

# **Update**

**Series 12**

## **Certain Aspects of Indian Agriculture**



## **Land Reforms & Imperialism**

**June-July 2006**

## In Lieu of an Introduction

The ruling classes of India are quite upbeat about the growth rate of Indian economy. It is claimed with much breast-beating that the Indian economy is running with full throttle bypassing the growth rate of all emerging economies barring only China. Some lackeys of the rulers project the coming century as Asian century led by emerging tigers such as India, China, etc. They are upholding the 'unbridled' growth rate of Indian stock markets with much fanfare (even after the 'crashes' in May-June 2006). They rejoice at the 'spectacular' growth rate of IT/BPO sector. They are projecting the swelling purchasing power of the 'new middle class' as panacea for once an ailing Indian economy. They are thrilled at the news of more and more Indian billionaires arising at this era of globalisation. They are excited by the venture of Indian big capitalist classes overseas. They are felt dignified as their imperialist masters have given them a pat on the shoulders for going along the 'right course' of 'economic reforms'. With the equal momentum they are 'satisfied' at the state of affairs happening even in the agricultural sector though 'showing some disturbing signs'.

In fact, the Indian ruling classes cannot hide 'certain symptoms' of deep-rooted diseases of Indian agriculture under the 'miracle' of 'growth rate'. In the last few years, lot of the reports regarding the 'distress of agriculture' have been flashed in the media. Some of these reports are as follows: thousands of 'farmers' are committing suicides; 'farmers' do not get the 'right prices' of their produce; input prices are skyrocketing making 'farming' unprofitable; 'harmful' aspects of 'Green Revolution' are developing; imports of agri-products are flooding domestic markets under the regime of WTO damaging the livelihoods of 'farmers'; foreign-made genetic seeds are making inroads rendering 'farming' more vulnerable; both domestic and foreign companies are penetrating in 'farming' & agri-business and are promoting 'contract farming' which may ruin 'farmers'; etc. etc. These are really some important questions and 'alarming signs' of Indian agriculture which should be asked, probed, and answered.

But, we believe strongly that there are more questions about Indian agriculture which miss proper attention. In other words, **UPDATE** want to stress on the fact that the real, basic 'problems' or 'crisis' of Indian agriculture have been almost forgotten. In fact, overwhelming majority of the Indian peasants are either landless or poor whose

conditions are deplorable and miserable. There are millions of agricultural workers living in penury. In percentage these peasants and agricultural workers constitute roughly **90%** of the population engaged in agriculture. In absolute terms they are nearly **600 million or 60 crores**. Some of the basic and burning questions in their livelihoods are: “landlessness”, “subsistence cultivation”, “subsistence wages”, “non-availability of work for whole year”, “unemployment”, “intolerable poverty”, “grave indebtedness”, “starvation or semi-starvation”, “malnutrition”, non-access to “minimum health facilities”, “elementary education”, “drinking water”; the “social deprivations & miseries” of the lower caste people and/or tribals as they are major constituent part of the poor population engaged in agriculture; and above all, the exploitations, oppressions arising out of the vast presence of semi-feudal remnants, etc. These questions deserve serious attention of the readers interested in Indian agriculture.

Out of these questions the most important one is ‘**landlessness**’ of the Indian peasants. There was a time when spontaneous and sporadic revolts of the landless peasants developed all over India. Can one forget the revolutionary upheavals of the landless peasants of Telengana and Naxalbari! In these stormy days the revolutionary demand of ‘**LAND TO THE TILLERS**’ had been voiced; movements had been organised; lands had been confiscated and distributed among the landless peasants, firstly during the late forties & early fifties and then at the end-sixties of the last century. These incidence of unrest forced the Indian ruling classes to make several programmes of ‘**Land Reforms**’ under the advice (or diktat) of their imperialist masters. In fact, after the World War II, the imperialists, particularly the US imperialists either forced or dictated ruling classes of many ‘independent’ & dependent third world countries **to take measures of ‘Land Reforms’ to ‘save’ these countries from revolutionary ‘upheaval’ and/or ‘communist menace’**. The ruling classes of India subserviently obeyed their masters and formulated ‘Land Reforms’ programmes. A little known figure, **Wolf Ladejinsky**, an architect of the ‘Land Reform Programmes’ in Japan and Taiwan (accomplished after the World War II to combat the influence of ‘communist’ march along the course of agrarian revolutions in some third world countries) on behalf of the US imperialists did splendid jobs of ‘land reforms’ in several countries of Asia, Middle East, etc. including India. In fact, under the guidance of this ‘land reforms’ *guru* (along with active participation of the imperialist agencies), the land reforms programmes in India

was initiated and got momentum at the early seventies of the last century to steal thunder from the 'land grab' movements. **Thus at this juncture, two paths of 'Land Reforms' appeared to confront each other – one is revolutionary (in an incipient state) and another is 'reformist'. The first one is visible at the 'land grab' movements of the peasants. The second one was its answer to douse the flames in the countryside.** At the incidence of gradual decrease of revolutionary fervour among the rural landless peasants and at the incapability of the masses to come decisively out of the grips of treacherous politics of 'left' leaders in the 1970s, the basic & revolutionary demand of the '**LAND TO THE TILLERS**' had been almost disappeared from the political scene. The vacant space created was filled up by the 'reformist' programmes of the ruling classes. Since then, though half-baked and cosmetic, the measures and programmes of 'Land Reforms' created a pervasive dampness of 'reformism' within the 'left' politics & the masses. In these grim atmosphere of reformist politics, *lakshmanrekha* of '**Land Ceilings Act**' were so much sacredly upheld that even the landless and poor peasants were made **forgotten** about the basic revolutionary demand of "**LAND TO THE TILLERS**". Even it was forgotten that an **overwhelming portion of land was being occupied by some non-cultivating 'parasites'** who were exploiting millions of landless and poor peasants.

Nevertheless, the programmes of 'Land Reforms' produced almost nothing. There are still crores of landless peasants in rural India. According to *Times of India (10.12.2004)*:

"Two decades ago, of every hundred families in rural India, **31 families were landless**. Today, the figure has gone up to **41 families** out of every hundred. This is a huge number, more than the entire population of many countries."

Therefore, in the last two or three decades, in real terms, incidence of **landlessness increased**. Even in the land-reform-famed **West Bengal**, the landlessness among the rural agricultural households reached a new high (**39.6% in 1987-88 and 49.8% in 1999-2000**) reports *West Bengal Human Development Report (2004)*. Most of these landless households are compelled to toil as agricultural workers or sharecroppers. Most of the days they work as labourer, get cashes (& kinds) valued lower than the minimum wages fixed by different state governments. Moreover, overwhelming majority

of them are severely underemployed and get less than 100 days of work a year. *Times of India (10.12.04)* further reports:

“In a field-based study in two districts in **Haryana** conducted by the Indian Institute for Women Studies and Development for the ministry of labour found **fewer than 50 days of agricultural work a year – 35-43 days for women and 32-44 days for men....** If this is the picture in Haryana, considered to be among the better-off states, the situation elsewhere can hardly be better.”

The livelihoods of the landed ‘small’ peasants are not much better. Most of them are known to be “subsistence peasants”. In fact, a sizable section of these peasants are compelled to work in another’s field as agricultural workers to make a square meal. Malnourishment (even semi-starvation in some parts of the country), ill-health, disease, illiteracy, etc. are part and parcel of their life. Most of them are denied the basic amenities like sources of drinking water within a kilometer, electricity at houses, latrine facilities etc. If one examines their state of livelihoods by social classification, i.e., by caste/tribal basis (e.g., SC, ST), the picture will be gravely dismal. According to the draft paper of the *Ninth Five-Year Plan*, **77% of dalits and 90% of the adivasis are either ‘absolute landless’ (own no land) or ‘mere landless’**. In sum, the overwhelming majority of the peasants (**90%** of all agricultural households), being the pivot of Indian agriculture, are neglected, rejected and unrepresented in the volumes of the literature published discussing the “plight of the Indian farmers”.

Under the above perspective, in this issue of *UPDATE*, we are trying to examine certain aspects of the livelihoods of the Indian peasants, landless & poor in particular. To be more particular, we are trying to draw attention to the **‘land questions & some associated problems’ in Indian agriculture**. This is contents of the *first chapter* of this issue. In the *second chapter* the ‘Land Reforms Programmes’ of the imperialists will be discussed.

## Certain Aspects of Indian Agriculture

It is mentioned earlier that the ruling classes of India were forced by the rising tide of agricultural unrest to adopt some measures of 'Land Reforms'. First it was taken in 1949 when the '**Zamindari**' system was abolished; then in the early seventies of the last century at the behest of their imperialist masters. The measures taken in the seventies were very much cosmetic. A '**Land Ceiling Act**' was promulgated with thousands of loopholes. And from the very beginning the efforts of the ruling classes in implementing these measures were very much halfhearted, and skewed. In fact, the 'Land Reforms' of the ruling classes were a **hoax** which produced little. Majority of the old structures and relations of land ownership remained intact (barring few changes in some pockets of 'forward' states). **Overwhelming vestiges of semi-feudal relations, exploitations, customs, etc. were preserved.** Even in land-reform-famed **West Bengal**, where land-tenancy was reformed (**under the 'Operation Barga'**), **the demand for ownership of the land ('land to the tillers')** was bypassed maintaining the old structures little disturbed. It may be inferred that the programmes of 'Land Reforms' were aborted and almost discarded by the ruling classes.

Interestingly, though little progressed so far with respect to 'Land Reforms', volumes of analysis/articles/discussions were made & published not only from India, but also from the universities, foundations, and the imperialist funding agencies delivering flood of suggestions, data, and research materials in this regard. But it is more surprising that from these volumes of researches very little information can be obtained since all of these data are derived from the Reports & Surveys of the Government of India [henceforth, GoI] which is based mainly on academic guidelines. **In fact, these Reports/Surveys are in the most cases devoid of realities & facts happening in the agricultural sector of rural India.** Moreover, these **databases** are almost **outdated** since most of the surveys on land holding patterns have been done in the early nineties of the last century. As for example, the ***Reports of Landholding Survey of the National Sample Survey Organisation*** [henceforth, *NSSO* or *NSS*] of GoI was published in 1991-92. Another source in this respect is the ***Agricultural Census*** which was published last in 1995-96, i.e., more than ten years ago. Moreover, most of these surveys are unreliable because when asked by the surveyors/officials of the governmental

agencies large sections of the landlords and/or peasants hide facts due to many social factors. Even **Wolf Ladejinsky**, one of the founders of the blueprint for Land Reform programmes in the 'dependent' countries acted on behalf of the US imperialists [to be discussed later in detail] expressed disgust at the questionability of these Surveys.

