BAIF foundation, Pune, too, have limited coverage.

The capital subsidy provided to SCs and STs in dairy entrepreneurship has not attracted enough beneficiaries among the marginalise groups. Therefore, it is suggested that the production relation in rural agrarian sector needs a structural change with basic input support to boost production. As the small farmers have a major share in production, they need to be strengthened with basic inputs such as land and credit to increase the production. There has been also a need for expansion of the net sown area under cultivation and increase in cropping intensity through land creation by developing wasteland and encouraging small farmers with all kinds of facilities to go for multi-cropping in the available land. It is being observed that due to lack of irrigation and power mostly the farmers go for paddy cultivation for about six months and the next six month from January to June the farmers and agricultural workers have virtually no work in the field. The rural families engaged in production can be supported through farmers cooperatives, women SHGs with land on lease and credit facility under priority sector lending by the Regional Rural Banks to encourage production of vegetables, fish, meat, milk and egg to meet the domestic consumption need of the people.

Saturday, 08 August 2015

NEEDED: LONG-TERM PLAN TO FIGHT DEBT, DROUGHT

Odisha has been passing through a distressful situation with increasing suicides by farmers due to debt and drought. The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) report on farmer suicide has identified crop failure as the major reason driving the hapless farmers to take the extreme step.

Over past three weeks, 25 farmers have committed suicide by consuming pesticides or hanging themselves in the State. In view of the enormity of the situation, the State Human Rights Commission sought a report from the State Government while a five-member Central team visited the drought-affected area recently for assessment. Besides, the Opposition demanded a White Paper on drought by the State Government. There has been substantial debate over the issue involving people from different walks of life, including political parties, farmer organisations and media. Both the Centre and the State Government have declared a number of temporary packages such as cash incentive over crop loss, input subsidy and increasing the man days of NREGS etc to meet the drought crisis on a war footing basis though these measures are not new to State like Odisha. With Rs 1,000 crore relief package, the Government of Odisha has converted the short term kharip loan to medium term loans with a same interest rate in drought affected areas and promised for fresh finance for Rabi cultivation.

The issues of natural calamities such as drought, flood, and cyclone has been a regular visitor in the absence of long-term disaster mitigation plans by the State in ensuring timely irrigation for agriculture. This year about 70 % of the agricultural land has been affected by drought covering around 100 blocks in 23 districts of the State. The State Government report says 5.23 lakh hectares of cultivable land has been affected and for long-term drought mitigation plan, the State has demanded Rs 3,500 crore as special Central assistance. The Centre has supported drought hit States such as Maharashtra with Rs 2,000 crore package recently.

Though farmer suicide is a global and national phenomenon, but it is very specific to the region. Odisha has unresolved traditional structural issues due to overall socio and economic backwardness with large presence of socially marginal groups that contributes to the

distress of farmers. The NCRB reports as many as 5,650 farmers suicides in the country last year, while it says Maharashtra, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka together account for about 90 % of the total cases.

So far as Odisha is concerned, though there are a number of issues, but mainly debt and drought are the prominent ones which need a long-term plan to ensure credit for the farmers and irrigation for cultivation. But it has been observed that the State Government has been implementing welfare programmes rather than investing in agriculture sector to change the economic condition of the farmers for a long term basis. There has been no plan to bring improvement in an institutional arrangement for disbursement of credit.

It is fact that about 70 % of the people of Odisha depend on agriculture and about 63 % of the total workers of the are engaged in the farm sector which includes 24 % of cultivators and 39 % of agricultural unorganised workers. They are not socially and economically a homogeneous group and have an unorganised diverse interest which has been a major barrier for collective bargaining. The production of agriculture not only provides food but also primary income for these families to make a living out of it. The socio-economic condition of farmers and agriculture labourers has been the most miserable one in terms of standard of living and income. They are the lowest paid workers and face problem of distress sale of their produces for a long time. The post liberalisation era witnessed a different growth model of privatisation, an increasing input cost of agriculture and dependence on market forces, private companies. The agricultural workers as a major workforce are lowest paid and without a regular employment and social security benefits. Many of the agricultural workers are small and marginal farmers and sharecroppers with small holding dependable on absentee landlords' land for cultivation. Their dependency has increased over the years over everything that includes inputs, land, seed, fertiliser, pesticide, agro appliance and credit. The State policy favours a lion share of subsidy that goes to the purchase of high-cost agro appliances such as a tractor, deep bore well etc and small farmers do not feature in such kinds of subsidy. There has been a lack of timely collateral security free institutional credit for agriculture. Barring a few cooperatives and regional rural banks, the farmers mostly depend on private money lenders with a conditional loan of a higher rate of interest for timely investment. Sometimes, it leads to distress sale in compulsion. It has been observed that many of the farmers those who committed suicide

are sharecroppers and got a loan from private money lenders. They are primarily dependent on agriculture as the main source of income to meet the growing need of the family, besides meeting the increasing input cost of agriculture and face continued inflation in the uncontrolled market economy. There has been no health and crop insurance to meet the unforeseen risk involved in the production and managing family. They have no control over Government policy, weather and diseases. The debt bondage is a trap that has been a never ending process in rural villages. The State has not yet covered two-thirds of its area with any banks whereas every panchayat should have a bank for making the availability of timely credit. There has been a need of a timely hassle free institutional credit for farmers where the State Government, NABARD, RRBs and RBI have a major proactive role in setting up farmer-friendly financial institutions and mobilising loans and encouraging the saving habit of farmers and building a culture of repayment of loans. There must be stringent laws to control private money lending and its exploitative nature for poor and illiterate farmers. The Odisha Money Lenders Act should be amended to suit the present context. The Money Lending Regulation Act 2008 of the Government of Maharashtra has set an interest rate slightly higher than the rate declared by Reserve Bank of India. The Government of Kerala also has set up a Kerala farmer debt relief commission.

Though Odisha has tremendous potential of water resources but this resource has not been tapped for the use of agriculture. The ground water and surface water with so much of rivers and Nalas have not been fully utilised due to inadequate State investment in irrigation and electricity, a prerequisite for lift irrigation. The irrigation projects in the State are suffering due to lack of adequate and timely Central assistance as well as State investment.

Large scale irrigation is not possible with individual investment and the farmers are not in a viable economic position to invest in irrigation. In spite of going for water sources for individual farmers, the State should encourage collective water sources for the farmers of a particular patch and develop water management committees of the water user farmers of the area. The farmers of should be organised for cooperative farming with collective responsibility for production, sharing of inputs, land, water and electricity and also for repayment of the loan by which the individual burden of risk management can be minimised. It will also minimise the average production cost and dependence on market forces for inputs and credit needs. The farmer

organisations while demanding for relief and welfare measures must have a demand before the Government for long term solution to debt and drought mitigation through adequate State investment for agriculture growth on promoting institutional finance, irrigation and farmer social security.

Monday, 26 October 2015

FOCUS CANAL & LIFT IRRIGATION TO BOOST STATE'S FARMING

Odisha has been historically prone to flood and drought every year. The huge potential of both ground and surface water resource has not been effectively managed for drinking, domestic, irrigation and industrial use in the State due to lack of holistic planning.

While a majority of the people of the State depends on agriculture, there should be an integrated plan for water sector putting irrigation in priority area. Agriculture development will lead to an increase in production, food security and income of the farmers and rural job opportunities, with improved irrigation potentiality in rain-fed areas that can arrest the vulnerability in agriculture due to erratic rain or monsoon failure and drought like situation. The agriculture dependent people, 41 lakh farmers and 68 lakh agricultural workers as per census 2011, of Odisha, have been suffering due to either flood or drought. The continuation of flood and drought every year along with other reasons has been contributing to reducing the cultivatable area as well as impacted over principal crops like paddy production in the State.

Paddy being the principal crop of the State covers about 78 % of the crop area; Kharif farming mostly done in the rainy season from mid-May to mid-October. While the farmers are struggling with a number of issues such as distress selling, credit, insurance, seed and fertiliser, the issue of drought and flood has been a regular phenomenon that impacted over production and economic condition of rural people engaged in production. It is mostly the disaster mitigation plan being carried out to manage the emergency situation with little help to farmers without long-term investment in irrigation which is the core of agriculture development of the State. Lack of irrigation also has been affecting pulses, oilseed, vegetable and other commercial crop cultivation. It has an impact over food market.

The small and marginal farmers and sharecroppers are mostly dependent on rain water and State-sponsored irrigation facilities because they cannot invest in private irrigation. Therefore it is mostly the State investment in irrigation that should be given utmost priority to boost agriculture production. The State has a large number of small and marginal farmers, share croppers with fragmented smallholdings as the consolidation of holding has not been completed in the State.

There are 141 million hectares (ha) of net area sown in the country of which about 65 million ha (45 % of total area) is presently covered under irrigation. In Odisha the total net area sown is 4,394 ha with 1,259 ha net irrigated area and 3,135 ha rain-fed area, revealed agricultural statistics by the Union Ministry of Agriculture last year.

The State wise percentage of irrigated area under principal crop shows Odisha has only 28.3 % of the area covered which is below the national average of 45 % and very less than States such as Punjab and Haryana which have achieved 98 % and 86 % irrigation coverage respectively. The irrigation potentialities created by the State have not even used effectively during last ten years as data shows a very minimal growth as well as utilisation of irrigation facilities. In the year 2001, it was 3,605.82 ha and in 2013-14 it was 4,930.94 ha taking together Kharif and Rabi, but only two third has been utilised. It is said that Odisha has not yet utilised the ground water potential, out of total crop area of 4.9 million ha in 2011 only 0.07 million ha has been covered underground water and 1.07 million ha by canal irrigation.

The Biju Krushak Vikas Yojana started in 2001 has been implemented through Odisha Lift Irrigation Corporation under the Water Resources Department for the sustainable harnessing of ground water in water deficit areas in 26 districts. The Pani Panchayat Act 2002, Odisha Integrated Agriculture and Water Management Project, Mahanadi Basin Development Plan, Jananidhi, Micro Irrigation Programme, Watershed Mission, National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Area and Drought Prone Area Programme are some of the initiatives of State Government with the support of the Centre for irrigation. Odisha has an extensive network of rivers and streams where canal and lift irrigation are very much effective along with tapping of ground waters. The river basins of Budhabalang, Baitarani, Mahanadi, Brahmani, Rushikulya, Bansadhara, Nagavali and Indravati etc have not been developed which need long term plan and adequate investment. It will not only help in flood control but also ensure water security for the whole area and irrigation for agriculture throughout the year. The river valley projects for soil and water conservation in catchment areas of Hirakud, Rengali, Upper Colab, and Upper Indravati can be integrated into irrigation projects in the area. The distribution network in the command area has not been developed with proper networking.

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) of the Government of India started in 2015 under the leadership of the Prime Minister

outlays Rs. 50,000 crore for a period of five years focuses on irrigation projects by harnessing rainwater, nurturing water conservation, ground water recharging and micro irrigation with slogan Jal Sanchaya and Jal Sinchan to counter dependency on rainfall in the non-irrigated area. It has proposed to the States to develop State and district level water use plan with a holistic perspective of water sector of the district covering drinking, domestic use, irrigation for agriculture and industry and to promote sustainable water conservation practice with the proposal of private investment in irrigation. It has a plan to reusing treated urban waste water, creation of new water source, water harvesting structure and enhancing capacity of traditional water bodies such as Bandha, Katha, Pokhari in Odisha. While giving importance to lift irrigation from water bodies and make easy access for farmers to water lifting devices diesel, electricity, and solar pump sets, Odisha should use this opportunity in getting adequate Central resources for investment in irrigation of the State in rain-fed areas. It is observed that there are a number of lift irrigation points in the State lying idle or defunct without electricity connection and there has been no storage capacity at the tail end of the canals system. Electricity is very much essential to run lift irrigation projects. As an alternative, the use of solar energy should be popularised. Recently in Kalahandi, a solar irrigation system with solar panels fitted to operating motor pump of two horsepower has been installed in Santapur village of Narla block. It has benefited 15 marginal farmers having ceiling surplus land which need to be replicated in other parts of the State.

There are number of sources such as Rashtriya Krusi Vikas Yojana, (RKVY), MGNREGA, Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), MP LAD, MLA LAD, TSP, SCSP, local bodies funds, NABARD, Regional Rural Banks, farmer cooperatives etc which can be converged for the irrigation project of the district. It is said that the districts having a larger share of the non-irrigated area, lesser agriculture production in comparison to State average, high population of SC and ST, small and marginal farmers will have to get more priority in getting resources for an irrigation project.

The most important is the mobilisation of water users mostly farmers for the effective use of water in their area throughout the year. It has been observed that in many of the areas the farmers are not being mobilised and clarified about their role and responsibilities in the context of irrigation. In some places, the role of Pani Panchayat has been quite effective but in many places, there has been need of local

farmer organisation to mobilise the farmers for water use. The Government should involve farmer organisations, PRI, CSOs and other resource agencies in the mission for irrigation for the agricultural development of the State.

Saturday, 19 September 2015

AMBEDKAR'S PROPOSALS TO TACKLE ODISHA POVERTY STILL RELEVANT

The nation paid homage to Bharat Ratna Dr BR Ambedkar on his 125th birth anniversary and there was a special session in the Parliament on November 26 last.

Leaders in both the Houses cutting across party line referred to Dr Ambedkar's pioneering role in constitution making process and his important contribution as Chairperson of the drafting committee and later as the first Law Minister of India in building democracy of modern India based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

He contributed to expanding democracy to all people with universal adult franchise based on the principles of one man/woman one value and provisions of affirmative action for inclusive democracy by ensuring representation of the marginalised in governance.

His political legacy continues to inspire, guide and influence over the governing principles of our nation in a situation of all kinds of diversity and inequality to ensure representation and active participation of all for building national unity and integrity of the largest democracy of the world.

Dr Ambedkar's economic thoughts are based on the principles of equality and State ownership over means of production. He argued for nationalisation of land and other means of production. He was suggesting for the fullest utilisation of natural resources and human power to fulfil the material needs of the people with active State involvement.

He argued for compact holding to be beneficial for agriculture production while avoiding too much agriculture. As a trade unionist, he played a major role in bringing labour legislation to regulate eight working hour and ensuring benefits of the minimum wage, social security, insurance, equal wage and maternity benefit for women workers and banned child labour.

He argued for one State, one language and said linguistic provinces would make democracy work better than a mixed language province. He was always in favour of federalism which gives legislative, executive and judicial power to States in managing the governance of the States.

In recent times while the States are demanding financial autonomy and power to manage resources, the discourses developed by Dr Ambedkar has become more relevant for resource-rich poor States.

Many of his thoughts and proposals are still relevant and draw public attention to the discussion on policy making and planning of projects of political and economic significance. His insightful proposals are based on information and scientific analysis and mostly targeted to public good with equity.

In the context of continuous visit of flood and drought and its damaging impact on the economy of Odisha and its slow progress underdeveloped economy, the speech made by Dr Ambedkar in 1945 at Cuttack still remains relevant to the people in the State after sixty years of the death of this visionary leader. His understanding and proposals for Odisha's development by fighting low income, poverty, diseases and inaccessibility through the proper scientific management of available vast water resources need to be discussed widely by the people of the State.

Dr Ambedkar visited Odisha as the Labour Member of Viceroy's Executive Council to the Government of India. In his presidential address at a conference of representatives of Central Government and Government of Odisha, the central provinces and eastern States held at Cuttack on November 8, 1945, he explored the possibilities of developing Odisha rivers to control flood while managing water for its best multipurpose use for the people. He made valuable opinion relating to the development of Odisha-based on information which is still relevant in the present context. He was worried after realising the socio-economic realities of the people in those days. He identified flood, drought, famine, deterioration in health, malaria, malnutrition, vitamin deficiency and above all, low-income and poverty as the major issues of Odisha. While discussing the underdevelopment and backwardness, he referred to learn from the drought of 1866 which was a major cause of tragic loss of life of thousands of poor people in Odisha.

He also identified lack of internal communication links within the State either by railway or by canal to connect the vast hinterland with sea coast. He said Odisha has natural resources, minerals, coal, chromites, graphite, limestone, iron ore, mica and forest products, bamboo, and precious possession of vast water wealth. The delta comprising of three districts Cuttack, Puri and Baleswar can be traversed by a network of distributaries arising mainly from five

rivers, Mahanadi, Brahmani, Baitarani, Budhabalanga and Subarnarekha for multipurpose use of water in all seasons. The poverty and backwardness of Odisha can be changed by using best method of utilisation of water resources.

He was critical of the Odisha flood inquiry committee report in 1928 and the subsequent reports in 1937 and Odisha Flood Advisory committee report in 1939 with the involvement of eminent engineers such as Adams William and M Visvesvarayya, on their approach to counter flood without a water management plan to utilise the excess water flows into the sea. Because the plan of only building embankments is not helpful in the conservation of water, there is a need of building small reserves to store the water flowing in the rivers.

Water being the wealth of people its distribution and conservation is highly essential from the point of view of public good. He suggested to construct dams in rivers at various points to conserve water permanently in reservoirs and these reservoirs can serve many purposes such as generating electric power. The power can be helpful in running factories to make Odisha industrially developed. Another important area was navigation which was equally important and can supplement the railways. He told in spite of railways, the importance should be given to canals by reviving old canals and make a new one like Germany and Russia.

While supporting the scheme of the canal, he said historically canal played an important role in British India and the East India Company invested public budget for development of canals and Odisha has one such canal having its multipurpose use but after 1875 the focus was more on railway replacing canal navigation. It impacted agriculture and overall economy and changed the nature of the public investment.

He proposed that it is possible to connect Chandabali to Sambalpur by a navigable inland waterway by the construction of three dams at seven miles above Naraj, Tikarpada and Sambalpur. It will be affordable, cheap and convenient artery for passengers and goods traffic from the sea coast to Sambalpur. He was equally concerned about submergence of land and its impact.

Finally, the conference decided to undertake a survey of the Odisha rivers to prepare projects for unified and multipurpose development like flood control, navigation, irrigation, drainage, soil conservation and power development.

Adviser to the then Governor of Odisha B K Gokhale also spoke at the meeting in support of the proposal of Dr Ambedkar and said Odisha is the most backward part of India and this irrigation project will bring multipurpose development for the State.

While Odisha has been continuing its struggle to change the problems outlined by Dr Ambedkar in 1945 the suggestions proposed by him have been still relevant in the context of utilisation of water resources which is very central to the development of Odisha. The natural advantage of Odisha with river systems, as a perennial source of water wealth, has not been fully tapped and managed for the development of irrigation which is a major reason of underdevelopment of agriculture sector of the State.

The development of agriculture will pave the way for industrialisation where the water management will play a key role in producing power for the industry. The available hydropower will boost the small scale industries especially the agro-based industries for a balanced sectorial growth in the State. The utilisation of natural resources and manpower in a scientific way will increase production, employment and income in the State and the backward economy can be changed. This will be a tribute to the great visionary leader in realising his dreams.

Saturday, 05 December 2015

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY OF AGRICULTURIST TO EASE STRESS

The Government of Odisha presented a separate Budget on agriculture of Rs10, 903.62 crores for the financial year 2015-2016 in the State Assembly.

Agriculture being a joint responsibility of the Centre and the State, the Central Government also allocated a substantial amount for agriculture development and implementing a host of schemes for different types of farmers in its Budget.

Agriculture budgets are focused more on irrigation, credit, crop insurance, input subsidy and welfare of farmers, especially the life insurance scheme. It is revealed that a lion share of the input subsidy and credit with lower interest goes to land owning big farmers and agribusiness industries while the small producers are left with a meagre share.

The people in agriculture are producers. A big share of our food production comes from small producers and it maintains food security as well contributes to the employment of a vast majority of our workforce. The globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation has impacted the small producers in agriculture. The developing countries such as India and backward States like Odisha having a majority of small producers have been facing the heat to cope with the transition from feudal to the capitalist mode of production. The structural changes taking place in the agrarian economy have a wider impact on people in agriculture. The State has to protect the small producers from natural calamities such as drought and market forces by providing irrigation, compensation for crop loss, credit, input subsidy and also to ensure social security for them as they are deprived of getting their due share like the labourers of organised sector.

The welfare and social security of people engaged in farming are paramount to boost the production because ill health and burden of social spending of the family keep the farmers in distress which impacted over production as the mental and physical health of the farmers has a wider impact on their working condition. The agriculture sector has not upgraded the skill of farmers with the application of modern technology and other related facilities.

In the recent farmers suicide cases in different parts of the State, it is found that majority of the farmer's families have no social security coverage. Though there are schemes but many well-intended programmes have not reached to the different categories of farmers due to lack of political commitment from top to bottom and poor governance. It is being observed that the block and Panchayat level functionaries of Government are not interacting with people in the village and a very poor monitoring mechanism at district and State levels have been weakening the implementation process. There has been a lack of information and transparency and absence of awareness and organisation of people in agriculture as an economic interest group. In Odisha, farmers are not a homogeneous community in many respects due to our socio-economic system, geographical condition and local specific situation. There are more vulnerable farmers with historical disabilities such as landless sharecroppers, farmers with small holding, women, Dalit and tribals who are prone to varieties of socio-economic issues. They do not have equal access to land, credit, marketing of their product and Government schemes and programmes due to illiteracy, social barrier and poor political affiliations. The land owning farmers, landless sharecroppers and agriculture labourers have no collective bargaining power because of lack of homogeneous interest though all are dependent on the agriculture sector.

People engaged in the agriculture sector are earning very less and without a regular income in comparison to other sectors. They have a very minimal saving habit and usually, they are left with almost no surplus to save to meet the unseen expenses such as health problem of the whole family. There has been insufficient and poor health and educational infrastructure in rural areas. For any major diseases, they travel to cities for healthcare which is too costly on their part.

Privatisation of healthcare facilities with increasing cost of services fee and medicines has been an added burden to the misery of poor producers who are depending on their own production for an income. Tribal farmers in interior parts are the worst sufferers in this situation. The income earned by a farmer is not enough to manage his/her family and especially during a time of huge crop loss it has been difficult for him to meet the education and health expenses of the family. So social security of the farmers has to be taken care of by the State. The students of farming families in rural areas are deprived of getting a quality education in the absence of adequate State investment and the privatisation of education has made education

expensive. It is good that the State Government has declared to exempt the tuition fee of students in drought-hit areas of the State. Students of farmers' families should be provided monthly financial support to meet the basic minimum educational expenses such as books, stationery and school dress along with mid-day meal. It will reduce the burden of educational expenses of children in the family and pave the way for a qualitative improvement in farmers' family.

The State Government report says there are 55 lakh farmers who have been covered under the Biju Krushak Kalyana Yojana (BK KY) out of which 84,000 families have benefited with a claim of Rs 45 crore having been settled. It shows that a very insignificant portion of farmers has been covered and the majority of the farmers have been left out. The Government should seriously implement the scheme covering all households engaged in agriculture, especially in inaccessible tribal areas, among Adivasi farmers. The Aam Admi Bima Yojana of LIC launched in 2013 has identified about 45 occupational groups including agriculturists which provide life insurance coverage to people below poverty line. This insurance coverage should include a major section of rural poor engaged in agriculture but in spite of Government involvement, this has not reached to the poorest in the agriculture sector.

Other important social security measures are housing, sanitation, maternity care, old age pension for farmers and agricultural workers. The rural housing scheme, Indira Awas Yojana and State Government housing schemes should cover the people in agriculture. Government should have a low-cost housing and sanitation scheme for the farmers as well. Elderly people in the family need special care for which old age pension for the elders is a must which can reduce the burden of the farmers' families. Kerala has introduced pension for farmers after sixty years of age since 1980 and especially agriculture pension scheme for small and marginal farmers in 2012. Worldwide it has been proved that a comprehensive family-based social security measure by State has an important role in bringing change in the quality of life of the families in agriculture which will have an impact on the agriculture sector and rural economy for an inclusive growth. It is time that the State should involve all actors such as Government officials, PRI, CSOs and farmer and agricultural labour organisations for mobilisation of farmers, agricultural workers in implementing the schemes and programmes.

Saturday, 14 November 2015

AGRO CRISIS: WOMEN WORKERS NEED URGENT ATTENTION

As per the 2011 Census, the female population of Odisha was 207,45,680 and a major chunk plays a very vital role in the State's economy. The Census reveals that there has been an increase in the total workforce with the proportion of male workers to the male population and female workers to female population. Women workers constitute 28 % of the total women population.

The continued natural disasters and industrial and mining based economic interventions have been affecting the agriculture sector leading to a distress condition and having an impact on the most marginalised sections. The condition of women in agriculture, mining and industrial areas is adversely affected.

The ongoing crisis in agrarian sector has been affecting women in their struggle to manage family and other economic activities outside the family. Rural women have been playing a major role in the agricultural economy though they are not being recognised as farmers and without land entitlement. The women constitute about half of the workforce of agricultural and other allied activities.

Women workers have been facing access to credit and other Government schemes due lack of land entitlement and male dominance in all sphere of social life. The male dominated public institutions also very rarely encourage women for self-employment at par with others. Women are mostly encouraged to form Self-Help Groups (SHG) to get Government subsidy and largely a majority of groups have no productive activities except private lending.

The prevailing distress condition in rural areas has rendered women more vulnerable in the absence of social security and entitlement rights along with socio-religious barriers. While a major chunk of male workers is migrating to different parts in search of livelihood, the women are left in the family with the responsibility of managing family of children and elders. Women of marginalised sections such as Dalit and Adivasis are sharing the burden of livelihood in family apart from household responsibility. Women are mostly engaged in agriculture, forestry, minor forest produce collection, animal husbandry work but mining activities have changed their occupation as construction workers and casual labourers. Lack of homestead land and proper shelter is a major issue which affects women more in

providing security to self and family. Along with agriculture, many Dalit and Adivasi women are working in mines as a casual labourer under contractors in Sukinda, Keonjhar and Sundaragarh mines areas. They face all kinds of exploitation like lack of minimum wage, social security and protection against sexual harassment at workplace etc. The flow of truckers and migrant workers disturb the normal life of the local people and particularly women are more vulnerable to this situation. It is found that there are single mothers (unwed mothers) in mining areas of Sukinda, Keonjhar, Angul and Jharasuguda. Their socio-economic condition is very bad which needs urgent attention. The condition of women in mining huts is very insecure with alcoholism and crimes ruling the roost. The health condition of women in mining areas marked with low infant mortality and pollution related disease like TB and Asthma etc.

The Odisha Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy says that unmarried girls above the age of 30 years have to be treated, separate families. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 also says an unmarried Hindu woman is entitled to equal share in ancestral property along with other male members. Many land-owning caste Hindu families women are taking the advantage of it in mining areas while getting compensation for their land. But Dalit and Adivasi women are not getting this advantage because of their landlessness and lack of education for formal jobs.

The State Government has instructed to issue homestead land “patta” in the name of both husband and wife but it has been observed that nowhere women are applying for land patta at tehsil offices. Women are participating in all public events organised in protest or in demand but women leadership is invisible in all these struggles in various organisations. Marginalised poor, resourceless, unskilled and illiterate families, Adivasis, landless Dalits, fisher folk on the river bank, mines workers in mining areas are under pressure to earn a livelihood while coping with the changing local economic scenario. The industrialisation and mining activities have largely impacted over agriculture in all mining and industrial areas in many ways. It is evident that the recent farmer suicides are reported from western parts of the State where mining and industries have a major role in the local economy. Mineral extraction activities cause huge displacement, pollution, loss of livelihood of people dependent on agriculture, water and forest-based subsistence economy. There has been growing poverty, dislocation of families and breakdown of community life due to unemployment, low income natural disaster, distress migration and

multiple displacements in mining and industrial areas that affect women and make their position vulnerable which encourages girl child labour as domestic maids, wage workers in mines, distress migration, sale of girls by parents and social insecurity in family and community. This kind of situation makes young women vulnerable when they go out to earn a living. They fall easy prey of false promises of marriage and sexual exploitation.

While rural poor and illiterate women are struggling against the impact of the economic policy on agriculture and employment along with continued age-old socio-cultural systems like male dominance, caste and ethnic barriers, and loss of dignity. The violence against women is not limited to sexual harassment, abuse or exploitation; it also includes poverty, unemployment, distress migration, single motherhood, various forms of gender-based discrimination in family and society, trafficking, sexual exploitation with a false promise of marriage, sexual harassment at workplace and rape etc. The State Commission for Women has registered hundreds of complaints of cheating and rape cases and the number of these cases are on the rise.

Mining attracts the inflow of outsiders, truckers, casual workers, contractors and encourages a consumer culture, where liquor and different type of addictions play a key role. Poor young women are trapped easily by this culture. As a result, sexual exploitation by cunning male and consent of young women for sexual co-habitation is taken fraudulently that lead to unwed motherhood. Leave apart mining, there are also male perpetrators in the village, protected by dominant people of the locality, who are denying marriage in demand of dowry and avoiding the girls on caste, religion and community ground after having exploited them sexually.

In these cases, girls are being insisted on going for an illegal abortion and threatened with gross atrocities if they expose the case in public. The Government should encourage women organisations in rural areas to play a proactive role of counsellor and facilitator along with all kinds of support and training to handle the cases. The Government and the women organisations should provide multi-level services like socio- psychological support, minimum financial assistance for livelihood, employment and emergency child health care and legal aid to access justice.

By the effort of women movements with progressive ideas, there has been growing consciousness about women human rights and bringing change in patriarchal legacy as a global phenomenon. Many of the

concerns of gender discourses have been visibly reflected in Government's development policy relating to education and employment of women, social security for workers, women participation in governance and gender budgeting. But most of the programmes are limited to urban educated women and women of the organised sector are the major beneficiaries of such schemes and provisions. The women in rural areas are being deprived of the benefits of such schemes and programmes.

Saturday, 21 November 2015

CHAPTER-2

BUILDING INCLUSION

ODISHA MUST ACCORD TOP PRIORITY TO FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Financial inclusion plays an important role in the process of economic development. The access to credit has not been democratised and inclusive across social groups. About two-third of the total poor in rural and tribal areas belong to SCs and STs, who constitute the core of poverty group. And this group is yet to get a smooth bank credit link.

Odisha has about 3,595 branches of different banks till 2012 which include commercial banks and cooperatives out of which about 55 % of branches are in rural area.

Till 2012 in terms of the number of commercial bank branches, SBI is heading the list with 678 of branches followed by 206 of UCO bank, 172 of Bank of India, 119 of UBI, 116 Andhra Bank, 112 of PNB and 109 of IOB. There are also 5,000 cooperatives functioning in the State. It is observed that private sector banks have advanced very marginal loans to the SCs and STs. The State-level bankers' committee for the year 2011-12 shows out of total advance of Rs93,094.85 crores, the advance to the SCs and STs was Rs4,181.56 crores only which is just 4 % of the total advance.

The Odisha SC and ST Finance Development Cooperative Corporation Ltd (OSDFC) under the department of the SC and ST Development should have a proactive role in this regard but this institution has been operating with very poor performances in spite of loan from NSKDFC and National SC and ST Finance and Development Corporation under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The provisions of the constitution under article 275(1) and 244 ,46,23, and budgetary provisions like TSP and SCSP have enough scope to promote credit facilities in Scheduled areas where the bank can play a major role but this has been seriously neglected by denying the SCs and STs rights to credit for their development. The international agencies like World Bank, DFID, UNDP, IFAD and many others need to focus on the credit need of the poor to generate self-employment through utilisation of natural and human resources locally.

The bonded labour system and the migrant workers problem are very much linked to the credit need of the rural poor who still depend on traditional money lenders, labour contractors and businessman to

meet their emergency need for small investment in agriculture and allied activities like purchasing agricultural appliances, fertiliser, seed and food need in lean period, emergency during illness and festival, rituals and ceremony expense like marriage and death in family.

Many of the upcoming youths those who want to invest in small business and self-employed activities are denied loans by the local banks with the plea of collateral security and third party guarantor. The SHGs members are harassed by bank officials to open an account or to withdraw money. They have to wait in the bank for days together and face discriminatory attitude of bank officials. The SC and ST students are getting many difficulties while opening their bank accounts for on-line transfer of Pre-matric and Post-matric scholarship.

Dalit and Adivasi women are routinely harassed in many ways. There have been reports in media about the nexus between ruling party agents, Government officials and corrupt bank officials who are managing a lion's share of the subsidy money and taking a bribe in sanctioning loans under different Government schemes for the poor.

The motivated young social entrepreneurs from the community should play a pro-poor role in helping women and others to have easy access to banks. In the mines and industrial areas, many displaced families are being harassed due to non-cooperation by bank officials in opening account or withdrawal of their compensation amount. Many of the illiterate families are being exploited even to open a bank account and the bank staff discriminate with customers of poor and SC and ST background.

The issues of landless, collateral security, third party guarantee and regular income are major problems for the SCs and STs when they deal with local branches. There are a number of centrally sponsored schemes under which credit is provided by banks with a subsidy. The credit provided under different schemes is monitored by the RBI. In both credit and subsidy, there is reservation and relaxation for SCs and STs. SGSY which is a poverty alleviation scheme in rural and semi-urban areas where not less than 50 % of the families should belong to the SCs and STs.

The committee on credit related issues under SGSY by the Ministry of Rural Development says the poor performances of SGSY in Odisha. It says high incidence of poverty in Odisha is due to lack of interest by banks and adequate knowledge of local Government officials. The role

of the bank is not just linked to provide finance but involvement in the project from inception.

The banks should increase their branch network and recruit more staff with proper orientation on credit need of SCs and STs. The State Government should provide support to the commercial banks to open a branch in remote rural and tribal areas in terms of incentives. Proper coordination is highly required among local Government officials and banks while executing programmes and credit link for rural poor because most of the schemes like MGNREGA are linked to the bank and there have been systems like direct bank transfer.

There should be a special cell to monitor credit flow to the SC and ST beneficiaries and ensure implementation of RBI guideline by documenting the issues and generating data. The institutions like NCSC, NCST, NSFDC, OSFDC, PRIs, CSO, SC and ST organisations should be involved in the process to promote awareness and transparency so that access to financial resources can pave the way to development.

Saturday, 25 July 2015

ODISHA PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING NEEDS TO REACH THE POOR

The priority sector lending implemented by the public, private and Regional Rural Banks (RRB) as part of credit policy of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is much relevant for poor States like Odisha where it can cover a majority of the population identified as potential beneficiaries of a credit based economic intervention.

This will bring positive changes in production, employment, income and make improvement in the quality of life of a vast majority of people in rural area. But in spite of the increase in credit flow to agriculture sector in post bank nationalisation era, the disparity in the flow of credit among regions and social groups remains a major cause of minimal impact over rural poor households. This needs a serious reflection by the State Government, financial institutions, banks and others.

Empirical evidence shows that the poor and landless sharecroppers and agricultural workers remain excluded in financial markets and the benefits mostly channels to the land-owning rich farmers and other economically affluent groups. Odisha still witnesses high incidence of poverty, chronic debt, distress migration, and small land holdings and agriculture sector is continued as the main stake of the State economy which keeps engaging about 60 % of the people in a number of ways. The socio-economic condition and quality of life of a majority of people engaged in agriculture and allied activities have not been changing to a minimum standard in comparison to others. The Union Ministry of Labour report on the cost of living based on consumer price index 2014 says the cost of living of the agricultural workers in Odisha is one of the lowest in the country; Odisha is the third lowest higher than Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. In order to bring change in the rural economy, especially in agriculture and allied sector in Odisha, the priority sector lending policy and implementation process needs a serious review to strategize further the credit need of people of the State in rural and tribal areas. Credit is being viewed as productive input which will boost production by bringing modern inputs and affirmatively contribute to food security along with controlling distress migration and unemployment. The RBI issues credit policy for the banks within which it has identified priority sector to bring sectoral balance within the credit disbursement and ensure easy,

timely and adequate credit for the financially excluded people and the weaker sections.

The priority sector lending includes financing agriculture and allied activities, micro and small entrepreneurs, education and housing loans and others targeting the weaker sections, which depend on traditional money lending. The weaker sections include small and marginal farmers with land holding of five acres or less, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, landless labourers, artisans, village cottage industries, people with disability (PWD), SCs and STs, self-help groups (SHGs), beneficiaries of NRLM, informal sector workers, manual scavengers, minority communities, and distress poor. The minority communities notified are Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, Buddhist and Jains etc. The RBI has identified 121 minority concentrated districts in the country and in Odisha, the Gajapati district is identified as a minority district. During the year 2013-14, Rs 308.64 crore was disbursed to 24,219 minority account holders by all commercial banks in Odisha. It is equally important to take care of the minority communities within the weaker sections with an equitable portion of the credit under priority sector lending. RBI notification says that 15 % of the total advance should be for weaker sections of the society and RRBs should have 60 % of the credit for the priority sector. Within this, half of the loan should go to small and marginal farmers possessing less than two hectares of land.

The loan can be provided to individuals or groups, SHGs or joint liability groups to meet the objectives and also to corporate, partnership firms and institutions for agriculture and allied activities that include dairy, fishery, piggery, poultry, beekeeping, plantation and horticulture etc. The rate of interest in agriculture is 7 % with 2 % Government subsidy and it further falls to 4 % in case of proper repayment. The loan to small and marginal farmers can be given to purchase land for agriculture purpose and other inputs such as agricultural implements, irrigation and other developmental activities undertaken in the farm. The various activities in pre-harvest and post-harvest periods, such as spraying, weeding, harvesting, grading, sorting and transportation, and exporting can also be covered under the activities. The common guidelines for priority sector loans say there should be no service charge on loan up to Rs 25,000 and the bank has to maintain a separate register covering data on receipt, sanction, rejection and disbursement of data. The bank has to issue an acknowledgement for loan applications. The loan applications by SCs

and STs will be rejected by the next higher authority of the branch with sufficient reasons of rejection.

In the past few decades, the Central Government allocation on agriculture credit has been consistently increasing to meet the challenges of farmers in distress, struggling with a number of issues of crop loss, natural disaster, distress sale, including credit as a major concern. The agricultural credit flow for the year 2012-2013 was Rs 6, 07,375 crores, during eleventh plan(2007 to 2012), it was Rs 19, 20, 400 crores and for the year 2014-2015, the Finance Minister has increased this to Rs 8.5 lakh crore. Along with this, around Rs 5,300 crore to support micro irrigation , watershed development and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana and Rs 25,000 crore rural infrastructure development setup in NABARD, Rs 15,000 crore long-term rural credit fund ,Rs 45,000 crore for short term cooperative rural credit refinance fund and Rs 15,000 crore short term Regional Rural Banks refinance fund. There are also central schemes such as National Agricultural Insurance Scheme, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, National Food Security Mission, etc. The banks such as NABARD and RRBs, cooperatives such as Odisha Gramya Bank and Kalinga Gramya Bank have a major role in the implementation of priority sector lending in the State. NABARD projected a credit potential of Rs 36, 959 crores under priority sector during the year 2014-15. The Odisha SCs and STs Finance Development Cooperative Corporation Limited has to address the credit needs of SCs, STs, scavengers and minorities in the State. But unfortunately, in the context of Odisha, the Central Government schemes and bank interventions remain with poor performance and slow progress. It is observed that there has been a lack of sufficient branches in rural and tribal areas and the bank officials and beneficiaries have very less interaction on the priority sector purpose and procedures of the loan.

Many of the prospective beneficiaries have no awareness about such facilities being provided under priority sector lending due to lack of information either by the Government or respective banks in their locality. In most of the cases, the banks in Odisha did not follow the orders of Government officials due to lack of monitoring and periodic review of the targets fixed by Government. It was also reported that many banks which were performing well in other States were performing very poorly in Odisha. The RBI has instructions that at least 25 % of the total number of branches opened by a bank during a financial year has to be in unbanked rural areas but this is not followed by banks in Odisha. They also are not being able to fulfil the

other targets under priority sector lending in the State as a result of which many of the prospective beneficiaries are deprived of their right to credit for development.

1 August, 2015

EXCLUDED GROUPS MUST GROW IN BUSINESS, INDUSTRY AS WELL

Democracy and growth are interconnected. Inclusive democracy believes in the inclusion of excluded groups in all spheres including business and industry. It is fact that for historical reasons and continued graded inequality in our social system, the excluded groups, such as women, minority and SCs and STs, are largely underrepresented in business and industry.

They have been facing discrimination in job market while competing with dominant social groups. Business and industry sectors have to ensure diversity in workplaces as well as in ownerships and must respond to social responsibility in nation building. Business and industry organisations should not limit itself to just doing charity by contributing donations but they should practice the policy of inclusion in employment and share ownership. The SCs and STs are visible in political parties and as representatives in governance from Panchayat to Parliament and they also have representation in Government and public sector jobs due to the reservation after independence, but they are not visible in private sector business and industry.

Just mere political representation benefiting few families is not enough; there should be mass economic activities for SCs and STs to liberate them from continued poverty and social discrimination. The continued inequality in social and economic life due to underrepresentation and lack of participation of a major segment of our society in economic activities are weakening social, economic and political democracy and it has been affecting the overall work culture and production and thus, economic growth.

The private sector business and industry have emerged as the largest source of employment. The post economic globalisation trends in India show increasing disinvestment of public sector companies and withdrawal of State from State-owned business and industry. The benefits of economic globalisation to the market forces need to be distributed across social groups.

The growing privatisation process has increased the public attention towards private sector not only as a major source of employment but also in responding to social responsibilities. By the effort of Government in 2006, the business and industrial sector has voluntarily come up with affirmative action as a social responsibility

in ensuring social equality by creating opportunities for the historically marginalised excluded sections of our society to ensure their participation in private sector business and industry.

Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) has been leading efforts on affirmative action agenda by developing a code of conduct on affirmative action in four areas which includes education, employability, entrepreneurship and employment for marginalised groups especially targeting SCs and STs since 2006. The other private business and industry bodies such as the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) have also voluntarily committed towards affirmative action in addressing social injustice, discrimination against SCs and STs.

Many of the prominent leaders of business and industry such as Tata groups have come up with affirmative action in a number of ways. Tata has declared affirmative action policy in its employment and undertaken promotional initiative to build business partners from among historically marginalised groups focusing SCs and STs by creating access to quality education, technical skill and competency.

The Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) came into existence on April 14, 2005, in Pune by upcoming small Dalit entrepreneurs having an annual turnover of Rs 1 crore to maximum Rs 5 crore to promote business among Dalits and encourage Dalit youths with the spirit of entrepreneurship and develop business leadership among them. The DICCI is in the national council of CII and has members in Australia, UAE, Japan, Germany and South Africa. Many studies have established the fact that SCs and STs have absolutely no representation in business and industry.

A study by a team of researchers associated with University of Northern British Columbia, Canada in a report published in EPW 2011 says there is no diversity in Indian corporate boards. About 93 % of board members belong to dominant social groups, Brahmin and Vaishya castes and the rest belong to SC, ST and OBC. The business and industry in India has to be inclusive of different social groups to become secular and democratic in its composition.

There are a number of industries and business houses which have developed affirmative action programme for the marginalised, especially for SCs and STs. As part of the affirmative action, many of them are running schools, hospitals, skill development training

centres and providing support in many ways to the youths to become employable. It is suggested that along with education there should be supply diversity in public contract, departmental purchase, dealer and distributorship which will help in getting access of SCs and STs to business and industry. The industry should follow a non-discriminatory employment policy to ensure diversity at the workplace.

The whole recruitment process should be transparent and free from caste and gender based biases against excluded groups. The workplaces should have a social environment free from all forms of discrimination by dominant groups. There have been reports of hate campaigns and derogative caste-based remarks against youths of vulnerable groups while they are participating in interviews and appearing exams.

The voluntary policy and self-declared code of conduct adopted by private sector business and industry organisations in a charity mode should be converted to a legal binding one because many of the business and industry organisations are not following the affirmative action on their own in the absence of monitoring and accountability.

The affirmative action effort of corporate bodies should be integrated with initiatives of Government and CSOs for targeted larger impact to change the continued situation of under-representation. It is also observed that there is no concentrated collective effort by business and industry organisations to address the basic issues faced by excluded groups such as livelihood and injustice and exploitation against them.

The affirmative action policy should percolate down State and regional level business and industry bodies such as Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Odisha. There are a number of private business and industry bodies operating in Odisha in mining, steel, power, aluminium, hotel, infrastructure development, mineral trading, education and health sector and their affirmative action efforts are very minimal in creating an impact on the life and livelihood of the marginalised groups.

The target groups are not aware of the opportunities of participation for their development available for them in private business and industry sector and there is no such formal arrangement either by Government or private bodies for monitoring of affirmative action to ensure transparency in the process. In Odisha with 40 % of its

population belonging to SCs and STs should have a State policy guideline for private business and industry and must have a dedicated institutional mechanism to ensure its fullest implementation.

23 May 2015

ENSURE DIVERSITY IN JUDICIARY, POOR'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In constitutional governance, an independent judiciary is one of the important pillars of democracy. A country like India with so much of diversity and inequalities needs an inclusive judiciary that represents social diversity in our courts. It has been observed that since sixty-eight years of independence, the higher judiciary, Supreme Court and High Courts and other related judicial bodies remain largely under-represented by SCs, STs, OBCs, minority and women.

In the last parliament debate over national judicial appointments commissioner to replace the collegium system in the appointment of judges, many members cutting across party line had expressed their views on the issues of representation. They demanded an inclusive judiciary that represents the social diversity and especially addresses the non-representation of about 85 % of people of the country in higher judiciary.

It is argued that there has been no judge from backward classes and SC, ST, minority and women just have very insignificant representation among judges of the Supreme Court and very inadequate in High Courts of the country. It is further said a majority of the judges from about ten percent of dominant social groups who have been managing higher judiciary. The Supreme Court as the apex court of the country has the power to interpret the constitution.

Over its 63 years of existence, the Supreme Court has had only five women judges with two sitting judge, Justice Gyan Sudha Mishra and Justice Ranjana P Desai. In 1989 justice Fathima Beevi was appointed as the first woman judge. There are 58 women judges out of 609 judges in different High Courts and there are no women judges in six High Courts. Justice K.G Balakrishnan of Dalit community was the first Chief Justice of Supreme Court of India in 2007.

While SCs and STs have been under-represented in the judiciary but they remain neglected in judicial process because of their poor economic status. They face social discrimination while dealing with judicial process which is a matter of concern in the context of constitutional mandate envisaged in the preamble of our constitution to build India a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic and to ensure justice to all its citizens. It is the moral and legal duty of the State to ensure adequate representation of people from different

sections of our society and make them proper and fit for the judicial service.

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes report on reservation in judiciary reveals about the victimisation of people from SC and ST in the judiciary and the apathy of judiciary to the cause of SCs and STs.

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) on prisoner statistics in India for the year 2013 says the percentage of inmates from three minority communities i.e. Dalit, Adivasi and Muslims is disproportionately higher than their total population. They constitute more than half of the prison population of the country.

While SCs and STs constitute 25.2 % of the Indian population as per census 2011 but their proportion is 33.2 % as prisoners in Indian jails. The trend is almost similar in case of all types of prisoners that includes convicts, under trials and detainees. The Muslims though about 13 % of the total population but they constitute 20 % of the jail population.

There are thousands of cases of atrocities against SCs and STs booked under SCs and STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 pending in different courts of the country. The poor and illiterate victims are suffering in the delayed judicial process to access justice. National Crime Record Bureau data for 2013 says there are 39,408 atrocity cases against SCs and 6,793 cases against STs reported in different parts of the country and there are above one lakh cases pending for trial in different courts of the country.

The number of crime, violence and atrocity against vulnerable poor and illiterate women, Dalit, Adivasis and minorities has been increasing which needs urgent judicial intervention to strengthen criminal justice administration and in that context the secular character of judiciary should be visible in its composition itself. The modern State has emerged as protector of minority from domination and exclusion of dominant groups. A strong judiciary can help in building an effectively accountable executive and responsible legislative in making new legislation based on interpretations of the court.

With the formation of separate State of Odisha and demand for independent high court, Odisha High Court was formally inaugurated in 1948. With 67 years of its existence, the representation of SC, ST and OBC as Judges is very minimal though they constitute a majority

of the State population. The court Bars are also having inadequate lawyers from SC and ST communities in proportion to their population in the State. Language has been a major barrier to express in courts as English has been continuing as the language of court. There has been no use of Odia language in courts but in certain States, Hindi and recently Tamil are used in High Courts. The use of mother tongue as the language of administration and justice will make people closer to justice. In Odisha with huge poor and having a larger presence of SC and ST population, the judiciary has a very vital role in protecting the constitutional safeguard for the poor and marginalised. But unfortunately, a vast majority of people of the state are illiterate, poor and also unaware about laws with very minimum legal awareness.

They have been routinely exploited in many ways to access justice. The legal aid facilities for poor, SC, ST, people with disabilities, minority and women are largely dysfunctional. The basic minimum human rights and entitlements guaranteed under the constitution have been remaining out of reach of the common people. In this context judicial activism has been playing an effective role in protecting the interest of the poor and marginalised as it is the spirit of law in jurisprudence to defend the weak and poor from exploitation and any form of injustice.

A study on women prisoners by State Commission for Women Odisha revealed that about 63 % women in prison belong to SC, ST and OBC communities. A majority of women prisoners are economically poor, mostly asset less, under BPL, agricultural labourers and wage earners.

They lack financial support and family backing for movement of their cases in the absence of legal aid by State which is very minimally reached to the women inmates badly in need of legal aid.

Articles 35A speaks about equal justice and free legal aid and there is Legal Service Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free and competent legal service to the weaker sections of the society to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizens by reason of economic and other disability. The provision of legal aid has been followed by most of the major countries in the world including USA, Canada, Australia, Europe, Denmark, Germany, Italy etc.

The countries such as USA and South Africa have made arrangements to ensure the participation of black and women to build an inclusive

judiciary that ensures the bench adequately reflects a society of equals.

The Government of Kerala has advocated a grant for young lawyers from among SC and ST communities with financial assistance to set up practice as advocates. Though reservation is not the only solution to make judiciary inclusive but it is one of the most important tools to bring change in the composition of social character in the judiciary and along with reservation in higher judiciary which is just a tool there should be opportunities for legal education for the poor and socially marginalised. The most important area is to build a discrimination-free environment in our judiciary that exhibits the spirit of social equality, dignity and brotherhood towards fellow men and women in judicial fraternity. The court should uphold the principles of social justice by defending the affirmative action for the marginalised and pave the way for its implementation in higher judiciary also.

16 May 2015

MARGINALISED SECTION'S PRESENCE NEGLIGIBLE IN MEDIA HOUSES

Mass media is being recognised as the fourth pillar of democracy and plays a significant role in strengthening people's democracy.

In the age of information with a revolution in information technology to access information, it is equally important to ensure the representation of people from diverse background in media to strengthen democratic space by making inclusive of all social groups by sharing the responsibility of building democratic societies.

It is found that like legislative, executive and judiciary the mass media is not inclusive of marginalised groups of our society. No significant effort has been made to bring diversity in all spheres of media till recent time though the issue has been raised by very few including people from media in an insignificant way. This issue of under-representation of marginalised section in media has not been brought to the attention of Government by media and others concerned such as the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) and Press Council of India (PCI).

The Press Council of India was set up in 1966 with the objectives of preserving freedom of Press and improving the standard of the Press India.

In the recent past, a few researchers and media persons have made an attempt to know the status of representation of Dalit, Adivasis, backward classes, minority and women by examining available data, information collected by filing RTI and through a private survey. They found that our newsrooms lack diversity with very insignificant representation of people from marginalised sections. A Delhi-based survey by Center for the Study of Developing Societies in 2006, to count the top decision makers in media, found that not even a single person was from SCs and STs. As 99 % of media houses are largely owned by private parties, they have not conducted any survey to know the social status of people working in media in spite of demands from various quarters. The RNI in its report "The Press in India 2014-2015" says till March 31, 2015, as many as 1, 05,443 publications, newspapers and periodicals have registered in India. In 2014 -2015 there were 7,871 dailies published in the country. It is told that both registration and circulation have increased in spite of increasing presence of electronic media.

The study of ownership pattern of publication shows a majority of publications (about 87 %) were owned by individuals and 10 % by joint stock companies and the rest with others includes societies, associations, trust, Central and State Governments. About 75 % or more of their advertisement revenue come from Government sources. The Hindi Press followed by English continues to maintain their lead in Indian Press. It is being questioned by many why the fourth pillar is not being democratised with its social role to becoming inclusive and the corporate social responsibility is not being carried out by the media sector by promoting journalists from among marginalised section who are historically underrepresented. While the Government has been supporting the media sector in many ways such as advertisement and other facilities, it is obviously expected that media should have an affirmative action policy for the marginalised in a country of huge social diversity like ours.

The RNI report says Odisha has 171 dailies in Odiya language and total 225 dailies. A majority of these publications are owned by individuals. As many as about 19 Odia dailies are claiming more than one lakh circulation. The circulation of Odia publication increased from 1, 24, 84,899 copies to 1, 34, 71,260 copies for the publishing year 2014-2015. Dailies and bi-weeklies claimed a circulation of 80, 45,411 copies while remaining 54, 25, 849 copies were claimed by periodicals.

Odisha is home to Adivasis and Dalits who constitute about 40 % of the population of the State but they have very insignificant representation in media sector of the State. Though their representation in media is important from the overall socio-eco and political points of view but this aspect has been deliberately neglected by the media sector as well as the State Government. The Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Odisha, the website shows the number of State level accredited correspondent in print media is 1,22, 9 in electronic media and 38 freelance journalists. Also, the list of the district, subdivision and block level correspondents has been displayed but out of them how many of the journalists in the list belong to Dalit and Adivasi communities in the State?

The opening of IIMC in Dhenkanal district has not helped much in promoting journalists among SCs and STs of the State. Why SCs and STs are absence in media though representation is very vital in a democratic process without representation of all sections of society is leading to dominance of few over the majority. Studies have found

that the reporters are chosen on personal contacts from social circles based on caste, regional and religious affiliations. Dalits and Adivasis in cities have no such social contact because of their socio-economic background and other social disabilities that prevent them to have a career in media. The diversity in media will give space to diverse opinion and reflect the experience of the people from marginalised which will enhance the secular, democratic and casteless character of media. It will also widen the scope of employment for the marginalised section while serving their people interest in media. The caste, communal, regional and gender bias in media can be minimised by building social inclusiveness in media. The inclusion of SCs and STs will expand the scope of circulation in interior parts as well as news and stories of marginalised sections from interior parts can be accessed easily which is very much required for the regional media. It is found that sometimes the people from upper caste impose their caste and religious views in media and use media for their caste and class interest without serving the larger interest of the society. They have been projecting Dalits and Adivasis in an inferior manner without respect and dignity for their social status and concern for public image. The views and opinions of representatives of Dalits and Adivasis are not getting visible space in media in the matter of socio-economic and socio-political issues of the State. They are not being contacted for any debate and discussion to share their point of view on different matters, even matters relating to the issues of marginalised sections. The views and opinions of dominant caste getting repeated and regular space in media whereas it is expected that media should be neutral of opinion and play facilitating role in educating the public to know the facts and truth by which public can take informed decisions. People from interior parts and diverse social groups, and women are not getting adequate space in addressing their issues through media which has been weakening our social fabric and limiting the participation of marginalised section in available democratic space of involvement in public life.

The print and electronic media in Odisha largely owned and managed by few upper-caste and upper-class urban families of ruling parties and corporates who are mostly belong to a social class of people of the state and they represent the interest of the upper-caste and upper-class people of Odisha. They enjoy all state sponsored benefits and recognitions because of their identity as media who serves the people and the state. It is highly required to make Odisha media inclusive of all social groups especially the SCs and STs, minority, and women

should have adequate representation in both print and electronic media. The media houses should make a conscious effort in promoting journalists from the marginalised groups and make them competent with all facilities required to ensure their effective representation.

Saturday, 13 February 2016

RURAL JOBLESSNESS STILL A CAUSE OF CONCERN IN ODISHA

The persistent disparity and deprivation in rural areas have led to a spurt in unemployment, distress migration, farmer's suicide and extreme poverty in many parts of Odisha.

The rural social culture is also changing very slowly and carrying the burden of old hegemonic control of feudal legacy. There has been huge inequality in access to productive resources such as land, education, credit and State sponsored opportunities, besides gap in income and limited sources of income. This inequality has been producing a number of issues in our rural, social and economic life. In order to generate employment in the rural area, the various sectors of the State economy such as agriculture, industry and service should get balanced priority investment. Over and above, the employment policy should have a perspective for the rural poor and marginalised.

The Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011, published in 2015, says nearly three-fourth of households of the country are living in rural areas and 30.1 % of rural households depend on cultivation as their main source of income and employment. It is revealed that 51.14% derive sustenance from manual casual labour while 56.25 % rural households own no agricultural land. The incidence of landlessness is highest among Dalits.

In case of Odisha, 54 % of rural households are without agricultural land. It is found that 75 % of the all rural households have an average monthly income below Rs 5,000, whereas only 9.68 % of rural households have salaried jobs that include jobs in Government, corporate and private sectors. Out of total about 21 lakh ST rural households, only 0.65 % of households are with salaried jobs and only 0.80 % of rural SC households are with salaried jobs.

The Directorate of Employment, Government of Odisha, says there were 2, 78,480 registrations made in 2013, whereas only 1,240 vacancies were notified. So the percent of placement vis-à-vis registration was only 0.95. The total educated job seekers through employment exchange above matric were about 10 lakh in 2013.

The data shows that still, rural Odisha continues with dependency on agriculture and manual casual labour with more than half of households without agricultural land, low income and without secured

salaried employment. The Government, corporate and private sectors have not created enough employments and a very insignificant percentage of households depend on it especially from among the socially marginalised groups. The production relations in rural areas have not changed.

While the private sector is using the land, water, forest, mineral, power, finance, capital and all other State sops, they ought to have a democratic employment policy that ensures diversity at workplace but this is not happening.

About 70 % of cultivable land in Odisha is affected by either flood or drought every year in the absence of a sound water management system. It has impacted over agriculture production and rural seasonal employment with lower cropping intensity. A vast majority of rural people depends on manual casual labour but there has been experience of non-implementation of employment generating schemes by State Government in spite of provisions of schemes by Ministries. The MGNREGS being the largest job creation programme of the Government is limited to 100 days with huge irregularities. The private construction works available in rural areas are very casual in nature and do not follow any labour legislation intended for unorganised sector workers.

The provisions of minimum wage, equal wage for both men and women workers and social security measures are usually not followed by the employers in rural area. It is seen that there are no crèche facilities for women workers in rural areas and almost all the workers have no health insurance against diseases, prolonged illness and during pregnancy. The women workers and workers of socially marginalised groups are more vulnerable in such distress situation. It has been encouraging child labour from poor and poverty stricken families for low paid casual work. The rigid caste and patriarchal structure and socially discriminatory practices restrict self-employment of marginalised groups and women in the absence of approving social environment that encourages micro and small enterprises. The manufacturing sector of the State has not been improving which can generate employment for the surplus workers from agriculture. The contribution of manufacturing sector to State GDP is remaining insignificant. Mining and mineral based industries still are being continued as focus of the State Government. The rural infrastructure development projects are also not following labour intensive methods; rather they have been more capital intensive

giving very limited scope of employment in the rural area. The industrial development in the State has created jobless growth.

The mining and mineral-based industries have encouraged labour migration from neighbouring States to emerging mining and industrial hubs of Odisha but the locals who have sacrificed land and livelihood and bear the brunt of pollution are not getting employment in their locality though there is provision to provide employment to the locals. The Government has no monitoring mechanism in the interest of the locals.

A number of State-owned enterprises have been getting closed like jute mills, sugar mills, cotton mills, power looms, etc which have deprived thousands of rural poor of a salaried job in their locality. These industries were also quite helpful to agriculture as they purchased the agro products from the local farmers.

The increase in standard of living of farmers and agricultural workers will create demand for consumer goods and construction work in the locality. But unfortunately, the agriculture sector has not been promoted with State investment. The farmer cooperatives need to be promoted through farmer mobilisation for productive and creative work among farmers. It has been observed that most of the farmer cooperatives are used for petty political power gain and grab the State resources in the name of agriculture development. Odisha's consumer market has been captured by the neighbouring States with supply of food grains, vegetables, fish, egg, meat, and other consumer articles. A major part of the income of salaried groups in Odisha is spent on food items and goes to the pockets of the businessmen of other States.

The service sector in the State is in the process of getting privatised. The health, education, service delivery works of Government, such as mid-day meal, welfare programmes for the vulnerable groups, housing and skill development are slowly being handed over to private parties in public-private partnership mode or by following outsourcing methods with less State accountability. There is no clarity about employment policy or any good practice of labour legislation or affirmative action in such handing over process. A majority of private sector enterprises lack diversity in their workplaces and exclude the poor and marginalised in a number of ways.

In order to minimise exclusion in labour market and to restrict the free play of market forces, there must be protective and affirmative action for the marginalised groups in the employment policy of the

State so that diversity and inclusive access to opportunities of employment can be ensured. This would reduce distress and insecurity of the marginalised in rural areas.

Saturday, 17 October 2015

STEPS TO PROTECT EDUCATION RIGHTS OF MARGINALISED NOT ENOUGH

Universal education is vital means for transformation of any backward society to a more equitable, egalitarian and democratic one. But due to a number of reasons, the scope of education has not been available to all and it still remains limited with elite few.

With the emergence of nation State and constitutional governance, education has been identified as a fundamental human right to be ensured by the State equally for all its citizens.

Internationally the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948 and Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC),1989 recognises education as a human right for dignified life. The intuitional arrangement for higher education in India has increased from 605 institutions of higher education in 1950 to 23,505 in the year 2007-2008 as well an increase in enrolment. Though globally Indian universities are not featured as best performers with not even one Indian university figuring in the latest list of the top ten universities in the world, the Indian students are found in abroad, mostly in the US, Australia, the UK, Russian federations, New Zealand, Germany, Canada and in about 80 countries. Indian students constituted about 1,77, 000 in 2007.

In spite of substantial progress of the country in higher education, the higher education access of marginalised groups such as SC, ST, OBC, and Muslims remain below national average. This has been a matter of concern and the ongoing privatisation process has thrown a challenge in many ways.

In India, it is fact that historically there are communities which are being deprived of access to education and later on as part of reparation initiative, the State has ensured their education by making special provisions through law and State sponsored programmes. During the freedom struggles, the makers of modern India made a mission of spreading education among the masses, especially among the poor and deprived ones, by way of a number of private initiatives, involving people. The Constitution of India recognises education as a fundamental right and after 60 years of the implementation of the constitution, the RTE Act 2009 came into force which speaks about universal, free and compulsory primary education. There has been a continuation of low budgetary provision for education in the country

in terms of its percentage of GDP in comparison to developed countries and backward States such as Odisha.

Way back the history of education in Odisha recalls the Puspagiri University which was centre of learning with students from abroad as mentioned by Huien Tsung the famous Chinese traveller of the 7th century. The education development in Odisha has become visible during British rule with schools and colleges opened by missionaries in Cuttack in 1822. The present education status of State does not show a very promising picture from the perspective of the poor and marginalised which constitute a majority in the State.

Census of 2011 shows the literacy percentage of the State is below national average i.e. 73 % and 75 % respectively whereas it is further less in case of women, SCs, STs, PTGs in the State. While the private educational institutions are mushrooming in urban locations of the State, the quality of education in primary and higher secondary level in Government run institutions has been challenged with lack of basic minimum such as teaching staff and infrastructure. There has been continuous strike by the Government run primary school teachers pressing for minimum salary and other social security benefits. This has been impacting over the school education system where mostly the poor and marginalised sections of rural area depend for education of their children. The dropout and child labour issues are continuing unabated. The dropout rate is higher in case of SCs and STs as well as a major chunk of child labour belongs to the poor household of SC and ST communities primarily in rural areas. The weak primary education system in the State gives a very poor foundation to students depending on Government run schools in rural areas and that further weakens their participation in higher education. There has also very insignificant presence of SC and ST faculties in universities of the State and the campus are dominated by dominant caste groups without social inclusiveness. An all-India survey of higher education report 2013-2014 on State-wise number of teachers among various social categories says out of total 41,714 teachers in Odisha, there were 1,172 SCs and 451 STs and 4,597 OBCs. The survey covered 850 colleges and 21 universities which include one Central University, three institute of national importance, 12 State universities, three private universities and two deemed private university. The report says at all India level SC students constitute 13.2 % and ST 4.5 % of the total enrollment, 32.4 % student belong to Muslim minority and 2 % from other minority communities. The data shows inadequate

representation of SCs and STs in higher education in spite of the policy of affirmative action by State.

Our society has unequal power equations based on gender, class, caste, race and geographical locations which determine the social status and opportunities to get education. So the State has to ensure balance for inclusive representation of all in building an egalitarian society. The State has a major role in promoting education as a process of distribution of knowledge and information. Knowledge is a creation of human society and it is the role of the State to see its judicious distribution among all its citizens while developing a political society based on modern political citizenship with equal rights and opportunities for all. The State creates scope of education out of public spending. It has to create scope for the poor and marginalised in an unequal society and give representation to them as matter of rights and ensuring inclusiveness in a diverse society.

The ongoing trend shows an increasing privatisation of education in the country, including Odisha, where a number of private educational institutions, colleges, deemed universities with huge private investment and Government support have been coming up and education becoming a more and more expensive. This has been helping the upper class to avail hassle free entry to educational institutions by payment of donations. The low-income groups mostly a major chunk of marginalised sections are not in a position to pay such huge donations, particularly for higher education, medical, engineering, management and information technology etc. The marginalised poor are availing relaxation only in Government run institutions for admission. The scholarship given to SC and ST students is very nominal in comparison to the total expenses for education.

The Government Odisha has denied higher education to the SCs and STs by depriving them of their legal right of availing reservation in all educational institutions run by Government and private bodies as per their percentage of population but it was only 8 % and 12 % for SCs and STs respectively until recent days. As per law in Odisha, the seat share should be 16.25 % for SCs and 22.5 % for STs. But this has been denied to them till April 2015 when a revision was made by the Government to implement such provision from the academic session 2015 -2016. Apart from reservation for students in admission, there has been very nominal stipend given to the SC and ST students. The educational institutions, classrooms and hostels are not a culturally

inclusive space for SC and ST students who usually face social discrimination in many ways by the fellow students due to their subjugated social identity and poor economic status. Many of the students are first generation of learners who face all kinds of difficulties to cope with the situation dominated by upper-class superiority and dominant cultural practices. The injected inferiority and discrimination lead to suicide of students in many educational institutions as reported by UGC. It has opened counselling centres for SC and ST students in universities to help them with all kinds of information and support. The educational institutions benefited by State should strictly follow the principles of inclusion in building an inclusive society as legal mandate and constitutional commitment to nation building. The State has to ensure equal opportunities for all its citizens while protecting the poor and marginalised from unfair competition.

31 October 2015

VILLAGE PRIMARY EDUCATION CONTINUES TO BE IN DOLDRUMS

Children are our future and primary education prepares a child for the future. Any kinds of negligence in realization of children's right to education will have serious ramification on society.

Universal, free and compulsory quality primary education for all remains a distant dream in spite of the effort to recognise education as a fundamental right. The 86th constitutional amendment in 2002 made education a fundamental right inserted in Article 21A and later in 2009 the Right to Education (RTE) Act was passed to realise the right enforced since April 2010.

The recent trend in Odisha shows a negative picture in the primary education sector of the rural areas where mostly the poor villagers depend on Government run schools. Though the educational statistics of the State has been changing in terms of increase in enrolment but the quality of primary education and the overall improvement of the sector in the State, as reported by mostly by the Government agencies, has been a matter of grave concern. There have been every day reports in media about teachers' strike for regularization of employment and hike in salary, along with poor status of schools, non-availability of basic infrastructures such as school building, toilet, drinking water, playground, classroom, library and inadequate female teacher and also the most important poor student and teacher ratio. The annual status of education report 2010 says 45 % of children in standard three cannot read the standard one level text. Odisha is among high private tuition States such as Bihar. There are hundreds of habitations without school within one km radius. The teacher unrest continues with faulty recruitment policy of the Government. The recent suspension of four thousand contract teachers shows the non-serious attitude of State Government towards primary education system.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India in 2014 reports about poor status of primary education in Odisha and says that the teacher - student ratio remains as high as 1:187 in primary schools as about fifty thousand posts of teachers remain vacant during 2009-2014. Thousands of under qualified teachers, under-matriculate and without professional training are continuing in primary schools. There are different categories of teachers without role clarity and serious disparity exists in salary and benefits available. Some of the teachers

are not even getting minimum wage declared by the Government for unskilled workers. The enrolment in elementary stage has decreased in 2013-2014 which is seen as a failure of the Government run schools and paves way for privatisation as the children enrolment in private schools has increased in rural areas.

There has been weak implementation of the provisions of The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 in the State. For last few years, the State Budget shows that the Government spends only about four percent of its gross domestic product on education. The State continuously failed to avail the Central assistance in the absence of non-availability of matching State share though education is in concurrent list after 42nd constitutional amendment in 1976 which has created scope of joint responsibility in many ways including sharing of financial resources by the State and the Centre. The implementation of programmes by Government for promoting primary education such as DPEP in 1996, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2003 and Mid-day Meal (MDM) in 1995 has been poor which helped little in developing the quality of education in rural areas.

The Anganwadi centres (AWCs) which provide pre -school education along with food supplement for the mental and physical growth of children in rural areas are in a state of disarray. The AWCs run with a number of limitations because of lack of awareness in the community and poor monitoring system by the implementing department. Many of the centres face the problem of inadequate and timely supply of rice. It is reported that about 50 centres in Gop block of Puri district have no rice and the Anganwadi workers have borrowed rice from the village to feed the children. The quality of food and the process of preparation have been always poor. Without proper kitchen and hygienic method, the meals are prepared. It is reported from many parts of the State that the foods served to the children affects their health. Insects, reptiles and lizards fall on the food bowls as the food containers are not covered properly. The condition of MDM in schools is also equally deplorable. The problem is acute in interior and tribal areas.

In a recent hearing of petition on poor status of MDM by State School and Mass Education Department, the State Human Rights Commission chairperson Justice Birakishore Mishra ordered the State Government to form an expert committee to review the MDM programme and asked the officials to visit the schools in remote tribal

areas to find out the causes of non-implementation of the guidelines and contingency plan relating to the meal scheme.

It is not only the quality of food, but also the dignified distribution of food has been a matter of concern in the Government run institutions in villages. Though the nutritional supplement programme for children primarily targets the poor and marginalised sections in rural villages but children of these communities face social exclusion in getting their entitlements as the location of the centres are near dominant community habitations and mostly managed by excluding the poor and marginalised in the village. There are reports of separate seating arrangement and discriminatory treatment with children of socially excluded groups while serving the food from distance. The social identity is a matter of controversy in appointment of cook in almost every village and the guideline of the Supreme Court has been just violated to appease the sentiment of the dominant communities.