But, in no way, we have to depend on these older, distorted, nonreliable databases to depict a realistic picture of landholding patterns. Even some newer (1999-2000) data for rural and agricultural labour households used in this issue are not enough to make up the loopholes in the older and skewed databases.

Moreover, there are problems and fallacies in the databases presented by GoI. As for an example, **the policy-makers of India do not recognise the landless peasants as cultivators**. It is a well known fact that the landless rural households are mostly engaged in agricultural practices since there are little other occupations available in rural India. These overwhelming majority of rural households and/or families are either sharecroppers or are compelled to toil as agricultural labourers. They are tillers of the land and for time immemorial their life is deeply involved with the agriculture. **But, according to GoI, they are not peasants because they are landless!** What a marvellous (mis)conception is it! In real life, these sections of the peasants constitute the main part of the rural semi-proletariat and are the most revolutionary section in the countryside. Potentially, this section is the most vocal for the demand of '**land to the tillers**'. It may be for this reason that they are excluded from the category of peasant households!

Another problem which deserves attention is the **question of tenancies and sharecropping**. In this case also, the official data are hardly full-proof since most of the peasants are reluctant to give out details about the conditionalities of tenancies (due to various factors including social). Most of the deals struck are mere verbal and subject to change at the whims/interests of the landowners; and most of the agricultural labour households are compelled to accept these indefinite conditionalities. For this reason, we are compelled to exclude this important question from our discussions. – **Update Editorial Board (UEB)**

## 1. Landholding Patterns among Rural Households

[**From UEB:** According to the *Agricultural Department of Government of India* the total geographical area of the country is **328.7 million hectares**, of which **141 million hectares is the net sown area, while 190 million hectares is the gross cropped area**. (Net sown area = Gross or total cropped area – Area sown more than once). Hence, the **cropping intensity** is nearly **134%**. (Cropping intensity = percentage of the gross cropped area to the net area sown).

On behalf of *National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO)*, several rounds of survey had been done on the structure of landholdings between 1960-61 to 1991-92. In 1995-96, *Agricultural Census* conducted another survey on landholdings. We have to depend on these sources though they have numerous limitations in their enumerations (discussed earlier). **Table 1**, taken from **NSSO** demonstrates 'Certain key characteristics of operational land holdings'. **Table 2-5** also provide some of the important data on land holdings. For definitions for the terms little known see **Box 1**. Note the **Findings I & II** for our observations/comments on these *Tables*.]

**Table 1: Certain Key Characteristics of Operational Land Holdings**

<b>Item</b>	<b>1960-61</b>	<b>1970-71</b>	<b>1981-82</b>	<b>1991-92</b>	<b>1995-96</b>
No. of operational holdings (lakh)	507.7	570.7	710.4	934.5	1,155.8
Percentage increase of operational holdings	–	12.4	24.5	31.5	23.7
Area operated (lakh hectare)	1,334.8	1,256.8	1,185.7	1,251.0	1,633.5
Average area operated by op. hol. (in hectare)	2.63	2.20	1.67	1.34	1.41
Number of parcels per holding	5.7	n.a.	4.0	2.7	n.a.

(Sources: 17th, 26th, & 37th rounds of National Sample Survey (NSS) Reports Nos. 144, 215, 331, & 407. Data of the last column are derived from Agricultural Census, 1995-96, Govt. of India (GoI))



## A. 'Findings I:

1. In 1999-2000 there was 158 million or 15.80 crore households in India. Out of this households **103.5 million** or 10.35 crore or about **66% of the households were engaged in agricultural practices. (Source: NSS Report No. 408)**

According to the *Agricultural Census 1995-96*, there was **115.6 million** or 11.56 crore households engaged in agricultural activities (See Table 1).

2. Table 1 provides the data for the operational land holdings for the period of 1960-61 to 1995-96. It is observed in this Table that during the period **1960-1992, total number of operational holdings** (a unit/holding which operate land for agricultural production; see also **Box 1: Terms Explained**) have been **increased** by a whopping **80%** (by **426.8 lakh** in absolute numbers).

The Table 1 shows also that during the 1st decade ('60-61) number of operational holdings was increased by 12.4%; during the 2nd decade ('70-71) by 24.5%; during the 3rd decade ('81-82) by 31.5%; and, during the next 5 years by 23.7%.

3. Though number of operational land holdings was increased during this period, the **area of land operated** under these holdings was **decreased by 6.28%** (by **83.8 lakh hectare** in absolute numbers). [Surprisingly, the *Agricultural Census 1995-96* projects an illuminating picture in this regard. If their data is being followed, the area operated increased between the period 1991-92 & 1995-96 by an unbelievable margin of 382.5 lakh or by about 30.58%!]

4. Therefore, it is revealed that the total area operated has been declined between the forty years' period of 1960 & 1992, whereas the number of operational holdings have been increased considerably.

In other words, **average operated area per holding has been decreased sharply** over the years 1960-91. *NSS Report No. 407* states that in these range of forty years the average size and/or holding has been decreased by nearly **50%** (or **by half**)! In 1992 the average area operated was **1.41 hectare or 3.52 acre** approximately.

## Box 1: Terms Explained

**Hectare:** 1 hectare (ha) = 2.5 acre (approximately); 1 acre = 3 bigha; 1 bigha = 1 shatak, 1 shatak = 1% of an acre (roughly on West Bengal standard).

**Household:** “A household is a group of persons normally living together and taking food from a common kitchen” defined by the National Sample Survey (NSSO). In plain terms, and in accordance to the Indian rural standard, it may be called ‘family’ comprising of several members.

**Operational Holdings:** NSSO states: “An operational holding is defined as a techno-economic unit used wholly or partly for agricultural production and operated (directed/managed) by one person alone or with the assistance of others, without regard to title, size or location.... In the context of agricultural operations, a technical unit is a unit with more or less independent resources covering items like land, agricultural equipments and machinery, drought animals etc. Holdings used exclusively for livestock and poultry raising and for production of livestock and poultry products (primary) and/or pisciculture are considered as operational holdings whereas holdings put exclusively to uses other than agricultural production are not considered as operational holdings.”

- **Notes from Update on above definition:** A household operating/cultivating an operational holding may be called an operating household. But, according to NSSO and/or Govt. of India, there is no difference between a person attached to cultivation directly and one not attached to cultivation in any way. Any household “directs” and/or “manages” the agricultural production is said to be ‘operating household’. The absentee landlords and/or landowners (i.e., non-cultivating landlords/landowners) are grouped along with the cultivating holders and/or peasants within the category: “operating household”. The basic concept of ‘cultivators and/or peasants’ is thus confused by the authorities.

**Parcel:** According to NSSO “a parcel of an operational holding is a piece of land entirely surrounded by other operational holdings or by land not forming part of any operational holding. It might consist of one or more plots.

**Agricultural Production:** NSSO states that “the extended definition of agricultural production, ....includes growing of field crops, fruits, grapes, nuts, seeds, tree nurseries (except those of forest trees), bulbs, vegetables and flowers, both in the pen and in glass houses; production of coffee, tea, cocoa, rubber, forest production in parcels of land which form part of the enumeration holding and production of livestock, and livestock products, poultry and poultry products, fish, honey, rabbits, fur-bearing animals, and silkworm cocoons”.

**5. Fragmentation:** Number of parcels per holding has also been decreased drastically – from **5.7** in 1960-61 to **2.7** in 1991-92. According to many commentators, this parcellisation process in landholdings made many holdings nonviable for cultivation.

**6. Few Comments from Update:** *Table 2* describes the size of operational holdings. According to *NSSO* and/or *GoI*, the operational land holdings **less than 0.002 hectare** or 0.015 bigha are **landless**; holdings between 0.002 & 0.2 hectare (0.015 bigha to 1.5 bigha) is near-landless. Other categories are described in *Table 2*.

**Table 2: Size Distribution of Operational Holdings (in hectare)**

<b>Size Class/Categories</b>	<b>Area Operated</b>
Landless*	< 0.002
Semi-Landless*	0.002-0.2
Marginal	< 1.01
Small	1.01-2
Semi-Medium	2.01-4
Medium	4-10
Large	> 10

\*Landless and Semi-Landless sub-categories are included within the 'Marginal' broad category.  
(Source: *NSS Reports, GoI*)

**Table 3: Distribution of Operational Holdings (%)**

<b>Category of Holdings</b>	<b>Percentage distribution of operational holdings</b>				
	<b>60-61</b>	<b>70-71</b>	<b>81-82</b>	<b>91-92</b>	<b>95-96</b>
Marginal (< 1.01)	39.1	45.8	56.0	62.8	61.2
Small (1.01-2)	22.6	22.4	19.3	17.8	18.7
Semi-medium (2.01-4)	19.8	17.7	14.2	12.0	12.8
Medium (4-10)	14.0	11.1	8.6	6.1	6.1
Large (> 10)	4.5	3.1	1.9	1.3	1.2

(Source: *Same as Table 1*)

**Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Operated Area by Category of Operational Holdings**

Category of Holdings	Percentage distribution of operated area				
	60-61	70-71	81-82	91-92	95-96
Marginal (< 1.01)	6.9	9.2	11.5	15.6	17.2
Small (1.01-2)	12.3	14.8	16.6	18.7	18.8
Semi-medium (2.01-4)	20.7	22.6	23.6	24.1	23.8
Medium (4-10)	31.2	30.5	30.1	26.4	25.3
Large (> 10)	29.0	23.0	18.2	15.2	14.8

(Source: Same as Table 1)

**Table 5: Rural Landless Households (% of rural households)**

Year	Landless (<0.002 ha)	Near Landless (0.002-0.2 ha)	Total
1960-61	11.68	26.22	37.90
1970-71	9.64	27.78	37.42
1981-82	11.33	28.60	39.43
1991-92	11.25	31.15	42.40
1995-96	na	na	41.64

(Sources: 17th, 26th, & 37th rounds of NSS; quoted in *Economic & Political Weekly (EPW)*, 25.12.1999; Data of the last column are derived from *Agricultural Census, 1995-96, GoI*)

No more information has been provided by the *NSS Reports* about this landless categories.