The other benefits provided by the State to children of marginalized sections to increase their enrollment and attendance in school such as school dress, books, bicycles for SC and ST girls, pre-matric scholarship and other incentives are not reaching to them on time and students have to face a number of hurdles to access these benefits from the schools. There has been report of delay and bureaucratic hurdles to get caste and residential certificate from the Revenue offices. Many of the illiterate parents have to visit Revenue offices and pay unusual fee to local middlemen to get certificates. The very attitude of the service providers is discriminatory and mostly the local officials lack civic sense and human courtesy while dealing with the poor and marginalised section of our society. The process of restricted access to Government supported benefits largely impact over the education of the marginalised section in rural areas. While ensuring quality education in rural areas for the poor, there should be effort by the Government to address the pressing issues of children of the marginalised poor in rural areas by effective implementation of laws and programmes. The most important The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, The Odisha Right of Children To Free and Compulsory Education Rules 2010, along with The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act 1986 and The Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 need to be enforced for the interest of the children of the poor and marginalized sections in rural areas.

The School and Mass Education, Women and Child Development, Labour and ST and SC Development departments should work

together and make a collective action plan for prohibition of child labour and for eradication of socially discriminatory practices against children of socially excluded groups in Anganwadi and schools in the rural area. It will help in reducing the dropout and child labour and in building socially inclusive environment in our educational institutions along with quality education.

Saturday, 28 November 2015

TRIBALS, DALITS YET TO GET ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION IN ODISHA

The education of the marginalised is the responsibility of the Government but there has been a continuous strategy to hand over the responsibility to private sector under the plea of quality education. There has been an impression that the Government-run schools are not capable of providing quality education whereas a vast majority of students still depend on Government managed institutions. For a long time, there has been growing involvement of other actors along with Government such as international organisations, DFID, World Bank, UNICEF, private foundations, corporates and public sector undertakings, religious bodies which are actively involved in education sector in many ways especially in promoting education among the marginalised poor in remote and inaccessible areas. But still, the impact of these agencies has been very insignificant. The post globalisation era has created a conducive environment that paves the way for private education business organisations in the country as well as in Odisha to tap both private and Government resources such as land, finance and a host of other benefits in form of grants in the plea of education of the marginalised.

Taking the advantage of large presence of poor Adivasis and Dalits in the State and support from both private and Government sources, these private organisations have been instrumental in providing education to the most marginalised section of our State. The shifting of responsibility of Government to private sector with handing over State resources will have wider implication on education of the marginalised poor of the State. There are a number of private residential schools coming up in Odisha and a very few of them are growing in a mega way by accommodating very huge number of students from marginalised sections. But ideally, the education facility should be made available at doorstep at Panchayat, block and district level. It is surprising why the Government grants, from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, public sector and corporate, besides of the State Government, are being channelled to very few private institutions without decentralising the resource distribution mechanism to institutions in all parts of the State. This has been creating regional disparity in access to quality education for all people in the State as well as the marginalised

sections. The Government has also not developed adequate monitoring and accountability mechanism for private institutions.

It has been observed from various reports and news in media that the status of Government run schools are qualitatively deteriorating and still there are many children out of school and the problem of dropout and child labour is still a matter of concern, mostly in rural areas. The attempt of the State Government to give encouragement to private run schools will deprive further the poor and marginalised from getting quality education.

It is found that the scope of education for the marginalised section is not universal and not based on the principle of equality. It is graded into different categories based on its available unequal opportunities and access. The recent State Government's decision to launch Anvesha scheme to provide free education to SC and ST students in selected private English medium schools is a welcome move. Under the scheme, around 5,000 ST and SC children will be enrolled annually into standard I in leading private schools in urban areas of the State. There are interior pockets without schools and teachers are not willing to continue there for long. There has been lack of sufficient qualified teachers from among the marginalised community in the locality to be appointed as teachers.

The allocation of budget for education and functioning of education administration has been subject to a number of criticism. The State Government has not allocated adequate financial resources, trained and dedicated manpower and necessary basic infrastructure for ensuring quality education for all in the State. The State should not encourage disparity in education system while providing education to the students of the state and there must be always an attempt to build universal education system as well universal access to education by all to minimise disparity and inequality.

The poor economic status of the parents and their vulnerability in socio-economic situation has been largely impacting on the education of children. It has been said in number of cases that the number of enrolment in schools has increased due to mid-day meal that means children are coming to school out of poverty and hunger.

For last several years lakhs of migrant families have been leaving their village with children in search of livelihood. The children of these poor families are being deprived of education and all other child rights to build a life for the future. A major chunk of migrant workers is from

marginalised sections and from the backward regions of the State where there has been poor educational infrastructure. Residential schools are highly required to ensure education of poor children. The children of farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural workers, construction workers, fisher folk, NTFP collectors, with low and fixed wage are struggling hard to meet the educational expenses and many of them are leaving school due to financial distress. The socially excluded groups are facing problems of social discrimination.

The private English medium schools are routinely increasing school fees and the educational expenses become costly. Children education budget becomes a lion's share of the income of economically poor families in both rural and urban areas.

The State Government has not seriously implemented the provisions in laws such as Right to Education Act to minimise social discrimination, reservation, stipend and all other benefits for the marginalised section.

It is suggested that now there are district mineral development foundations in each district and major mineral bearing district will have more financial resources available for the development of the districts, and this district mineral development fund should be allocated for education development of the district. Especially the education of the marginalised section should be in focus to provide quality education at their doorstep at block and district level by opening residential English medium schools in the district. The children of SC, ST, SEBC, religious and linguistic minorities and women should be supported additionally to ensure their fullest participation in access to education. The financial resources from other available resources can be pulled together in building a common Statewide plan for the educational development of the whole State. The ST and SC Development Department, School and Mass Education, Mines Department and other related departments can plan this scheme by involving all stakeholders for education development of the State.

Saturday, 16 January 2016

STOP DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION: LET MARGINALISED GROW

Disparity based on class, caste, ethnicity, region, religion and gender continues as a social reality of our country in spite of legal provisions to bring equality in social life. These are man-made inequalities being practised by dominant communities against the marginalised sections as it is more visible in case of poor, low-caste, backward region, linguistic and religious minority and women.

Unfortunately, the State run institutions such as Anganwadi in village or universities in cities are not free from various forms of discrimination. A recent case of suicide by research scholar Rohit Vemula in Hyderabad Central University (HCU) has triggered the issue of institutional discrimination. It is said by many that Rohit was a victim of institutional discrimination.

It is not just Rohit, but thousands of students face discrimination in their everyday life not only in universities but also at Anganwadis. It is a reflection of our collective social consensuses continued since centuries. It perpetuates abhorrence, violence, and disrespect for human being and continues as a potential threat to human dignity. It will further disintegrate our political unity and pose more challenge to social understanding and economic growth. It is important to think about such issues while we are celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedker who had dreamed for a discrimination-free society through annihilation of caste. Rohit was a member of Ambedkar Student Association that propagates the ideas of Dr BR Ambedker, which are also placed in the constitution of our country.

It is fact that not only the Government run institutions from villages to cities but also the private run institutions also have not paid adequate attention to the issues of caste-based discrimination as a result of which this has been continuing in new forms.

While we are moving towards privatisation of education and other service delivery institutions for the poor and marginalised, the issues have become more complex. The economic liberalisation process has not integrated social issues as a result of which it will further exclude the socially marginalised groups. The corporate foundations spending under corporate social responsibility schemes have no social reform agenda to address the social issues while the focus is on only building

economic charity for the marginalised. It is being argued by many that only focus on economic development cannot bring social change.

Non-economic issues are vital to economic development especially in a complex society with huge diversity, disparity and full of discrimination inherited from a continued history of centuries. The most planned economic welfare programme in the post independent India by the Government for the marginalised has not changed their social status from poor beneficiaries to dignified citizens of the country.

The current news from different parts of the country shows that institutions run by Government have not been strictly enforced laws against discrimination and necessary attempt has not been made to change the mindset of the people managing such institutions. In this context, the experience in Odisha is almost similar to other parts of the country.

In rural areas of the State, the service providers of various social welfare schemes which are specially meant for the marginalised sections have not changed their mindset towards the marginalised communities. It was evident in 2014 that Parsuram Munda (2) of Jhumpura block in Keonjhar district was attacked by an Anganwawadi helper by throwing hot water because he just touched the boiled egg kept to serve the children. There are reports on various forms of discrimination such as practices of untouchability during mid-day meal and Saraswati and Ganesh Puja and other social functions in schools, forcing Dalit children to clean the dining space after mid-day meal and school toilets, calling Dalit and Adivasi children by their caste and community names in classroom and public functions and many more from districts of Kendrapada, Dhenkanal, Jajpur and Ganjam but many such cases are underreported from all over the State. Dalit and Adivasi women are not preferred to get appointed as cook or other service provider in caste Hindu villages. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe students are routinely humiliated and harassed by their teachers and non-teaching staff of dominant communities. There is existence of separate hostels for SC and ST students in the educational campus. There have been campaigns under SSA for building schools as punishment free zones and clean zones with care for health and sanitation but very limited attempt has been made to develop our schools as discrimination-free zones. The Anganwadi centres, primary schools, residential schools, ANM centres, child care centres in rural areas are not free from

discriminations in many forms. The quality of food, service, and social environment build an inferior mindset among the poor and marginalised in rural villages.

The representation and participation of marginalised sections have been always restricted to a limited access to benefits. There are unwritten and hidden social restrictions systematically imposed and followed against the poor and marginalised.

The Left dominated trade unions of service providers have not educated their members with civic and human rights education to practice non-discrimination in public institutions. They need to be educated about citizenship and democratic values placed in our constitution. Trade union movements are limited to economic benefits without any social commitment and reform in public institutions.

Added to caste, gender-based discrimination is also very much prevalent in public institutions. The recent cases of harassment of lady professors of Ravenshaw University by their male colleagues, is one of the example of gender-based discrimination in higher educational institutions of our State. There are hundreds of such cases which go under reported and intervened by the Government.

The service providers are educated in our schools, colleges and universities where only formal degrees are given and very scanty attempt has been made by the Government to popularise anti-discriminatory laws as an important means of establishing equality. It is most unfortunate that our institutions of higher learning such as IITs and Central Universities are not free from discriminations of different forms. It is reported that during last five years, 25 students of universities have committed suicide out of which 23 were Dalits.

There were 11 Dalit students who committed suicide in HCU during 2007 to 2013. A three-member committee under the chairmanship of Prof SK Thorat was set up to inquire into the allegations of differential treatment of SC and ST students in All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Delhi. The panel reported that the students face discrimination in hostel and by the faculty. The higher educational institutions are not following the constitutional provisions for the marginalised. The posts of teaching and non-teaching staff largely remain vacant.

All India survey of higher education report 2013-2014 says about inadequate representation of marginalised section in higher education posts and services. Odisha has 21 universities which include one

Central University, three institute of national importance, 12 State universities, three private universities, two deemed private universities and about 850 colleges imparting education to the students from Odisha and outside. The available disaggregated data shows the insignificant representation of marginalised communities in the educational institutions. Leave apart other issues such as timely payment of stipend, there are a number of cases of discrimination reported but never been discussed by the State Government to address the issues with priority.

The State Assembly committee of SC and ST members, advisory councils of STs and advisory board for SCs, State vigilance and monitoring committee are headed by the Chief Minister but these empowered bodies never discuss the issues of education of the marginalised barring a few routine works under the provision and as part of mandate to get central assistance.

The Government should introduce civic, human rights and citizenship education in school, college and universities along with strict enforcement of anti-discriminatory laws. Along with anti-rigging and gender justice laws there should be laws to fight caste-based discrimination in educational institutions to protect the marginalised students perusing education with all difficulties. Added to new legislations, the existing anti -discriminatory laws such as PCR Act, SC& ST (PoA) Amendment Act and The Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act should be strictly enforced in all institutions. The institutions should creatively organise functions to promote brotherhood, social amity and respect for diversity and dignity. There should be periodical social audit of institutions by a committee to monitor the institutional discrimination with assessment and action to minimise discrimination and make all other effort to build our institutions as centre of equality and dignity.

Saturday, 06 February 2016

EDUCATION QUOTA HIKE: STATE STILL NEEDS TO DO MORE FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH

A policy of affirmative action has been followed worldwide to build an inclusive society that ensures representation and participation of people from diverse social groups. The State has to ensure the implementation of such policy in a most dignified way in all spheres of socio-economic and socio-political life to reduce inequality.

Worldwide it is understood that a State needs to have a political commitment to ensure basic minimum opportunities that ensure human rights and a dignified living. For historical reasons certain sections of people remain unrepresented and marginalised in areas of governance, employment, education and business which are vital to human development and economic growth.

Globally it is gender, ethnicity, indigenous and minority status, race and caste, especially in south Asia, has been a basis of discrimination which has been attracting affirmative action as a policy for building an inclusive society. There are exceptions such as Malaysia where the son of the soil the majority Malays have reservation to protect them from other ethnic minorities. Brazil has social quotas in universities and workplaces. Colombia has affirmative action for black and afro-Colombian communities to encourage their involvement in national affairs. The South Africa has provision to ensure 69 % of the workforces at all level should be black South Africans. It has also made an attempt to democratise higher education. Canada, Finland and Germany have made provision for minorities. The Canadian employment equity act gives preferential treatment to women, people with disability, aboriginals and minorities.

Almost all south Asian countries, including India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka have been following affirmative actions in different spheres to build inclusiveness in public places. All the south Asian countries have ratified the convention for elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW).

In India, we have both horizontal and vertical inequality among social groups as well as among individuals and households in society. The Parliament of India has very poor representation of women as its members. In the 16th Lok Sabha elections, it is only 11 % of the total seats which is lowest in East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The

parliamentary seats have been reserved for women in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. The women reservation bill has been passed in Rajya Sabha with absolute majority in 2010, but still it is pending in Lok Sabha. Odisha was formed in 1936 on the basis of language and later other feudal kings joined the modern independent State under the constitutional governance and rule of law. The people of India have resolved to build this country a socialist, secular, democratic republic that ensures equal opportunity for all with dignity which is mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution.

In line with constitutional mandate, Odisha has adopted affirmative action in form of policy of reservation for SC, ST, OBC and women in areas of governance, job and education. The reservation for SCs and STs is as per their population percentage. The reservation for SC, which includes 93 castes, and ST which include 62 communities, in the State is 16.25 % and 22.50 % respectively.

In case of reservation in education, it was 20 % only and recently, in May, the State Government has increased the percentage to 38. This has been a demand of the SCs and STs for a long time. The State Government has made a list of 209 communities in the State as SEBC and reserved 11.25 % of jobs for them besides equal percentage of reservation in education. But the SEBC communities should avail 27 % of reservation as per the Act. The States such as Tamil Nadu have 69 % reservation. At all India level, OBCs are getting 27 % reservation.

Odisha Reservation of Posts and Services for (socially and educationally backward classes) Act 2008 has provision of 27 % reservation in State employment but in June 2014, through a resolution it was reduced to 11.25 % to limit the total reservation within 50 % as per Supreme Court order.

The Odisha Grama Panchayat Act 1964, Odisha Panchayat Samiti Act and Odisha Zilla Parishad Act amended in 2011 have made provision of 50 % reservation for women and within women reservation there has been a proportionate representation of SC, ST and OBC women in Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayats. There is also Panchayati Raj extension to scheduled areas (PESA) Act 1996 which ensures tribal representation in scheduled areas which is almost 45 % of the total geographical areas of the State.

Arunachala Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram have 80 % reservation for STs in State jobs. The North Eastern Hilly University (NEHU) and Rajiv Gandhi University have 60 % reservation for STs.

The countries like New Zealand have separate electorate for Maoris and there is Sami parliament in Norway for indigenous Sami people. Norway also made provision that all public company boards with more than five members must have at least 40 % of women. The UN has ranked Norway as the best place to be a mother out of 179 countries where India ranks at 140.

Though religious minorities, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and others constitute about 6 % of the total population of the State but they have very insignificant presence in governance, job and education. A number of committees and commissions, such as Sachar Committee and Ranganath Mishra Commission, have recommended reservation for religious minorities. The States such as AP and Maharashtra have made attempt for reservation for the minorities and Maratha but it has been challenged in courts.

It has been argued that affirmative action has not impacted over the structural issues though it has only brought changes in the composition at Government educational institutions, workplaces and legislative bodies. It is further said that the policy is benefiting an insignificant few within the marginalised groups and the relatively forward groups are taking more advantage than the poor in the community.

As the case in Odisha, the SCs and STs have still inadequate representation in class one and class two posts while they have proportionate representation in class three and higher percentage than other social groups in class four posts. The political reservation in State Assembly has ensured proportionate representation of SCs and STs. With a total 147 members, there are 24 SC and 33 ST seats in the State. The policy of reservation has not been implemented by the departments in line with the rules and there have been huge vacancies in reserve posts due to lack of monitoring.

There is provision in the ORV Act 1975 that there should be a standing committee headed by SC and ST development department Minister along five MLAs chosen by the Speaker besides Chief Secretary and Home Secretary. It should have meeting twice in a year to review the implementation process of the provisions under the Act and suggest remedies to the Government to bring improvement.

The reservation policy is being implemented in Government, semi Government and public sector in a limited way. With rapid privatisation process and reducing role of State, it has been suggested

that reservation should be extended to private sector. It is argued that the private sector have been largely benefited by the State in terms of land, power, minerals and subsidy in many ways.

Mostly many of the industries and mines are coming up in areas largely inhabited by STs, SCs and OBCs who have been facing the burden of displacement, pollution and losing their traditional livelihood. So private sector should adopt affirmative action in their employment policy. Private sector leaders like Tata have been voluntarily making an assessment of their own situation in terms of representation of SCs and STs. Studies have pointed out about the non-representation of SCs, STs and women in private sector job market which still have a discriminatory employment policy.

Saturday, 09 May 2015

INFANT DEATHS: TIME TO FINE-TUNE STATE'S IMPOVERISHED HEALTH FACILITY

The recent death of 34 infants within six days in Sishu Bhawan, Cuttack, a post graduate institute of paediatrics and an exclusive health care centre for children, shows the callous attitude and negligence of the Health Department in managing the health service of the State.

This tragic incident is a reflection of the status of our health governance managed by unaccountable bureaucracy and the visionless ruling party. In the absence of regular monitoring of hospitals, the visit of political parties in fact-finding team and by the State Health Minister is not going to change the situation because Odisha public health sector needs a fundamental change.

Infants and children dying in hospitals every day in different parts of the State are a daily occurrence and many of the cases go unreported. The overall health scenario of the State in general and infant and child healthcare, in particular, has been a matter of concern for the State because the State has not made adequate investment to strengthen the public health system and continue to maintain a poor status. The people in rural interior and tribal areas still continue to suffer and die every day in the absence of public healthcare facility.

The child population in Odisha from zero to six years comprises 12.6 % of the State's population which is over 52 lakh as per 2011 census. Of them, 27.16 lakh are males and 25.57 lakh females. Along with malnutrition and infection, the issues of negligence by doctors, nurse and other health staff in hospitals has been a matter of concern because most of the deaths have been due to the negligence of the medical staff in providing timely service. Malnutrition is also a result of inadequate healthcare service.

The annual health survey by census of India 2012-2013 says the IMR of Odisha is 51 in the year 2012-2013 but in rural areas it is still higher and higher than national average. The main reason is poor availability of professional attendance and care. The five major diseases, malaria, leprosy, scabies, acute respiratory infection and diarrhoea collectively account for more than 70 % of the total patients in Odisha. There has been high incidence of malaria, acute respiratory and tetanus infections and anaemia among infants. This is also one of the major causes of high IMR in the State.

After 68 years of Independence, there has been an insignificant improvement in health infrastructure in rural areas of the State. The basic facilities such as safe drinking water and latrine under rural water supply and sanitation programme are yet to reach the interior parts and the marginalised sections. The universal integrated child development scheme (ICDS) targeting the children below six years and nutrition and health education of pregnant women covers about 52.11 lakh beneficiaries through 61,000 Anganwadi and 10,000 mini Agwanbadi centres, with an annual budget of Rs 647 crore.

Along with this, there is also supplementary nutrition programme as a combined effort of both the Centre and the State to improve health and nutrition status of children in the age groups of six months to six years. The Government data shows that the coverage of a number of beneficiaries in providing supplementary nutrition is more than the coverage of women undernutrition and health education, health checkups and immunisation of children. The Rajiv Gandhi National crèche for children of working and ailing mothers for children of zero to six years mostly targeting the children of poor marginalised groups, women workers has not covered a majority of the poor.

It is found that poverty and social exclusion are a major reason of malnutrition but there has been no effort to address the issues among the socially excluded groups in rural and interior parts of the State. The IMR is very high in backward districts having more numbers of excluded groups accompanied with less number of Government medical institutions. The major development programmes for SCs and STs and other rural poor should include healthcare facilities for infants, children and women in their community. The care of an infant and child is the responsibility of the whole family and the entire family engages them in taking care of their pregnant women and children. It has an impact on the employability and earnings of the family. When it comes to health care in case of any illness of child in family, both husband and wife have to come to the hospital all the way from a distance place without proper transportation facility. Even today people carry patients with all difficult traditional transport practices to the hospital. There have been cases of child delivery on the way to hospital without a proper ambulance facility. In most of the hospitals there is no facility of restroom for patient attendants and mostly the poor who cannot afford for a rented room has to suffer a lot by taking shelter in the medical veranda or its outskirt. There has been growing number of middleman and Dalals in the hospitals who are exploiting the poor and illiterate patients and many of them are agents of private

hospitals who mostly serve the interest of private hospitals by mediating with the patients. The behaviours of health service providers in health institutions have been subject to dispute by many and in many accusations it leads to unwanted fight among the attendant of patients and the staff. The cleanness, discipline, privacy and security issues of the hospitals are always being managed with less priority mostly in the Government hospitals. There is a need of orientation of health staff on ethics and social conduct in public service especially in case of healthcare service.

The Union Health Minister in a reply in Rajya Sabha said the doctor-patient ratio in India is less than WHO prescribed limit that is 1:1,000. India has just one doctor per every 1,700 people. Every year about 5,500 doctors pass out and most of them are not willing to serve in a rural area due to the feeling of professional isolation and disparity in living condition and also other reasons which include lack of basic facilities, infrastructure, equipment and well-trained paramedical staff.

In the case of Odisha, in spite of increase in Government and private medical institutions still, there are only 9.75 doctors per lakh population and less than four beds per 10,000 populations. There has been an increase in private medical institutions in districts of Cuttack, Khurda, Kalahandi and Ganjam.

The district of Cuttack has 88 Government medical institutions with 2,440 beds and Khurda has 81 Government medical institutions with 965 beds where as there are 348 private medical institutions with 2,919 beds in Cuttack and 224 private medical institutions with 4,155 beds in Khurda. This shows an increasing dependency of people over private medical institutions than Government. The privatisation of health sector has been impacting over the Government run health institutions and affecting poor people who are mostly depending on public sector healthcare system in the State. As per Health and Family Welfare source about 20 % of posts in hospitals are vacant in the State. The Government doctors are being engaged in private hospitals as consultants. The alternative systems of medicine, Ayush, Ayurveda and Homoeopathy have not been developed in the State especially in rural and tribal areas. It has been observed that a number of Central Government schemes and programmes on health has not been properly implemented by the State Government. It is high time the State learnt from other States and made a serious attempt in all fronts by pulling resources from public sector companies and funds available

with district mineral foundation to build an effective public health sector to serve the people of the State.

Saturday, 29 August 2015

NHP SHOULD FOCUS ON MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES HEALTH

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has placed a draft National Health Policy (NHP), 2015 in public domain for comments, suggestions and feedback. This new policy is going to replace the NHP of 2002 followed by the first policy of 1983. Health being one of the most important matters of public concern, it needs to be addressed with top priority as the health of the people is a wealth of the nation. The proposed policy will further position the role of the Government in setting the priorities of health sector to ensure universal access to affordable healthcare services following the principles of equity and universality as told in the policy.

Though India is emerging as one of the most vibrant economy in the world but the question of equity and universality remains a matter of concern because of its diversity and disparity in socio-economic status and scope of accessing opportunities by different social groups. There are backward States and within the State backward regions which have been bearing the burden of underdevelopment even after planned development of last sixty years.

The national resources have not been democratically allocated to all its citizens for ensuring basic human rights such as right to health. There are millions as left out, unreached and excluded due to lack of opportunities and discriminatory treatment of the State in allocating resources and creating opportunities through policy decisions. India ranks at 135 among 187 countries in the Human Development Index for 2014 by the UNDP. It is even below Srilanka and just equal with other south Asian countries. The quality of life in terms of average life expectancy, reproductive health and access to health services, health infrastructure remain far behind countries such as Norway, Netherlands, Sweden and Canada with very high human development.

India remains poor in terms of health sector spending among BRICS countries as quoted in the draft policy. The States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh have made good performances in health sector where as States like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and UP are struggling with a number of challenges. Coming to Odisha, in spite of MDG target for maternal and child survival, it is still the poorest of the poor and ranks below the national average in all aspects of human development.

Especially in health sector, Odisha has high MMR and IMR. There are remote and inaccessible areas with primitive tribal communities, poor people in rural hamlets and urban slums who are still unaware of modern health system. Public healthcare services are out of reach of these people due to their socio-economic backwardness. The State interventions in health sector have benefited an insignificant few whereas a vast majority of public is living without hope. How this new national health policy is going to address the health sector-related concerns of backward States and marginalised communities is very important to States like Odisha and the people of marginalised communities.

It is good that the policy has accepted the principles of equity and universality in public healthcare expenditure and affirms to take care of excluded groups by increasing investment from of 2.5 % of the GDP which is just 0.5 % more than the target fixed in the earlier National Health Policy of 2002 though ideally it should be 5 % of the GDP. In searching finance for the health sector, the policy proposes a special tax on extractive industries such as mining and development projects which caused displacement and loss of natural resources and habitations, to invest more on affected communities' healthcare development along with policy of CSR.

The policy says the Indian private healthcare industry is the second largest destination for global capital investment in health. As the private healthcare industry in India has been growing very fast in comparison to other sectors, it is projected that by 2020 it will be at a value of 280 billion dollar which includes insurance and equipment, pharmaceuticals, diagnostics and hospitals and clinical care. The Government has been promoting private investment, with the provision of 100 % FDI in healthcare, by reducing tax in many ways such as income tax exemption for health insurance, subsidised allocation of land, subsidised education for professionals and lots of other attractive subsidies. The policy says as 50 % of the health expenditure goes to human resources for health it will increase employment in fighting jobless growth in the country.

It is evident that the private sector healthcare industry is inaccessible for poor and largely concentrated in the metropolis without rural presence and the healthcare charges have been increasing day by day. While the Government has been providing support to private health industry there should be regulations to ensure services of these industries to the poor and people in rural and inaccessible areas. But

it is observed that the policy has not sufficiently dealt with the controlling mechanism over the private sector in ensuring transparency and accountability and especially protecting the interest of the poor and marginalised. The NHP 2015 says over 63 million persons are suffering from poverty every year due to healthcare cost alone.

It is also observed that the public sector health insurance has not reached to all and due to lack of awareness, the people have not yet been assertive over getting their due entitlement in health sector. The Central Government under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, running the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana since 2008, has covered only one-fourth of the population and many of the RSBY card holders are not aware of the use of the card. The national programmes like NRHM and NUHM have been meeting the health services of millions of people. But they are still facing the problem of inefficiency in fund utilisation, poor governance and linkages in public expenditure which has been a matter of concern.

The Government hospitals in Odisha are running with poor quality of health service and lack of health infrastructure. Usually, they are charging user's fee especially for diagnostics and outside prescription for drugs. The medical college and hospitals are overcrowded with patients and there is insufficient minimum infrastructure and trained staff even to meet the emergency need of serious cases. Someone who has visited the casualty room in SCB Medical College can better understand the state of affairs of health system in most popular and oldest premier hospital in the State. The people in interior parts still do not have the minimum opportunity to get health service from the public health sector. While the Government has been deliberately encouraging the private sector in health but there has been no attempt to improve the quality of service delivery at par with private hospitals. This has been creating a negative understanding about public health system among public and in spite of increasing in number of private hospitals still a vast majority of poor are depending on public health system which needs to be strengthened.

The policy identifies coordinated action in seven priority areas relating to health as a social movement for health involving community and media in the name of Swasthya Nagarika Abhiyan which includes Swachha Bharat Abhiyan relating to sanitation and drinking water, balanced and healthy diet to reduce malnutrition and food security, Nasa Mukti Abhiyan against tobacco and alcohol, Yatri

Suraksha to control rail and road traffic accident, Nirvaya Nari, against gender violence including sex determination, workers safety at workplace and controlling pollution and related illness.

10 January 2015

EQUAL ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFRA CAN ENSURE BUILDING OF MODEL VILLAGE

The model village programme by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to transform rural India with high standard of physical and institutional infrastructure is very much significant for backward States like Odisha which lag behind the national average in terms of poor rural infrastructure.

In this context, the social vision of building modern Odisha should focus on reorganising its habitations in village with basic infrastructural amenities for a decent living not only to minimise rural-urban gap, but to bring social inclusiveness.

There have been huge differences in the life and standard of living of individuals and communities in villages since generations in spite of efforts by public and private bodies. The common resources available in the village such as land, water and forest are still under the hegemonic control of a dominant few and our governing system that manages public resources has not ensured equal access in use of the resources.

While building public infrastructure out of State investment there must be an attempt to ensure inclusiveness so that the poor and marginalised sections have access to resources as well as the infrastructure of public utility. It has been observed that the poor and socially marginalised communities have been deprived of getting access to common resources in the village and in the ongoing process they are also equally deprived of getting access to public infrastructure. Many of the communities still live in segregated hamlets and are not being integrated into the main village. Their hamlets are in the end part of the village without an all-weather road, electricity, drinking water and above all without enough land for housing and building physical infrastructure. They face discrimination in employment, business and trade. Land ownership and access is very important and key to village infrastructure building.

Historically a majority of our rural village habitations are coming up as caste hamlets in a much-unplanned way without a proper vision of human habitation. The growing demand for land use for different purposes and increase in population in recent times should be considered for a judicious use of land in the best interest of the locals. The traditional land use pattern has not been democratised to make it

available for use of all people in the village. Since its inception, the Revenue Department has not thought up adequately on public land management. On the contrary, it routinely engaged in land revenue collection and formalising legal ownership. There has been no proper survey and settlement in many parts of the State as a result of which thousands of habitations do not have a formal legal status as a revenue village though they exist for generations. Lakhs of families have no record of rights over the land they have been living with a family.

The Revenue Department should proactively work along with village Panchayats to demarcate the status of the land and make provisions for the use of that land for various purposes by other development departments of the Government such as R&B, Electricity and RWSS etc. It has been observed that many of the village infrastructural development projects are getting delayed due to problem in demarcation of the status of the land.

There are also illegal possessions of land by influential and anti-social persons of the village who remain adamant of their status in the absence of strong action by public authority especially the Revenue Department and police. There are also cases of incidents of conflict over common land use by different social groups for different purposes in the absence of democratization of public resources by the State such as village forest, grazing land, temple land, cremation ground, playground, water bodies and forest land available for public uses which are still under hegemonic control of dominant groups in the village. Though there is the availability of land in the village but poor people have no access to use the land even for housing and other basic human requirements for a decent living. They manage to live with a limited space in a subhuman condition because of their poor economic status and social identity. They cannot buy land and there has been legal and social restriction over access to common land.

The rebuilding of the model village should start with democratising resources available in the village by making it legally and socially accessible to all economic and social groups. While making available the existing resources for public utility, the new public institutions should come up to create more democratic space for all.

The local leaders in Odisha should change their mindset to cope with changing socio-economic environment and modern political and social values of democracy, international human rights standards and cosmopolitanism. Not only a few model villages but each and every village should have public connectivity facility, road, power, water,

telephone, fuel, LPG, social infrastructure, school, hospital, bank, post office, internet centre and cultural centers, marriage mandap, marketing space, godowns, farmers market and other public infrastructure required by the locals.

There should be a mini stadium in every panchayat with all facilities of gym and sports, swimming pool which can be availed by the locals, especially youths and students. The space for village forest can be developed into parks with fruit bearing trees under the management and supervision of village panchayat. Along with agriculture, there should be enough land for small industries in the panchayat. But the public institutions should be free from all kinds of discrimination and hegemonic control. The State has to ensure it by making law and exhibit it in practice.

There should be panchayat development authority similar to authorities in cities to carry out planned development of habitations in the village. The villages near railway stations, national and State highways should be expanded to large villages with space of more habitations.

The change will be possible only through huge State investment but the investment should not be only economic. It should include public educational investment with a plan to complimenting with building a public culture that respects civic laws and a sense of caring for public property. The public must denounce stealing, bribe, violence and discrimination. Social democratic values that encourage an inclusive social culture in the village should be practised. The ongoing industrialisation process should not be seen as a threat to the village but where ever there is displacement due to mega projects, it should be taken as an opportunity to rebuild the village.

Saturday, 11 April 2015

VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS SHOULD NOT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST UNDERPRIVILEGED

The vision of modern Odisha should focus on its 50,000 villages which need an all round change in line with achieving global standards in terms of quality of life with a dignified living. Along with material development, the dignity of a human being is equally important. It is a historical fact that our villages are far away from social democracy in the family and social life which keeps people in segregation and continued to stand as a barrier in the path of inclusive development. A majority of voiceless poor in villages are also identified as socially excluded groups. The visible corruption in village development work and lack of people's interest in involving themselves in village development are closely linked to the existing social structure of the village. The social relation in rural villages is hierarchical based on the concept of caste and male supremacy. The traditional hegemony of upper caste, land-owning feudal, former kings and Zamindars remains unchallenged. The political organisations in the name of progressive forces are dominated by rural educated upper caste elites without the leadership role of the rural poor. A vast majority of rural poor remain illiterate, resourceless, unorganised and victims of all kinds of fanatic ideas that demean their status as a human being.

It has been suggested by a number of studies that the non-economic factors are major causes of poverty and low economic development in terms of income, employment and production which are determinant of quality of life. The State has to create equal opportunity for all by eradicating social barriers that enslave our villages. The architects of modern India have extensively debated over the status of village and it was suggested to rebuild the village with ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity and make social democracy and respect for human dignity as a way of life in family and society but since independence in spite of our efforts in many ways still the social structure of the village has not changed to the desired extent. The social situations of the village have to be changed through active participation of grassroots public institutions. The existing grassroots democratic institutions and service providers need to build themselves to achieve social democracy which will precede economic growth.

The Constitution of India in its Directive Principles of State Policy says that the State shall organise the village panchayat and endow

them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. The political institutions such as Panchayati Raj system in rural area is one of the most important agents of change of social development of our village. It is good that due to reservation these grassroots institutions are socially inclusive of women and representatives of different social groups but a majority of them are unable to assert themselves in a leadership role because of the caste and gender based orientation in family and social life. They are subjugated to a traditional caste-based male-dominated value system in the village and face all kinds of discrimination.

The selections of candidates in Panchayati Raj election in a majority of cases are based on political affiliation and by dominance of powerful class and caste leaders of the village. Women are used in proxy role for their husband or family members. Dalit candidates are mostly selected by the dominant caste as their obedient and being accommodated as representatives to fulfil the reservation criteria. There are very few villages where Gram sabha is being held involving the adult members of different castes and communities. The untouchability practices and gender barriers in the village never allow the Dalits and women to seat with the dominant caste in the same carpet and discuss matters as equal stakeholders of the village. Even it has been very often reported in media that the elected women and representatives of Dalit and Adivasi communities are being harassed and abused due to their social status and not allowed to function freely while taking decisions in the panchayats. The capacity building programme by State and CSOs for the women PRI leaders and elected representatives of marginalised sections have not given enough attention to address the structural issues that affect the real participation.

The grassroots public institutions such as block, tehsil, police station, school, hospital and bank which are very closely working in village for different purposes have very important role in changing the traditional socio-economic and political structure of the village by practising the constitutional governance with values of social democracy and human dignity. The service providers in the village appointed under different Government schemes are the change agents who can play a major role in motivating people for social democracy by eradicating gender and caste based discriminations prevalent in the village. The service providers are not just employees but they are representing a constitutional mandate to enforce changes that rebuild our village society in the spirit of constitutional values of democracy

and equality to ensure participation of all in nation building. It is the duty of service providers to identify the poor and marginalised and integrate them in the national development process with protection and opportunity of participation to change their life for a better living. The poor and discriminated should not be seen in leniency as beneficiaries rather all the development programmes for the poor and marginalised should be used as an instrument in bringing change in the social structure of the village through participation of the poor in every sphere of social life in the process of implementation of the programme. But it has been observed that many popular programmes for poor, children, women and marginalised sections are not being implemented with the value of human dignity. The ICDS centres, Anganwadi, public distribution centres, mid-day meal in school, health care programme of Government are always subject to complaint of discrimination in access to the marginalised communities who are always excluded in getting their rightful entitlements and claims because of their social status though largely these programmes are intended for them. The Supreme Court guideline very affirmatively insists on the appointment of cook from Dalit community but barring few it has been almost impossible to appoint a Dalit women as cook for midday meal or to run an ICDS centre in a village. It has been observed in many places that the children of excluded communities who are attending ICDS centres are routinely harassed and discriminated. The schools in villages should be a place of practicing equality among future generation through learning of self-respect, dignity and mutual respect while treating fellow human beings as equals in spirit of brotherhood but unfortunately many of our teachers are not going beyond their routine work of teaching and managing school affairs in building school environment discrimination-free for all children of the village. The festivals and functions in school in majority of villages are excluding children of excluded communities in fully participating in the festivals like their fellow students.

The State should invest on building inclusiveness of grassroots public institutions such as PRI and other service providers of public bodies by promoting their socio-political understanding in spirit of the constitutional values of democracy and citizenship because these grassroot institutions functionaries and service providers are directly responsible for the execution of development work that rebuilds our villages. The social development and inclusiveness will pave the way

for fullest participation of all section of people in nation building as equal citizens.

Saturday, 04 April 2015

EQUAL INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES YET TO REACH THE STATE'S POOR

Infrastructure facilities for the people in the rural area provided by the State Government are not equally distributed across the region and among different social groups. The Government infrastructural facilities have not reached to the poor and marginalised groups in remote villages. Though there are special provisions for separate budgetary allocation with special Central assistance for backward remote areas and marginalised social groups but this has not been reflected in infrastructural development sector of the State Government.

This is a matter of grave concern as it is a violation of human rights and especially violation of right for the development of the poor and the marginalised. The State Government which supposes to be the protector of rights of the deprived and ensure the development of the poor has failed to ensure this fundamental right of all citizens.

Let us look at the infrastructure such as electricity, surface communication, drinking water, sanitation, health and education infrastructure in rural areas of the State. Census 2011 revealed that 83.32 % of people live in rural area in the State and 16.68 % in urban area and during last ten years, only the urban population has increased by only 1.68 %. Rural Odisha has been lagging behind basic infrastructure for human and social development such as drinking water, toilet, electricity, linking road, primary school and primary health care centres.

The poor infrastructure has a direct ramification over local production, employment opportunity and income of the people in village. The non-availability of basic infrastructures in villages has been impacting the quality of life and standard of living of the poor and marginalised people.

As Government statistics shows the cost of living of rural agricultural worker is one of the lowest in the country next to Bihar. The current issues confronted by the rural poor such as distress migration, higher dropout of their children in schools, child labour, and uncontrolled water-borne diseases, distress sale of rural agro products, low production and marketing have a direct link with underdeveloped rural infrastructure.

With fast changing of State economy towards industry and service sector, the rural population still mostly depends on continued backward agriculture while the contribution of agriculture sector to GSDP is decreasing the dependence of rural people on agriculture. To change the face of village, the focus should be on agricultural workers and cultivators in rural areas by bringing change in their standard of living and quality of life where the village infrastructure development with State investment can play a very vital role in transforming the traditional socio-economic structure of the village in favour of the poor and the marginalized.

The building of infrastructure is largely the responsibility of the State Government. As there has been a disparity in access to use of infrastructure due to social segregation based on caste, ethnic and religious based social identity, the people of the marginalised social groups have been traditionally deprived of even whatever available public infrastructure in the village.

Electricity is one of the most important necessities of every household which is not only linked to modern days production but also a precondition for a developed quality of life but this facility is not available for all as only 80 % of village has been electrified in the State till 2014 which is less than the national average and the neighbouring States like AP, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Within the State only Nuapada and Jharasuguda district have been fully covered in electricity and districts like Koraput and Boudh are less than the State average.

These districts are primarily dominated by Adivasi and Dalit population. It has been evident that funds of rural electrification programme of the Central Government have not been fully utilised by the State Government. There are interior pockets where remote village electrification programme has not covered through non-conventional energy sources. Though about 70 % of consumers are in rural area but the uninformed frequent power cut for hours together in rural areas has been a matter of concern.

It has been frequently reported in media that many Dalit hamlets are not getting connected and the electric line ends at the end part of the village without reaching to the hamlet. There are many hamlets where the electric polls are installed without a connection for years in spite of routine visit by villages to local offices.

The availability of drinking water and sanitation facility which is very basic and essential for human life has been neglected in the State. The household access to safe drinking water in rural Odisha is 74 % only whereas it is 83 % at national level. Mostly the rural poor people still depend on surface water for their everyday household consumption. People in summer still go to the river bed and dig small pits to get water.

There are a number of villages where drinking water is a major problem for about half of the year. Coming to sanitation, Odisha is having highest number of people in the country that used to go for open defecation without a latrine facility at their household premises. Census 2011 revealed that there are 20 districts in the State having less than 20 % of household with access to toilet within their premises. The people in poorest districts such as Kalahandi, Deogada, Malkangiri, Nawarangapur, Sonepur, Boudh and Kandhamal have very less access to toilet which is less than the State average of 22.4 %.

It is revealed that the State lags in surface road density and tele-density in rural area. The rural connectivity in terms of linking road and telephone is still not ensured in many parts especially many Dalit hamlets and Adivasi villages in interior parts which caused inconveniences to the people mostly in rainy seasons.

There are habitations inside paddy field and places disconnected by traditional water channels without all-weather bridge and cross drainage work for the locals. There have been usual complaints of lack of all weather linking road by people at the end part of the village and disjointed locations which are mostly inhabited by marginalised communities.

The primary schools and primary health care centres in the State have not yet been established in many rural villages to cater to the primary education and health care need of the poor and marginalised who have no other way but to depend on Government institutions. The posts of doctors and health personals remain vacant mostly in remote rural areas inhabited by marginalised communities.

The districts of Boudh, Gajapati and Nuapada have very less medical institutions in comparison to other districts. In spite of increase in the number of primary schools, the non-availability of primary school near the habitations has direct impact on the dropout rate. It is one of the major causes of child labour in remote and backward areas.

The State aims to provide primary education within one km and upper primary within three km of habitations having a population of more than three and five hundred respectively. Many of the primary schools have lack of basic infrastructure to provide a decent environment to poor children for education in a dignified manner.

It is unfortunate and a matter of concern that the rural infrastructure has not been improving to the desired extent due to inadequate State investment and lack of priority in annual and five years plans to address the basic issues of the rural poor by linking it to overall growth of the State. There is an urgent need to utilise the Central assistance and special programme assistance for backward area and marginalised section of the State for infrastructure development in order to ensure equity and inclusive growth.

Saturday, 21 February 2015

LET HOUSING SCHEME BOON GO TO GENUINE BENEFICIARIES

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, a scheme of housing for all by 2022, has been launched in June last by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The scheme aims to construct more than two crore houses within a span of next seven years, especially for the poor, economically weaker sections and low-income group people living in urban areas of the country.

The scheme has provision to make available housing loan and interest subsidy for beneficiaries for a period of 15 years. The house for poor will be allotted in the name of women in the family as a pro-women scheme and the ground floor of the allotted house will be given to people with disability and the elderly as well.

The scheme has also provision of support to urban poor for the construction of their own house or for renovation of their old house. It is also said that eco-friendly technology will be used in the construction of the building. In the coming seven years, all the urban areas of the country will be developed with basic infrastructure and amenities in three phases till 2022. This has created hope among urban poor to have a house of own to live with dignity. It is the role of the State Government, especially the Department of Urban and Housing Development, to ground the ambitious scheme for the urban poor.

The housing project will create urban employment, civil and social amenities and infrastructure for the urban people and thus improve the quality of life of the people in urban areas by providing them a security for family with decent shelter as a basic requirement for a dignified life. The vision for a slum-free city and housing for all also includes to improve the quality of life of all irrespective of economic class and social groups by ensuring accessible health and education, drinking water, electricity, controlling all kinds of noise, air and water pollution, garbage management, maintaining law and order and overall social environment required for a healthy and peaceful life.

The children and women should enjoy a better social and ecological environment. The economic liberation process globally has brought market forces to become partner of the housing projects for the poor and the Government has been engaged in bringing necessary policy, legal and administrative reforms to facilitate the process further. The

housing and real estate projects are becoming important contributor to GDP and economic growth of the country.

For the last few years, there has been a growing trend of urbanisation as rural areas are converting with facilities of urban locations. This has brought new challenges for the urban administration. The urban areas have been facing the problem of pollution, internal mobility, road traffic, waste management, law and order and also growing number of slums which are a major challenge in building clean cities.

The emerging urban locations are coming up due to opening of Government and private offices, mining and industrial hubs, marketing areas, education and health service locations which are source of employment and livelihood for poor people migrating from villages. These poor constitute a major part of the urban population who also belong to weaker section of the society and mostly low paid workers.

They have no financial capacity to build a house of their own for shelter. There has been huge increase in urban land cost, building materials, household equipment, doubtful role of revenue authority, cheating by corrupt builders and land mafia and the most disturbing and rigid process of approval of plans. All these make a house almost a day dream for the urban poor.

India has 4,041 statutory towns with 2,613 slums with a population of about seven crore. Odisha has 107 statutory towns having 76 slums with a population of 16 lakh. All slums in Odisha are yet to be notified as slums. Odisha has a share of 2.4 % of the total slum population of the country where as Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, UP, Tamil Nadu and MP have larger shares of slum population.

Odisha has been changing its urban face with urban areas increasing and urban population also on the rise. There are 223 statutory and census towns, three municipal corporations, 37 municipalities and 63 Notified Area Council (NAC) in the State. Though the extent of urbanisation in Odisha has been relatively low which is around 17 % as equated to the national average of 30 % but still there has been considerable growth of urban areas which need timely attention of the Government.

As per 2011 Census, about 70 lakh people live in urban areas of the State out of which ten lakh are Scheduled Castes and six lakh are Scheduled Tribes. The urban population has increased by 27 % within the last decade. The sex ratio for urban area is 932 and 989 for rural

areas. About 50 % of the urban population lives in municipalities whereas the rest lives in municipal corporations and NACs in equal percentage. With continued rural and urban gap in many respects, every day people from villages are coming to urban locations in search of livelihood.

Students and youths are coming for education and many people are coming for healthcare as the cities are having good health and educational infrastructure and communication facilities. Almost all the major Government offices are located in urban locations, mostly in cities, which receive a host of visitors for different purposes every day. The people displaced by mining and industrial projects are joined in urban locations as better rehabilitation points.

It has been observed that the quality of basic services in existing as well as emerging urban areas has not improved to meet the basic requirements of the people. Especially the poor in slums and city outskirts are suffering with shortage of basic requirements such as drinking water, sanitation and transport facility to travel from outside the city to different places within the city. There has been growing unauthorised occupants of public land.

There are upcoming urban areas with a population predominantly of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, minority and other vulnerable sections, homeless and migrant workers who need more attention of the Government to ensure housing for them. It has been observed that there has been very insignificant attention given to the issues of housing for the urban poor by the Government.

The most popular housing scheme for the poor Indira AwasYojana (IAY) is meant for rural poor and there has been visible absence of popular housing scheme for urban poor. The Rajiv AwasYojana has very selective impact on the urban poor and covers a very minimal part of the homeless in cities.

The municipal administrations have a major role in identifying the prospective beneficiaries by involving the local leaders of urban governance, urban local self-bodies, but unfortunately, there has been huge corruption and nepotism in the identification of beneficiaries and many genuine beneficiaries are left out in the process. Procedures should be followed in the process of beneficiary selection for housing projects. It has been reported in the media that there was huge corruption in Rajiv Awas Yojana in the State and the same should not be repeated in case of Pradhan Mantri AwasYojana. The Government

of Odisha should ensure the genuine beneficiaries avail the benefits of the scheme in a transparent manner.

Saturday, 30 January 2016

FDI PROJECTS SHOULD PROTECT LOCAL PEOPLES' INTEREST IN ODISHA

The Foreign Direct Investment is going to increase in the country as revealed from Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion and Reserve Bank of India.

During last two years, it has just been doubled to 4.48 billion dollars. It has been told by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's world investment report 2014 that among BRICS countries, India is the most favourable destination along with China. Asia remains the number one recipient region in the world focusing India. The countries joining with a large share of FDI includes Mauritius, Singapur, The Nederland, Japan, the UK, the USA, Germany, Cyprus, France, Switzerland etc. The investments include sectors such as telecom, service, automobile, pharmaceuticals, computer, infrastructure, metal and metallurgical etc.

Odisha with its natural advantage of sea coast and the mineral reserve has been most favourable attraction among the States in India. Already Odisha has one of the highest FDI ventures of the country by Posco with Rs 52,000 crore investment and many other private and State-owned transnational corporations have decided to invest in Odisha mostly in power, steel, aluminium, cement, oil refinery and infrastructure etc.

The State Government is in the process to build a world trade centre to promote global networking and attract investors. The recent development in mineral sector and land acquisition laws along with changes towards a more liberal FDI policy will pave the way for an increase in FDI by mostly rich countries from Europe and America.

Odisha with resources of land, forest, water, mineral reserve, coal, thermal and hydro power and manpower has to plan to integrate its economy with the international economic trend and make the best use of FDI for its economic growth which should be inclusive of all regions and social groups.

It has been told that the Central Government has been playing a major role in a federal structure like ours. There has been a continued move towards resource centralization by neglecting resource federalism as it is evident from Central legislations on SEZ, mines, water, forest and land management. Mostly in the context of FDI the Centre has to be

more proactive in taking forward the investment plans. The State leadership has a very crucial role in the implementation of economic plans. It has been observed that many of the infrastructure projects like railway, telecommunication, airports, roads and ports in Odisha have been delayed due to lack of investment. There has been no expansion of railway line as Khurda –Balangir track has been a distant dream in spite of huge hue and cry by all political parties. The condition of ports, railway stations, airports, bus stand and roadways in the State has not improved much in terms of quantity and qualitative service to meet the commercial need which should be the priority of the Government. The State should have plan for basic infrastructure development in rural and urban locations. But many of the State plans to develop railway infrastructure, such as Angul-Chhendipada rail corridor, Angul- Sukinda rail link and Daitari – Basapani link are mostly going to be used by the mineral-based industries.

The State Government's investment strategy should focus on the continued regional imbalance in the State and make effort to mitigate this through strategic FDI with investment targeting more backward regions and including benefits to the socially marginalised section in the region. But the State has to play an economic leadership role in planning the overall development of the region by linking with other projects. The most important concern is while allocating land, the Government should reserve land for agriculture and forest and mostly the waste land should be given for developmental projects. As it has been observed in many countries, mostly the wasteland, dry, rocky land has been given for development through FDI. Worldwide it is popular understanding that the irrigated land with multi-crop facilities should not be given to industries. The coastal area land management should be carefully made to strike a balance between forest area and agricultural area.

In order to create a favourable environment for mega investment, the Government should increase social sector spending to bring change in the quality of life of the people in terms of education, good health, environment and communication beneficial to all social groups and classes across the region. On the one side while the State is going for FDI in mineral based industry, service and other sector, on the other side a vast majority of poor still live with basic minimum with illiteracy, low skill and extreme poverty without adequate State investment in social sector. Their traditional dependency on agriculture has not been changed due to lack of State investment in

agriculture. So people in agriculture see FDI as a direct threat to their livelihood in the absence of an assured alternative source of employment. Their traditional dependency on agriculture has not changed due to lack of State investment in agriculture. The social sector development should be an integral part of FDI as globally transnational corporations along with others have been contributing to reducing poverty, and in ensuring food security, health and education and reducing the impact of climate change. The FDI in education and health sector should have affirmative action; otherwise, the service will be limited to a few rich who can pay while a vast majority will be out of reach of getting quality health and education from the private sector with diminishing State expenditure.

The State Government shows its favourable commitment to industry by acquiring land for them and providing infrastructural facility, constructing boundary wall and approach road and providing five-year exemption in electricity duty, exemption for land conversation from agriculture to non-agriculture use, allotment of raw materials, interest subsidy, VAT reimbursement, capital investment subsidy and all other service .

While the State is making policy in favour of transnational corporations the same has not reflected in case of protecting poor and marginalised from market forces without the State protection it is increasingly difficult for the poor to access market. The State resources such as land, forest, water and minerals under the traditional control of people are going to be used by market forces with payment of mere one-time compensation. The insignificant access of poor to resources, livelihood and employment with less State protection on rights and entitlements will lead to violence and political unrest manifested in form of people's movements, protest and non-cooperation which may not be a favourable condition for overall economic development.

It has been observed that in the case of a number of projects in Odisha such as Kalinganagar, Paradip, Jharasuguda, Sundergarh, Koraput and Angul, the FDI has generated very less employment for the locals.

Barring a few, it is mostly the people outside the State who get employment and even sometimes the employees above manager level are outside the country. The managements of such mega-corporations rarely keep coordination with the State Government and local administration. The State should have an employment policy for FDI projects which can protect the interest of the locals.

Many of the transnational corporations are not using the State infrastructure and alternatively building captives of their own. For example, in the case of Posco, the company has the plan to develop its own captive port though there are nine ports coming up with private investment in the 480km coastline of Odisha with a coastal highway connecting Digha to Vizag.

There have been protests against mega projects in different parts of the State mostly by local people but the local movements against mega projects are not reflecting the overall interest of the State as a whole. Rather these are more reflection of local aspirations without a State perspective.

28 March 2015

VIOLENCE AGAINST VULNERABLE SECTIONS INCREASES IN STATE

The deteriorating social situation in the State of Odisha is a matter of grave concern and requires committed intervention of the Government in the context of the increasing violence against the vulnerable sections such as SC, ST, women, children and farmers during last few years. It has been reported by different Government agencies such as the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) and the State Home Department that the crime rate in the State has increased; especially the vulnerable sections of society are feeling insecure in the absence of adequate State protection through enforcement of laws by available institutional mechanism.

The published data of Government agencies show a trend of growing violence against SCs, STs, women and children, labourers and farmers in various forms though a large number of cases remain unreported without registration by police and other concerned authorities.

The everyday media reports exhibit the hegemony of dominant forces with the feudal mindset, patriarchy and caste-centred obscurity and fanatic ideas which still dominate social life. The Constitutional values of equality before the law, human dignity, social justice and sense of respect for a human being has not been practised much in ensuring justice to the weak and poor; rather, it appears that the State power has been used to protect the perpetrator rather than the victims of violence.

The NCRB's Crime in India Report 2013 exposed that the crime rate against SCs has increased with Rajasthan has the highest crime rate followed by Goa, Bihar and Odisha. The crime rate in Odisha is 36.06 which is the fourth highest and about double the national average. Rape has increased by 32 % and murder by 4 % than the previous year. The rate of crime against SC means the number of crimes against SC per one lakh population based on Census 2011. The SC population in Odisha is subject to subjugation and inhuman practices of untouchability and caste-based violence which remains unabated in villages despite existence of strong protective Central legislations such as PCR Act, 1955 and SCs and STs (PoA) Act, 1989 since last 25 years to prevent untouchability and caste-based violence.

The Annual Reports published by the State Home Department show a consistent increase in the cases of atrocities against SCs and STs. The

data show that in 2010 the number of cases reported was 1,589, 1,662 in 2011, 2,522 in 2012 and 2,298 in 2013. About more than half of the cases remain pending for investigation.

The crimes against women have increased with incidences of rape, murder, dowry torture, domestic violence, witch-hunting, honour killing, torture of girl child labour and trafficking of women, student suicide and many other forms of crime across the State. The statistics maintained by the State Commission for Women show a consistent increase in the cases of dowry death, dowry torture, suspected death, rape, kidnap, cheating and harassment. The Home Department data revealed that during 2013, 5,382 cases of dowry /non-dowry torture were reported in as it was 4,898 in 2012 and 4,085 in 2011 and 3,831 in 2010. There has been an increase in rape cases. It was reported that in 2013, there were 1,832 cases while in 2012 it was 1,458, 1,112 in 2011 and 1,025 in 2010.

Very recently, an incident of honour killing was reported from Ganjam district where Sulochana (22) of Daha village was killed by her family members to save the family's caste pride. Many women are routinely harassed as witches and punished brutally by the community members, and many times they are killed in suspect. Districts like Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Ganjam and Puri are featuring in the news despite The Odisha Prevention of Witch Hunting Act, 2013.

The most vulnerable sections are the migrant labourers who are mostly from backward areas and belong to socially backward communities. Their conditions remain unchanged as the number of migrant workers has increased with an increase in labourer contractors. The labourers are used to all kinds of violence, humiliation, most heinous forms of physical and mental torture at workplaces by contractors and employers. The State Labour Minister reported in the Assembly that more than one lakh migrant workers were sent to States like Tamil Nadu, AP, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa through 3,044 labour agents in 2014. A very insignificant number of labourers get rescued while others are forced to live in humiliating conditions at workplaces. Women and child labourers have a significance presence among migrant workers and they are more prone to violence in helpless situations.

The distress and disadvantage social conditions are forcing many innocent students and farmers in the State to kill themselves without any hope for life. A few month back, tribal students of Gajapati, Ganjam, and Nabarangpur committed suicide due to the State apathy;

and it is known that many such cases are unreported. Added to this, many poor students are getting affected and dying because of casual implementation of Government welfare programmes in Agwanwadi Centres, hostels and schools, which shows a careless attitude of the departmental authorities in managing the programmes for poor children. The violence against child labour in hotels, household work as domestic servants and trafficking of women are often reported in media, and there has been very minimal action by the district administrations. A number of district-level monitoring bodies are almost unaware of their role and remain nonfunctional.

Farmer suicides have increased in the State, but there has been no effort to document the cases by the Government to avoid the truth. It is an established fact that many farmer suicide cases have been unreported though many farmers' organisations have been reporting the truth to the Government. It is unofficially estimated that about 4,000 farmers have committed suicide during last ten years.

Many innocent people are harassed by police with custodial death, abuse and killing in encounters in the name of extremist forces and hundreds are in jail without a fair chance of a trial and legal aid. A majority of jail inmates are from marginalised communities, poor and illiterate, and even many of them do not know why they are in jail.

The recruitment in the police department has increased with special drives for STs. Tribal youths numbering 1,521 have been recruited for the formation of the Odisha Auxiliary Police Force. Police personnel numbering 6,243 in different posts have been recruited in 2013 and the State has allocated Rs 622 crore for police modernisation to improve the efficiency of the police. The Human Rights Commission in the State has become rehabilitation centres for retired bureaucrats and ruling party workers. The child and women desks in police stations and HRPC cells are almost nonfunctional. The victims are being harassed and discouraged to register their cases. The protective laws for women, SCs, STs, children, labourers are not being implemented as the conviction rate shows a discouraging trend. The State Government has also increased the number of liquor licences as well as the selling timing to get more revenue without caring for its impact on social life and violence, though many women groups and eminent citizens are protesting against the move of the Government on the ground of increasing violence.

It is a matter of concern for all as to why in spite of laws, programmes and dedicated institutions, implementation of protective laws remains

minimal. This needs a serious reflection by policymakers and law enforcing agencies. The concerned departments such as Home, ST and SC Development, Women and Child Development, Labour and Agriculture should have a serious joint review and its further reflections should happen in State Assembly.

29 November 2015

NEEDED: EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SC/ST (POA) ACT

We are in the process of building a democratic political society based on constitutional governance which respects human dignity but our age-old rigid social systems and caste-based customs and traditions still inhumanly deal with our fellow citizens. There is a need for strong enforcement of laws that protects the dignity and punishes the perpetrator of discrimination.

SCs and STs constitute about one-fourth of the population of our country and in spite of constitutional safeguard, protective laws and institutional arrangement, they continue to live a life with fear and discrimination. It is our national mandate to build an inclusive society that respects dignity without discrimination based on caste and ethnic identities.

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) in its report Crime in India 2014 has reported 47,064 cases of atrocity against SCs and 11,451 cases against STs in the country in the year 2014. It says the number has increased by about 20 % than the previous year in cases SCs and by about 69 % in case of STs. During 2014 there were 1, 27,341 cases of crime committed against SCs and 27,207 cases against STs were pending for trial in the country.

The nature of atrocities includes practices of untouchability in public places and institutions such as primary school, Anganwadi, Panchayat office, village market, temple, and denial of access to village common property resources, forest, cremation ground, water sources, village pond, tube well, well etc. The service providers of a host of Government schemes for the poor including SC and STs such as control dealer, Asha workers, cook of mid-day meal, and teachers are behaving discriminately against the SC and ST communities in villages. There has been a heinous form of physical atrocities, violence against women and children, rape, murder, house burning, arson and destruction of crops, organised loot and social and economic boycott committed against SCs in rural and interior areas. These cases lead to organised violence, loss of property and human life and peace in social life that affect the development and democratic goals. The police stations very often do not accept FIR and hesitate to register the cases. They manipulate the FIR and mostly guided by the local dominant caste leaders. The vast majority of victims of atrocities are poor,

illiterate and lack of organisational and political backing in the caste-dominated villages. The issues of SCs and STs in a caste-dominated society needs State protection through protective laws and programmes in defence of the marginalised sections in order to build an inclusive society free from all forms of discrimination including caste-based discriminations.

The Constitution of India in Article 14 says about equality before the law, and 15, prohibition of discrimination based on caste and 17, the abolition of untouchability and 46 says about protection of SCs and STs from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 primarily addressing the issues of untouchability. There has been a felt need to make a special legislation to make a legal intervention in issues of atrocities against SCs and STs. After 40 years of constitutional governance, the SCs and STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (POA Act) came into force on January 30, 1990, as a central Act. Again after 25 years, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (PoA) Act, 1989 Amendment has introduced as an ordinance in 2014 and later passed by Lok Sabha. The amendment has added many new clauses to the original act to make it more effective in ensuring justice to the historically oppressed communities in the country.

The implementation of any law depends on the State executive and judiciary as well as legislative bodies. The PoA Act has developed an inbuilt mechanism for its effective review and monitoring and included programmes of awareness building on the law and provision of legal aid, compensation to the victims with special courts for speedy trial. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Home and Constitutional bodies such as National Commission for Scheduled Castes and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and their State counterparts are responsible for the effective implementation of the law. These bodies are largely controlled and managed by SC and ST leaders chosen by ruling political parties. The SCs and STs have very marginal representation in executive and very insignificant representation in the judiciary of the country.

Odisha experience shows, there were 2,266 cases of atrocities against SCs and 1,300 cases of atrocities against STs registered in different police stations in 2014. There has been the prevalence of innumerable forms of practices of untouchability by upper caste people in rural parts of the State. Around 8,000 cases are pending for trial in courts

of the State. Though Odisha is an SC and ST dominated State but the people from these communities are not well represented in governance and decision-making process due to their inherent socio-economic, educational and political backwardness. It has been observed that both leftist and rightist political parties, bureaucracy, judiciary, media, academics, civil society, international aid agencies and business sector are being largely monopolised by the upper caste people. The SCs and STs are in the periphery, barring few political leaders chosen by party bosses to fulfil the political reservation criteria.

The social issues such as untouchability and caste-based discrimination have never been discussed in public and purposefully avoided by policymakers and development actors on the plea of economic development. There has been a subjugated peace prevailing in the State in the fear of dominance and violence by the upper strata of the ruling elite.

The poor and illiterate SC and ST people in villages are being routinely humiliated, harassed and dehumanised by the hands of dominant caste where police have been acting as a helpless onlooker. The majority of the victims are not in a position to write a FIR and has to pay someone mostly the local agents to write the FIR and take him to the police station where the police behave like a British police to innocent public without dignity and decency. In many cases, victims are being forced with the threat for amicable settlement in police stations. It is evident that mostly the SCs and STs are killed in police custody and by police and paramilitary forces in interior parts of the state. The jails are crowded with mostly under trial victims belonging to SC and ST communities due to lack of legal aid and advice for a speedy and fair trial.

The statutory bodies under the PoA Act such as State vigilance and monitoring committee, district vigilance and monitoring committee headed by Chief Minister and district Collectors respectively have been dysfunctional and without even routine work mentioned in the PoA Rule. The SC and ST MLAs and MPs and Government officials are members in such legal bodies without any proactive role. There has been no special court; the existing district courts are designated as special courts. The State Government's proposal for three special courts is yet to be carried out. There has been an unexplained delay in payment of compensation to the victims as per norms and scale prescribed in the rule from time to time though mostly the

compensation is paid by Government of India. The State public prosecutor has almost no role in monitoring the cases by recruiting senior experience advocates. The PoA Act has added new clauses in the interest of the victims asking for building a synergy among concerned departments such as Home, Law, ST and SC Development Department and to make more effective the criminal justice administration which again depends on the political will of the State ruling parties. It is expected that the State Government will make a review of the whole mechanism of the implementation of the PoA Act based on the new amendment in the interest of the SCs and STs.

Saturday, 09 January 2016

AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA INSPIRING

Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Dr BR Ambedkar passed away on December 6, 1956 and this day is observed in memory of the great man who became more popular after his death and continues to inspire the people around the world through his exceptional work and prolific writings relevant to contemporary social realities. While the country is striving for equality and vibrant democracy in an era of emerging international identity politics based on caste, religion and ethnicity, the relevance of Ambedkar is important in the dynamics of new socio-political challenges like social inclusion, proportional representation in governance and economic growth in India and the world.

We have achieved only political democracy but not social and economic democracy without which political democracy is meaningless as the soul of democracy is the doctrine of one man one value. Democracy is not merely a form of Government it is also essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen and women.

Ambedkar will be always remembered by mankind for his greatest contribution to human rights movements putting human dignity and self-respect in centre and enforcing the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity in our public life in the path of the great traditions of Buddha, Jyotirao Phule, EV Ramaswami Periyar, Ram Manohar Lohiya, Birsha Munda and Bhima Bhoi. His personal experience and realisation of caste-based discrimination and poverty combined with wisdom has taken him to a different height where he commands respect for his extraordinary work for India as a visionary statesman and chairperson of the drafting committee of the constitution in the historic Constituent Assembly of India in 1946-1948 and later as India's first Law Minister in Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet from 1947 to 1951.

He played a historic role in shaping the unity and integrity of the country. His commitment to the cause of justice manifested in his conduct while he resigned as Law Minister on the issue of Hindu Code Bill relating to marriage, divorce and property right of women and his famous speech on this issue was published in a book form under the title 'The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women. With the support of the Constituent Assembly members, he infused affirmative action and

protective mechanism in the constitution to ensure social justice and social democracy in India to the untouchables, Adivasis, backward classes, minorities and Women. One such important historic resolution was moved by Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel for the abolition of untouchability under Article-17 of the Constitution in 1947.

At a young age, he internationalised the caste issue by giving it a global visibility through his path-breaking work to understand caste in India and towards the annihilation of caste. Born in 1891 in a poor and untouchable family during British rule, he struggled to achieve education in the best institutions of those days such as the Columbia University, USA, the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Bonn in Germany where he studied law and economics with a fellowship from Maharaja of Baroda and with support of his wife Ramabai Ambedkar who managed her daily bread with all sorts of difficulties to support him for the completion of the study abroad. She had been a source of strength for Ambedkar till her death in 1935.

During his student days in Colombia University Ambedkar purchased more than two thousand books from the second-hand store as his personal collection as he was devoted to reading with a purpose. On his return to India, the socio-political compulsions forced him to devote his time to politics even though he had to struggle to financially manage himself and his family while responding to the need of the time with a multiple roles as professor, advocate, journalist, politician, organiser, legislator, minister and above all, a prolific writer on subject relevant to people and nation.

He started Marathi weekly, "Mooknayak" in 1920 and fortnightly "Bahiskrit Bharat" in 1927 along with people's organisation to mobilise the untouchables. He led Satyagraha in demand of right to access to water and right to worship through temple entry at Kalaram temple in 1930.

The most famous Satyagraha was at Mahad, Kolab district of Maharashtra, in 1927 in demand for dignified access to water. Through his work and visibility, the British Government invited him to join as a delegate of the round table conference representing the untouchables of India along with leaders of different religious groups and organisations in 1930.

His strong demand was legal protection and political power to the untouchables to solve their own problem like the other minority

communities in India. He demanded separate electorate with a double vote for the untouchables by which they can choose their own representatives and make them accountable to the people. The MacDonald's communal award came in 1932 with separate electorate for the untouchables, which was vehemently opposed by MK Gandhi who went on fast to death in protest of the award.

Dr Ambedkar was under tremendous pressure to save the life of Gandhi and finally he agreed to compromise with Gandhi by accepting joint electorate with reserve seats for the untouchables. As a result of this the untouchable leaders are mostly chosen by others and not dependent on untouchables voters to get elected.

This famous historic pact was known as Poona Pact of 1932 between Gandhi, Ambedkar and Hindu leaders. Ambedkar wanted to mobilise the workers and formed an independent labour party which won few seats in the Bombay Assembly in the first general election held under the Government of India Act, 1935.

He mobilised the municipal workers in Bombay and promoted trade unionism among workers as he said right to strike is the birthright of the workers. He said caste system has divided the workers because of the division of labour and it is not only division of labour but also the division of labourer. He explained the complex relation between class and caste in India where labourers are unequally graded one above the other as per their caste.

In order to promote education among the poor untouchables he was instrumental in building hostels, schools and colleges through trusts and social organisations in Bombay such as People's Education Society,

The Building Trust and the SC Improvement Trust, Siddhartha College of Art and Science, etc. As the labour members in viceroy's executive council Ambedkar visited Cuttack in 1945. In his presidential address at the conference of representatives of the Central Government, the Government of Odisha, the central province and the eastern States to discuss the possibilities of developing Odisha's rivers he expressed concern for Odisha's poverty, diseases, drought and non-utilisation of its resources and suggested for the fullest utilisation of the precious possessions of water, forest, mineral and land resources for eradication of poverty of the State. His ideas on water resource management, irrigation are quite relevant even today to counter flood, drought and to produce electricity.

It is unfortunate that such a leader of the country who was posthumously awarded Bharat Ratna in 1990 along with Nelson Mandela, had to face defeat from Congress party candidates twice in Lok Sabha election in 1952, the first Lok Sabha election held under Constitution of India, and later on in 1953 in a byelection for Lok Sabha Constituency in Vidarbha region. He was introduced to Rajya Sabha as a member representing from Bombay in 1952. At the end part of his life, he devoted time for Buddhism and established Bharatiya Buddha Mahasanga and The Buddhist Society of India in 1955. He embraced Buddhism in a historic ceremony of millions of his followers at Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur in 1956. He interpreted Buddhism as a religion which teaches Prajna, (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), Karuna (love) and Samata (equality) for a happy life.

He also established the Republican Party of India by dissolving the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, a political party formed by him in 1942. After a few months of the historic event of his life, he died at his Alipore residence in New Delhi. His cremation was done at Chaitya Bhoomi, Dadar in Mumbai.

He left a legacy of struggle against man-made inequality to realise justice, equality, fraternity and dignity of all which is also very well spelt in our constitution in its preamble and that will be the guiding vision for all of us in building a democratic India.