If the study of K.H. Rao is followed (mentioned above) the landless holdings will be greater. According to his study, “**landlessness has been growing at the rate of 0.3 million per annum** in rural areas during 1971-72 to 1991-92. (*The Rural Labour Enquiry 1999-2000* provides more information about landlessness which is discussed later.)

**Fifthly**, the *GoI*, *NSSO*, etc. shed much tears about the ‘**marginalisation**’ of holdings in their survey reports. But this categorisation of ‘marginality does not help us to gather any real picture about the holdings. **The NSSO & Co. categorise the holdings as ‘marginal’, ‘small’, ‘semi-medium’, etc. depending solely upon the size of land operated.** These type of categorisation provide little about the actual state of affairs in the livelihoods who operate these type of holdings. The **loopholes and/or fallacies** in above categorisations are as follows:

‘**Marginal**’ holdings are **less than 1.01 hectare** of land and according to 1991-92 survey these are nearly **63%** of all holdings (*see Table 3*). In absolute number these are roughly **6.52 crore** (calculated from the *Table 1*). Out of this category, holdings of 0-0.2

hectare of land or nearly **42%** may be excluded as these are classified by *NSSO* as **landless and semi-landless**. So, the **remaining 21%** holdings can be said as the **marginal** measuring 0.21-1.01 hectares. In absolute terms, these are nearly **2.07 crore**.

Accordingly, '**Small**' holdings (1.01-2 hectares) are **18%** of all holdings numbering nearly **1.86 crore**. Now comes the Semi-medium holdings (2-4 hectare) numbering **1.24 crore (12%)**. These types of classifications demonstrate little. *GoI* and *NSSO* strive to establish by the categorisation of 'marginal' that these holdings are so tiny in size that these are simply uneconomic to operate and hence they are 'marginal'. This interpretation sounds enough to any ignorant person unaware of the agricultural practices. But to anyone having some knowledge about cultivation and/or rural characteristics these classifications are very much distorted and flawed. **In fact, several questions are being unanswered in these survey reports:**

- What are the type of the land under these holdings? Is it fertile or fallow? Is it irrigated? Is it mono-cropped, bi-cropped, or tri-cropped? Or in other words what is the cropping intensity (i.e., how much times these are cultivated annually)? What is the location of the land – far from the source of water or near to it? What is the charges of the water used? What are the charges of power consumed?

**An example:** a 'marginal' holding measuring 1 hectare of fertile, thrice-cropped irrigated land is economically viable than a 'small' holding measuring a semi-fertile mono-cropped 2-hectare land.

- Is the land holding parcellised into several plots? How many parcels the holding have and what is the distance between these parcels? How much modern implements can be used in these holdings (more parcelised the land, less modern implements can be used)? What are the rents of these implements?

**An example:** a 'small' holding measuring 1.5 hectare of non-parcellised land is more viable than a 'semi-medium' holding measuring 2.5-hectare land parcellised into three mutually distant plots.

- Are institutional credits of banks and/or NABARD accessible to the household operating these type of holdings? How many of them are indebted to the usurers and how much?

**An example:** a heavily indebted household (to usurious capital) operating a 'small' holding may be in utter distress than a non-indebted household operating a 'marginal' holding.

- How many family-members are there in each household operating a particular size of holding? One may have three members two of which can cultivate. Another may have six members only two of which can cultivate. Which one is more viable? These are the questions completely overlooked by the government surveys.

Hence, from the categorisation of 'marginal,' 'small' etc. solely depending upon the land-size, almost **no real "class" picture comes out.** In fact, in the Indian villages, these type of classification have little meaning to the sons of soil – the peasants. **The holdings operated can be classified as 'very poor' or 'poor' or 'medium' or 'rich' depending upon several factors (some of which are cited above).** But no or little data have been provided by the Survey Reports regarding these factors.

Moreover, if the factors stated above are linked to assess the viability of the holdings of all sizes (i.e., from 'marginal' to 'medium' & 'large'), it may be found that the 'medium' and/or 'large' holdings will show mixed results. **In real life, many 'small' holdings in West Bengal are more economic than a 'semi-medium' holding depending upon the factors related with nature & scale of cultivation.** Moreover, whether the holdings are economic or not depend on other important factors such as the relations of production – semi-feudal or capitalist. In Punjab & Haryana where method of capitalist cultivation is applied in a wider scale, medium and/or large holdings are largely economic than the identical holdings in parts of Orissa or Madhya Pradesh where this method is less applied.

Therefore, the extent of 'marginalisation' cannot be evaluated properly from the data provided by the above survey reports. Still we are using these data as we have no other options. The bourgeois method of classification of operational holdings (this method was

prescribed by the imperialist agencies such as *FAO, World Bank, United Nations' organisation*, etc. in the fifties-sixties of the last century) as '**marginal**', '**small**', etc. **does not provide any real picture about the "class divisions" or "class-demarcation" among the rural peasants.** In fact, these classifications according to "classes" can be done depending upon the development of peasants' struggle as happened either in Russia or in China. The rising tide of peasant movements will make the class divisions clear & sharp in India also. At the present juncture (when the scale of the peasant movements is at one of its lowest ebbs), if it's tried to "classify" the rural peasants depending upon the databases provided by the bourgeois methods of *GoI/NSSO*, these will lead him to a distorted/erratic conclusion. (Surprisingly, many left organisations/journals are doing so.) Even Lenin and Mao-ze-Dong "class"ified the peasants based on the then production relations.

## **B. Findings II:**

**1.** During the forty to forty-five years' period between 1960-61, 1991-92, and 1995-96 the percentage distribution of operational holdings has **changed** more drastically in the lowest class-size, i.e., in 'marginal' category (demonstrated in *Table 3*). **Update** has derived these changes in *Table 6*.

It is observed in the **Table 6** that the marginal category of operational holdings has been increased during the last forty or forty-five years by a whopping **23-24%**! Thus it may be concluded that (as done by the *NSSO*) that '**marginalisation**' of holdings are **growing rapidly**.

In the study of K.H. Rao (mentioned earlier) it is derived that:

"Indian agriculture can be aptly described as small holder agriculture with over **two-thirds of holdings** in every major state **being marginal and small** holdings. About **70 per cent** of operated area was under these holdings in **Kerala, West Bengal and Assam**. In fact, marginalisation has been taking place at a considerable rate in several states..."  
([http://nird.ap.nic.in/res03\\_4.html](http://nird.ap.nic.in/res03_4.html))

*The Agricultural Census* shows that **41.6%** of the operational holdings are in fact **less than 0.5 hectare (or less than 3.75 bigha)**. And another **38.7%** holdings are

**between 0.5 hectare & 2 hectare.** Therefore, in all-India basis, there are **80.3%** holdings either ‘marginal’ or ‘small’. If this analysis is followed, it is found that **four-fifths** of the operational holdings are in fact, small holdings in all-India basis.

[What does it indicate? Does it not indicate the **‘land hunger’** among the landless peasants in rural India? Even the ‘Land Reform’ doctor of the US imperialism, *Wolf Ladejinsky* commented in the late sixties that India is “a country with great **land hunger**”. This question of land hunger is pertinent because of the fact that many left journals/organisations don’t recognise it. Follow again. — **Update**]

**2. Update** has tried to measure the ‘marginalisation’ process of the holdings from another angle. If the class-sizes of the ‘operational holdings’ are measured only by the size of land operated (as done by the *NSSO*), the lowest categories should include **both ‘marginal’ and ‘small’ categories as ‘poor’** [**Update** is consciously using this term as it speaks more than the terms ‘marginal’ or ‘small’] **holdings**. In real life, the holdings of land size between 0.2-2 hectares have little differences in economic scale (as all the factors cited above are not coexisted concurrently). These class-sizes may be called as **‘poor’**. If these two categories (i.e., holdings of <2 ha) are taken together, the percentage of ‘poor’ categories are increased from **cumulative percentage of 61.6 (1960-61) to 80.6 (1991-92)**. It means that out of total operational holdings not less than **80.6% are either ‘poor’ or ‘marginalised’**. In other words, more than **four-fifth** of the operational holdings are **‘poor’ or ‘marginalised’**. This is the true face of the holdings pattern on question of economic viability. [Note **Box 2** for further illustration.] (*Though, strictly speaking from “class” angle all of them are not “poor peasants”*)

**Table 7: Percentage Changes in Operated Area by Each Category**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>60-61</b>	<b>91-92</b>	<b>% change over 60-61</b>	<b>95-96</b>	<b>% change over 60-61</b>
Marginal	6.9	15.6	+8.7	17.2	+10.3
Small	12.3	18.7	+6.7	18.8	+6.5
Semi-medium	20.7	24.1	+3.4	23.8	+3.1
Medium	31.2	26.4	-4.8	25.3	-5.9
Large	29.0	15.2	-13.2	14.8	-14.2

(Source: Derived from NSS Report No. 407 & Agricultural Census 1995-96)



**3.** In absolute terms, during 1991-92, the numbers of 'marginal' operational holdings were 586.8 lakh and that of 'small' operational holdings were 166.34 lakh. Therefore, the **total number of 'poor' or 'marginalised' operational holdings were 753.14 lakh (a 2.4-fold increase over the 1960-61 figures)!**

**4. Table 7** (derived from the *NSSO* data) will demonstrate the percentage change of operated area by each category during the forty to forty-five years' period.

**5. Table 7** shows that the 'marginal'+ 'small' operational holdings measuring less than 2 hectares (according to *Update* these may be recognised as 'poor') operate **19%** of operated area in **1960-61** which is increased to **34%** in **1991-92**. This means more holdings are rendered 'poor' in the last forty to forty-five years!