Saturday, 06 December 2014

NEEDED: GREATER AWARENESS ON SCSP TSP LAW FOR TRIBAL GROWTH

The provision of Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) have been introduced by Central Government in late eighties to reach to individual household of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the country as it was found that the direct impact of public expenses of various ministries and State departments of the Government is not reaching to the poor across social groups especially to the SCs and STs who constitute a large chunk of the poor.

A majority of them are suffering from extreme poverty and unemployment because of their social identity and resourcelessness. Therefore, a holistic State intervention is required for their all-round development. The SCSP and TSP were introduced to make a budgetary allocation to spend a certain percentage of the budget, especially for SCs and STs. It is a budgetary provision with specific budget heads, SC-789 and ST-796, which says that the budget percentage should be equal to the percentage of SC and ST population of the respective State. It was also targeted to closing the development gaps between SCs and STs as compared to others. But during the process of its implementation for last 30 years in Odisha, it is found that it has not been properly implemented in the State while many other States such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have very innovatively brought changes in the implementation process for more effective implementation in the true spirit of the provision. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has enacted legislation, The AP SCSP and TSP (Planning, allocation and utilisation of financial resources) Act, 2012. Similarly, the Government of Karnataka has enacted The Karnataka SCSP and TSP (Planning allocation and utilisation of financial resources) Act, 2013.

This special provisions are made in the budget in the line of the Constitution of India (Article -14) which speaks about Rights to Equality that includes equality of status and opportunity and it further says in Article 38 that the State shall promote the welfare of people and minimize inequalities in income and endeavour to eliminate inequality in status, facilities and opportunities not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people. So the SCSP and TSP legislation are fully representing the spirit of the Constitution for ensuring socio-economic justice to the historically marginalised groups.

It is argued that while SCs and STs together constitute about 40 % of the total population of the State (39.98 as per census 2011), about 40 % of the State budget should be spent for these communities. A vast majority of the SC and ST households are under below poverty line and their percentage is more than national and State average in comparison to other social groups. The SCs and STs also lag behind all social and human development indicators. A very insignificant percentage of individuals from SC and ST community have benefited out of the policy of reservation in Government job and political representation while a vast majority of illiterate and landless poor still depend on Government development programmes for their wellbeing and in that context the provision of SCSP and TSP is very important.

There are remote rural and tribal areas in the State where people do not have the basic minimum such as drinking water, primary healthcare, education and communication facilities. Lack of sustainable livelihood sources and unemployment problem forced them for distress migration to outside the State in search of livelihood.

As per provision under SCSP and TSP, the SC and ST Development Department of the State has been acting as the nodal department to plan, coordinate and monitor with other departments especially Finance, Planning and Coordination in the execution of the provision. But unfortunately, this department and statutory bodies like State Tribal Advisory Council and Scheduled Castes Advisory Board headed by the Chief Minister has no proactive role in the implementation process which has been frequently reported in media. It has been observed that many of the officials and elected representatives are very poorly aware of such an important provision for the development of SC and ST communities. The monitoring committees formed at different level in the State under the provision are largely dysfunctional. It is a gross violation of development rights of the poor and marginalised of the State.

Though it is mentioned in the provision that SCSP and TSP funds are non-divertible and non-lapsable but a number of media reports and study by advocacy bodies engaged in promoting rights of marginalized poor have revealed that there has been diversion and misuse of SCSP and TSP funds for another purpose which are not directly beneficial to the SC and ST households. There is lack of inter-departmental coordination in the State in spending the allocated amount in the absence of proper planning, coordination and monitoring. It is reported that SCSP and TSP funds were diverted to Odisha State

Police Housing and Welfare Corporation and spent in the construction of jails, police barrack, training of police personnel, court buildings and fly over in Bhubaneswar city. Many rights activists have complained that the district level monitoring committee under the chairmanship of the district Collector and Block level monitoring committee under the chairmanship of the Sub-Collector are not functioning and there is no data available at district and block level. It is very difficult to track the development spending for SCs and STs. Many activists have complained that the information asked under RTI is misleading the facts about SCSP and TSP. The Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram sabha and SC and ST PRI leaders have no role in the process of implementation. The Finance Department has never been consulting any SC and ST organisations and civil society bodies to incorporate their suggestions in the formulation of SCSP and TSP. The universities and research organisations in the State have no focused research on various aspects on SCSP and TSP.

It is observed that the budgetary allocation made at state level is not getting translated to implementation through specific programmes for the development of SC and STs. The nodal department in consultation with other departments should have programmes to address the core issues such as poverty, unemployment, distress migration, landlessness, education, and health and livelihood development. It is suggested that land is central to the life and livelihood of SCs and STs; so land distribution, land development along with housing and sanitation should get the priority which will fundamentally change the economic status of poor household among SCs and STs. The Central Government guideline in 2014 has suggested for the formulation of a State level SC and ST Development Council and a State level SCSP and TSP Fund along with vigilance and monitoring committee for its effective implementation.

The monitoring committee should be at State, district, block, panchayat and Gramsabha level which will help in identifying the real beneficiaries at hamlet level and monitoring the work to take to its logical end. It will bring transparency and accountability in spending. There has been a lack of awareness among people about SCSP and TSP in the State. So the State Government should make effort to promote awareness among people about SCSP and TSP so that greater involvement of the people can be ensured. It will create political will among legislators.

There has been growing demand by SC and ST organisations from all over the country to bring a national legislation to streamline the provision and many States have gone ahead with State legislations. The Government of Odisha should discuss this matter in the Assembly to bring legislation for SCSP and TSP in the interest of the people of the State. Irrespective of the party affiliation it is expected that all the MLAs should express their political will to bring SCSP and TSP legislation which will be a step ahead in the implementation process in the State and bring benefit to most neglected section of our society.

07 February 2015

ODISHA SC SUB PLAN FUND USE FAR FROM SATISFACTORY

Dr BR Ambedkar's 125th birth centenary year has been celebrated by political parties in Delhi and his birthplace at Mhow of Madhya Pradesh. Lots of discussions are happening over vision of Ambedkar on annihilation of caste towards achieving social democracy in India. The vision of building a democracy is not possible without addressing social inequality that has been continuing in our social structure.

The Constitution of India has made a number of provisions in terms of protection and development leading to social equality. In spite of efforts of last 65 years by the Government, it has been identified by a number of studies that Scheduled Castes (SC) are lagging behind in every aspect of human development in comparison to other caste Hindu social groups. In order to bridge the socio-economic gap, along with other measures, Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP) was introduced in 1979 by the Central Government. There has been a provision that the annual budgets of the Central and State Governments must have allocation of funds exclusively for SCs as per the percentage of their population at State and national level.

These funds have to be allocated by each ministry and department in the State and the funds cannot be diverted for other purposes. The spending of the funds should target individual household, communities and areas having a large concentration of SCs. There has been special Central assistance to the SC sub-plan received from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment by the State. But unfortunately, the Government of Odisha has not been following any of the guidelines in spending of SCSP in the State. It is a crime against 17.13 % of the population of the State which has been victims of historical injustice and continued State apathy. There is not a single scheme being implemented out of State fund, mostly all the Central Government schemes are being implemented by the State.

There has been no attempt by the State to develop specific schemes out of own fund like other States in India. The State Scheduled Caste Welfare Advisory Board headed by the Chief Minister with SC MPs and MLAs as its members is virtually non-functional. Even the routine annual seating is not being conducted. The meeting of State Vigilance and Monitoring Committee headed by the Chief Minister under the provisions of SCs and STs (PoA) Act, 1989 and Rules, 1995, is also not

being conducted regularly to discuss the matters relating to atrocities against SCs and STs in the State. The enforcement of PCR Act against untouchability is equally weak in the State due to lack political commitments for a social cause.

There are 25 SC MLAs in the Odisha Assembly with 23 of them representing BJD. Two of them only two are Ministers, including one in Cabinet rank and the other in State rank. The SC/ST Development Department is with a State Minister which shows an attitude of less importance to the development of the Dalits by the BJD Government. The elected MPs and MLAs from SC reserve constituencies, chosen by the ruling parties, are made voiceless by the party boss with threat of denial of party ticket for next election. The Congress and BJP have one SC MLA each.

The SCSP funds should ideally be spent on education, employment and livelihood development of SCs towards achieving equality. There has been no initiative by the Government to develop innovative schemes and programmes for the all round development of SCs based on information and research feedback from academics, policy makers and CSOs. As such the State has not yet developed a Scheduled Caste Development Policy or Vision Document for SCs development integrating it with the overall development of the State. The SCs and STs Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) ever since its existence in 1952 has done no research on SC development, except organising few training camps and workshops with the help of nonprofit organisations. The critical information and inputs on SC development based on research has been callously neglected.

The SC and ST Finance Development Cooperative Corporation Ltd since its inception in 1979, while SCSP was introduced, with its declared objective of SC development along with focus on scavengers has been depending on the assistance of National Scheduled Caste Finance Development Corporation. The placement linked skill development training programme by OSCFDC for last five years from 2011 to 2015 shows that less than 50 % of its target has been achieved with about only 20 % placement. In spite of Supreme Court's directives, there has been non-implementation of Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 in the State. The Central Government grants and schemes for SCs and especially scavengers are not being implemented properly and criminally delayed and non-utilized by the bureaucracy.

There has been no innovation in the schemes and caste-based non-viable traditional occupations are routinely encouraged by the department. SC development is more linked to education, as a vast majority of SCs are illiterate and depending on physical labour for livelihood. Education also is one of the most important means of social change and in order to bring change in socio-economic life of scheduled caste, there have been provisions of reservation in educational institutions and other supports such as scholarship to SC students.

A majority of SC students mostly depend on Government run schools as day scholar and very few on residential schools run by the SSD Department. The primary education is the foundation for every child based on which the future education can be built up but unfortunately primary education system is not encouraging for SC children due to lack of Government initiative in addressing poverty and social discrimination in primary schools. The SC day scholar students of class 6th and 7th get Rs150 per year and class 8th get Rs. 200 per year as pre-matric scholarship.

It is declared that the parents of such students should not be income tax payee. The SSD Department report revealed that from 2014 to 2015 there were 6, 25,590 SC students who got Rs. 6,811 lakh as pre matric scholarship. Many States like Kerala, AP, TN and Telangana have been spending much more on pre matric scholarship. Even they pay it from class one for the day scholars.

SC population's livelihood is closely connected to land but unfortunately, there has been no land distribution programme and the protective laws for the sharecroppers. A vast majority of rural SC households are engaged as sharecroppers in agriculture. There are lakhs of homestead less household living over unauthorised habitations without homestead land patta and possession to securely construct a house. A vast majority of SC farmers have small holdings and mostly depend on sharecropping but there has been no protection for the sharecroppers who suffer all kinds of loss during manmade and natural disasters and undergoes exploitations since generations in the absence of State protection.

The SC families in forest area are facing problem to get reorganisation as other traditional forest dwellers to get forest land under FRA Act and the Government is knowingly showing discriminatory attitude towards the landless forest dwellers. The Government of Telangana has allocated Rs3,321 crore for SC development out of which Rs1,000

crore has been allocated for purchase of land for landless SC families in the State. The Telangana Government has spent Rs 94.45 crore for distributing 2,524 acres of land among 959 SC families in the year 2014-2015. Though there is a land purchase scheme for landless household but this has not been implemented by Government of Odisha.

The State Government should prepare a vision document involving all concerned for the development of the historically marginalised social groups in order to ensure their development at par with others. The Government must have the commitment in implementing all the protective legislations and development plans such as SCSP as an integral part of the overall development of the State towards achieving inclusive growth.

06 July 2015

IMPLEMENT PESA TSP IN TRUE SPIRIT FOR REAL GROWTH OF TRIBALS

The provisions for economic development are mentioned in fundamental rights and directive principles as guidance for the State in dealing with the economic development of the marginalised sections such as tribals of the country who constitute eight percent of the total population. For historical reasons, they remain backward which needs extra intervention in form of sub plans to bring them to the level of other social groups in all respects.

We had had five years and yearly plans, sub plans and micro plans within the plan to meet the special needs of specific groups of people or regions to ensure equity in development by creating opportunity. The State has formulated policy and protective laws and set up institutional mechanism with budgetary provisions to translate the mandate of the constitution into reality. It is the duty of the elected Government to take forward the process further but unfortunately, the institutions are dysfunctional even though there has been tribal representation in such institutions.

The State Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) has no regular meetings and when held, the meetings are organised without consulting its members on agenda. The regional office of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes in Odisha is almost non-functional without adequate staff and infrastructure. In this context, let us take a view of tribal development in Odisha which is very important for the overall development of the State because 62 identified tribal communities constitute about 23 % of the total population of the State as per Census 2011 but they suffer a historical injustice against them by dominant social groups taking the advantage of their backwardness.

Almost 45 % of the geographical area of the State has been declared as 5th scheduled area for the purpose of autonomy in governance and development which is home to 68.09 % of the total tribal population. Odisha is home to ten percent of the tribal population of the country and is the third largest concentration of the tribal population of the country.

The constitution has made provision of a tribal development department with a Cabinet Minister from tribal community to head the department and a TAC headed by the Chief Minister of the State. There have been provisions of reservation in Lok Sabha, State

Assembly and Panchayatraj institutions for tribal representation as per the percentage of their population. The financial assistance from Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Minority Affairs, in form of special Central assistance, several Central plans, additional Central assistance under the special plan for KBK districts, external assistance from DFID, WFP and IFAD, President's grant under Article 275(1), ministry's own projects, and provisions of tribal sub plan are the major sources for tribal development. The budget of ST and SC Development Department for the year 2014-15 was Rs2,486 crore.

The Government of Odisha has to implement all the constitutional provisions, laws and programmes. Last 65 years of governance has witnessed huge non-implementation of such provisions and programmes which resulted in a continued situation of distress and deprivation. The basic human needs such as food, drinking water, housing, sanitation, education, healthcare and employment have not been solved to the desired extent. The scheduled areas remain backward marked by lack of core infrastructure such as road, electricity, communication and connective facilities. There have been regular reports of hunger deaths, extreme poverty, child labour, trafficking of tribal women, bonded labour, distress migration, violence and deprivation in tribal areas and still there areas remain inaccessible without basic facilities.

The level of mass education and political citizenship is very poor where people still remain in a feudal era in terms of political participation and understanding. The State Government has been acting as a project implementing agency depending on Central grants without any long term vision of tribal development by integrating it in the overall development. There is lack of coordination and integration among various departments and dedicated institutions operating within the State for tribal development. The various actors and interveners of tribal development, especially the large number private players such as corporate and other international and national self-managed bodies in the name of non-profit organisations are working in isolation without integration with Government departments. Many of the interventions of tribal development are unsustainable, disjointed and self-style experiments without any larger prospects and visions compatible to the overall vision of the State.

Two most important provisions such as The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) and Tribal Sub Plan -1974 (TSP)

have not been implemented in the State in spite of movements by tribals and many concerned civil society groups and tribal rights activists. The non-implementation of these two important provisions has impacted over development and governance in tribal areas. PESA is linked to local governance and ownership over resources and TSP addresses the developmental concerns of tribal households and area having tribal concentration covering all aspects of development with focus on education, health and employment. But there has been no amendment in State laws in line with PESA and there has been a notional allocation of TSP in State budget without implementation by formulating State schemes out of TSP funds. The funds are being diverted and largely misused by the State. Along with non-implementation of PESA and TSP, there is also partly implementation of reservation provisions in education and jobs and affirmative action by business and industry. The language, culture and belief system of tribals are not getting adequate State patronization and protection.

As a matter of constitutional provision, elected tribal representatives are participating but they are without power in decision-making process. The leaders are used by ruling parties as followers with personal benefits to betray the cause of the community. They are mostly acting as representatives of the party in the community but not representing the cause of the tribals in party or governing bodies. This may be largely due to lack of political power to challenge the hegemony and dominance of ruling elites. A large number of non-tribal civil society members are representing tribal cause in public in form of advocacy without a fair representation of educated tribal themselves in such forums. Tribals are also getting divided into religious and ethnic grounds and not getting united with a homogeneous tribal identity at the State level due to lack of political mobilisation based on tribal identity. The radical political mobilisation has damaged to build tribal leadership for using available democratic space in parliamentary democracy. The dominant development model implemented by corporates in active State patronization has failed to integrate tribal development. The modern education and technology has been used to exploit and alienate tribals from their society and community development process. The insignificant few upcoming elites within the tribal community are accommodated to dominant discourses of the ruling elite. It is time to look at the past to review the whole process of tribal development programmes and administration and have a fresh plan for the future.

30 May 2015

STATE APATHETIC TO TRIBAL GIRL STUDENTS SAFETY

The vulnerability of girl child of historically marginalised communities in backward regions of the State is extremely high in the State. The girls bear the burden of caste, class, ethnic and gender-based discrimination with continued political and bureaucratic apathy in spite of protective laws and programmes for their protection and development. The girl child faces violence in family, community and institutions such as schools and hostels where she is supposed to get the fullest protection to live a life with dignity without fear and exploitation.

A vast majority of tribal families are poor and live in remote areas where they do not have a school near their habitations. Many of them prefer to send their children to residential schools. With growing trend of privatisation of education, the Government schools are the only option for the poor tribals to educate their children. It is the duty of the State Government to protect the girl children while ensuring quality education. However, it is still a far cry.

Sunita Raita, a nursing student of R Udayagiri of Gajapati and Kanakdei Bhadra, a class 10th student of Bhatiguda High School in Papadahandi block of Nawarangapur committed suicide, the one by hanging herself and the other pouring kerosene, just for being unable to put up with harassments and casteist remarks. In a most recent incident, two minor tribal girl students, the one in the Umri Ashram School in Jeypore and the other in Lingagada in Kandhamal district, gave birth to a child in their hostels. The hostel superintendent and headmaster were arrested and released on bail and in later case the teachers and ANM were suspended and removed. The matter raised concern by many in media including a discussion in the State Assembly by members cutting across party line.

The tribal literacy rate in the southern region of Odisha is lowest in the country. It is estimated in 2012 that 64 % of the tribal population in rural area of the State is under poverty line and southern Odisha has a large share in it. There are about 5,375 hostels for ST students which provide residential facility to four lakh students out of which three lakh are girl students till 2013-2014. This figure is excluding hostels run by NGOs for tribal girls and the Government has been

engaged in increasing the number of hostels with special Central assistance.

These hostels are run by the ST and SC Development (SSD) Department. There has been regular news in media about the plight of inmates of Ashram schools run by the SSD in backward regions such as southern Odisha. The girl children are the worst sufferers of the prevailing disturbed conditions of both private and Government run educational institutions in spite of growing public concern for women in the country. It has been regularly exposed in media that the hostels run by the SSD Department are in poor condition without basic facilities like drinking water, electricity, latrine, kitchen and boundary wall etc.

The inmates are not being supplied with bed and bed sheet, mosquito net, adequate food and other minimum essential items required for a student in hostel. The lack of basic amenities has badly affected the physical and mental health of students and many of them are forced to leave the hostel. Coupled with this are the sexual, moral and physical exploitations they have to face in the hostels. While the State Government has been madly engaged in building hostels after hostels for tribal students with major Central assistance but there has been no plan to address the safety, security and dignity of girls in hostel.

It is largely the reflection of age-old hegemonic, casteist and patriarchal thinking of people in governance and policy making bodies those have no respect for dignity of women. It also shows the attitude of administration towards the tribal girls. The social composition of teaching and non-teaching staff in all residential schools is a matter of concern. It is found that a majority of staff do not mix with tribals. The SSD Department has not developed any special orientation or training for the teaching and non-teaching staff employed in these hostels.

Education is key to development of any backward community including tribals who are historically marginalised for their distinct identity. Odisha is the third largest tribal populated State having near one-fourth of the population belonging to tribal communities which is about ten percent of the total tribal population of the country. The girl child education is very important in the context of the overall tribal development of the State. Tribal girl education has impacted over the transformation of tribal families from the bondage of poverty, illiteracy, alcoholism, landlessness, debt and distress migration as tribal women play a central role in family and community.

The literacy rate of tribal women is only 41 % as per Census 2011 which is below the State and national average and less than all other social groups including SC women. There are also women in specific tribal regions and women in PTGs whose literacy percentage is much lower and a matter of concern. The dropout rate of tribal students is very high in comparison to students of other social group. It has observed that mostly tribal girls are forced to serve as maidservants in the urban areas of the State and outside in the metropolis of our country. Trafficking of women and distress migration of women with other family members are very often reported in media.

A number of studies have established that prevalence of domestic violence and sexual exploitation at the workplace is much higher among women belong to SC and ST communities. Ministry of Tribal Affairs reported in 2012 that Odisha was the State with highest number of cases registered under SC and STs (PoA) Act, 1989 in the country and the performances of the State in disposal of cases against Scheduled Tribe by courts during the year 2012 indicate that Odisha is the second largest State having more number of pending cases for trial next to Madhya Pradesh.

The State Women Commission does not maintain a disaggregated database on tribal women through one of commission members is a tribal woman under the provision of 3(2) of The Odisha Commission for Women Act, 1993. Tribal women have represented in Panchayat Raj institutions, State Assembly and as members in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha as a result of provisions of political reservation for STs but they have very insignificantly represented in visible leadership role in women movements, academics, media, courts and bars, trade unions and CSOs which are largely dominated by upper caste, educated, urban women and mostly non-tribals.

Tribal women are largely encouraged with microfinance and women-centric unsustainable livelihood programmes without their active participation. There are a number of provisions for spending such as Tribal Sub-plan, Special Central assistance and President's grant under Article-275(1) and externally aided projects like OTELP which are especially dedicated to tribal development where women can play a central role in the development process.

14 February 2015

ODISHA GOVERNMENT MUST PRIORITISE GIRL CHILD SAFETY & PROSPERITY

Girl children are a most vulnerable section of our society. They are prone to all kinds of abuse in prevailing socio-economic structure. Odisha with higher rural concentration is home to 65 lakh children between the age group of 6 and 14 years as per 2011 census, out of which more than 29 lakh are girl children. There are about 60 lakh children in rural areas and five lakh in urban areas of the State.

The girl child in rural areas and slums are bearing the brunt of unequal access to available opportunities provided by the Government and are deprived of basic child rights in many ways. In spite of efforts by many actors including State, international agencies, private and corporate bodies, there have been continuous media reports of child sexual abuse, forced prostitution, trafficking, child labour, domestic child labour, begging, single mother, dropout and many forms of anti-human and distress situation faced by the girl children in the State. It is being reported that most of the victims are poor, resourceless, poverty stricken, illiterate and mostly from rural areas.

The protecting laws and institutional arrangements to counter the vulnerable situation have not effectively reached to the poorer sections of society in rural areas. Odisha has a draft policy for girl child and women in 2013. The policy speaks about convention of the rights of children and convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. But our State policy, laws and institutions have not achieved that much of effectiveness in fulfilling the objectives of the conventions.

The youth policy of the Government of Odisha 2014 affirms that girls and young women should enjoy equal right to opportunities and status with equal access to resources as men. It also says that workplaces should be made safe and secure for girls and young women. The girls of SCs, STs and minority communities who suffer from multiple disabilities will get more attention in form of preferential treatment as they constitute a vast majority of neglected population among girls.

Many of our well meaning policies have not been transformed into action through institutional mechanism. There are a few national and State level institutions to intervene in child rights such as NCPCR and OSCPCR which are playing a very insignificant role in addressing the

huge number of cases. It is fact that very few cases were registered and drew media attention whereas more cases of child rights violation are not getting reported either in media or registered in police stations due to lack of awareness in public and in absence of popular complaint mechanism at grassroots level.

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data says the number of reported crime against children has increased by 50 % from 2012 to 2013 and in the year 2014, nearly 90,000 crimes against children were registered in the country. The nature of crime against children includes kidnap, abduction and rape. There were 225 incidents of assault against women, girl children, with intent to outrage their modesty in 2013 in Odisha.

Odisha has a major role in bringing larger impact over basic socio-economic condition of the marginalised. Along with socio-economic development programmes, the enforcement of law is equally important in prohibiting the vested interest groups and criminals who are taking the advantage of the weakness of the system. Due to social subjugation, illiteracy and lack of education among the marginalised groups, the legal awareness on girl child rights and their protection and development has not been realised by a majority of the people of the State. The people in rural areas still carry the feudal value system and religious traditions and customs in dealing with issues of girl child.

The patriarchal mindset and value system deprives girls of their child rights. The women, girls, young women in rural areas have no basic amenities and privacy for a dignified life. It is evident that mostly the girl children in poor families take care of their siblings and helps the mother in managing all domestic works. In urban areas a large number of girl children of poor families brought from rural areas are serving as domestic helps and getting deprived of education and family care in their tender age. The condition of the girls in family of migrant workers from Odisha is heartrending.

The Women and Child Development Minister of Odisha in 2014 informed that 42 % of women face physical violence in the State. There are 2,011 rape cases registered in 2014 in the State and the number is on the rise as reported in a white paper by State Home Department. Police reported a continuous increase in crime against women in the State and in that context the situation of girl child has been a matter of concern. The State Government has set up 537 women and child desks in police stations to register the cases. The

Government has launched some popular programmes such as pink auto service and Mo Sathi safety helpline for women in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar to enhance their security. There are integrated anti-human trafficking units in 21 places of the State to control trafficking and ensure protection and rehabilitation of rescued women but there has been lack of holistic initiative for the protection of women from everyday violence and insecurity in rural areas. It is the children of the marginalised section who need protection and care because of their vulnerability. The constitutional mandate and human rights, child rights, women rights laws must be popularised among people to build an egalitarian society that values girl child's dignity.

A social consciousness about the dignity of women and value of girl child will build a protective environment. The State has to not only make laws but also see to its fullest enforcement.

The Government of India has launched '*Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao*' programme with the objective of preventing gender biased sex selective elimination and ensure survival and protection of girl children. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme also has been implemented since 2004 in educationally backward blocks where the rural female literacy is below national average targeting girls of rural area. Recently the public sector company Nalco has come up with programme like Nalco Ki Ladli which aims to ensure education of the girls in BPL families in the company's periphery areas of Angul and Koraput. Like NALCO, other public sector companies such as MCL, NTPC and SAIL etc should take a proactive role in the protection and development of girl children in Odisha.

22 August 2015

INDEPENDENCE DAY: LET'S RESOLVE TO VALUE WOMEN'S DIGNITY

Social democracy precedes economic development and political freedom without which progress in human development is not possible. When we are celebrating the 68th anniversary of our Independence Day it is time to reaffirm our faith in social democracy which has been the dream of makers of modern India.

Social democracy is a way of life that recognises liberty, equality and fraternity, as principles of life. It is possible when all sections of society are provided facilities and opportunities to participate in public life. It is not only the State who has to ensure this but also all citizens have to accept this as their primary duty towards nation building.

Article 51(A) of Constitution says it is the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic, regional and sectional diversities to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. It also says that citizens have to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.

In this context of social democracy, the situation of women in Odisha and especially the situation of tribal women is a matter of great concern. They are on the lowest ladder of our socio-eco structure and have been facing the triple discrimination of class, caste/ethnicity and gender. It is expected that our public institutions run by State should carry such value and practices in ensuring social democracy.

It has been observed that many of our social practices in the name of religion, gender, caste, ethnicity and tradition are anti-human and derogatory to human values, civil rights and human rights standards accepted globally. In spite of the constitutional provision of equality and anti-discriminatory laws, gender and caste-based discrimination and atrocities have not been minimised to desired extent.

In Odisha, many of the developmental issues of the State have been directly linked to the socio-cultural practices of the people. If the State will not bring desirable change in the socio-cultural sphere, it will not pave the way for the economic development and political governance because non-economic factors are equally responsible for overall economic development of the State.

In that context, there has been a need for bringing socio-cultural change among the people by promoting social democracy through equal opportunities for the most marginalized sections specially women who are prone to all kinds of subjugation and suffering because the women in our society are still struggling to come out in public life in spite of few favorable laws.

The women of the marginalised sections are suffering in middle age barbarism by the act of fellow community members. There have been reports of female foeticide, witchcraft, sacrifice, dowry, and caste Panchayats that prevent women to take independent decision about their life. The women of marginalised sections are being subjugated and exploited in many ways by the dominant people of the society. The social barriers in villages should be changed in a way that encourages women participation in public sphere.

The National Crime Record Bureau reports 160 cases of murders linked to witchcraft in the year 2013. There are hundreds of women being brutally killed by mob, paraded naked, their hair cut, and forced to eat human excreta and face physical torture in the districts of Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh, Cuttack and Ganjam though there is Odisha Prevention of Witch-hunting Act 2013, which came into existence by a High Court order to deal with such cases in line with similar Acts existing in States like Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

The Act says whoever forces any women, branding her a witch, to drink or eat inedible substances or any other obnoxious substance or parade her with painted face or body or commits any similar act which is derogatory to the dignity or displace from her house, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than one year but may be extended to five years and with fine. But the implementation of the Act needs public awareness among the illiterate people engaged in such practice in the name of customs and traditions.

There are also media reports about people who made a human sacrifice to become rich and harvest more crops. There are cunning individuals exploiting the religious sentiments of the people for their petty personal interest. It is being told that illiteracy and lack of healthcare facilities are the major reasons of such inhuman act against women.

The most recent incident happen in Joda of Keonjhar district where Gura Munda and five of his family members were brutally killed by a mob with the reason that the children in local villages were not keeping well. Though Joda is a mining area but the education and health problems of tribal communities have not been addressed by the local miners or the Government.

The tribal women in the State lag behind in every aspect of human development. The overall child sex ratio between zero to six years was 934 in the State in 2011 census. The districts such as Nayagarh, Dhenkanal, Angul and Ganjam were below 900. This has been a matter of concern that the female sex ratio has been decreasing in the State.

In order to ensure social democracy, the Government should ensure basic facilities such as education, health and livelihood of people so that they can have the scope of exposure to the enlightened societies that respect the dignity of each and every human being and treat them equally in all respect irrespective of their sex and social identity.

“Only making laws is not enough to empower women without changing the socio-cultural barriers that contradict women participation, decision-making process in family and society, and freedom to move in public. The Government should introduce human rights education, civic sense and promote scientific human values and logical bent of mind among students in schools and encourage them to question such anti-human practices that exist in our social life.

So that our next generation of society will have progressive mindset and cultural practices that put human dignity in centre irrespective of identities.

It is very much relevant to States like Odisha having a large number of marginal majorities who are being deprived of basic human facilities to grow in a dignified way.

The Government of India has been signatory to a number of international human rights covenants such as The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention against elimination of all forms of discrimination against women but this has not been translated to laws and programmes in many States for its effective implementation by the administration.

Article 16 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights says men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race and nationality

or religion have the right to marry and found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and its dissolution. But still, our social system does not permit eligible male and female to go for a dignified married life of their choice in the absence of fully State protection in enjoying the basic human rights.

It has been observed that many of our constitutional commitment and international human rights laws are not taken to people for its practice in building social democracy that respect all human being irrespective of their social identity. The public institutions and law-making bodies need to bring in such legalisation in facilitating the democratic participation of women of the marginalised groups.

15 August 2015

MINES ACT AMENDMENT TO ENSURE RESOURCE FEDERALISM

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) amendment ordinance got the President's assent on January 12 last and was published in the Gazette of India by the Ministry of Law and Justice. The ordinance promulgated to further amend the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Act, 1957 which was last amended in 2012.

It is the ninth ordinance by the NDA Government over last seven months including the Coal mines special provision ordinance promulgated twice. The ordinance was necessary to intervene in the emergent problem of the mining sector to increase in the production and bring balance in the import of minerals.

While the mining industry has seen this as a major favourable shift for private and foreign direct investment, the mineral bearing States have raised questions over resource ownership and management in a federal structure like ours. It is a matter of grave concern for mineral bearing backward States like Odisha where mineral resources have been playing a substantial role in the political economy of the State and seen as a source of economic development. In the past few years, along with displacement and environmental issues, the illegal mining, lease and renewal process have been challenged by court judgments leading to the closer of mines. It has affected the livelihood of mining workers in iron ore, chrome and coal sectors in major mineral districts like Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Jajpur, Angul, Jharsuguda and other parts of the State in particular and the State economy in general. Many trade unions have registered their protest against closer of mines.

The Saha Commission of inquiry on illegal mining has unfolded many serious dimension of the mining industry in the State. The Centre-State relation over mineral resources can be referred to the earlier Commissions, i.e. The Sarakaria Commission of 1988 and Anwarul Hoda report of 2006. It has been questioned that whether the rights of the mineral bearing States over the major minerals can be more recognised by such amendment or it is heading towards more centralization in the name of economic growth. As it is argued that the mineral bearing State should have greater say in allotment and auction of lease, they need to be democratically consulted in such matter.

It is further said that whether the amendment has adequately addressed the issues of people of different socio-economic groups in mineral bearing areas by dealing it with special care while recognising their contribution to national development. Therefore debate and discussion over the amendment ordinance is quite relevant from the prospects of mineral bearing backward States like Odisha and the people in mining areas.

The share of Odisha in terms of value of mineral production in the country is highest in the year 2013-14. The State has 94 % of the chrome and nickel, 52 % of bauxite and about one-third of the coal, iron ore and manganese reserve of the country. There are more than five hundred mining leases in operation covering an area of one lakh thousand hectares. The leaseholders include the Central Government owned public sectors undertakings such as Nalco, MCL, NTPC, Hindustan Rare Earth Ltd, SAIL, State-owned public sectors like Odisha Mining Corporation and Nilachala Ispat Nigam Ltd, besides a number of corporate, private- owned companies of Odisha and outside.

The major change through the amendment ordinance of 2015 is the auction system to attract the private FDI to mineral sector while there is continued provision for reservation for the public sector.

The second major change is that the lease period in case of minerals, other than coal, lignite and atomic minerals, has increased from 30 years to 50 years and it has abolished the renewal of any mining concession. On the expiry of the lease period, the lease shall be put up for auction as per the procedure. It has to ensure power to the Central Government to intervene even where the State Government does not pass order within the prescribed time limit in order to speed up the matter. In case of captive mines, it has given more protection by fifteen years of transition period, which is more than the merchant miners, without sudden stoppage, in order to boost the mineral based industries that are getting affected with the earlier lease process.

As relaxation to mineral bearing States, the amendment denied prior approval needed from Centre for States in case of ten minerals mentioned in Part C of the 1st Scheduled of MMDR Act, 1957 which includes metallic and non-metallic minerals such as bauxite, chrome ore, gold, iron ore, manganese and copper etc. In order to check the illegal mining, the penal provision has been made stronger in terms of imprisonment for five years and fine of Rs5 lakh per hectare of area.

There is provision that the States have to set up special courts to undertake speedy fast-track trial of case related to illegal mining. The special courts will have powers of court of sessions. The Judge of the special court will be appointed by the State with concurrence of High Court.

The new provision in the MMDR amendment ordinance is that it has made provision of District Mineral Foundation (DMF) which has been a demand by the people of mining areas who are getting affected in many ways due to mining activities. Though they have been losing land and livelihood and facing the brunt of water, air and sound pollution in the name of national development but their plight has not been addressed in a special way as a matter of national interest. The objectives of DMF shall be to work for the interest and benefit of persons and areas affected by mining operation. The holder of mining lease or prospecting licences cum mining lease has to pay an amount to the fund of DMF which shall be less than one-third of the royalty as per provision or as may be prescribed by the Central Government. It is further said the composition and function of the DMF shall be decided by the State Government. The State Government will prescribe the payment to be made by the leaseholders of minor minerals to DMF of the district in which the mining is taking place. The DMF is creating hope that the typical problems faced by the people and the area can be tackled with such dedicated fund placed locally at the district level because it has been observed that the fund generated due to mines such as royalty is not percolating to the locality and mostly spent at the State level. There is also provision of setting up National Mineral Exploration Trust with 2 % of the royalty to be paid by the leaseholders for the purpose of mineral exploration.

As an addition to the principal act, the amendment has recognised the role of Central Government in the reduction of waste and waste management practices. It also said that the Central Government shall have power to issue direction to States for minimising and mitigating adverse environmental impact in respect of ground water, air, noise and land pollution. The problem of abundant mining and mined out land and its further use by local communities is well placed in the amendment ordinance.

The Government of Odisha has done nothing in its last fourteen years of presence so far as mines and minerals are concerned. It should carefully go through the amendment ordinance and raise such pertinent issues of concern in the interest of the State. There will be

scope of representation when the amendment will be laid in each House of Parliament.

17 January 2015

STATE NEEDS TO HAVE A PRO-POOR MINOR MINERAL POLICY

With the increasing demand for building and construction materials in a rapid urbanisation and industrialisation process in the State, the use of minor minerals has been increasing. The housing and road communication projects, both in rural and urban areas and industrial hubs, have created a huge demand for minor minerals that have raised concern for an effective minor mineral management policy.

It is a fact that in many areas there has been non-implementation of laws and violation of provisions of the Central Government policy and court orders relating to mineral utilisation in spite of the provision of State power to make law over minor minerals management. While changes are taking place in the State economy with more focus on urbanisation and industrialisation and reform in the mining sector, the State needs to review its current administrative procedure of minor minerals putting priority on the concern of environment, revenue and local area development.

The National Mineral Policy, 2008 and mineral policies in many States have reflected concern over minor minerals. Odisha has no mineral policy whereas mineral bearing States like AP, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, MP and Rajasthan have their mineral policies. As minerals are broadly divided into two major categories under major and minor minerals, The Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Act, 1957 which administer the mineral sector of the country has made provision under Section-15 of the Act saying the State Government may by notification in official gazette make rules for regulating the grant of quarry lease, mining lease or another mineral concession in respect of minor minerals and for purpose connected therewith. The Government of Odisha has made Minor Mineral Concession Rules, 1990, amended in 2004 and further amended it in September 2014. In its Schedule-1, minor minerals are listed in nine varieties, which include clay, sand, brick earth, moorum, sand stone, marble chips, road metals, decorative rocks, lime kankar and chalcedony shingles etc.

There are three departments Forest, Mines and Revenue which are involved in the minor mineral lease depending on the areas such as forest land, and mines area and revenue land respectively. The State Government has got Rs 202.65 crore as royalty from minor minerals

in 2009-2010 which has been marginally increasing during last few years.

The Government has to revise the rate of revenue within three years of interval and the revenue includes royalty, dead rent, surface rent and fees for compensatory afforestation specified in Schedule-I and II of the rule. There has been no regular revision of royalty and rents by the State Government which caused huge loss of revenue from minor minerals sector. The rate was not amended from 2004 to 2013 and a study group was set up in September 2013.

In MP, Chhattisgarh and Kerala, the minor mineral lease has been given to the poor people, unemployed youths of BPL category and locals of marginalised groups as a source of income and employment but this has not been thought up in Odisha with huge unemployment and distress migration of youths. The minor mineral quarries in most of the Panchayats are creating an environmental problem for the local people by affecting the local ecosystem, forest, land and surface water management of the area.

Many of the quarries are abandoned as artificial ponds after extraction of minor minerals. No environmental procedure is followed in refilling the mines which cause a problem for the grazing animals and the general public. Both the mining operation and transportation causes inconvenience to the local public. The public places such as burial ground, village forest, temple land and places of archaeological importance are occupied by leaseholders in many ways without concern.

There are also a number of minor mineral processing units such as stone crushers operating in public road side which caused huge dust and sound pollution in the area. The loss of trees due to minor mineral mines is not being compensated with afforestation. It has been observed that minor mineral lease has been awarded to the local influential people with the backing of ruling parties and there has been no attempt to generate more revenue from the minor mineral sector. The revenue collected from minor mineral is not spent for local area development.

As per the provision in rules, the quarry lease shall be granted in favour of an applicant who has quoted the highest rate of royalty. The leaseholder has to submit a mining plan for the development of the mineral deposits of the area. The mining plan should include the nature and extent of mineral body and spot of mining operation with

details of the mineral reserve and extent of manual mining and use of machinery.

It should clearly specify the impact of mining on water, forest and land in the vicinity and a detail scheme of restoration of the area by afforestation, land reclamation and pollution control measures with a mining closer plan within five years. The lease clearance has to get the environment clearance as per the provisions of Union Forest and Environment Department. The Supreme Court in 2012 in the matter of Deepak Kumar etc Vs State of Haryana and others has passed an order that lease of minor minerals including their renewal for an area of less than five acres shall be granted by the State only after getting environmental clearance from the MoEF. The State level impact assessment authority has to give the clearance.

There shall be no mining activities in a distance of 50 meters from water bodies, public road, temple, reservoir, dams, burial ground, railway track, and public building and the mining activities should not cause any damage to private or public properties. The case of river bed sand mining and environmental regulations has been mentioned separately. There is a restriction on lease area which should not be more than 100 hectares as a cluster in development block.

The rules have made provision of Environment Management Fund (EMF) at State level out of five per cent of the royalty for reclamation and rehabilitation of mined out area. The fund will be utilised for provisions of common facilities for the benefit of the community in and around the mining area. The State has setup Environment Management Fund Trust at Bhubaneswar for the purpose.

It has been suggested that the revenue fund should be used for the local community development. The lease for minor minerals should be given to Panchayats and cooperative of local people as it is the natural right of the local people over the local resources. The Kerala State Mineral Policy, 2009 has given priority on SCs and STs, while granting lease in revenue land and there is mining area welfare programme for the local community. Chhattisgarh has made provision to provide minor mineral lease to cooperative societies formed by BPL of SC, ST, OBC and women and unemployed youths and revenue of minor minerals goes to the panchayats. The PESA Act, 1996 allows Gramasabha the power to lease minor minerals in scheduled areas but Odisha this power is with Zilla Parishad. AP, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and MP have the provision of prior recommendation of Gramasabha for grant of lease of minor minerals.

The Samata Judgment of 1997 by the Supreme Court has suggested to spend about 20 % of the net profit on water, education, health and sanitation of the local communities in scheduled areas. Gujarat has made provision to spend a major portion of the royalty from minor minerals in the district. The Government of Odisha has wiped out royalty over minor minerals used for MGNREGS, IAY and Mo Kudia on items such as earth, bricks, sand, chips and moorum but this is not enough. The Government of Odisha should look at the policies of other States and follow their best practices for the interest of the poor people.

The Government should review the lease administration of minor minerals and streamline the monitoring procedure of revenue collection and environmental management with local area development.

31 January 2015

NEW MINES LAW: OPPORTUNITIES GALORE FOR LOCAL GROWTH

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015 has brought a major institutional arrangement with the provision of District Mineral Foundation (DMF) as a nonprofit trust for ensuring the welfare of the mining affected areas and the inhabitants.

DMF is created under the provision of the Act, by insertion of section 9B to the principal Act, to work for the interest and benefits of persons and areas affected by mining-related operations. Any district affected by mining-related operation will have a DMF as a nonprofit body to be created by the State Government by notification. The State Government has to make rules regarding the composition and functioning of the trust. It is further said in the Act that while making rules, the Government has to be guided by the provisions of administration of scheduled area /tribal area and provisions of PESA 1996 and FRA 2006. The leaseholders of major and minor minerals will have to pay to the DMF in the manner decided by both Centre in case of major minerals and by State in case of minor minerals.

This DMF is going to play a major role in the development of mines area as well as the affected people there. The Government of Odisha has initiated the process to set up DMF in all mines bearing districts. As said by the Minister of Mines, it is decided by the State that Collectors of the respective district will be the Chairperson of the trust along with senior officials and representatives of the mining companies as its members but Government must include the local people's representatives specially Adivasi, Dalit and women in such bodies to make it inclusive of all social groups in mining area.

With the Chief Minister's order to the Rural Development Department to prepare a master plan for the development of mineral bearing districts such as Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Angul, Jajpur, Koraput, and Rayagda, the DMF has raised hopes high among the people in mines areas because this provision is created by law and a complete institutional mechanism is going to be established locally to address the interest of the people and the area which bears the impact of mining for last few decades. In the coming days, the mining operation will grow manifolds because the lease period has been extended to 50 years and the lease area will also be expanded. There

are a number of mining companies including the MNCs with FDI are already operating in Odisha for mining and mineral based industries. Odisha, being a mineral bearing State, is a favourable destination for companies. The DMF is going to play a major role in the overall development of the State including the mines area.

Odisha has about 58 varieties of major minerals and 22 varieties of minor minerals with four major mineral belts. The coal belt covers central Odisha on the bank of river Mahanadi which includes districts of Angul, Sambalpur, Jharasuguda and Sundargarh where about one third of the coal deposit of the country is available. The Sukinda chrome valley having 98 % of the chrome deposits of the country on the bank of river Brahmani in Jajpur and the adjacent areas of Keonjhar district, parts of Mayurbhanj and major parts of Sundargarh district constitute the chrome, iron ore and manganese belt. The south-west Odisha includes Malkanagiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Balangiri, Kandhamal, Kalahandi districts having 70 % of the bauxite deposit along with tin, graphite and other minerals. The coastal mineral belt includes Ganjam and Puri district with minerals of sand and rare earth. Besides, natural gas, petroleum and metallic minerals have been identified in the Mahanadi delta and Puri –Brahamagiri belt. The Sundargarh district has the highest number of mines followed by Keonjhar and Maurbhanj. Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Angul and Keonjhar are ahead of all districts in terms of displacement due to mining operation.

Odisha is home to 10 % of the tribals of the country and 44 % of the total geographical area of the State is declared as fifth scheduled area inhabited by 62 tribal communities. About 60 % of the mines are in scheduled area and these areas are home to tribals, Dalit and other farming communities. The last few decades of mining operation has impacted over life and livelihood of these communities who have been primarily depending on forest and agriculture base livelihood for survival. Along with displacement, they face huge loss of livelihood which resulted in landlessness, poverty, distress migration and unemployment.

Since independence, in spite of people's movement and protest, a number of constitutional provisions such as PESA and TSP and protective laws for Adivasis are not being implemented by State and deliberately violated in many ways to benefit the mining companies operating in scheduled areas. In the case of Samata Judgment, the Supreme Court order in the year 1997 to spend a certain percentage of

the profit for local area development, and similar provisions of periphery development, rehabilitation and resettlement are openly flouted. The funds earmarked for the purposes are not spent properly by any mining company in the absence of State monitoring of these provisions in the interest of the local people especially the Adivasis and other marginalised sections.

The impact of mining on people's socio-economic and environmental condition, quality of life and standard of living in the State in general and mines areas, in particular, gives a negative picture as poverty and deprivation with environmental degradation are hallmarks in the mines bearing areas. Many studies have found that it is always the poor and marginalised mostly the Adivasis, Dalits, farmers, women and children are the worst sufferers. The majority of mining workers live in mining slums and their living condition has not been improved to a minimum standard. They have been deprived of getting basic minimum such as drinking water and housing in spite of organised trade unions intervention in mining areas. The majority of people in mining slums are Adivasis, who are mostly landless, homeless and depend on physical labour in mining. They have been made homeless in their own soil and face displacement, directly and indirectly, due to mining operation.

Mining has been a major cause of deforestation, soil and water pollution with improper implementation of all environmental protection and pollution control laws. The temperature in mining area has gone high and the ground water table has gone down as well as the water bodies getting dried up. The mining areas become inhabitable due to both underground and open cast mining. There has been no refilling of abundant mining in the major mineral area which is a matter of concern as it is prone to the underground eruption and such other serious problem. The DMF funds can be used for the creation of land by refilling the abundant mining and regenerating the wasteland with soil and water treatment. It will bring back the devastated area into a habitable climatic zone by restoring the ecosystem. The land can be given back to the landless and farmers still depending on agriculture for livelihood.

The State Government should use this opportunity to rebuild the mining areas by using such huge funds going to be available locally for the social and human development along with the ecosystem of the zone. The DMF should target basic things like health, education, communication and basic infrastructure focusing the most

marginalised sections in mining area, and the affected core, buffer and periphery of the mining area. The district plans can be supported out of DMF funds for the overall development of the districts by integrating the development of the poor and mining areas of the districts. The districts like Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj and Jajpur can be integrated as a zone by linking the development of the whole region. Similarly, the coal areas of Angul, Jharsuguda and Sundargarh can be combined into a common action plan. The undivided Koraput district can have a common development plan. The State may constitute a Mines Area Development Board to plan and coordinate all such developmental activities at State level by integrating all developmental plans of mining areas.

13 July 2015

ODISHA'S MINERAL DISTRICTS CAN AVAIL HOST OF SCHEMES

The people in mineral bearing areas have faced the backlash of unbridled mining in many ways. They need to be compensated and their overall development should be inclusive of national growth.

It is fact that most of the mineral bearing areas are home to the marginalised sections of our society specially Adivasis who lag behind in human and social development indicators in comparison to other social groups. The Ministry of Mines has declared Prime Minister Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) with its detailed guideline in the national interest for the welfare and development of people affected by mining and mines areas of the district on September 16 last.

With the increasing trend of liberalisation and mechanisation of mining sector, the concern for the plight of mining affected people and ecosystem of the affected area has been raised in people's movements from mining areas of the country and in this perspective the royalty sharing with affected locals has carried much importance.

The Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Act 1957(MMDR Act) governs the mineral sector. The MMDR Amendment Act by insertion of section 9B has made provision of direct royalty sharing with affected people of mining areas with the provision of District Mineral Foundation to be composed by State. The Ministry of Mines has notified that in the case of all mining lease executed before January 12, 2015, the miner will have to pay an amount equal to 30 % of the royalty payable by them to the DMF. Where mining lease is granted after January 12, 2015, the rate of payment would be 10 % of the royalty to the DMF. The Central Government in exercise of the power conferred under section 20A of the MMDR Act 1957 directs the concern the State Government to incorporate PMKKKY into the rules framed by States for DMF and its implementation. The State Government will incorporate PMKKKY in DMF and the DMF will implement PMKKKY in mining areas of the district. For the purpose of PMKKKY, the description of affected people, family and displaced family is as defined in section 3C and K of The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 which says affected families include family whose land or other immovable

property has been acquired, landless families, agricultural workers, sharecroppers, tenants, artisans, fisher folk, STs, NTFP collectors, other traditional forest dwellers, beneficiaries of Government land distribution programme whose primary sources of livelihood have been affected. The displaced family connotes any family who on account of acquisition of land has to be relocated and resettle from the affected area to the resettlement area. There are also others who are being indirectly affected due to mining operation. The mining operation is long term process which begins with pre-mining stage to post-mining through mining activities and at different stages it impacted over the people and the local ecology, environment, socio-economic condition directly.

During the course of mining, the socio-economic condition of the mining areas has been changed with new economic activities and inflow of outsiders to the area for employment which further pushes the local inhabitants to the periphery. The impact on ecology has changed the forest and agriculture-based economy and with environmental impact on water, air and soil, the agriculture has become costly affair accompanied with a shortage of agricultural workers who mostly shift to construction work. The sub-human condition of casual mining workers in mining area needs a special attention to address their vulnerability because a majority of them are Adivasis who have been uprooted due to mining and relocated in emerging mining slums.

The PMKKKY has developed a model guideline for States where 60 % of the funds has to be allocated for drinking water, environment preservation, pollution control measures and primary healthcare, education, welfare of women and children, welfare of aged and disabled people, directly and indirectly, affected people in the area. It will give emphasis on skill development for livelihood and local sanitation through waste management and provision of toilets and related facilities. The rest 40 % will be spent on physical infrastructure development, irrigation, energy, watershed development and improving environmental quality in mining areas of the district. The administrative cost of will does not exceed 5 % of the annual receipt of DMF. The activities of PMKKKY will compliment to the ongoing State and Central Government schemes and programmes in the area and it will converge with State and district plans as extra-budgetary resources. The utilisation of PMKKKY will follow the provisions of Panchayatraj extension to scheduled area Act and Forest rights Act in 5th scheduled areas and Gram Sabha's approval will be needed in

identification of beneficiaries, planning and execution of the projects. The DMF will have to maintain complete transparency by sharing all kinds of information with public through a website and voluntary disclosure under RTI Act .The annual reports of DMF shall be discussed in the Assembly.

The DMF and PMKKKY bear much importance for mineral bearing State like Odisha which has the largest share of value of mineral production among the major States of India in 2013-2014 and also having deposits of major minerals. The value of mineral production in Odisha was `54,531 crore in 2013-2014 as reported in Odisha Economic Survey 2014-2015. The major mineral bearing districts such as Keonjhar, Sundergarh, Angul, Jajpur, Bolangiri, Kalahandi, Koraput, Jharasuguda, Mayurbhanj, and other districts having both major and minor minerals should use this as an opportunity for local area development along with other schemes such as CSR and periphery development fund and compensatory forestation etc in mining and industrial areas. The major mining areas of Odisha, also 5th scheduled area of the State, having a large number of tribal population can avail special grants like Article 275(1), Tribal sub plan, special projects for PVTGs and for tribal development. Many such financial provisions can ensure holistic development of mining area.

The minor mineral sector is governed by State under Minor Mineral Concession Rules 1990 with an amendment in 2014. The MMDR Act made provision of royalty to be collected from minor minerals by the State for DMF by adding section 15A. The portion of royalty collected from minor minerals will also be deposited in DMF to be decided by the State. Odisha has major and minor minerals in every district; so there will be DMF in every district.

The Central Government has revised the royalty with effect from September 2014 considering the demand of the State and by the recommendation of study group on mineral royalty. The Government of Odisha has been demanding to raise the royalty of iron ore on ad valorem basis. The Ad valorem royalty refers to royalty based on a percentage of the value of the mineral extracted. The royalty of iron ore and chromite is 15 % of average sales price on ad valorem basis. In case of graphite, it is Rs 25 per tonne. For manganese, it is five per cent of average sale price on ad valorem basis. The exploitation of iron ore in Odisha for the year 2013-2014 was 78 million tonnes.

The Government of Odisha has made draft rules for DMF. The Union Mines Ministry has circulated a model draft district mineral

foundation trust to the States. It has been suggested that the DMF should lead by people's representatives of the district with inclusive composition of people from diverse walks of life including experts as well as experienced people from different social groups with gender balance to represent different concerns. The involvement of mining affected people's organisations, social movements, civil society bodies, environmental groups, trade unions, PRIs, media and local institutions must have to be ensured in such forums to contribute to planning and monitoring and ensuring transparency and public accountability. The Government of Odisha should discuss PMKKKY and DMF at district level especially in major mineral bearing districts of the State involving all concerned to build understanding on the process for its effective implementation in the interest of the people in mining areas in particular and State in general.

26 September 2015

STOP ILLEGAL MINING FOR FAST GROWTH OF MINERAL AREAS

Recently, the Union Mines Minister has admitted the existence of thousands of illegal mining of major and minor minerals in the country. The fraudulent miners take the advantage of non-effective enforcement of laws and a well build nexus with elite bureaucrats and mafia politicians. The illegal mining is a matter of concern as it has huge ramification over the economy, environment and livelihood of locals.

The Karnataka Lokayukta report, 2010, and Justice MB Shah Commission report 2014, and Vigilance report on iron ore mines in Karnataka, Goa and Odisha have revealed the continuance of huge illegal mining in a number of ways. There were mines without mandatory environmental clearance and operating close to protected area; mining operation taking place beyond the permissible area; lack of pollution control measures and under-reporting of quantity of extraction of ores and its value; irregularity in filing returns to Government leading to underpayment of royalty to State, and even many of the mines in operation without renewal permit. The States of Jharkhand, Goa and Odisha have not yet submitted the latest action taken report to the coordination cum empowered committee headed by Union Mines Secretary.

It has been estimated by the Shah Commission and other agencies that due to illegal mining the mineral bearing States including Odisha have lost royalty worth hundreds of crores of rupees. The mining areas in the States have witnessed deforestation, pollution of land, water and air and its damaging impact over the local people's life and livelihood. The easy way of black money earning through illegal mining has paved the way for all other related illegal activities and encouraged anti-social elements. It has also impacted over elections to Parliament, Assemblies and local bodies and weakened the democratic institutions of governance in many ways which put a big question mark on effective governance and representative democracy.

Odisha having deposits of iron ore, manganese and chromite, which are very important basic minerals, requires modern infrastructure and industrial development, having an international market. Iron ore deposits are available in countries such as China, Australia, Brazil, India, Russia, South Africa and USA, etc and in India deposits are

found in Goa, Karnataka, Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. Odisha has deposits of iron ore in districts of Keonjhar, Sundargarh and Mayurbhanj. The iron ore mining in Odisha dates back to 1910 in Gorumahisani in Mayurbhanj when lease was given to Tata by the then king of the Mayurbhanj State. The lease was awarded almost without royalty. In the post independent era, the leaseholders include State and Centre owned public sector companies such as SAIL and OMC and private companies for both captive and export purpose and the rate of royalty has been very minimal even with the increasing demand for iron ore and its sales price. The minerals from Odisha such as iron ore and chrome ore are being exported to China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Spain, Australia and UAE. The metallurgical products such as pig iron, sponge iron, Ferrochrome, Ferromanganese, charge chrome and aluminium are exported to China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, USA, Russia, Spain, Canada, Iran, UK, and Germany from the Paradeep port of Odisha.

Along with India other countries are also featured as world's top-20 steel producers. As reported in Odisha economic survey, the total export value of minerals and metallurgical products exported from Paradeep port was Rs 1,122,428 lakh for the year 2013-2014. The production value of iron ore for the year 2013-2014 was Rs 25,867 crore with production of 78 lakh MT. China has been the biggest producer as well as importer of iron ore.

The issue of illegal mining export came more visibly in the State with the capsizing of Black Rose ship in Paradeep coast which is still lying deep in the sea water for last six years loaded with 24,000 metric ton of iron ore. The ship and the consignment go unclaimed till date. After the Shah Commission of inquiry, the State Government suspended 128 mining lease of iron ore, chrome, manganese and limestone mines and also cancelled 482 licenses for trading and storage of minerals as action against illegal mining.

The closer of mining in the iron ore belt has affected local employment and transporters of minerals in the absence of alternative sources of income in the area. In spite of un-sustainability, still mining has a source of employment and income. This has encouraged huge distress migration of the locals in search of job to other places.

During last hundred years of mining, the iron ore bearing area become desert like and the natives have been displaced and lost their livelihood without development. The mafias have taken control of the

areas with all kinds of illegal activities including theft and pilferage of mineral resources with active support of politician–bureaucracy nexus.

The iron ore bearing areas are backward ex-feudal States ruled by kings where a vast majority of locals are Adivasis who are mostly illiterate, unorganised and almost unaware about the happening in their area. Their leaders are co-opted by ruling parties with reserve seats. Many of the protective laws, rights and entitlements are not being implemented in the interest of the locals and their basic issues remain unaddressed. The natural sources of their livelihood, language, culture and identity have slowly been destroyed to make them refugees in their own land. Their vulnerability has been used to make them lowly paid workers of mining.

It has been always told by everyone that Odisha has mineral deposits but it was equally important to tell in which way these resources are being used for the people. Historically the post independent legal provisions of mining sector with Central control deprived the mineral bearing States of getting genuine royalty as an important source of non-tax revenue. The States also have been ineffective in the management of mineral revenue administration.

In the changing trends in the mineral sector with liberalisation and centralisation, Odisha should focus on three major areas such as (1) collection of royalty by minimising undervaluation and reporting of mining companies (2) managing environment during mining and post-mining, (3) employment and livelihood of local people.

The Government has to ensure that the miners strictly follow the environment management plan, submit annual environment audit statement, stress on forest and local area development, employment for local people and their livelihood. The huge loss of forest, water bodies, land and ecology should be regenerative with all efforts as per rules laid down in the mineral concession rules.

The MMDR Act amendment has provisions of power to States to control illegal mining by setting up special courts with power of Court of Session. All offence under the MMDR Act will be subject to a maximum punishment of five years imprisonment or fine of Rs 5 lakh per hectare. There are also a number of new commitments by provision of law such as compensatory afforestation programme, corporate social responsibility and District Mineral Foundation which also require high level of Government attention for effective

implementation in the interest of the people. While controlling illegal mining, the synergy of the whole process should affirmatively contribute to bring positive change in the quality of life of the local people, mining workers and others affected and displaced by mining activities for inclusive development of the State.

03 October 2015

HIGH TIME INDIA ADOPTED PROPORTIONATE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The two most popular electoral systems in practice all over the world are First Past the Post (FPTP) and Proportional Electoral System (PES). The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Sweden, says that 90 countries in the world have in practice PES. The countries including, India, Canada, USA and UK have adopted FPTP, but there has been strong demands from various quarters in the countries in support of the PES.

The last 2015 elections in the United Kingdom have triggered a debate over the FPTP system as the electoral system there failed voters because the UK Independent Party and Green Party got just two seats despite the overall share of votes of 12 %. The winner Conservative Party formed the Government without a coalition with just 37 % of votes.

So parties those who failed to convert their votes to seats are seriously forming alliances to demand electoral reforms in the UK. Many such countries, with traditionally two-party system and emerging to multi parties, are facing the problem.

After passing through seven years of struggle, our most favourite neighbour country Nepal has formally adopted its new constitution. The constitution has included changes of electoral system from FPTP to Parallel system without threshold in the parliament election and by this it has enabled more proportional representation of political parties. The system has also allowed for a more inclusive representation of women and other marginalised groups such as Dalit, Adivasi, KhasArya, Madhesi, Tharu, and Muslim. The preamble of the constitution of Nepal is committed to create an egalitarian society to ensure equitable economy, prosperity and social justice. It has included provision on political parties which says that political parties should be democratic with regular elections and the executive committees at all level should reflect the diversity of the country.

In South Asia, Nepal and Srilanka are experimenting with different electoral systems. India being the largest democracy has FPTP system. It follows the UK as a former colony but the demand for PES is increasingly gaining momentum in India. Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr BR Ambedker, Kaji Sayedi Karimudin, Mahebuballi Beg, Jayaprakash Narayan and different socialist, Dravidian and minority outfits and all

Left parties advocated for proportional representation in India. The National Law Commission of India and Dr JM Lyngdoh, former Chief Election Commissioner, pointed out the inherent shortcomings of FPTP system and MC Raj, founder of Campaign for Electoral Reforms in India (CERI) in his book 'Electoral Systems', has clarified public misgiving on PES and well argued for proportional representation system.

India being a multicultural society with coalition politics for last two decades should think about an alternative system to replace FPTP because the electoral system has been the root cause of many problems in the post-colonial governance. The electoral system is very vital for good governance, legislation and policy making which build the socio-economic and socio-political development of country. The post independent general elections since 1952 have witnessed that always parties with less percentage of vote formed the Government. There has been no value of all votes though the principle of the constitution says one man one value in vote and therefore each vote must carry the same value in democracy. The formation of nation State has promised to all its citizens political Governance with principles of equal citizenship, right to vote and right to contest election to become part of governance but how can one citizen realise these rights without the protection of the State. So the State has to ensure an environment where free and fair election can be conducted and all the candidates get equal support by the State to avoid unequal competition among rich and poor candidates in terms of money and muscle power. It is mostly the upper-class candidates, former kings and Zamindars, businessman, owners of corporations, who by using money, muscle, media, caste and communal and patriarchy, influence the voters and win elections. Many poor candidates are not able to campaign at par with their opponents.

These days party's high command has final say over distribution of party tickets and often the high command do it on partisan basis.

There is lack of inter-party democracy within the party without regular elections and inclusive representation of people from diverse social groups of our society. Women and marginalised groups are cornered within party. In FPTP it is always the personal responsibility of the candidate with less role of the party to win election in a cut-throat competition by using all kinds of unfair means. The powerful and rich candidates encourage dummy candidates to contest election to divide the votes so that it will be easier to get elected. It has been

observed that even candidates getting less than ten percent of the total polling are getting elected. The rest 90 % of the votes go waste.

The Election Commission sources say there are more than 1,000 registered political parties in the country and in the last general election of 2014, a total of 446 political parties contested the election. There are two major visible national coalitions such as NDA with 29 parties and UPA with 12 parties contested the last elections.

The six national parties, BJP, Congress, NCP, BSP, CPI and CPI (M) have disproportionate representations in the Lok Sabha. Their votes have not been converted into seats. The ruling BJP with its 31 % of votes has got 52 % of seat in the Lok Sabha and all other parties have very disproportionate representation. It is a matter of concern in parliamentary democracy because both ruling and opposition have equal responsibility in democratic Governance and accountability to the people of the country.

Take for the example of Odisha. There were a total of 2, 88, 81, 030 voters in 2014 out of which 74 % of voters cast their vote.

There are 34 political parties who contested the elections for the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly. The BJD got 44.10 (94,91,497) % of votes in Lok Sabha and 43.4 % in Assembly with total vote of 93,34,852 but in terms of seat it has 20 seats in Lok Sabha out of 21 and 117 seats in Assembly out of total 147 which is eight per cent of the total seats. While the Congress has got 26 % of the votes without a single seat in Parliament, the BJP with 21.5 % of votes has won only one MP seat. The BSP and JMM have got 1 % and 0.8 % of votes respectively. Both the parties with social base among SCs and STs have continued to get support. Odisha is having 40 % of the population as SCs and STs but the parties have almost nil presence in the Governance of the State. The two communist parties, the CPI and the CPI (M), have got 0.3 % and 0.2 % respectively. CPI (M) has only one representative and CPI has no presence in the State Assembly. It is a known fact that political parties with mass base have been in the forefront of the people's struggle in the State but in spite of their overall vote, they have no presence in the legislative bodies. Their leaders' voice goes unheard of in the Assemblies because of the electoral system.

It is important that all votes should be converted into seats where all votes must have an equal value and this can be possible by changing our electoral system from FPTP to PES. We have to bring change in

the Representation of People's Act 1951. Democracy is a form of Governance that emerged through ages of people's struggle for equality and justice and without widening democracy through proportional representation we cannot achieve equality in the country.

10 October 2015

WOMEN SHOULD GET PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

The makers of modern India recognise gender-based discrimination and patriarchy in our social life and affirm to ensure gender justice through various provisions in the Constitution such as the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

After 65 years of independence, still women's participation in socio-political and socio-economic sphere remains a distant dream. For a number of reasons, gender-based violence in public and private sphere has been increasing and it is a matter of grave concern for all of us as a national issue. The participation of women in executive and judiciary remains under-represented but the participation of women in governance is very vital to address the concerns of women through policy and legislations. The voice of women is almost muted with an insignificant presence in Parliament and State Assemblies of our country. The women should have proportional representation in politics and especially in Parliament and State Assemblies. In a representative democracy, people from all segments should be proportionately represented. The 16th Lok Sabha with 543 MPs has only 12 % of women members which is the highest number in the history of Parliament. The Rajya Sabha also has the same percentage of women member. The national average of women representation across all the State Assemblies in India is only 9 %. Even there are States and union territories without women member in their Legislative Assembly and several States have no women Minister. The inter-Parliamentary union ranked India at 105th position out of 190 countries having women representation in Parliament. Even, India is below global average of 22 % as on May 2015. Women constitute only 22 % of the members of Parliament around the world as reported by inter-parliamentary union. India is behind countries like Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh in terms of women representation in Parliament. Globally, the change process of women representation has been very slow which will take a long time in achieving equal representation if some major State intervention will not take place.

There are countries like Rwanda and Bolivia which have more than 50 % of women representation and about ten countries, such as France, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Cuba, Finland and Egypt

have more than 40 % of women in parliament. Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians having 63.8 % of the seats in the Lower House. It is because many of these countries have provided reservation to women and many political parties in Europe have voluntarily made provision of women representation in political sphere in a number of ways including party leadership and representation in governance. The countries such as Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh have made provision of reservation for women in national parliament. As a result, these countries have more than 20 % women representation. It is also observed that countries with Proportional Representation (PR) as electoral system, women hold better representation, almost more than one-fourth of the seats, and also shows an increase in representation of women because of the importance of party in the electoral system.

Political scholars give emphasis on electoral system to increase women representation. The countries with First Past The Post (FPTP) system such as India have shown under-representation of women where electoral system is being recognised as one of the factors that restricts proportional women representation. The ten countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, South Africa, Norway, Germany, New Zealand, Nederland and Mozambique with the highest percentage of women in parliament have PR electoral system.

Worldwide it is understood that women reservation is not discrimination against men rather it is a positive intervention and means towards achieving equality. About 85 countries in the world have a gender-based quota system to ensure women representation in governance. The status of women representation in BRICS countries is also very discouraging with exception of South Africa and Asia below America and Europe in terms of women representation.

India being a country of diversity with unequal social structure and continued discrimination based on caste and gender the issues of women representation need to be addressed in the governance. The caste discriminated communities such as SCs and STs have been protected under provisions of reservation in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

Similarly, there should be reservation for women and within women reservation to ensure social diversity, representation of women of marginalised communities such as SC, ST, OBC and minority should be inbuilt by inclusion of women of such social groups. Because it is a fact that women of marginalised groups suffer the triple

discrimination based on caste, class and gender, still they are struggling for survival against all kinds of inequalities being practised by dominant social groups. Take the example of Odisha where SCs, STs, OBCs and minority constitute a majority of the population, but the women of these social groups are not visible in policy making and legislative bodies. There are women of most backward tribal groups in interior parts who are even not able to come to a minimum level of participation. The literacy rate of Bonda women is 2 % only and they suffer all forms of exploitation and discrimination in everyday life. So how to ensure the representation of such primitive tribal communities who are suffering from extreme poverty and illiteracy and continued internal colonisation of dominant caste and class of people. The women of such marginalised groups are not part of the policy decisions about their life and livelihood. The under-representation of women in governance is one of the major reasons of growing violence against women and many cases of atrocities, domestic violence, rape, murder and physical assault, exploitation of labour, denial of wage and sexual harassment at workplace are not getting registered by policy and not even reported by local media and discussed in our Parliament and Assemblies. The Odisha Legislative Assembly has only 11 women members which are just 7 % of the total members. Out of the 11, five are SCs and STs because of reservation for SCs and STs. Since inception of State Assembly in 1936 only 66 women have entered the Assembly, 12 to Rajya Sabha and seven to Lok Sabha from the State. Women of Odisha, especially the marginalised groups, are almost invisible in matter of public affairs.

The reproductive role of women, responsibility for family and children, conservative religion and cultural practices, gender and caste-based discrimination, poor economic status, dependency on male and above all, the attitude of male-dominated upper class and caste political parties are the major challenges before women representation.

The convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) speaks about the principles of equal opportunities in public life which has been rectified by 163 nations. The UN Beijing platform for action aims for 50:50 gender balance in all areas of society and advocating for full participation of women on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in decision-making process and access to power which are fundamental towards achievement of equality, development and peace.

The Panchayatraj institutions in the country are proportionately represented by women because of women reservation by 73rd amendment to the Constitution in 1992 reserving 33 % of seats in Panchayati Raj institutions for women. It has impacted well over the local self-governance. Rural women including women of SC, ST and OBC have been participating in large number in the local governance. It is unfortunate that the Women Reservation Bill introduced in Parliament in 1996 for 33 % reservation has not yet been passed in spite of support by major ruling parties. It is expected that the BJP-led NDA will make it possible in the near future to make history of women representation in governance. There is also a need to amend

The Representation of the Peoples Act 1951 to bring the PR electoral system in place of present FPTP electoral system in practice. Therefore, it is being agreed by many political parties that India should adopt PR system along with women reservation to ensure proportional representation of women in Parliament and State Assemblies towards building inclusive democracy.