**6.** Apparently this is no doubt an increased share of operated area held by the 'marginal'+ 'small' or 'poor' categories in 1991-92. In fact, **Table 7** shows that all the categories except 'medium' and 'large' categories operate more area in 1991-92 than 1960-61 in percentage. Thus it may be '*concluded*' that the **top classes comprising 'medium' & 'large' categories 'lost their predominance'** (in '60-61 they operate **60.2%** of operational area and in '91-92 their share was reduced to **44.2%** – **i.e., a 16 percentage point of decrease** is observed). But this phenomenon of '*losing predominance*' by the top classes will be **faded away** if we look into the figures below:

1. In 1960-61 the 'medium'+ 'small' categories ['poor' categories – *Update*] comprising **62%** of operational holdings held **19%** of operated area. And in 1991-92, being the **80.6%** of operational holdings operate **34%** of operational area! **Hence, in real terms as a category they have gained almost nothing.**
2. Conversely, in 1960-61, the **top categories ('medium'+ 'large', i.e., operators of more than 4 hectare of operational land) comprising 18.5%** of operational households operate **60.2%** of land. And in 1991-92, **these categories (7.4%) operate 41.6%!**
3. Clearly, the drum-beatings of land reform programmes under the aegis of GoI produces nothing but **more inequality.**

7. The figures given below (derived from the data presented by *NSS Report 407*) show that with respect to the amount of area per each holding **inequality or land concentration is gradually increased surpassing all previous records:**

**Concentration (or Inequality) in Operated Area:**

- Bottom 30% operated 4.6% area in '60-61 and 3% in '91-92
- Bottom 60% operated 18.3% area in '60-61 and 14.2% in '91-92
- Bottom 80% operated 34% area in '91-92
- Top 10% operated 46% area in '60-61 and 47.6% in '91-92
- Top 5% operated 30.5% area in '60-61 and 33.6% in '91-92.

8. Note also the *Table 8* showing this incidence of inequality or concentration of distribution of operated area **state-wise**. The figures given state-wise follow the national pattern almost identically.

9. From the *Table 8* it is revealed that in the selected states (including in land-reform-famed West Bengal), the percentage of 'marginal'+ 'small' or '**poor**' operational holdings (i.e., <2 ha) **rose substantially** during the thirty years period (1970-71 to 1991-92).

But, in **Punjab & Haryana**, percentage of these 'poor' categories rose during the 80s, after declining sharply in the 70s (i.e., during the peak period of Green Revolution). Moreover, the **land concentration in the upper rungs of the operational holdings in Haryana and Punjab** is especially noticeable.

10. The percentage of 'medium'+ 'large' categories, i.e., the top categories declined in the states (which is general trend in almost all states). Moreover, the percentage of land operated by these categories has been decreased. But with careful scrutiny of the *Table 8* reveals that **a small minority of the operational holdings remains occupied with large percentage of operating area and this trend is more or less observed in all the states** (except in West Bengal & Bihar to a certain extent).

**Table 8: Concentration (or Inequality) in Operated Area (Selected States)**

State	Size Class/Category	1970-71 (%)		1991-92 (% & % change)	
		Holding	Area	Holding	Area
Andhra Pradesh	Marginal (<1 ha)	47.29	9.28	59.27 (+11.98)	17.54 (+8.26)
	Small (1-2 ha)	19.14	11.74	21.38 (+2.24)	23.34 (+11.6)
	<b>Marginal+Small (&lt;2 ha)</b>	<b>66.43</b>	<b>21.02</b>	<b>80.65 (+14.22)</b>	<b>40.88 (+19.86)</b>
	Medium (4-10 ha)	11.87	31.32	5.38 (-6.49)	23.49 (-7.83)
	Large (>10 ha)	3.47	25.75	0.81 (-2.66)	9.40 (-16.35)
	<b>Medium+Large (&gt;4 ha)</b>	<b>15.34</b>	<b>57.07</b>	<b>6.19 (-9.15)</b>	<b>32.89 (-24.18)</b>
Assam	Marginal (<1 ha)	52.40	21.64	70.78 (+18.38)	34.24 (+12.6)
	Small (1-2 ha)	30.23	26.22	19.99 (-10.24)	25.14 (-1.08)
	<b>Marginal+Small (&lt;2 ha)</b>	<b>82.63</b>	<b>47.86</b>	<b>90.77 (+8.14)</b>	<b>59.38 (+11.52)</b>
	Medium (4-10 ha)	2.99	12.20	1.51 (-1.48)	9.07 (-3.13)
	Large (>10 ha)	0.08	0.07	0.19 (+0.11)	2.55 (+2.48)
	<b>Medium+Large (&gt;4 ha)</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>12.27</b>	<b>1.70 (-1.37)</b>	<b>11.62 (+0.65)</b>
Bihar	Marginal	58.86	18.14	76.76 (+17.9)	29.1 (+10.87)
	Small	23.32	26.22	13.68 (-9.64)	25.14 (-1.08)
	<b>Marginal+Small</b>	<b>82.18</b>	<b>44.36</b>	<b>90.44 (+8.26)</b>	<b>54.15 (+9.79)</b>
	Medium	4.52	21.01	2.48 (-2.04)	18.24 (-2.77)
	Large	0.45	5.71	0.22 (-0.23)	3.92 (-1.79)
	<b>Medium+Large</b>	<b>4.97</b>	<b>26.72</b>	<b>2.70 (-2.27)</b>	<b>22.16 (-4.56)</b>
Haryana	Marginal	17.48	2.53	50.73 (+33.25)	5.32 (+2.79)
	Small	17.54	6.54	13.50 (-4.04)	8.81 (+2.27)
	<b>Marginal+Small</b>	<b>35.02</b>	<b>9.07</b>	<b>64.23 (+29.21)</b>	<b>14013 (+5.06)</b>
	Medium	31.06	49.24	11.49 (-19.57)	29.38 (-19.86)
	Large	5.62	21.83	3.96 (-1.66)	30.95 (+9.12)
	<b>Medium+Large</b>	<b>36.68</b>	<b>71.07</b>	<b>15.45 (-21.23)</b>	<b>60.33 (-10.74)</b>
Punjab	Marginal	11.71	1.46	63.22 (+51.51)	6.20 (+4.74)
	Small	19.06	7.09	11.42 (-7.64)	10.74 (+3.65)
	<b>Marginal+Small</b>	<b>30.77</b>	<b>8.55</b>	<b>74.64 (+43.87)</b>	<b>16.94 (+8.39)</b>
	Medium	30.51	45.05	9.82 (-20.69)	40.55 (-4.5)
	Large	6.02	22.12	1.69 (-4.83)	15.79 (-6.33)
	<b>Medium+Large</b>	<b>36.53</b>	<b>61.17</b>	<b>11.51 (-25.02)</b>	<b>56.34 (-10.83)</b>
Uttar Pradesh	Marginal	49.78	15.64	68.01 (+18.23)	24.96 (+9.32)
	Small	26.92	25.30	18.52 (-8.40)	26.31 (+1.01)
	<b>Marginal+Small</b>	<b>76.7</b>	<b>40.94</b>	<b>86.53 (+9.83)</b>	<b>51.27 (+10.33)</b>
	Medium	6.20	23.33	3.33 (-2.87)	18.18 (-5.15)
	Large	0.65	5.97	0.29 (0.36)	4.25 (-1.72)
	<b>Medium+Large</b>	<b>6.85</b>	<b>29.30</b>	<b>3.62 (-3.23)</b>	<b>22.43 (-6.87)</b>
West Bengal	Marginal	61.21	24.80	80.69 (+19.48)	39.98 (+15.18)
	Small	22.80	28.92	13.43 (-9.37)	30.69 (+1.77)
	<b>Marginal+Small</b>	<b>84.01</b>	<b>53.72</b>	<b>94.12 (+10.11)</b>	<b>70.67 (+16.95)</b>
	Medium	2.98	14.58	0.88 (-2.10)	7.27 (-7.31)
	Large	0.07	0.64	0.00 (-0.07)	0.00 (-0.64)
	<b>Medium+Large</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>15.22</b>	<b>0.88 (-2.17)</b>	<b>7.27 (-7.95)</b>

(Source: Derived from NSS Report 407)

**11. The figures given in *Table 8* shows that in:**

**Andhra Pradesh**

bottom 66% operated 21% area in '70-71 and  
bottom 81% operated 41% area in '91-92;  
topmost 15% operated 57% area in '70-71 and  
topmost 6% operated 33% area in '91-92.

**Assam**

bottom 83% operated 48% area in '70-71 and  
bottom 91% operated 59% area in '91-92;  
topmost 3% operated 12% area in '70-71 and  
topmost 2% operated 12% area in '91-92.

**Bihar**

bottom 82% operated 44% area in '70-71 and  
bottom 90% operated 54% area in '91-92;  
topmost 5% operated 27% area in '70-71 and  
topmost 3% operated 22% area in '91-92.

**Haryana**

bottom 35% operated 9% area in '60-61 and  
bottom 64% operated 14% area in '91-92;  
topmost 37% operated 71% area in '60-61 and  
topmost 15% operated 60% area in '91-92.

**Punjab**

bottom 31% operated 9% area in '60-61 and  
bottom 75% operated 17% area in '91-92;  
topmost 37% operated 67% area in '70-71 and  
topmost 12% operated 56% area in '91-92.

**Uttar Pradesh**

bottom 77% operated 41% area in '70-71 and  
bottom 86% operated 51% area in '91-92;  
topmost 7% operated 29% area in '70-71 and  
topmost 4% operated 22% area in '91-92.

**West Bengal**

bottom 84% operated 54% area in '70-71 and  
bottom 94% operated 71% area in '91-92;  
topmost 3% operated 15% area in '70-71 and  
topmost 1% operated 7% area in '91-92.

## 2. Landholding Patterns among SCs, STs, & other Social Groups

[From *UEB: Agricultural Census 1995-96* has enumerated landholding patterns among the **Social Groups (i.e., SC, ST, & Upper Castes+OBCs)** of rural households. The enumerations, though skewed and/or incomplete as earlier reports of the *NSSO*, provide some startling aspects about the landholding patterns among the social groups in the countryside. Unfortunately, this *Census* does not account the OBCs separately. See **Table 9** and '**Findings III**'. It must be remembered that due to the 'rounding off' the data, total may not tally in the following enumerations.]