20 June 2015

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM ENSURES INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY

The emergence of democracy with its methods and instruments of governance had designed different electoral systems. It has thus deepened its wider reach in order to make it more relevant in the complex situations of the specific countries. Worldwide, the two most popular electoral systems, First Past the post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR), are in practice in most countries that adopted representative democracy. 89 countries have adopted PR and there has been a trend to shift from FPTP to PR in many other countries.

In a country like India with so much of diversity based on language, culture, ethnicity and highly unequal rigid social structure, the question of representation has always been a matter of great concern. During the great debates in constituent assembly by the elected members it was proposed by many to adopt PR electoral system for India. However, Dr. Ambedker withheld it for two reasons. One was inadequate literacy of the voters. The other was the situation of the post independent India, separation of Pakistan, with emerging threat of disintegration of India as a Nation. It was prime task to keep India together in a unitary spirit and it was thought that too much of diverse representation might be a potential threat to the national sovereignty and integrity. It might be difficult for the parliament to handle too many diverse concerns of a number of small groups and also difficult in building a national consensus in matters of national interest. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Ambedker were in favour of PR system, which they have accepted later after realising the failure of true representation of minorities, women and other persecuted castes, ethnic groups and linguistic nation states. The debate of representation was in the first round table in 1931 in London followed by communal award and the historic turn in Poona pact of 1932, which has paved the way of political representation in governance through reservation of seats for the depressed classes were later called as SC and STs in 1936 leaving women, religious minority and others to come through a direct contest. Representation through political reservation of seats has been subject to a number of criticisms. They were based on the grounds of party dominance in selection of candidates and dependence on non-Dalit voters to win in reserved seats, who were the majority of voters in reserve constituencies. As a result of which the elected leaders of Dalit communities depend on

more on non-Dalits to win rather than on Dalits whom they represent. Ambedkar did not prefer a parliamentary democracy based on FPTP especially in the context of India because the communal majority could easily command a political majority. He advocated Single Transferrable Vote (STV) with plural member constituencies. His famous argument for social, economic and political democracy on the principle of one man—one vote and one value is very much relevant for building inclusive democracy. But in FPTP, each vote has no value. We have wasted votes and all votes are not converted into seats. In the present Lok Sabha BSP with 20%, DMK with 27% and Left parties of WB with 30% share have only 2 members of Left. The other two have no presence at all. In the first general elections in 1952, the percentage of successful candidates who secured less than 50 % of the votes was 67.28 %. The percentage was 82.68 % in the 2009 elections. It is a fact that majority of elected members of Lok Sabha in recent years won a minority of votes cast in their constituencies. We have been mechanically following electoral democracy without making it fully representative of all.

It was the left leaning and members from minority community those who proposed PR in the constituent assembly with the argument of democratic representation of people's representatives from various section of our society. Majority of the members of the constituent assembly were freedom fighters, patriots and not experts of constitutional legislation. It may be understood that the colonial legacy and hangover during power transfer has overpowered the then leaders in the process of power transfer. As a result, not only India, but all other countries that were former British colonies are practising FPTP. However, the recent election 2015 in UK has raised debate over the FPTP electoral system. Parties such as Green party, in spite of their increase in voting percentage, have disproportionately decreased seat share and now Green party along with other small parties are demanding PR in UK. The Green party has planned to mobilise other smaller parties and a wider public debate about proportional representation. The number of seats won by the party shows the unfairness of first past the post electoral system. The Greens with 1.1 million have got only one seat and the conservatives with only ten times more votes have got 331 seats. In a fully proportional representation system, the Greens would have got 25 seats and the conservative with their vote share of 37 % would have got 240 seats. The Green party focuses more on social, economic and environmental issues. The post-independence India witnesses a number of concerns

in a different phase of political development in the country. The leader of the Dravidian movement C. Annadurai argued for PR. It is being confirmed by K. Karunanidhi recently in 2014 after election debacle of DMK without a single seat in Parliament in spite of 97 lakh vote. The cause of PR was more visible with demand of Jayaprakash Narayan, as president of Citizens for Democracy in 1974 set up a committee with Jurist V.M. Tarkunde along with Mavlaner, AG Noorani, Prof KD Desai and EPW D'Costa as its members. They were mandated to study electoral reforms and the committee recommended a public discussion on PR electoral system.

The 170th report of the Law Commission of India chaired by Justice BP Jeevan Reddy submitted its report in May 1999 suggested electoral reforms. It suggested that it should be the mixed member PR as in Germany. The DMK, Left parties and Siromani Akali Dal have recommended to the Law Commission of India to recommend fifty percent of elected representatives of Parliament and assemblies should be through PR.

Lok Satta party founded by Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan since 2006 has been demanding to replace FPTP with PR for better governance.

The Campaign for Electoral Reforms in India (CERI) a national platform of political parties, academics, CSOs and social movements has been engaged in campaign for electoral reforms focusing on PR system for India. It has roped in electoral systems experts and former chief election commissioners, political scientists and many others concerned to develop a PR system suitable for India. The campaign has generated lots of literature on PR and is promoting public education. CERI suggested that India should have 30 FPTP and 70 PR. Each voter has two votes, one for the party and the other for the candidate by increasing the number of seats of Parliament.

Almost all the left parties including CPI, CPIM, CPIML, CPIML (Red star) and others have been vocally arguing for PR and in their party organs the issue of PR has been well articulated by party leaders. Eminent leaders like Sitaram Yechury of CPIM and D. Raja of CPI have raised the issue in the Parliament on different occasions. In a recent move All India Progressive Forum, All India People's Forum (AIPF), an all-India platform of people's movements and activists have identified PR as one of the core agenda of their campaign.

It is suggested to amend the Representation of Peoples Act 1951 in this regard but before that it needs a wider debate and mass political

education in the country about the kind of PR India is looking for. It is also true that PR is not a panacea to all our problems but representative democratic governance has a close link with the electoral system and it is observed that countries with PR electoral system are also good in social and human development. Many of the countries, prominent as good performer in the list of Global Human development Index (HDI), Global happiness Index, food security and social security index and also featured in the bottom of global corruption index have various forms of PR electoral system in practice. Why is this? Is there any correlation with electoral systems and good governance?

27 June 2015

CHAPTER-3

SOCIAL SECURITY & POVERTY ALLEVIATION

ODISHA YET TO HAVE A ROBUST, INCLUSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY PLAN

Universal social security measures by the State are required to build an inclusive democratic society. It ensures a sense of belonging among its citizens who feel that the society takes care of its people of all ages, classes and groups. The unwell, weak, poor, children, elderly and unemployed are always in need of special care and protection because of their vulnerability. Our social culture and State policy should take care of all its vulnerable sections by ensuring material comfort and emotional support to live a dignified life without depending on others' mercy. But in spite of constitutional mandate, our State social security policy has not been universalised to ensure social security for all people irrespective of their nature of employment.

The employees of organised sector in Government, private and semi Government jobs have a better retirement life while a majority of people who are in unorganised and informal sector have a very miserable life in their old age. They do not have a privilege of pension with dearness allowances. The provision of old age pension for them is very minimal and irregular which cannot provide a dignified and decent living. They have to depend on private source or on other earning family members for survival. In the absence of such family support system many of them are pushed to begging and destitute condition and these cases are very often reported in media. Though depending on sons and daughters has been a tradition in our society but in recent time due to economic and demographic change, composition of family and migration from rural to urban areas in search of employment have contributed to the increasing burden of managing family with elderly people which have been a challenge to the poor and it has led to a number of complex social issues. The poor migrant workers are leaving their old and ailing parents at home without any humanitarian assistance shown by the society.

There has been an increase in old age homes, beggars, orphanages and shelter homes for the deserted and destitute in the State. It is reported that the condition of elderly people in rural area has become worst in the absence of a proper social security mechanism. The social security policy is not just a State sponsored charity but it is also closely linked to growth and has a direct impact on employment, production, work culture and quality of life of the people. It is the most integral part of the overall development of a society.

The developed countries of the world with better social and human development standards such as Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand, The Nederland and Australia have a better social security system while the poor and developing countries such as India are still struggling to establish a developed universal social security system. In recent time of post globalisation it has been widely debated over State investment and public finance spending on social security and its impact on economy and role of emerging market forces but worldwide it is being understood that social security has a close link with the economic growth and the State has a major role in ensuring social security for all its citizens especially for the vulnerable sections by adopting a universal social security policy beneficial to all.

The International Social Security Association, Geneva's report in 2012 on BRICS countries revealed that India has a very weak social security policy in comparison to Brazil, China, Russia and South Africa which have adopted international standards covering important areas such medical, sickness, maternity, old age, family, invalidity, unemployment, employment injury and death. The Allianz Global investor's Pension Sustainability Index 2014 says India has one of the world's weakest pension systems.

Brazil has a major social security programme. The Russian federation and China with a socialistic principle have universal social security, State pension system and universal compulsory nature of social insurance. South Africa has more inclusive social security policy that includes the excluded and marginalised groups. The Russian federation has a good mother and childcare policy and its funeral grant provision has been continuing for a long time. It is argued that a good pension system, healthcare and social assistance are intended to reduce inequality and help in building a democratic society that ensures equality and stimulate economic growth. Therefore social security measures should be integrated into the larger process of building democracy for an egalitarian society.

The concept of equality and universality has been rooted in the Constitution of India. It has been told in the Directive Principles of State Policy about the social security measures to be taken by the State but still most of the social security laws are limited to the organised sector workers and privileged few. They have not been extended to informal sector workers while 90 % of the workers in India are in the informal sector and mostly in rural areas. The Unorganized Sector Social Security Act, 2008 has remained unimplemented to a large

extent. A vast majority of informal workers are in agriculture sector. The income of one in five informal workers is below poverty line. The workers in agriculture sector are seasonally employed. The most popular social security measures by Government of India for the poor such as Indira Gandhi National Old age Pension Scheme, Rashtriya Swasta Bima Yojana, Janashree Bima Yojana, Ama Admi Bima Yojana, Mid Day Meal, Targeted Public Distribution system, Annapurna, Antodaya and conditional cash transfer etc have largely benefited the poor but these are not available under one umbrella in the absence of an integrated and coherent social security policy. The quantum of subsidy is very minimal and still it has not reached to the deserving people in rural areas.

The Centre has proposed Atala Pension Yojana and Universal Social Security scheme for ailing and elderly people. The poor and socially marginalised groups in rural and remote areas have not been yet fully covered under available social security schemes because the committed involvement of the State and local bodies is most important in implementing the social security measures. The State has a major role in building social security infrastructure and developing a social security administrative mechanism. There are States such as Kerala which has done exemplary work in terms of benefiting the poor and vulnerable sections with State sponsored social security measures. The States like Tamil Nadu ,Uttarakhand and Kerala have introduced pension for agricultural labourers and farmers and Uttar Pradesh has programme such as Samajwadi pension scheme for milk producing farmers , SC , ST and minority.The Tamil Nadu agriculture labourers - farmers social security and welfare scheme has provisions of pension , education ,marriage and maternity benefits which cover the whole family.

With a large presence of informal workers and marginalised social groups, Odisha has a very poor social security measure in comparison to other States in India. Many of the social security schemes implemented in the State are mostly supported by the Centre and barring a few sectoral initiatives such as Madhubabu Pension Yojana and Construction Workers Welfare Scheme, the State has not developed any universal schemes out of own fund and also not fully utilised the Central schemes in the State. The Government of Odisha should go for integrated universal social security schemes because of the large presence of poor and marginalised groups who are mostly engaged in informal sector such as agriculture, forestry, fishing,

construction work and not being covered under formal social security laws.

The State initiative for construction workers through building and other construction workers welfare fund is most welcome step though not enough. A similar initiative is highly required for forest and agricultural workers, farmers and fisher folk and other rural and urban poor. The social security should include the provision of universal health, education and public distribution system and employment opportunity for all with the protection of poor from market forces.

Saturday, 18 April 2015

STATE MUST ENSURE FOOD SECURITY FOR THE VULNERABLE

The right to food is a non-negotiable fundamental human right and it is the primary responsibility of a State to ensure it for all. The State has to make efforts to improve food production, regulate price and also to develop a mechanism for its equitable distribution among all sections of people. Especially, the State has to make efforts to improve access of poor to sufficient and quality food by ensuring employment, standard income and an inclusive public food distribution system. The Global Food Security Index (GFSI) of 2014 by The Economist ranked India 69 out of 109 countries of the world. The GFSI covers the issues of affordability, availability and quality across a set of 109 countries. It is revealed that the countries ranked from one to ten in the list are USA, Norway, France, Austria, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Canada, Belgium and New Zealand those have been implementing food safety net programme for a long time for poor households and food is also affordable for all.

For example, education and feeding programme for the poor in Europe have been continuing since nineteenth century. Norway has school breakfast programme since 1897. These countries are not only industrially developed but also have achieved high social and human development. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the World Bank suggest that food safety net has positive impact over growth. The world food summit held in Rome made a resolution to reduce the number of food insecure people by 2015 with food aid by leading industrialised countries, mostly G8 of the world. The Global Hunger Index 2014 by IFPRI ranked India at 63 out of 76 countries. The average per capita food consumption of India is much lower than global average and it is further lower for poor States and marginalised social groups in remote, inaccessible and backward areas.

The Government of poor States such as Odisha with large presence of poor marginalised social groups has a major role to ensure food security. Historically, Odisha has been struggling with the challenge of food insecurity since the days of famine in 1866. The free food distribution programme was introduced for the poor by the then British Government to tackle the famine of those days. Odisha has been known as one of the poorest States of India for its continued huge poverty, chronic backwardness and distress labour migration. It

is reported that in few parts of the State poor people eat leaves, roots of trees in distress and dying a premature death. There have been reports of hunger death, malnutrition and extreme poverty in rural areas of the State in spite of organised efforts by the State and other stakeholders in many ways to meet the challenges.

The economy of Odisha is currently passing through a transition which is impacting over food security of the poor. The ongoing economic trend shows a process of industrialisation through FDI with capital intensive models that are taking over the traditional sources of food of the poor communities, without offering an improved and viable alternative source of food security. Rather the poor are pushed to more vulnerable situation than before. The traditional access of the poor to food from natural sources such as land, forest, sea, river and other water bodies is getting restricted due to a number of reasons that includes use of land for non-food producing activities, privatisation of common resources, pollution, environmental and ecological changes. The emerging industrial hubs in the State are filled with inflow of relatively more skilled labourers from outside the State.

This process has created a challenging and competitive environment that deprived the poor locals of employment in industries. It has been observed that the outside employees have a sizeable presence in the industrial and mining areas while the labour migration from the State is increasing. For example Similiguda, Rourkela, Jharasuguda, Angul, Joda, Badabil, Paradip, Rourkela, Kalinganagar, Gopalpur have a sizeable presence of people outside Odisha engaged in business, trade and employed in the local mines and industries. Though the people in these areas have faced huge displacement and loss of livelihood but the share of local people of different social groups in employment by industries has been a matter of concern and remains unaddressed. As food security is closely linked to employment, the State Government has to ensure employment opportunity for the people of the State from different social groups. The State Government has to make plans to make people employable through skill development training and protection of locals in employment policy.

The employment opportunities in the informal sector in rural areas are seasonal and the wage rate is very low to manage a family. Most of the poor people engaged in informal sector have food insecurity. In spite of increase in food production, the access of the poor has not increased due to restricted access to food markets because of unemployment, low wage and low income. The control of Government

over food market has been minimal and limited to a few items only. The small producers in the State, mostly the sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers, agricultural workers, milk producing farmers, forest produce collectors and fisher folk are struggling hard to make a living out of their production which is always a peril with disaster and calamities. They sell their produce at low price in distress to meet other expenses and to make further investment to continue the production. Food storage is one of the important concerns of small producers in rural areas due to lack of proper storage facility in the village.

The seasonal nature of production pushed the small producers for distress sell in the absence of proper storage facilities. The storage facility is required to maintain local food availability for households and communities by developing small producer cooperatives that can take care of production and storage of its members. Every village should have food storage infrastructure and the Government should directly purchase from the small producers to meet the local food need under different Government food security programmes. It has been argued by food rights groups that the Government has to continue food security programme for the poor till they will have a standard income with dignified employment. The ongoing food security programme should be universal to all poor in spite of their identities. The quality of food should meet the minimum calories need to children, women, elder, people with disability and working population. Considering the situation in Odisha, the State should have universal PDS along with subsidised food distribution in each block-level especially in remote and backward blocks with more number of BPL population and large presence of marginalised social groups.

The ICDS centres and mid-day meal (MDM) in schools should qualitatively improved and make discrimination-free dignified access of all sections of people without any social barrier. The girl children, women, especially pregnant women must be fed with quality food to ensure child and mother care to counter higher infant mortality rate, low wet baby birth and higher mother mortality rate etc. The basic food need such as rice, wheat, dal, salt, sugar, potato, onion, oil and milk should be provided under universal public distribution system in each village. There should be free kitchen for poor elderly people in the village. It is unfortunate that the children, women and elderly people in poor families are suffering a lot while the earning members of the family are migrating in search of livelihood. These vulnerable people in family remain unattended and are forced to live in a sub-

human condition. The State should implement food security laws and international standards of food security and ensure a well build food security programme covering all the poor of different socially groups. The spending should be ensured out of State investment and under the administrative control of the Government. Food security programme should not be directly managed by private organisations.

Saturday, 25 April 2015

SUBSIDISED RS. 5-A-MEAL TO PROVE BOON FOR THE POOR

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) by International Food Policy Research Institute ranked India at 63 out of 76 countries in 2014. Indian's hunger status is classified as serious. The GHI combines the indicators, such as undernourishment, child underweight and child mortality. The human development report by the UNDP for 2014 also ranked India at 137 out of 187 countries.

Odisha has 32 % of people below poverty line who are unable to spend more than Rs 841 in urban area and Rs 695 in rural area. The percentage of people below poverty line is extremely higher in case of Scheduled Tribes in Odisha. The STs constitute 64 % and the SCs 42 % of the State's population. Along with Odisha, the poverty level is very high in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The share of food expenditure in total expenditure declines in Odisha. The average monthly per capita consumer expenditure for urban area in Odisha is one of the lowest in India next to Bihar and it is highest in Kerala. Increasing food price has been impacting over the poor excessively as their wage and sources of income have not been expanding in the same proportion due to lack of opportunities created out of State investment.

Odisha having the highest percentage of BPL population of the country with huge distress migration, the existence of chronic poverty and hunger among historically marginalised groups, need to be subsidised food programme the most to counter the situation in order to ensure food security of the poor. The State has been a witness to hunger death in many parts in the absence of an integrated, inclusive food security programme for different economic groups.

As per the Government of India sources, during last 20 years, the food subsidy of the Central Government has increased by about 25 times from Rs 2,850 crore in 1991 to Rs 75,000 crore in 2012. Many States have developed their specific programmes to address the issues of food security.

Though late, a recent decision of the Government of Odisha is most welcome. It will be immensely helpful for the urban poor struggling to get the basic minimum. The State Government has decided to provide a meal of plain rice with Dalama at Rs 5 in urban areas under a scheme named 'Aahar'. The scheme will start from April in

Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Sambalpur, Brahmapur and Rourkela in bus stops, railway stations, collectorates, hospitals and other crowded places. In order to maintain quality, the local food inspectors will inspect the eateries. The Government has targeted to reach to 25,000 people every day. The Government will mobilise support of corporate houses to run the scheme. The State Government has already been providing food such as rice and wheat to the BPL and the APL families, subsidies, nutrition to children of 0 to 6 years and pregnant and lactating mothers through ICDS Angawanwadi centers, mid-day meal to students of Government run primary and upper primary schools, emergency feeding programme in KBK districts to ensure at least one cooked meal for two lakh old and destitute people. A few months back, the Government introduced the National Food Security Act, 2013 in the entire State in a phased manner to be covered by July, 2015. The scheme ensures 5kg food grains per person in a month for priority household.

States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala have gone much ahead in implementing subsidised food programmes such as midday meal for all students up to higher secondary level. Amma canteens in Tamil Nadu provide Idli at rate of Re 1, a plate of Samber rice at Rs 5 and curd rice at Rs 3. The scheme was introduced in 2013. The quality of food and drinking water at the eateries is well maintained. The canteens are managed by women self-help groups and municipal corporations. The women employees in the canteen get Rs 300 per day as salary along with other benefits.

In the State Budget 2013-14, Kerala introduced TRUPTI fare price restaurant to ensure food at reasonable price of Rs 20 at eateries in all Taluk headquarters. It is managed by women and the Government provides yearly grant of Rs 5 lakh for rent, electricity, water and a managerial subsidy of Rs 50,000 along with food, vegetables, fish and gas connection at subsidised rates

Tamil Nadu has been a pioneer in mid-day meal since 1963 and credit goes to the then Chief Minister Kamaraj Nadar who introduced this concept and the idea has been replicated by other States to combat malnutrition and boost primary education among children of poor communities. The wage provided to the employees, quality of food and coverage has been much better than other States. But in the case of Odisha, the quality of food, wage to the employees and coverage is very poor which need improvement. For example, the mid-day meal in Tamil Nadu includes eggs in the everyday diet of the students up to

higher secondary level and the cooks get a good salary with social security benefits but in Odisha, eggs are given only once in a week and the cook gets a paltry salary of Rs 1,000 only. The State investment is very less in comparison to others to ensure quality food and security of the employees.

The urban poor lead a very miserable life in the cities without proper house, drinking water and sanitation facilities. It has been observed that preparing food at home has been a struggle with the daily wage workers.

The rural poor are also visiting urban locations especially district headquarters, hospitals and other places for a number of reasons. The eateries may be helpful to the poor in getting lunch at a subsidised rate. This scheme may relax the burden of urban wage earners to some extent as well.

Saturday, 14 March 2015

ODISHA NEEDS TO COORDINATE EFFORTS AT POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) report 2015 says though progress is taking place in different spheres but it has not been inclusive. The poor and disadvantaged are being left out in spite of increase in official aid for their development by developed countries, Governments and private sector spending during last 20 years.

UN report on MDG says the official development assistance from developed countries has increased by 66 % in last 15 years. The countries such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden and UK have been contributing more than 0.7 % of their gross national income which is more than the UN official development assistance target. Along with a number of development programmes, the food subsidy of the Central Government has increased by 25 times during last 20 years; by 2012 it was Rs 75,000 crore. After the change in The Companies Act 2013, many of the foreign and national companies are getting involved in the programme that target to reduce poverty and inequality. In the context of Odisha, the international aid, Central assistance and corporate funding have increased in fighting poverty but still the progress is very discouraging and the poverty gap among social groups and regions is a matter of concern.

A number of reports by the Government and private bodies revealed that poverty reduction in Odisha is very slow and the incidence of poverty is higher in southwest and north-west region of the State. It is more acute among STs followed by SCs, and agricultural workers. There are more numbers of people living below poverty line in southwest Odisha and SCs and STs continue to be a majority among the poor. There are backward areas having poor social infrastructure and very marginal State investment has been done in building basic infrastructure, connectivity and communication, such as linking road, sanitation, drinking water supply and electricity, telephone and assets to provide educational and health services to the marginalised people. There are seven districts in the State which have no railway link and other infrastructure. Majority of the rural households have no productive assets such as land and landlessness is relatively higher among Dalit households all over the State in comparison to other social groups.

The last Odisha Economic Survey Report 2014-2015 says that given the Poverty Head Count Ratio (PHCR) percentage by different social groups for rural Odisha for the period 2004- 2012, the overall poverty level has reduced from 60.80 % to 35.69 % but in case of STs it has very marginally reduced from 84.40 % in 2004 to 63.52 % in 2011-2012 which is just less than two percent per year. Similarly, in case of SCs, it has reduced from 67.90 % to 41.39 % but in case of OBCs and others, the PHCR has come down from 52.70 % to 24.16 % and 37.10 % to 14.20 % respectively. The PHCR in case of coastal regions has come down to almost 50 % from 41.60 % to 21.65 % but in case of southern region, which includes the KBK districts, it has come down from 73.40 % to 48.00 % and in the northern region, it is from 70.50 % to 39.97 %. The incidence of poverty in KBK region has been remaining high and not being reduced to the desired extent.

In spite of continued spending in the backward districts, they still remain below the State average in many aspects even in achieving basic minimum. The district wise household access to toilets within their premises data for the year 2013-2014 says the districts features below State average of 22 % are mostly from southwestern and northern districts. The Odisha Economic Survey data 2013-2014 says the districts of Gajapati, Rayagada, Koraput, Malkanagiri, Kandhamal, Boudh and Nawarangapur have very less percentage of village covered under rural electrification which is below the State average. Drinking water has been a major issue in these districts for a long time and all villages have not been covered under national rural drinking water supply programme.

The district development and diversity index report for India by US India Policy Institute in 2015 says there are eight most backward districts in Odisha which featured in the most backward 50 districts of the country. They are Malkanagiri, Nuapada, Nawarangapur, Boudh, Mayurbhanj, Gajapati, Kandhamal and Kalahandi. Among these districts, Boudh is the most poverty- stricken district, followed by Malkanagiri,

Mayurbhanj and Kalahandi. The survey said none of the 30 districts of Odisha featured in the top 100 developed districts of the country. The KBK plan was started in 1995 by the then Prime Minister to improve productive infrastructure in the region and develop livelihood of marginalised communities. Mid Day Meal (MDM) also started in the same year in the State as per the direction of the Supreme Court of India. The Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) started in 2006-

2007 in 20 backward districts of the State and later an additional Central assistance special scheme was introduced for Left-wing extremism affected districts covering around 15 districts in 2010-2011. Apart from these there has been regular Central assistance to TSP area and SCSP for SCs since 1979 and grant under Article-275 (1) of the Constitution for the 5th scheduled areas. These Central Government programmes have been mostly for the backward districts of south-west and northern Odisha.

The international agencies such as Department for International Development (DFID), UK, International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and World Food Programme (WFP) have been supporting jointly the Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihood Programme (OTLP) since 2004-2005 primarily for tribal food security and livelihood development in seven districts. There have been additional programmes by the State Government such as Biju KBK, Biju Kandhamal O Gajapati, and Western Odisha Development Council etc. Added to them, a number of popular Central Government schemes such as NREGS, NRLM, ICDS, IAY etc which primarily target the backward communities and backward areas are also in operations in the vulnerable districts, but unfortunately all such schemes have not created desired impact in improving the condition of the poor in the region though it shows that the districts in southwestern Odisha have been getting maximum anti-poverty programme in different ways. It is also observed that mostly the Central Government has been spending in these backwards region for the development of backward region and communities, but the ineffective implementation by the State has not earned the desired results.

The Regional Imbalance Inquiry Commission headed by Justice S.K. Mohanty submitted his report in 2008 with several suggestions which have not been widely discussed and worked out by the State Government in its planning and programme implementation. The commission has suggested classifying the districts and blocks based on their development status to mitigate regional imbalance within the State. It has been argued that there has been lack of coordination among different players of anti-poverty programmes and also lack of integration among different interventions. The planning process is very poor without long-term vision and focus. The State level planning board and district level planning committee have no role in shaping the vision of the people. There has been lack of disaggregated data on status of different social groups and regions within the State by the State Government and it is mostly the Central Government which

provides data through census and NSSO based on which development planning and evaluations are taking place.

The research reports, a number of studies and recommendations have been an eye opener to the situation of the people which needs to be discussed at appropriate bodies of Government such as State Assembly and State Planning Board and needs to be reviewed to re-strategize the policies and programmes that target to eradicate poverty and inequality among different social groups and regions within the State. The State Government should have a special department for anti-poverty programme to coordinate several initiatives and give direction to different players by integrating their interventions in common direction to mitigate unequal development and geographical imbalances.

18 July 2015

AWARENESS ON GOVERNMENT SCHEMES CAN PREVENT THEIR MISUSE

The makers of modern India dreamed of a socialist pattern of society with equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens. As a constitutional mandate, the Central and State Governments have been implementing a number of schemes and programmes to build an inclusive society that bridges the gaps of inequality. But many of such well-intended efforts are being misdirected with increasing fake beneficiaries.

The call of Prime Minister to give up subsidy in LPG has motivated many to give it up in the interest of the poor and similar spirit should be exhibited in all other schemes in the interest of the poor and the marginalised. The benefits of various development programmes and projects should reach to the targeted beneficiaries but it has been observed that in many rural parts there are fake beneficiaries availing benefits. There have been media reports about Government employees who have managed to get BPL and ration cards and identified as beneficiaries of IAY for rural poor. There are also fake caste certificates by a few Government employees and others who manage to get a job, admission in educational institutions under seats reserved for SCs, STs and OBCs and even contest elections to get elected in Panchayati Raj institutions. There are two court cases challenging the caste status of candidates in Assembly constituencies in Sundargarh and Deogarh districts where the opponent candidates challenged the elected members' caste background and the matter is sub-judice in the High Court of Odisha. Along with usual charges of corruption, bribe, and bureaucratic delays in getting entitlements, the most important is the benefits provided to the rural poor and marginalised communities under various Government development schemes and programmes increasingly getting diverted to fake beneficiaries. Some of the popular schemes such as IAY, NREGS, land distribution, pension, healthcare, social security and food security schemes complain of fake beneficiaries getting the benefits of the poor and marginalised.

The State Government has received 2,300 cases of complaint on false caste certificate from different sources till 2014. The Government of Odisha ST and SC Development Department and Home Department have issued model guidelines to inquire the fake caste certificate issued by police. The cases are mostly found in the districts of

Kandhamal, Nawarangpur, Balangir, Baragada and Kalahandi. It is reported by ST and SC Development Department that the Southern RDC division has the highest number of cases in comparison to Northern and Central RDC zones. The State Government has formed a State Level Scrutiny Committee for its verification and district level vigilance cell to inquire such complaints with legal retainers to facilitate the process. It is unfortunate that one department of Government is issuing caste certificate and the other department is forming vigilance team to verify the certificates. Why does the caste certificate issue process not ensure transparency? The fake caste certificate issues are creating social tension among different communities that lead to loss of life and property along with law and order situation. As many of the Government schemes and programmes and policy initiatives are linked to caste identity of communities, the fake caste certificate is a matter of concern for the State in ensuring identification of genuine beneficiaries of the respective programme.

Mostly the development schemes implemented by State are primarily targeting the rural poor and people of marginalised communities but due to a number of reasons, they have a very insignificant role in selection of beneficiaries. Majority of the rural poor are illiterate and unorganised and there has been a wide communication gap between the local administration and rural poor. In recent times there are reports of suspension of Government employees in different districts who applied for grabbing benefits of the food security scheme though they were ineligible.

Keonjhar districts Collector suspended 11 Government employees a majority of whom are school teachers. The Collector of Kandhamal suspended one ASI of police and informed to SP, DFO and CDMO to initiate action against six teachers, eight police personnel, one clerk, one forest guard and one medical staff in the district. Similar cases are reported in other districts also. Recently 17 Government employees that include a school teacher, a staff of SSA, a sports teacher and a village agricultural worker were suspended by the district Collector of Ganjam. It is revealed that in Kukudakhandi block of Ganjam district there are six instances of withdrawal of pension in the name of dead beneficiaries which came to the notice of local BDO after an inquiry. The pension schemes meant for people with disability and elderly people has been mismanaged with fake beneficiaries and many of the eligible targeted beneficiaries are being deprived of getting their entitlement.

Take the example of Barachana block in Jajpur district where the number of IAY beneficiaries has gone high with an increase in a number of fake beneficiaries and irregularity in the selection of beneficiaries. The matter was discussed in State Assembly and a House committee which visited the area found the lapses during their verification. The then Jajpur Collector suspended seven officials in charge of corruption.

In spite of direct cash transfer benefit to job card holders of NREGS, the Kendrapada district administration has received reports of wage payment to dead persons. It was reported that there were fake beneficiaries and muster rolls being maintained to misuse the funds for rural poor under the employment guaranty programme. There are a number of popular schemes with Central assistance being misdirected due to the lack of monitoring. In compensation case to Posco project affected families in Jagasinghpur, fake beneficiaries have got compensations. In the Ahara Yojana, many unwanted people rush to the centre to take subsidised meals.

People having land and regular Government jobs are trying to tap the benefits for the poor by manipulating records through their influence over local Government employees and with backing of ruling party agents. The process of beneficiary selection is one of the important works which has been neglected by Government officials. There is minimal transparency in selection. In a few cases, a nexus of ruling party workers and local officials leads to selection of fake beneficiaries. The Panchayati Raj institutions have a major role in beneficiary selection but they have failed to ensure a transparent beneficiary selection process. The provisions of open discussion for selection of beneficiaries in Gram Sabha are very rarely being followed in the village. The caste and gender barriers in the village restrict the participation of women.

The tendencies to get free out of public money need to be discouraged and undeserving people should keep out of access to schemes and programmes. There should be enough awareness about schemes in public especially about the purpose of such schemes and the target beneficiaries. The organisations of rural poor should get involved in the process of implementation of schemes for the poor from the very beginning with genuine and transparent identification process.

05 September 2015

DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES MISSING TARGETS IN ODISHA

The development programmes for the poor in backward regions have been subject to ineffective implementation that leads to very limited impact in improving a lot of the targeted groups.

It is a fact that there is a vertical and horizontal disparity in the social and regional sphere. It is reported that the Central Government grants, MP LAD funds and State sponsored projects are not being spent in time. The most humanitarian concern is the delay in releasing of assistance to BPL families for construction of IAY and wage of job card holders under NREGS programme. While the poor States like Odisha are struggling for financial resources and many of the development schemes are getting affected due to shortage of funds, on the other side, whatever available in public is not being spent effectively on time.

The implementation of schemes is the primary responsibility of the bureaucracy while planning and monitoring mostly lies with the legislators and bureaucracy collectively. There are State and district level planning committee and structure of development administration but why this delay has not been reviewed in proper forums of the Government.

The SCs and STs of the State and the backward regions are the worst sufferer of this delay process as their development is very closely linked to the Government development interventions. Many of the schemes are directly targeted to the development of SCs and STs. Union Minister Tribal Affairs Juel Oram alleged that half of the Rs 421crore Central assistance as grants for different welfare programmes for STs has not been spent in the State during 2014-2015. A study by a private organisation revealed that MPs of Odisha have not achieved 100 % of MPLAD fund spending. The study collected information through RTI data shows only 70 % of spending in 2009 to 2014. The MPs from tribal and backward areas have very poor performances in spending the fund. The SC and ST MPs are no exception in playing a proactive role for the community and the constituencies they belong.

There is also delay in execution of MLALAD funds in the State as reported by CAG in 2014. Lack of interest of MLAs, diversion of funds, no local participation and supervision of district Collector are the

major reasons for improper spending of MLALAD funds. The MLA LAD started with annual Rs 5 lakh in 1997-98 was augmented to Rs 1 crore in 2010-11. In 27 constituencies, the MLAs are not recommending any projects to the Collectors with priority list in the beginning of the financial year. A few MLAs have supported from their LAD fund for building religious centres in the name of community halls but neglected development programmes for the locals.

The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation source said 15 Odisha MPs, including 13 from Lok Sabha and two from Rajya Sabha, have not spent a single pie from their LAD funds for last one year.

The CAG audit notice that during 2011-2014 out of 600 bridges planned for construction under Biju Setu Yojana (BSY), only 12 of them are fully completed. It says non-availability of land, delay in approval of tender and execution of tender are the major reasons. It is revealed that the BPL beneficiaries of development programmes such as IAY and NREGS have not received their instalment on time which affects the development of the poor households in Dhenkanal districts of Odisha. The inordinate delay in releasing the funds to IAY beneficiaries in eight blocks of the district has affected the construction of house programme. Two years back the district administration of Kendrapada had issued show cause notice to 21 Gram Panchayats in the district for the reasons of non-implementation of Central flagship poverty alleviation programmes. It is said that there has been lack of coordination among Panchayati Raj institutions and district level Government officials in charge of the implementation of the programmes. There are instances where the beneficiaries of IAY have been waiting for years together to get the work completed and the poor fellow make hundreds of visits to blocks to release the grant.