**Table 9: Percentage of Operational Holdings & Operated Area by Social Groups (or Castes) in 1995-96 (All India)**

	SC		ST		Upper caste+OBCs	
	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area
Marginal	15.23	13.64	6.15	7.58	78.62	78.78
Small	10.51	10.34	10.80	10.84	78.69	78.82
Semi-medium	7.71	7.55	12.46	12.33	79.83	80.12
Medium	5.63	5.53	12.46	12.56	81.91	81.91
Large	5.03	4.82	9.61	8.52	85.36	83.66

*Note: Total may not tally due to rounding off*

(Source: Derived from data presented by Agricultural Census 1995-96)

**Table 10: Landholding Patterns among Social Groups (%) (All India)**

	All Social Groups		SC		ST		Upper caste+OBCs	
	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area
Marginal	62.1	17.2	73.8	28.6	45.9	12.2	61.2	16.7
Small	18.7	18.8	15.5	23.7	24.5	19.0	18.6	18.3
<b>Marginal+Small</b>	<b>80.8</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>89.3</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>70.5</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>79.9</b>	<b>35.0</b>
Semi-medium	12.8	23.8	7.5	22.0	18.7	27.4	12.6	23.6
Medium	6.1	25.3	2.7	17.1	9.4	29.7	6.3	25.6
Large	1.2	14.8	0.5	8.7	1.42	11.7	1.3	15.8
<b>Medium+Large</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>40.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>41.4</b>

*Note: Total may not tally due to rounding off*

(Source: Derived from data presented by Agricultural Census 1995-96)

## C. Findings III:

1. Out of the total Rural Households, **SC rural households** constitute slightly **more than 22%**, **STs are 11%**, **OBCs are 37%**, and **the other and/or upper castes are 29%**. (*Rural Labour Enquiry 1999-2000, <http://labourbureau.nic.in>*)

2. **Operational Holdings:** From the data provided by the *Agricultural Census 1995-96*, it is found that out of total **operational holdings** during 1995-96, Scheduled Caste (**SC**) groups constitute a mere **12.7%** (being 22% of rural households) and Scheduled Tribes (**ST**) groups **8.2%** (being 11% of rural households). Together they form **21%** though being **33%** of the rural households. Rest of the operational holdings (**79%**) constitute **upper castes (or groups)+the OBCs!**

3. **Area Operated:** Out of the total area operated, SC groups operate only 8.2% and ST groups 10.7%. Therefore, 21% operational holdings of SC+ST groups operate nearly 19% area. On the other hand, upper castes (or groups)+the OBCs (79%) operate 81% area!

Therefore, a stunning inequality is expressed through these figures. In other words, this is the true face of 'Rural India' buried under the pompous promises of the parliamentary leaders.

4. These types of inequalities are revealed in different categories of operational holdings also (See *Table 9*). As for example, '**marginal**' categories belonging to **upper caste+OBCs** are **78.6%** of holdings who operate **78.9%** area. On the other hand, '**large**' categories of these social groups are **85.4%** who operate **86.7%** area! Hence, the inequalities are more prominent at the upper rungs, i.e., **greater percentage of operational holdings and operated area both are concentrated in the hands of the upper castes+OBCs**. If this Census can provide us data for the OBCs separately – we believe – the picture will be more colourful. The overall revelations (calculated from raw data provided by the *Agricultural Census 1995-96*) are as follows:

- 21.4% 'marginal'+ 'small' (bottom and/or 'poor') SCs+STs operate 21.2% area.
- 78.6% 'marginal'+ 'small' upper castes+OBCs operate 78.8% area.

**Moreover,**

- 17.7% 'medium'+ 'large' (top) SCs+STs operate 16.3% area.

- 82.3% 'medium'+ 'large' (top) upper castes+OBCs operate 83.7% area!

5. Some startling features are revealing from *Table 10* which demonstrates the landholding pattern among the social groups. These aspects are as follows:

- There are more 'poor' holdings in the SC group (nearly 90%) than STs (70.5%). Among the upper castes+OBCs, this percentage (nearly 80%) follow more or less national pattern.
- The 'poor' categories belonging to the SCs operate more percentage of area (52%) than the STs (31%) & upper castes+OBCs (35%). In this case also, the upper caste+OBCs groups show almost similar pattern of the national level.
- Few operational holdings by the SCs belong to the 'top' categories; whereas the upper caste+OBCs exhibit almost similar pattern of the country.

**In short, the *Table 10* shows:**

- For SC groups, bottom (or 'poor') 90% operate 52% area.
- For ST groups, bottom 70% operate 31% area.
- For Upper Caste+OBCs, bottom 80% operate 35% area.
- For all social groups bottom 7.3% operate 40% area.

**Moreover,**

- For SC groups, top 3% operate 26% area.
- For ST groups top 11% operate 41% area.
- For Upper Caste+OBCs top 8% operate 41% area.
- For all social groups top 7.6% operate 40% area.

### 3. Irrigation Pattern by Operational Holdings & Area Operated

[**From UEB:** Surprisingly, the 'Agricultural Census 1995-96' does not provide any clue about the 'landlessness' among the social groups of SCs, STs, and other groups. In this respect, 'Rural Labour Enquiry' provides some data which is discussed later. Nevertheless, the data presented by the *Agricultural Census 1995-96* presents some interesting information about the **irrigation** status of the operational holdings in general and by **social groups** in particular. This information may be valuable to the readers since the intensity of irrigation is an important factor in determining the **productivity** of the holdings as well as an **indicator** of adoption of **modern (and/or capitalist) method of cultivation**. These data are presented in *Table 11*.]

**Table 11: Percentage of Operational Holdings & Area Operated by Irrigation Status & by Social Groups (All India)**

Categories	Social Groups	Wholly irrigated holdings		Wholly unirrigated holdings		Partly irrigated holdings	
		Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area
<b>Marginal</b>	SC	38.2	36.9	45.1	36.9	10.4	12.8
	ST	13.7	12.6	72.1	63.2	11.1	10.7
	Upper Castes+OBCs	38.6	39.7	44.1	34.9	11.6	13.1
	All groups	37.0	37.2	46.0	37.3	11.4	12.9
<b>Small</b>	SC	25.0	22.7	51.0	46.6	20.2	18.7
	ST	8.8	8.0	72.1	64.8	17.1	15.7
	Upper Castes+OBCs	30.9	28.8	46.1	41.9	20.1	18.6
	All groups	27.9	26.0	49.4	45.0	19.8	18.3
<b>Semi-medium</b>	SC	18.2	16.6	54.0	47.5	24.8	23.0
	ST	6.4	5.5	70.1	60.1	22.1	19.9
	Upper Castes+OBCs	26.6	24.7	46.1	41.0	24.9	23.0
	All groups	23.5	21.7	50.0	43.8	24.6	22.6
<b>Medium</b>	SC	13.9	11.9	55.8	48.3	28.0	24.3
	ST	5.1	4.0	66.5	54.0	27.7	22.0
	Upper Castes+OBCs	23.1	20.8	44.4	38.7	30.7	27.7
	All groups	20.3	18.2	47.8	41.1	30.2	26.8
<b>Large</b>	SC	6.8	5.1	71.1	57.0	18.6	13.6
	ST	3.9	3.1	65.6	49.0	29.6	20.4
	Upper Castes+OBCs	17.1	14.4	50.0	40.3	31.2	25.0
	All groups	15.2	13.0	52.4	41.9	30.4	24.0

*Note: Total may not tally due to rounding off*

*(Source: Derived from Agricultural Census 1995-96)*



## **D. Findings IV:**

**1.** The irrigation status of the operational holdings has been subdivided into three: **i) wholly irrigated holdings** – the holdings which receive irrigation facilities for the all season; **ii) unirrigated holdings** – the holdings do not receive the irrigation facilities at all; **iii) partly irrigated holdings** – the holdings receiving irrigation facilities sometimes annually. An example: a holding receiving irrigation for **one day in a year** will be called partly irrigated!

**2.** From the '*Agricultural Census 1995-96*' it is found that a staggering percentage (**47.3%**) of all operational holdings **do not get irrigation at all**. Moreover, a considerable percentage (**42%**) of the operated area are **unirrigated**.

Only **32.4%** of the operational holdings are **wholly irrigated**. The operated area which are wholly irrigated is a mere **23%**.

**16%** of operational holdings are **partly irrigated**. The operated area receiving irrigation partly is **21.4%**.

**3.** Hence, percentage of the all operational holdings receiving **whole+part irrigations are 48.4%**. And the respective percentage for the operated area is **44.4%**. This is a pathetic situation of the irrigation status revealed through these figures. This situation persists even after the 60 years of 'independence'!

**4.** If we study the irrigation status according to the categories (i.e., 'marginal', 'small', etc.), more interesting phenomena will be observed. It will be seen that **smaller the operational holdings, more they get irrigation facilities**. Study about '**marginal**' category belonging to all social groups shows that **37% of operational holdings and 37.2% of operated area are wholly irrigated**. Respective figures for the '**large**' categories belonging to all social groups are **starkly opposite: only 15.2% of operational holdings and 13% of operated area are wholly irrigated**. Corresponding figures (presented in *Table 11*) for other categories show the similar trend.

**The figures are as follows:**

- For the 'marginal', as high as 46% of holdings are unirrigated.
- For the 'small', as high as 49% of holdings are unirrigated.

- For the 'large', as high as 52% of holdings are unirrigated.

**Moreover,**

- For the 'marginal', 37% of area is wholly irrigated.
- For the 'large', only 13% of area is wholly irrigated.

5. It is noticeable that considering availability of irrigation facilities as a whole (i.e., wholly irrigated+partly irrigated), the respective figures for the categories at the two extreme ends (i.e., marginal' & 'large') are almost **similar**.

- For the 'marginal', 48.4% of holdings are either wholly or partly irrigated.
- For the 'small' nearly 48% of holdings are either wholly or partly irrigated.
- For the 'medium' 50.5% of holdings are either wholly or partly irrigated.
- For the 'large' 45.6% of holdings are either wholly or partly irrigated.

6. It is observed from the above analysis that **'large' holdings use irrigation facilities less than smaller holdings**. These phenomena indicate that the 'large' holdings cannot be said 'forward' per se in adopting the irrigation facilities. On the contrary, it must be noticeable that among the total irrigated land (which is slightly more than one-third of the cultivable area in national level) less amount is attributed to the 'large' holdings. Hence a question arises – are 'large' holdings more backward?

## 4. Irrigation Pattern by Social Groups

[Next section provides information about the irrigation status by Social Groups, i.e., by **SCs, STs, & Upper Caste+OBCs**. Data for this analysis will be available in **Table 11**. It must be remembered that due to the 'rounding off' the data, total may not tally.]

### E. Findings V:

1. It is revealed from the figures presented by the *Table 11* that irrigation is far to reach for the **ST groups** cutting across the categories (i.e., irrespective of the size of holdings).

- For the **STs**, 72% of '**marginal**' holdings are **wholly unirrigated**. The area remained unirrigated is **63%**.

- For the **STs**, **65.6%** of ‘**large**’ holdings are **wholly unirrigated**. The area remained unirrigated is **49%**.

Therefore, for the STs, larger the holdings, more is the availability of irrigation. These features are contrary to the general phenomena for all social groups.

**2.** But for the **SCs & upper castes+OBCs**, the irrigation status resembles the **general pattern**, i.e., larger the holdings, less is the availability of irrigation.

**Table 11A: Usage of Fertilisers, Farm Yard Manure & Pesticides by Categories, 1991-92 (in Tonnes)**

Categories	% of Area treated with Fertilisers	N+P+K* used per unit Area	Farm Yard Manure used per unit Area	Pesticides used per unit Area
Marginal	63.6	72.2	36.8	15.5
Small	62.6	65.5	37.4	17.8
Semi-medium	61.0	61.7	32.5	19.5
Medium	58.0	56.2	28.0	20.8
Large	47.0	46.0	19.0	17.6
<b>All Groups</b>	<b>59.1</b>	<b>60.7</b>	<b>31.2</b>	<b>18.6</b>

\*N+P+K is the measure of total consumption of nutrients used.

[Source: All India Report on Input Survey, 1991-92; Agriculture Census Division, Ministry of Agriculture, GoI]

## 5. Application of Inputs by Landholdings

[**Inputs Survey** conducted in **1991-92** shows some interesting features about the **usage pattern of different inputs** (in percentage and per unit area) by different categories. See *Table 11A* and *Findings VI*.]

### F. Findings VI:

**1.** *Table 11A* shows that **larger the holdings, less percentage of area is treated with fertilisers, farm yard manures**. The Large holdings (>10 hectare) are least ‘advanced’ with respect to the usage of fertilisers. They are well below (**47%**) the national average (**59%**). ‘Marginal’ & ‘small’ categories are more ‘advanced’ in this regard.

**2.** **Similar trend** is observed in the pattern of **N+P+K used per unit area**. ‘Marginal’ holdings use these nutrients (**72.2 tonnes per unit area**) **far more** than

the 'medium' & 'large' categories (**56 & 46 tonnes per unit area** respectively). In fact, the bottom categories ('marginal'+ 'small') use more nutrients per unit area than the national average.

**3.** Different pattern is observed in usage of **pesticides per unit area**. In this case, 'top' holdings use more pesticides than the 'bottom' holdings.

**Table 12: Rural Labour Households & Agricultural Labour Households (All India) (in million)**

	'63-65	'74-75	'77-78	'83	'87-88	'93-94	'99-00
Number of rural households	70.4	82.1	95.7	100.5	108.4	119.5	137.1
% of rural labour households (RLH) to rural hhs	25.4	30.3	36.8	37.3	39.7	38.3	40.2
% of agricultural labour hhs (ALH) to rural hhs	21.8	25.3	29.9	30.7	30.7	30.3	32.2
Average size of the ALH	4.5	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.4	4.6
Average no. of wage-earners (ALH)	2.0	2.2	1.8	1.9	1.4	1.7	1.8

[Source: Rural Enquiry Report on General Characteristics of Rural Labour Households, 1999-2000; <http://labourbureau.nic.in>]

## **6. 'Landless' Agricultural Labour Households**

[The '*Rural Labour Enquiry Report on General Characteristics of Rural Labour Households, 1999-2000*' provides some important data about the **landholding** pattern. Moreover, this '*Labour Enquiry*' deals with some important aspects related with the **livelihoods of 'Rural Labour Households' & 'Agricultural Labour Households'**. These aspects are "landlessness", "minimum wages", "consumption expenditure" "unemployment & underemployment", etc. Moreover, these data provide some important information about the rural labour and/or agricultural labour households by **social groups**, i.e., by **SCs, STs, & OBCs**, depicting some actual state of affairs among these social groups. The figures for this discussion are demonstrated in **Tables 12, 13, & 14**. In **Box 3** some terms are explained.]

## **G. Findings VI:**

**1.** From the *Table 12* it is found that the number of rural households is **137.1 million** or 13.71 crore in 1999-2000. Out of these **55.11 million (40.2%)** are rural labour households and **44.15 million (32.2%)** are agricultural labour households.

**2.** *Table 13* provides data for the social groups. It is found that **SC** rural households are **30.35 million (22%)**, **STs** are **15.14 million (11%)**, **OBCs** are **50.58 million (37%)**, and the **upper castes** are **41.02 million (30%)**. Therefore, in the rural India, **70%** households belong to the **lower** rungs and **30%** belong to the **upper** rungs of social groups.

**3.** But in case of agricultural labour household's different patterns is observed. *Table 14* provides some figures which glaringly point out that larger proportion of the agricultural labour households belong to the lower castes or groups. As for example:

- Out of the SC rural households (which are **22%** of all rural households), **51.4%** are agricultural labour households.
- Out of the ST rural households (which are **11%** of all rural households), **39.6%** are agricultural labour households.
- Out of the OBC rural households (which are **37%** of all rural households), **29.2%** are agricultural labour households.
- Out of the upper caste rural households (which are **30%** of all rural households), **only 19%** are agricultural labour households.

Thus, it can be concluded that an overwhelmingly larger proportion of lower caste rural households are agricultural labour than the upper caste + OBCs.

**[From UEB:** The term 'Agricultural Labour Households (ALHs)' is defined (in *Box 3*) as the 'Rural Labour Households (RLHs)' who derive "50% or more of their total income from wage paid manual labour in agricultural activities". Understandably, these sections of the rural households deserve appropriate attention to comprehend the "livelihoods of the poor peasants and agricultural workers" in the rural India. It is a well-established fact that the majority of the peasant households belonging to the bottom categories (i.e., marginal+poor) are compelled to seek work in agricultural activities to make both ends meet. In case of agricultural rural households (ALHs), it may be found

that some households possess and/or operate a piece of cultivated land. But this tiny piece of land is not economically viable to operate. Hence, most of these ALHs are in fact, landless. *Table 15* depicts their landlessness by social groups and *Table 16* presents data state-wise. Note also *Table 17* for landlessness among the ALHs.]

**Table 14: Rural Labour Hhs & Agricultural Labour Hhs out of Rural Hhs by Social Groups (%) ('99-00)**

	Rural Labour Households	Agricultural Labour Households
SC	61.4	51.4
ST	48.5	39.6
OBC	37.1	29.2
Others	25.3	19.0
All groups	40.2	32.2

*(Source: Derived from Table 12)*

### Box 3: Terms Explained

**i) Household:** A household is a group of persons normally living together and taking food from a common kitchen. A boarding and lodging house, a hotel or a hostel is treated as a cluster of households where each individual boarder (with his dependents or guests) forms a separate household. Households maintained and fed directly by institutional bodies such as those in prisons, police quarters, cantonments, hospitals, asylums, relief camps are, however, excluded from the scope of the survey.

**ii) Household Size:** The number of normally resident members of a household formed the size of the household. It included temporary stay-aways but excluded temporary visitors and guests.

**iii) Rural Labour Household:** A household was classified as rural labour household if its major source of income during the last 365 days preceding the survey was more from wage paid manual labour (agricultural and/or non-agricultural) than either from paid non-manual employment or from self-employment. Rural labour households include agricultural labour households also.

**iv) Agriculture Labour Household:** Of the households which are initially classified as 'Rural Labour Households', those deriving 50 percent or more of their total income from wage paid manual labour in agricultural activities are treated as agricultural labour households.

**v) Rural Labour Household with Cultivated Land:** A household with cultivated land, either owned or taken on lease, was treated as household with land. Cultivated land was taken to mean the net area sown during the last calendar year (i.e. January to December, 1998) preceding the year of enquiry and included orchards and current fallows.

**vi) Wage Paid Manual Labour:** A person who does manual work in return for wages in cash or kind or partly in cash and partly in kind (excluding exchange labour) is a wage paid manual labour. Salaries are also to be counted as wages. A person who is self-employed in manual work is not treated as a wage paid manual labour.

*(Source: Rural Enquiry Report on General Characteristics of Rural Labour Households, 1999-2000; <http://labourbureau.nic.in>)*

**Table 15: Percentage of Rural Households, Agricultural Labour Households, & Labour Households With or Without Land by Social Groups (1999-2000)**

Categories	Agricultural Labour Hhs.		Rural Labour Hhs.		All Rural Hhs.	
	With Land	Without Land	With Land	Without Land	With Land	Without Land
All Groups	42.67	57.33	41.12	58.88	59.15	40.85
SCs	35.62	64.38	34.49	65.51	44.45	55.55
STs	51.63	48.37	52.89	47.11	67.89	32.11
OBCs	45.73	54.27	42.70	57.30	60.87	39.13

[Source: Rural Enquiry Report on General Characteristics of Rural Labour Households, 1999-2000; <http://labourbureau.nic.in>]

**Table 16: Rural Households, Agricultural Labour Households, & Labour Households With or Without Land in Selected States (%) (1999-2000)**

States	Agricultural Labour Hhs.		Rural Labour Hhs.		All Rural Hhs.	
	With Land	Without Land	With Land	Without Land	With Land	Without Land
Andhra Pradesh	39.37	60.63	36.62	63.38	47.65	52.35
Assam	38.43	61.57	37.74	62.26	64.42	35.58
Bihar	28.25	71.75	27.80	72.20	53.34	46.66
Haryana	17.16	82.84	18.12	81.88	50.74	49.26
Karnataka	42.98	57.02	41.71	58.29	57.79	42.21
Maharashtra	44.84	55.16	41.08	58.92	54.05	49.95
Orissa	57.39	42.61	55.65	44.35	61.64	38.36
Punjab	9.03	90.97	8.79	91.21	38.81	61.19
Uttar Pradesh	61.86	38.14	56.50	43.50	73.78	26.22
West Bengal	36.23	63.77	34.68	65.32	50.21	49.79
<b>All India</b>	<b>42.67</b>	<b>57.33</b>	<b>41.12</b>	<b>58.88</b>	<b>59.15</b>	<b>40.85</b>