One of the major reasons of non-implementation of development programmes is lack of effective coordination and monitoring among legislative and executive because almost all the planning and monitoring bodies are largely dominated by the elected representatives and the bureaucrats at different levels such as State, district and block. These monitoring bodies have routine engagements and never have serious review unless there is a complaint. Many of the statutory bodies such as Public Accounts Committee, State Planning Board, District Planning Committee, State Tribal Advisory Council and State Scheduled Caste Advisory Board and committees on SCSP

and TSP are almost non-effective in the State. The Governor has special power to monitor the development work of 5th Scheduled Areas in the State and 44 % of the States geographical area is 5th Scheduled Area with 24 % of the total population belonging to STs. There has been lack of regular departmental review by Minister and departmental committees on the performance of the respective department under the guidance of the Chief Minister and experts in the department on technical issues. In a recent meeting the Chief Minister has deputed four senior officials in State Secretariat to four districts, Malkangiri, Nuapada, Nabarangpur and Kandhamal for monitoring the development programmes as additional input to speed up the implementation process. The Chief Minister himself will take a review of the progress in every month. In the district and block level there are a number of monitoring committees which need to meet for periodic review to meet the target and for completion of the work. It has been observed that many of the works are unnecessarily delayed due to bureaucratic apathy at local level and communication gap among local Government officials and beneficiaries. A major chunk of the beneficiaries are illiterate and poor wage earners who routinely visit the local Government offices to get their genuine entitlements. There are a number of procedural hurdles being faced by the poor beneficiaries to fall in line with instruction of the Government officials without a proper complaint mechanism in favour of the beneficiaries. It is also observed that while discharging their duty in implementing developmental programmes, the Government officials are in continuous pressure by the ruling party workers and local vested interest groups by which they are not fully functional in discharging their duties effectively. The general trend is everybody wants their share from Government fund for the poor while releasing the grant to the poor beneficiaries. Nobody in the system is accountable for delay in implementation, under-spending and even non-spending.

In recent time the use of RTI by the public has been playing a kind of monitoring role in the implementation process but only ensuring information is not enough unless the political will and public commitment is not there to carry forward the planning. The most essential services such as health, sanitation, drinking water, education, employment, and housing for the poor and anti-poverty programmes should get top priority by the Government in terms of availability of financial resources and timely implementation. The process of programme implementation should be decentralised to make the involvement of Panchayati Raj institutions, CSOs and

educational institutions with proper training and institutional mechanism.

12 September 2015

IMPLEMENT LAWS, ANTI-POOR SCHEMES EFFECTIVELY

The number of migrant workers has been consistently increasing in Odisha in recent years. In December 2013, the hands of two migrant labourers Jialu Nial and Dhangada Majhi were chopped in Kalahandi while recently, Bibek Chinda of Boudh district died of severe burns at Balangir hospital.

The issue of distress migration and plight of migrant workers has been a matter of concern. The Central Government, the Supreme Court and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have often expressed worry over the matter. Distress migration is not limited to south-western part of Odisha, rather these days it has covered almost all parts.

Scope of dignified employment within the State though is being expanded by the Government by implementing several schemes. Labour Minister Prafulla Mallick told the Assembly that more than 3,000 labour contractors have got a licence to send labourers to outside Odisha as more and more labourers are migrating to outside States in search of employment. In the absence of reliable data from Government source, it is privately estimated that around 25 lakh migrant workers are employed outside Odisha, predominantly in Gujarat, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Kolkata, Chhattisgarh, Assam and Andhra Pradesh.

Sudarsan Chhotaray, convener, National Coalition of Migrant Labourers (NCML) said Ganjam is heading the list with six lakh migrant workers. It is further estimated that each year around four lakh workers are seasonally migrating to other States for work in most hazardous condition and the Labour Department has not been maintaining any database of such workers.

All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) State secretary Mahendra Parida said the plight of migrant workers in brick kilns has been a matter of grave concern for the Ministry of Labour and the ILO besides for the Governments of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. As part of initiative to ameliorate the condition of migrant workers in brick kilns, the Labour department has engaged executive officers in eleven districts at panchayat level to identify the migrant workers.

A division bench of Supreme Court has taken suo moto cognizance of media report and intervened in the case of December 2013 by issuing suo — cause to the Governments of Odisha and AP. The Supreme Court has expressed dissatisfaction over the action taken by Government of Odisha in the issue. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued directions to Government of Odisha and the district Collectors in States of AP, Karnataka and Tamilnadu on the issue of proper rehabilitation of migrant labourers.

It has been complained by activists that the labour legislations like The Inter-State migrant Workmen Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services Act, 1979, The National Rural Employment Guaranty Act, 2005, The Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2007 and Rules, 2010, which are primarily related to migrant workers, are not being effectively implemented by concerned departments.

Added to this, there have been structural issues such as caste and untouchability practices, poverty, landlessness, illiteracy and lack of access to credit restricting the local employment opportunities of the marginalised communities. The State investment in primary sector and rural infrastructure development has not been integrated to the issues of rural employment. The Government programmes for employment generation fail to reach to the job card holders in need of work due to ineffective and non — committed local bureaucracy under the hegemonic control of the local vested interest groups associated with ruling parties.

Mostly rural workers are unorganised and untouched by central trade unions for political mobilisation to increase the bargaining power of the workers. The recent trend shows a growing concern by rights based independent trade unions without political affiliation for the cause of the unorganised sector workers. A number of studies have revealed that the majority of the migrant workers mostly belong to Dalit, Adivasi and backward class communities from relatively backward regions. They are historically marginalised, assetless, illiterate and seasonally employed in the primary sector, agriculture, forest and fishing related works.

The primary sector is in feudal mode of production. With all forms of insecurity, the rural producers are always struggling for remunerative price for their products. In distress, they are mobilised by local contractors, money lenders and labour agents to mortgage their job cards so that official records can be managed because whatever work

executed in rural area under NREGS is mostly done by the machine in the name of labour. The minimum wage provided under Government programmes such as NREGS is very less in comparison to the wage available for other work in the locality.

The minimum wage rate in Odisha is lowest in the country with unequal rate for men and women. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in its report on performance audit on NREGS has expressed concern over the poor implementation in the State. It is observed that from 2005 to 2014 the man-days generated under NREGS and the flow of fund have marginally increased whereas consistently the number of migrant workers has increased.

The activists working on migrant labour issues have strongly established correlation between NREGS work and the issue of distress migration and concluded that the failure of NREGS in the State is facilitating migration of labourers to outside. Biswajit Mishra, activist, with the Odisha Shramajibi Manch(OSM), a State level platform of unorganised sector workers in ten districts, recently staged a three-day dharna in front of the Governor House in Bhubaneswar demanding pending wage of workers under NREGS along with food security for rural workers. ‘

He alleged that a huge none spending of NREGS funds as well as delay in releasing the funds at different levels not only affect the development work in the village but also employment. He argued that the living condition of workers is very poor and the nutritional level of workers in rural area has gone down in the absence of proper diet, so the Government should increase the quota of rice from 25 kg to 35 kg per family and dal, sugar and salt should provided in subsidised price through PDS and must be procured from the locality. The Manch also said that social security for rural workers such as old age pension, health, housing and other benefits to the rural workers have been neglected in the State.

Rakshyakar Anupama, Secretary, Pragatisila Shramika Manch(PSM), Jharasuguda , with a membership of around forty thousand workers, in a Press conference at Bhubaneswar demanded issue of identity card to all rural workers and condemned the district labour officer’s negligence in timely issue of cards to the labourers. The organisation observed that the State Government is not properly implementing The Building and other Construction Workers (Regulation of employment and condition of services) Act, 1996 and Rules, 2002 and the Building

and Other Construction Workers Welfare and Cess Act, 1996 and Rules, 2002.

As step towards regulating the migrant workers it is suggested that there should be rise in minimum wage for rural unskilled labourers with equal wage for both men and women. It has been the demand of many trade unions that the minimum wage should be Rs 500. The Government should provide land to agricultural workers for self-employment along with social security. The Labour, Panchayati Raj, Home and Revenue departments should work together for implementing protective legislation and development programmes.

Saturday, 27 December 2014

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ODISHA FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

RIGHTS CAMPAIGN IN ODISHA SHOULD GET ALL-OUT SUPPORT

Democracy is reflected in the realisation of human rights of individual and it's needless to say that rights movements strengthen democracy and enhance the quality of life with human dignity.

With increasing awareness on human rights globally, Odisha has witnessed a spate in people's movement for the realisation of human rights by motivated individuals and groups in many ways from protection to promotion of human rights. Rights groups, civil society organisations, activists and defenders have been making efforts to popularise rights education among people and also have been intervening in cases of rights violation especially focusing the poor and marginalised in the State.

There have been attempts to spread rights education among children in schools. Many events are being organised by the Government and the public on December 10 as the International Human Rights Day and December 9 as the Day for Human Rights Defenders.

There have been cases of rights violation increasingly reported in different parts of the State against the vulnerable sections of society. The number of cases registered with the Odisha State Human Rights Commission has been on the rise. 4,176 cases were registered with the SHRC in 2013-2014, while 3,873 cases were registered in 2012-2013.

The SHRC started functioning in the State in 2003 with enforcement of The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 which has made provisions of the National Human Rights Commission, State Human Rights Commissions and Human Rights Courts.

There are also reports of cases of violation of rights of specific vulnerable groups such as women, children, SCs and STs registered with SHRC, Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, National Commission for Scheduled Caste and National Commission for Scheduled Tribe.

The NHRC has 48,448 cases under consideration until August 2015. It has been reported that almost all the human rights bodies have very slow progress in disposal of cases due to a number of reasons including lack of Government apathy in ensuring of human and financial resources for effective functioning of these bodies.

Since the inception of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the scope of human rights has widened with ratification of all the 30 articles by most of the democratic countries of the world. The Protection of Human Rights Act 1993 defines human rights as rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of individual guaranteed by the constitution or embodied in the international covenants and enforced by courts in India. The international covenants on civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights and such other covenants such as CRC, CEADW and CERD are all included as matter of human rights. The international bodies such as UNCHR have been taking periodical review for strengthening human rights mechanism in all over the world for protection and promotion of human rights.

Many of the provisions of human rights principles are integrated into the Constitution of India and enforced since 1950 by the Government. The preamble, fundamental rights and directive principles have such provisions that uphold rights to live with human dignity.

Human rights also include special rights of the oppressed such as women, children, people with disability, Dalits, Adivasis and religious minorities those who deserve special treatment within the framework of human rights because of their different identities. Their human rights are being violated because of their identity as a different human being.

While respecting equality, liberty, dignity of all its citizens, the Constitution of India has made special provisions for the protection, participation and development of such groups who face discrimination based on gender, caste and ethnic identities and set up constitutional bodies such as National Commission for Scheduled Castes, National Commission for Scheduled Tribe, National Commission for Women, National Commission for People with Disability, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, National Commission for Minority and Nation Commission for Backward Classes.

Odisha because of its large presence of vulnerable groups such as Dalit and Adivasis and its inherent socio-economic backwardness has been prone to violation of human rights. The State figured among top five having maximum cases of human rights violations and most of the cases are linked to State apathy and repression. It is reported that the State police and paramilitary forces operating in interior parts have been arbitrarily using power against the vulnerable, poor and illiterate

and backward sections. There have been reports of death in firing, custodial death, torture and abuse of power in police stations and also by paramilitary forces that have taken life of many innocent people. The inherent colonial days character of police administration need to be changed to cope with emerging human rights standards and laws. The police personnel should know all human rights issues and laws and enforce them as an integral part of their service.

The people who are facing all forms of human rights violations are the women, migrant workers, Dalits and Adivasis of the State. They have been facing abject poverty, distress migration, trafficking, untouchability, caste-based discrimination, gender-based violence and many other worst forms of violence.

The democratic protest movements against discrimination, exploitation, deprivation and violation of human rights often face repression by police and local administration with illegal detention, unlawful arrest, implicating false cases and extra-judicial actions. It is very often reported by prison authority that these section of people are suffering in jails due to lack of legal aid and advice though availing free legal aid is also a human right which needs to be provided by the State.

The other most important aspect of State violence is criminal apathy in fulfilling basic human needs such as drinking water, sanitation, food security, housing, primary health, education, communication, livelihood, minimum wage and social security of the poor people in interior parts of the State. The State role in protecting the people from social discrimination and exploitation by dominant and powerful social groups has proved ineffective. The dominant social groups manage to influence local police and administration and use laws in their own way while dealing cases of violence against the marginalised sections.

The human rights groups and rights activists /defenders from all over the country including rights activists from Odisha have been raising issues about their rights to get protected while they are intervening/reporting the cases of human rights violation as many of them are being harassed with false cases and face violence by administration, police and anti-social elements. Along with capacity building of human rights defenders, they need emergency relief, assistance and medical treatment in order to promote human rights movement in the interest of the common people. It has been suggested that the human rights defenders from among marginalised

groups should be encouraged and promoted for building inclusiveness within human rights movement. The universities and CSOs in the State should play a proactive role in this regard by the active support of international organisations and Government.

Human rights movement should include the members of the legislative bodies, MPs, MLAs, elected leaders of Panchayati Raj institutions, Government officials and media. They need to be sensitised and informed on human rights issues, laws, and provisions so that it can have impact on Government and people at large.

Saturday, 19 December 2015

INTER-CASTE MARRIAGE: ADMINISTRATION MUST COME TO RESCUE OF COUPLES

Every day we come across news of cold-hearted barbaric violence against couples of inter-caste marriage from all over the country, including Odisha, and often reports about the killing of young people by family and caste panchayats to uphold caste pride and religious sanctity.

Many young couples end their life in distress without protection and those who continue against all odds are struggling with false cases implicated against them and their supports. They face all types of caste bias, socio-psychological mental torture and organised brutal muscle power against them in spite of constitutional governance and laws because our socio-religious systems are not compatible with constitutional values and human rights laws. Such cases are largely seen as a private matter where as the individuals suffering from to uphold a choice of their own are facing all kinds of problem not because of their own fault but due to religious and caste-driven mindset based customs and traditions in practice that restrict freedom to marriage and perpetuate indignity in human relationship.

The suffering of the youths in their most productive age has wider implications on our economy and socio-political life. There has been caste and religion based mobilisation and increasing hatred among communities that leads to law and order situation and loss of peace and normal life which has been affecting our social fabric, brotherhood and peace. If these issues are not being addressed properly, it will block our national unity and growth; so there is an urgent need to intervene in these issues in national interest.

The International Bill of Human Rights which include Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, and International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ratified by many democratic countries of the world have recognized right of man and women of marriageable age to marry and to find a family as a basic human right which needs to be protected by the State. It says to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relation on the basis of equality of men and women. The preamble of Indian Constitution propagating the values of democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity and dignity, the fundamental rights and

directive principles say the right to marry is a component of the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 as protection of life and personal liberty. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 have no restrictions on inter caste and inter religion marriage. It is said the bridegroom must be at least 21 years old and the bride must be at least 18 years old with both having a sound mental capacity to enter into a marriage contract.

The Supreme Court of India in its judgment on July 7, 2006 in case of *Lata Singh versus State of Uttar Pradesh* says, “This is a free and democratic country and once a person becomes a major, he or she can marry whomsoever she or he likes. If the parents of the boy and girl who do not approve the inter-caste marriage or inter religion marriage, they cannot harass, threaten or commit or instigate acts of violence on people who decide on for marriage. The Supreme Court also says in a judgment in criminal appeal 958/2011 that we must take care not to insult any one’s feeling on account of his caste, religion, tribe, language, etc. Only then can we keep our country united and strong.

India is a country of diversity and there has been historical divisions based on four Varnas, thousands of castes and subcastes with hierarchical relationship that practice inequality in all spheres. During the anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggle, the makers of modern India aimed to build India a class and casteless society that ensures the dignity of all individual. Inter-caste marriages are in reality promoting the national interest and enforcing constitutional value.

It is a fact that the marriages in India with customs and traditions are expensive and do not respect the wishes of the individuals getting married. Thousands of farmers in the country are committing suicide due to debt trap and one of the major reasons of debt is for expenses in the marriage of their daughter and all other post marriage follow up spending. It is observed that inter-caste marriage discourages dowry and lavish spending on the wedding which has very less financial implication over family.

Many great Indians including Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr B. R Ambedkar have advocated for eradication of social evils such as untouchability, caste and gender-based discrimination and violence. As a remedy they have suggested inter-caste marriage in their writings and also encouraged the practice in many ways. Dr B.R Ambedkar in his famous book ‘Annihilation of Caste’ has suggested inter-caste marriage for eradication of untouchability and caste

system in building a socially cohesive Hindu society required for national unity, integration and nation building.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has introduced Dr Ambedkar scheme for social integration through inter-caste marriage to spread constitutional values and for enforcement of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and The SCs and STs (PoA) Act, 1989. Under this provision the Central Government has been providing an incentive of Rs. 50,000 to all the couples with fifty per cent Central assistance since 2006. Added to this, in 2012 the Ministry decided that under the recommendation of MP, MLA and district Collector each year about 18 couples will have to be given an incentive of Rs. 2.50 lakh from the State of Odisha and about 500 from all over the country as support to encourage inter-caste marriage and help the couple taking the social risk.

The SC and ST Development Department has been providing an incentive for inter-caste marriage between caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes belonging to Hindu communities for social integration and removal of untouchability. During the year 2014-2015 an amount of Rs. 3, 23, 76,000 to 671 couples of inter-caste marriage was released. There are highest number of couple i.e. 122 in Baleswar district followed by Kendrapara, Puri, Dhenkanal and Bhadrak.

In the tradition of social reform, there are social movements by progressive social and political forces, civil society organisations and inspired individuals, writers, artists, reformers and groups those who believe in human liberty, equality, dignity and respect constitutional values. They have been contributing in many ways by producing literature, song, drama, film that encourage inter caste and inter religion marriage. There are initiatives such as Love Commandos, a non-profit organisation, in Delhi, with slogan of “No more honour killing” and “Manava Mantapa” of Karnataka who have been taking all the efforts to help the couples in distress.

In Odisha, the Anti-caste Marriage and One child Family Organization of India (AMOFI) founded in 1980 by most popular political science teacher and social reformer couple, B. Ramachandra CST Voltaire and Madam Swapna Bijayini has set an example of commitment to the cause with all difficulties. The organisation has helped about 7,000 couples in getting marriage recognition and continues to stand by young lovers of change by expanding this effort to different social spheres.

There has been demand by organisations and activists engaged in promoting inter caste and inter religious marriage that the incentive granted to the couple should improve to give them all kinds of strength to cope with the situation. The most important aspect is the protection of the couples from all forms of violence where the police and judiciary should have a proactive role in defending the life of young people. The political parties supporting such change and included inter-caste marriage in their manifesto should be voted for power. There must be a continued effort by all for the eradication of untouchability, gender bias and superior caste complex which has been a major cause of social conflict in rural villages. The marriage age restriction has been manipulated in many times to implicate the boys in false case of kidnap and criminal cases booked by police which need to be looked into to stop its misuse to punish the couple. It is said that the young boys and girls taking such bold step should be publicly honoured and recognised because they are doing a social change in building a democratic society.

Saturday, 26 December 2015

ANTI-LIQUOR DRIVE A WELCOME MOVE IN ODISHA

Odisha has been witnessing an unprecedented surge in people's movement against liquor in many parts of the State, especially among women of the marginalised sections in rural parts. The movement demands complete ban on sale and consumption of liquor by the Government.

The ordinary women from their own everyday experiences are narrating their problems and how liquor consumption has impacted their socio-economic life and pauperized many households. Consumption of alcohol has been identified as one of the major causes of poverty and violence in social life, especially against women and children. It has been contributing to loss of quality of life, working hour, ill health and influencing the decision-making process in many ways in the matter of public importance.

An economically backward State like Odisha having a large presence of illiterate and poor is very much prone to alcoholism. The State has witnessed death of innocent poor due to consumption of poisonous alcohol supplied by liquor traders having a strong nexus with bureaucrats and ruling party politicians. There were more than 200 people who died and many were hospitalised by consumption of poisonous liquor at Cuttack in 1992 and later about 29 people died in February 2013. The victims were poor people mostly belonging to the marginalised sections.

There have been reports of accidents, social disturbances and law and order problem in liquor shops opened near schools, hospitals, bus stops, temples, mosques and other such public institutions by disobeying even court orders and limited execution of law by the administration.

Anti-liquor movement activists, women groups and other concerned are protesting the inaction of the Government. There is violence and repression in many forms against anti-liquor activists, such as Dileswar Dandasena of Sundergarh and Dalit women in Namatara village of Kendrapada district whereas many others remain invisible and go unreported by both liquor mafia and local administration. But in spite of difficulties, more and more people are getting involved and supporting the anti-liquor movement. The campaign has been supported by progressive politicians, freedom fighters, left-wing

intellectuals, Gandhians, Sarvodaya workers, voluntary agencies, academics and common citizens. They have called for a total ban of liquor in the State. There is also an instance of a move by ruling party MLA through a private bill for ban on liquor in the State.

The Odisha United Anti-liquor Movement has been spearheading the struggle throughout the State. It has been getting support from women in tribal areas such as Kandhamal. Tribal organisation like Indigenous People's Forum has been demanding complete ban on foreign liquor and any kind of liquor business in scheduled areas and full implementation of PESA.

The Constitution of India in Article 47 says every State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health except for medical purpose. There are Government declared dry days on the occasion of national importance such as Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti and during voting and counting days of elections. The World Health Organization report says around 30 % of the total population of India consumed alcohol, spirits and the per capita consumption of alcohol has increased from 1.6 to 2.2 liters in a decade which is one of the fastest increases in the world in 2012. Social scientists and medical experts say alcoholism has been a serious problem with major impact on social environment and human health. It is closely linked to domestic violence, crime, suicide and loss of social peace.

With a continued social tradition of prohibition, the movement against liquor has been an all India phenomena with example of dry States such as Gujarat, Kerala, Nagaland and Lakshadweep. Bihar is in the process to ban alcohol starting from April 2016. The Government of Kerala with support of almost all other political parties in the State has decided to close the Kerala State Beverage Corporation with a ten per cent cut in every year with its limited use in five star hotels and for NRIs and foreigners. There are State legislations such as The Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act 1989 which speak for total prohibition.

States such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, UP and Haryana have witnessed huge movements in recent times against liquor. AP, Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Mizoram have repealed prohibition with the plea of leakages from the neighbouring States and increase in illegal trade within the State.

Odisha has about 4,000 excise shops which include off shops, on shops, beer parlours, military canteens, clubs, country spirit, Bhanga, Tari, and panchwai shops. The excise revenue of last ten years has registered a growth from Rs 256 crore in 2003 to Rs 1,380 crore in 2011-2012 and Rs 2,038.79 crore in 2014-2015. The State has monopoly over wholesale trade of liquor through the Odisha State Beverages Corporation.

In the State excise policy, the Collectors have power to grant licences and consider and recommend the change of location of shops. It is also said that the location of the liquor shops should be shifted to 50 meter away from the State and National Highways and no shops shall be allowed on Government land. Besides, there is prohibition in employment of women and children to encourage sale of liquor.

The excise policy granted concession in tribal areas to brew liquor for personal consumption and not for sale. In the PESA Act 1996, the Gram Sabha gives power to enforce prohibition or to regulate or restrict the sale and consumption of any intoxicants in scheduled areas. It is important to regulate the liquor trade in tribal area for the development of the tribals. It has been observed that land alienation and money lending have been directly linked to liquor consumption. It is a fact that during elections the party candidates use free liquor distribution to attract the voters in their support. There are reports of crime, domestic violence, separation in family and diseases linked to flow of liquor and its unrestricted consumption. Sometimes liquor consumption is being promoted in the name of culture and traditional food practices and hugely used in festivals and functions as an inseparable item. It has been very often told by development workers in tribal areas that without controlling liquor consumption, no development will sustain among the marginalised sections. Many of them routinely run anti-liquor movement as most complimentary programme to other development works such as health, education, nutrition, employment and livelihood. The traditional exploiters in tribal areas have been

using liquor as most important means to spoil the body and mind of the illiterate poor to make them deprived of resources and possessions and use them bonded labour for generations.

It is unfortunate to note that while the State Government has been linking the recent farmer suicide with domestic violence and liquor, and trying to establish a close link of distressed farmers, there has

been to attempt to prohibit liquor consumption and its availability in rural areas.

Former Chief Minister Nabakrushan Choudhury had enacted the Odisha Prohibition Act 1956 to prohibit manufacturing, sale and consumption of intoxicating liquors and drugs in Odisha but it has not been enforced. In a recent reply to a question in Assembly, the State Excise Minister rejected the idea of total prohibition on the ground that it will encourage illegal trade of poisonous liquor which may lead to hooch tragedies.

Saturday, 12 December 2015

STOP OPPRESSION TO FIGHT OUT ODISHA'S POVERTY

The most recent reports by the Government and research bodies such as Oxford Poverty and Human Development Report 2015, Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) report 2015 have again revealed that the situation of poverty and hunger in India especially in the poor States such as Odisha has not improved to the desired extent and still remains a matter of grave concern.

The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative by using a unique index (The Global multidimensional poverty index 2015) developed at the University of Oxford concluded there are more poor people in India than in the Sub-Saharan Africa and it further said the largest number of people classified as destitute in the developing countries are in India.

The poorest region in South Asia is Bihar and the other seven States having large numbers of poor people are Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Odisha. The SECC, 2011 data revealed recently has exposed the overall socio-economic status of households and the status of different social groups. Illiteracy, landlessness and low income still continue as a feature of rural India. 30 % of rural households are landless and earn a major part of their income from manual and casual labour. Their income level has not increased to ensure a standard living. As it is revealed, about 75 % of rural household members' monthly income is less than Rs5,000. It is much higher in case of poor States such as Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

The MDGs identify eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Its first goal is to reduce 50 % of the population below the national poverty line as well as the poverty gap ratio. The MDG India report 2015 released by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation says the incidence of poverty, as per Poverty Head Count Ratio(PHCR) has reduced from 49.4 % in 1994 to 24.7 % in 2011 but this reduction in poverty is less than achieved by our neighbouring countries because of India's slow progress.

The report further says the share of poorest 20 % in national consumption was always less than 10 % during 1993 - 2012. The poor States such as Odisha with their slow progress have missed the MDG

target narrowly. The PHCR estimate of Odisha was 59 % in 1993-1994, 57 % in 2004-2005 and 32.59 % in 2011-2012. The PHCR estimates are based on Tendulkar methodology of consumption expenditure.

About 70 to 80 % of the consumption expenditure accounts for the consumption basket and there has been continuous increase in price of food grains. It is being argued that a major reason of poverty is lack of purchasing power due to low income and unemployment. Odisha has been fighting poverty with support from international agencies, the Central Government and others, but in spite serious efforts in this direction, the impact level has been consistently slow and the cause behind it needs deep reflection by all concerned involved in poverty eradication issue.

The Central Government has framed a number of schemes and programmes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranty Act 2006(MGNREGA), National Rural Livelihood Mission(NRLM), National Urban Livelihood Mission(NULM), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Indira Awas Yojana(IAY) and Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS), etc targeted to improve the employment, income and quality of life of the rural and urban poor people but many such schemes have been largely suffering from improper implementation in States like Odisha. Many times it is reported that the Central Government funds remain unspent or the Central Government does not release the funds in time. There are also numbers of non-economic reasons, socio-political and socio-cultural issues, which affect the implementation of anti- poverty programme.

The beneficiaries of the programmes have very insignificant involvement in the implementation due to lack of informed organisation of the rural poor and ineffective local service delivery system run by Government officials. Corruption in development programmes has been a matter of concern because it has been very often found by evaluations that the targeted funds are not reaching to the targeted beneficiaries due to exploitative role of middleman between the Government system and the beneficiary.

In order to avoid the problem to some extent, direct cash transfer benefit has been introduced in programmes such as MGNREGS. It is further observed that though NREGS aims to ensure 100 days employment of unskilled manual work for every rural household but in many villages the beneficiaries are motivated to rent their cards to get a percentage and machines are used in their place. Similarly, the

beneficiaries of IAY have been routinely visiting block offices to get their due but they face non-cooperation of the block officials and PRIs at different levels.

The women self-help groups in rural villages are facing difficulties in dealing with bank and block officials while getting loan and in getting them involved in self-employment activities. The assertion of rural poor women of marginalised sections is largely witnessed in anti-liquor movements where they join to destroy the liquor shops. While the poor women are fighting to save their family from addiction, they are not getting adequate State support. Rather the State suppresses anti-liquor movement by using police through lathi charge, illegal arrest, detention and false case.

All it wants is to promote liquor business on the pretext of revenue generation, regardless of the fact that liquor ruins hundreds of rural poor households and pushes them to the brink of poverty. Continued poverty and hunger in rural poor households leads to domestic violence and family employability. It is reported in June 2014 by Minister for Women and Child Development in the Odisha Assembly that 42 % of women between 15 to 49 years of age face physical or sexual violence.

The people who face violence are mostly in distress condition due to continued poverty, illiteracy, resourcelessness and victims of State apathy to their rights and entitlements, issues and problems which remain unaddressed by institutional mechanism setup by the Government. They face continuous harassment by various wings of Government such as revenue, forest, police, judiciary and other service providers. People living in poverty are also mostly from marginalised communities and socially excluded groups.

The large non-representation of marginalised sections in administration and policy making bodies, CSOs, and media has been the major reasons of their protest in various forms through which they have been trying to ventilate their concerns and views to the Government. Their issues are not being discussed in the appropriate forum of the Government and many of the decisions relating to their life and livelihoods are being imposed on them and their decent protests are suppressed by using police and military.

The Home Ministry reported in 2014 that mostly the poor States such as Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh etc are reeling under Left-wing extremism and over 12,000 killed in Naxal violence in past

20 years out of which 9,471 were civilians and 2,712 were Central and State security forces personnel. There has been continuous violence against the vulnerable sections such as Adivasi, Dalit, farmers and women.

It is unfortunate that mostly the poor and illiterate people are being killed in violence. It is reported that the people killed in protest movements in different parts are mostly poor Adivasis, Dalits, farmers and women who suffer historical injustice. The State violence along with social oppression by dominant social groups against the poor marginalised minority has been continuing and getting intense. But when the poor become assertive to realise their basic entitlements and rights for living a life with prosperity and dignity, they are not allowed to do so and have to undergo many trials and tribulations.

Therefore beyond the Government schemes, the agenda of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger must address the non-economic causes of poverty.

The poor people's initiative in different forms including protest to fight out poverty and asserting their rights and entitlements over land, livelihood, wage, social security, education, health, housing and movement against liquor, social oppressions and corruption ought to be seen as a larger process towards poverty eradication because poverty eradication should be integrated to people's initiatives and seen as a larger holistic process of change in quality of life of poor people.

Saturday, 11 July 2015

SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS NEEDED TO BUILD DEMOCRATIC ODISHA

The conspicuous existence of various forms of practices of untouchability in rural areas, caste-based discrimination, social exclusion based on ethnic status, heinous forms of atrocities against marginalised sections, violence against women, suicide by young couples of inter-caste marriage, child labour, increasing domestic violence, witch-hunt, female feticide, too much of regular expensive celebrations of gods and goddesses, animal sacrifice, increasing flow of liquor, brutal ancient methods of treatment, increasing influence of Baba and Mata in public life and faith on unforeseen power to change fate have been matters of serious concern.

Continued poverty, illiteracy, lack of education, modern health care and social security have been further aggravating it in the absence of visible social reform movements.

These social issues are cause of killing of hundreds of innocent illiterate poor and creating social tension, encouraging crime, physical and mental violence and law and order problem for the State. It affects the poor and marginalised and impacts their social development negatively. The poor, socially marginalised sections, women and children are the worst sufferers.

Studies have found that social issues are major cause of poverty and deprivation. Traditional social systems are used as powerful means of exploitation of labour and women and especially alienation of resources. The social customs have contributed to indebtedness, landlessness and bondage of marginalised sections.

Odisha is not just a State with maximum percentage of people below poverty line but also a socially backward State that lags behind all social and human development indicators. There are existence of middle age, feudal social practices in the name of culture and tradition with huge illiteracy and lack of basic healthcare facility. Inequality and irrational ideas are being enforced in modern form and being exhibited vulgarly by some section of media.

The focus on economic development must be accompanied with social reforms as both are interconnected. While Odisha is marching ahead to build democratic society, it must adhere to international human rights standards and constitutional values of our country. The

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the Protection of Human Rights Act 1993 and Article 51A of the constitution of India should be strictly enforced by the State and must be followed by all citizens of our country. As per 51A (h) constitution of India it is the fundamental duties of every citizen to develop scientific temper, humanism, and spirit of inquiry and reform.

The social systems of Odisha carry their inherent feudal and backward social legacies on principles of inequality based on caste, gender and economic status rooted in dominant religious values. The formation of Odisha brought together diverse social groups in 1936 and later in 1948 as a modern political State. It comprises of coastal Odisha under direct British rule, 26 feudatory States and large tribal areas recognised as scheduled areas. The scheduled areas constitute 44 % of the total geographical areas of the State. There are diversity in languages, belief systems, religions, castes, ethnic groups and customs and traditions. Though Adivasis, Dalits and SEBCs constitute a majority of the population but the post independent Odisha continues to be ruled over by upper caste people, including the former kings and feudal lords, land-owning class and western educated persons etc. It has created huge imbalance in social life.

The Hindu upper caste cultural symbols, language and social practices are projected as Odia nationality. The public institutions, Government offices, functions and media are using this with active State patronage. There has been very insignificant reference to others' existence with an impression of inferior and backward status. The hegemony and dominance of upper caste continue without any basic change that reflected in social culture of the State. There has been no attempt to make laws for social reform. Economic welfare programmes are projected as solution to age-old social issues which perpetuate further segregation and marginalisation in the name of development.

The social reform agenda must get top priority. The State has to enact progressive legislation to bring social reform by preventing unwanted practices derogatory to human dignity and punish the perpetrators engaged in promoting and practising irrational anti-human ideas. The laws must be accompanied with change of mindset of the people by progressive social movements.

It is being observed that there are laws such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955, POA Act 1989, the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace, Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act 2013, the Odisha Prevention of Witch hunting Act 2013, Child Labour

Prohibition Act, Eradication of Manual Scavenging Act etc, but they are not being effectively implemented in the State. The police and judiciary have to be more sensitive and responsive to social issues and handle such cases with care.

Every political party must have a social reform agenda and its members should be model in public life to be followed by common people. The political parties should recognise diversity by including people from all social groups and gender in the party organisation, structure and leadership.

The artists, painters, writers, poets, academics and social reformers and human rights activists need to play a proactive role in influencing public life and building secular and humanist discourses through creative literature and art conducive to building a democratic society. They should be engaged in monitoring cases of human rights violation and help the victims of violence to access justice. The young people coming forward to denounce all forms of unwanted social bondage and discrimination need to be protected and respected. Our educational institutions should be centres of social reform through education and orientation to students. The teaching community has a great role to play in this regard to building our future generations as most modern and democratic citizens to respect and recognise diversity and dignity of individuals and to value constitutional principles. The teaching community should be above religious bias and educational institutions should not use any religious symbol and only national flag and national symbols should be used in all public functions.

We need to democratise our family by practising democratic values in family life. The human rights of women, children and elders in family need to be respected with care. Young women's rights have been very often suppressed in family in the name of family and caste pride. Social democracy must be a way of life-based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. It will pave the way in building a democratic society. Political democracy is meaningless without social democracy. We must have to bring social reform to strengthen our democracy in all spheres.

Saturday, 23 January 2016