[Source: Same as Table 15]

**Table 17: Landlessness among the Agricultural Labour Households (%) (1999-2000)**

	Nil (landless)	0.01-0.20	0.21-0.40	0.41-0.60	0.61-0.80	0.81-1.00	1.01-2.00	2.01 & above
Andhra Pradesh	60.7	11.9	11.6	3.3	5.7	2.1	4.1	0.6
Assam	61.5	22.3	9.4	4.0	1.9	0.5	0.4	–
Bihar	71.8	21.6	5.1	1.0	0.3	0.2	0.4	–
Haryana	82.9	5.4	8.5	1.4	1.3	0.5	–	–
Karnataka	57.0	7.7	11.5	5.0	8.0	2.6	7.3	0.9
Maharashtra	55.3	10.1	7.2	4.1	6.4	4.8	10.5	1.6
Orissa	42.5	20.2	20.7	8.2	5.5	1.7	1.1	0.1
Punjab	90.9	5.7	1.4	0.9	0.4	–	0.5	0.2
Uttar Pradesh	38.1	38.1	16.7	3.6	1.7	0.9	0.6	0.3
West Bengal	63.7	22.7	11.5	1.1	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.1
<b>All India</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>0.5</b>

[Source: Same as Table 15]



## H. Findings VII:

1. From *Table 15*, it is found that **nearly 41%** of the rural households of India are **landless** during 1999-2000. In our earlier discussions we have found from *NSSO* surveys that during the 1991-92 this figure was 42%. Hence no change has been developed in the landholding patterns during this period. In absolute number these landless rural households are **56 million or 5 crore 60 lakh** (1999-00).

2. It is found from the '*Rural Labour Enquiry*' that the **average size** of these rural households is **nearly 4.6**. Hence in the rural India, not less than **257.6 million or 25 crore 76 lakh** people are vulnerable since their families are landless. It is well known fact that little viable alternatives to agricultural activities have been created in rural India. So, majority of these rural 'landless' households have no other options but to engage in agricultural works under any conditions forced upon them.

3. Among the **SC** groups of rural households, this picture is grimmer. More than **55%** of them are landless. In absolute numbers they are **16.86 million** rural households.

4. Landlessness is less among the **ST** groups than the national average. **OBCs** show more or less identical pattern of the national level. It is found from the data provided by the '*Rural Labour Enquiry*' (not given in *Table 15*) that landlessness among the **upper caste** households is slightly less than national level.

5. *Table 16* depicts the landlessness among the rural household's **state-wise**. In this respect, the green-revolution-famed states like **Punjab & Haryana** show **high incidence of landlessness (61% & 49%** respectively). This horrible type of landlessness – where more than or nearly **half** of the rural households are **landless** – is visible also in **Maharashtra** and **even in land-reform-famed West Bengal!**

6. **Agricultural Labour Households (ALHs)** are **32.2% (44.15 million)** of all rural households. Out of these households, **57% are landless**. Moreover, *Table 16* shows the landlessness among the ALHs **state-wise**. This landlessness pattern in the states selected, though following the national pattern to a certain extent, are grave in **Punjab & Haryana (91% & 83%)**. Cases of Punjab & Haryana may be explained by many analysts ("as a characteristic of 'capitalist' method of farming") since they are green-revolution-famed states where majority of the peasant holdings are occupied and made

concentrated in few hands. But states like **Bihar** (famous for its backward & 'semi-feudal agricultural practices) are not far behind with nearly **83% landless** among the ALHs. Even 'land-reform-famed' **West Bengal** shows landlessness (**64%**) among the ALHs **greater than the national average!**

### **Box: Facts deserving your attention**

- There were 55.1 million rural labour households and 44.2 million agricultural labour households constituting **40.2%** & **32.2%** of the total estimated rural households (137.1 million) in the country.
- A significant proportion of the **rural labour households** belonged to the weaker classes i.e. the **scheduled castes (33.8%)**, the **scheduled tribes (13.3%)** and **other backward classes (34%)**.
- The **incidence of indebtedness** among all rural labour households, defined as the percentage of indebted households to total rural labour households, **declined from 35.1% in 1993-94 to 25.0% in 1999-2000**.
- The **scheduled castes** rural labour households exhibited **higher** incidence (**25.3%**) whereas it was **lower (22.9%)** in case of **scheduled tribes** rural labour households at all-India level.
- The **average debt per indebted rural labour household (Rs. 6049)** in 1999-2000 recorded an **increase of 90.9 percent** over the level of debt (Rs. 3169) in 1993-94.
- The rural labour households of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes reported a lower extent of indebtedness (i.e. average debt per indebted households) at Rs. 5077 and Rs. 4781 respectively, whereas the other backward classes rural labour households reported a higher debt at Rs. 7731 during 1999-2000.
- A significant proportion of the **total debt was for unproductive purposes** such as households consumption (27.6%), marriages and other ceremonies (24%), repayment of debt (1%) and purchase of land and construction of building (21%). **The debt for productive purposes constitute only 18.5% of the total debt.**
- **Money lenders** continued to be the **major source of debt (31.7%)** though banks also have caught up with them (17.19%). Other sources, such as shopkeepers (7.13%), friends & relatives (15.14%) and cooperative societies (13.09%) are also significant contributors of the loan to the rural labour households.

(Rural Labour Enquiry Report on Indebtedness among Rural Labour Households, 1999-2000; <http://labourbureau.nic.in>)

7. It seems peculiar that the agricultural labour households (ALHs) have some lands for cultivation. The data provided by *Table 16* show that **42.67%** of the ALHs are 'with lands'. But closer scrutiny may transform this 'fact' into a mirage. In fact, *Table 17* confirms that the '**landed**' ALHs are **de facto landless**. In our earlier discussions it is

observed that **landholding size between 0.00 hectare to 0.2 hectares** (cited in *Table 5*) are declared as **landless & near-landless** by the surveying agencies of GoI. Following this reference frame, it is found from the *Table 17* that **75%** of ALHs are either landless and/or near-landless. The sizes of 0.21-0.40 hectare (found in the third column of *Table 17*) belong to the ‘marginal’ category (**11.2%**) as stated in the ‘*Rural Labour Enquiry*’. Only 0.5% of the ALHs operate more than 2.01 hectare operational holdings.

Thus the overwhelming percentage (**75% + 11.2% = 86.2%**) of ALHs are ‘poor’ and are compelled to seek any type of “manual work” in agriculture under any conditions supposed to them.

## **7. Unemployment & Underemployment among Agricultural Labour Households**

[Still many problems remain. The whopping percentage of Agricultural Labour Households (ALHs) seldom get full-time work. Most of the days in a year they remain unemployed or underemployed. Even the ‘Rural Labour Enquiry’ promoted by GoI states,

“The landless labourers and marginal farmers (read: peasants – *Update*) predominate the rural society. Due to seasonal nature (What’s a candid statement by our government!) of the agricultural activities they are **remain unemployed during a major part of the year....** (The surveys) show that majority of the (labour) households were without occupation.... It may.... be observed that a **majority of the members of Agricultural Labour Households (ALHs), like Rural Labour Households (RLHs) were without occupation.**

This means that most of the ALHs are “without occupation”, i.e., unemployed. The ‘*Labour Enquiry*’ demonstrates more about them:

“At all-India level, of average household size of 4.65 persons..., 2.61 persons were without occupation, 1.74 persons were agricultural labourers, 0.10 persons were non-agricultural labourers and 0.20 persons were engaged in other occupations.”

In the following points obtained from the 'Rural Labour Enquiry' this harrowing condition of the ALHs is explained. Note *Table 18* for further elaborations.]

**Table 18: Average Number & Percentage of Members Per Household in All Agricultural Labour Households by Usual Occupation (State-wise) (1999-2000)**

States	Agricultural Labour	Non-agricultural Labour	Other Occupations	No Occupation	All
Andhra Pradesh	2.01 (48.7%)	0.09 (2.2%)	0.20 (4.8%)	1.83 (44.3%)	4.13
Assam	1.61 (31.4%)	0.14 (0.3%)	0.17 (0.3%)	3.21 (62.6%)	5.13
Bihar	1.62 (33.5%)	0.02 (0.4%)	0.10 (2.0%)	3.09 (64.0%)	4.83
Haryana	1.09 (20.7%)	0.18 (3.4%)	0.18 (3.4%)	3.81 (72.4%)	5.26
Karnataka	2.11 (44.4%)	0.08 (1.7%)	0.22 (4.6%)	2.34 (49.2%)	4.75
Maharashtra	2.05 (44.0%)	0.06 (1.3%)	0.21 (4.5%)	2.34 (50.2%)	4.66
Orissa	1.60 (35.9%)	0.05 (1.1%)	0.14 (3.1%)	2.66 (59.8%)	4.45
Punjab	1.19 (23.5%)	0.20 (3.9%)	0.18 (3.5%)	3.49 (69.0%)	5.06
Uttar Pradesh	1.38 (27.0%)	0.11 (2.1%)	0.23 (4.5%)	3.41 (61.2%)	5.13
West Bengal	1.32 (27.7%)	0.09 (1.9%)	0.30 (6.3%)	3.05 (64.1%)	4.76
<b>All India</b>	<b>1.74 (37.4%)</b>	<b>0.10 (2.1%)</b>	<b>0.20 (4.3%)</b>	<b>2.61 (56.1%)</b>	<b>4.65</b>

(Source: Same as Table 15; percentage is derived by Update)

## **I. Findings VIII:**

**1.** According to the 'Rural Labour Enquiry', out of **4.65** persons (average household size) in an **agricultural labour household** (ALH), **2.62** persons or **56.34%** are non-'occupied', i.e., **unemployed**. This is indeed a very high figure even if we discount for the elderly ones, children & disabled.

**2.** Only **1.74** persons or **37.42%** in ALH are engaged in agricultural labour! Thus, the majority of the 'Agricultural' labour households do not find any 'agricultural work'. What's a paradox!

**3.** Therefore, these households/labourforce are 'surplus' in economic terms. They may be employed in small-scale & large-scale industries either in villages or in towns. But this is not happened owing to the underdevelopment of capitalist economies and industries all over the country. Hence, these agricultural labour households have little other options of getting jobs outside agriculture. They are compelled to settle in the villages; search any type of agricultural work for any amount of wages; sometimes get work but remained unemployed for majority days a year. Moreover, they are very much involved in agricultural practices. They are **hungry for land**; hungry for tilling a piece

of land, if possible, as their 'own' (which was observed by the 'land reforms' *guru* Ladejinsky in India and elsewhere in the sixties & seventies of the last century).

4. *Table 18* narrates some miserable stories about the **non-'occupation' status (i.e., unemployment)** of these **ALHs state-wise**. The stories are as follows:

- ALHs of green-revolution-famed **Haryana & Punjab** get **least agricultural jobs (20.7% & 23.5%** respectively). Therefore, incidence of unemployment among the ALHs is maximum (**72.4% & 69%**) in these states which is well above the national level of **56.1%**.
- It may be argued that Haryana & Punjab cases are exceptions as 'farming' in these states are heavily mechanized than the others. This argument is partly true because, in states like **Bihar** (with an underdeveloped agricultural practices) the **incidence of unemployment** among the ALHs is as high as **64%**!
- Even in the **land-reform-famed West Bengal** – where some modern methods of agricultural activities are claimed to be practiced – these **unemployment** statuses among the ALHs are **64.1%** (which is considerably greater than the national average)!
- Other states follow the general trend more or less with considerable exceptions in Andhra Pradesh.

5. In fact, in all the major states, except Andhra Pradesh, **more than 50%** of the agricultural labour households are **non-"occupied"**. Moreover, these non-"occupied" agricultural labour households have no other options open outside agricultural to get a job. *Table 18* demonstrates (in the last row) that in national level only **6.4%** (2.1%+4.3%) agricultural labour households **get jobs outside agricultural activities**. This is our 'real India'! Labour households, mainly, are unable to transform themselves in proletariat!

**Table 19: Average Daily Earnings of Workers of Agricultural Labour Households in Different Agricultural Operations, 1999-2000 (in Rs.)**

<b>Operation</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Children</b>
Ploughing	42.36	33.21	27.86
Sowing	38.75	28.30	25.09
Transplanting	39.53	28.59	24.56
Weeding	34.99	25.41	22.88
Harvesting	38.44	29.30	27.28
Cultivation	39.31	27.72	24.78
Forestry	46.03	33.41	41.08
Plantation	58.27	43.99	18.06
Animal Husbandry	32.25	22.68	19.74
Fisheries	54.11	34.33	41.55

(Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report on Wages Earnings of Rural Labour Households; <http://labourbureau.nic.in>)

**Table 20: Average Daily Earnings by Agricultural Labour Households (State-wise) (in Rs.)**

<b>States</b>	<b>Money Earnings</b>		<b>Real Earnings</b>	<b>Range of</b>
	<b>1993-94</b>	<b>1999-00</b>	<b>(at '93-94 prices)</b>	<b>Minimum Wages*</b>
			<b>1999-00</b>	
Andhra Pradesh	18.99	39.76	24.54	25.96 – 62.85
Assam	26.19	43.13	na	33.10 – 63.80
Bihar	16.95	35.04	22.75	38.60 – 55.54
Haryana	30.54	60.04	na	71.21 – 72.21
Karnataka	19.01	39.75	23.95	26.00 – 76.33
Maharashtra	19.41	37.47	22.44	8.46 – 108.10
Orissa	16.30	28.63	17.14	40.00 – 40.00
Punjab	41.98	63.57	na	67.25 – 69.80
Uttar Pradesh	21.43	37.85	24.42	47.00 – 79.19
West Bengal	23.64	43.32	27.59	40.49 – 96.17
<b>All India</b>	<b>21.34</b>	<b>40.15</b>	<b>25.25</b>	<b>46.22 – 77.12</b>

\*The range of the prevailing minimum wages (per day) fixed under The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 as on December, 1999.

(Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report on Wages Earnings of Rural Labour Households; <http://labourbureau.nic.in>)

## **8. Earnings & Wages of Agricultural Labour Households**

[The 'Rural Labour Enquiry' of GoI published some data about the “**Wages & Earnings of Agricultural Labour Households**” for 1999-2000. But, discrepancies remain within this data also. Normally, the survey work has been done among the agricultural workers during the peak season of agricultural activities (i.e., during the **months of June-July**) when the rate of wages, 'earnings', and incidence of employment

remain **higher**. Therefore, actual picture about these aspects is hardly available if the studies are based only on the data collected during the peak season of cultivation. But we have no other options but to depend on these incomplete databases.

**Table 19** provides data for ‘**Average daily earnings** of workers of **Agricultural Labour Households** in different agricultural operations during the year 1999-2000’. The term “Earnings” is defined in the *Box 4*. Note that these ‘earnings’ and/or ‘wages’ include both ‘Cashes’ & ‘Kinds’.

But, there are still **loopholes** in the data provided by the ‘*Labour Enquiry*’ demonstrated in *Table 19*. **Firstly**, the **earnings/wages** received in 1999-00 were **much less in real terms** (i.e., after proper adjustment of rate of inflation). **Secondly**, the earnings/wages given to the agricultural workers were **well below the minimum wages fixed by the respective state governments**. And, there are **large variations** in the rate of wage **in different states**. Moreover, these **variations are wider** among the **male, female & child workers**.

**Table 20** provides data for earnings/wages for **different agricultural operations in different states**. *Table 21* provides data for earnings/wages **in real terms**, etc. Note the **Findings IX** for our comments.]

## **J. Findings IX:**

**1.** It is found from the *Rural Labour Enquiry* that the **minimum average daily wages/earnings** by Agricultural Labour Households (ALHs) are **Rs. 40.15 for men, Rs. 28.38 for women, and Rs. 24.23 for child workers**. Therefore, the **female** workers, on an average, earn **70%** and the **child** workers earn **60%** of the wages earned by male workers.

**2.** *Table 19* shows that there are huge differences of rate of daily wages for male, female, and child workers in different agricultural occupations. In jobs like ‘plantation’, child workers get a mere **31%** wages of the male workers.

**3.** *Table 19* demonstrates also variation of wages given in different types of agricultural operations. These variations illustrate different demands of labour for different types of agricultural jobs.

4. *Table 20* shows variation of rate of daily wages across states. It is found that in states like **Haryana & Punjab**, where modern methods of agricultural practices are employed more than the other states, these rates are substantially **higher**.

5. Wages in **Orissa (Rs 28.63) & Bihar (Rs 35.04)** are miserably **lower** than the national average.

6. In many states (given in the *Table 20*) average wages received by the workers scarcely touch the lower limit of minimum wages fixed by the respective state governments. In states like **Orissa & UP**, the wages paid are considerably **lower** than the **minimums**. Even in states like **Haryana & Punjab**, workers get **less** than the **minimum** fixed by the respective state governments. Even in state like **West Bengal** where a 'Left' front is ruling for thirty years, the average wages paid are significantly low with respect to the minimum range of wages fixed by the government!

7. **In real terms**, the wages received in 1999-2000, are incredibly small. In fact, during the six years' period ('93-94 to '99-00), the wages of the workers increased **marginally (18%) in real terms**.

8. An interesting fact is demonstrated in *Table 12* (quoted in the last row) regarding the **number of wage-earners** of the ALHs. It is found that during 1999-2000, on an average, **only 1.8 persons are wage-earners of a household size of 4.6**. Therefore, **as low as 39%** of the agricultural labour households are wage-earners! Surprisingly, the same *Table 12* shows that in **1963-65, 44%** of the agricultural labour households earned wages. Is agricultural India progressing?

[*From UEB: Anyone little informed about rural India knows well that the actual state of affairs in the livelihoods of the agricultural workers is more dismal. In reality, most of the figures stated above are mere paperwork in lives of the poor agricultural workers. Majority of the workers do not get jobs at least 100 days a year!* Most of them remain in state of **starvation or semi-starvation**. In fact, the rate of average earnings/wages speak little about their livelihoods. More realistic picture in this regard may be available from their **monthly per capita expenditure.**]



## Box 4

**Earnings:** Earnings refer to the wage/salary income (and not total earnings) receivable for the wage/salaried work done during the reference week by the wage/salaried employees and casual labourers. The wage/salary receivable may be in cash or in kind or partly in cash and partly in kind. The wages in kind are evaluated at the current retail price. (Source: Rural Labour Enquiry)

**Table 21: Average monthly per capita expenditure for Agricultural Labour Households & Rural Labour Households (in Rs.) (99-00)**

	<b>Agricultural Labour Households</b>	<b>Rural Labour Households</b>
AP	396.65	401.74
Assam	<b>334.22</b>	347.01
Bihar	<b>340.07</b>	339.44
Gujarat	448.15	452.96
Haryana	552.07	552.25
Karnataka	417.31	425.36
MP	<b>338.19</b>	342.18
Maharashtra	396.90	425.41
Orissa	<b>311.34</b>	316.36
Punjab	544.87	564.83
UP	<b>373.46</b>	385.05
West Bengal	<b>388.38</b>	397.28
All India	390.45	479.62

(Source: Derived from 'Report on Consumption Expenditure of Rural Labour Households', Rural Labour Enquiry, 1999-2000; <http://labourbureau.nic.in>)

## K. Findings X:

1. From *Table 21*, it is found that the average monthly per capita expenditures of agricultural labour households (Rs. 390.45 & rural labour households (Rs. 479.62) in all-India basis are both higher than the 'median class' of these two categories (Rs 340-380 & Rs 380-420). But, agricultural labour households (ALHs) in three states (Orissa, MP, & Assam) spend less than the MPCE. And more surprisingly, six major states (specially marked in *Table 21*) spend less than national average! Moreover, the ALHs of West Bengal, where 'left' parties are ruling for thirty years uninterruptedly, spend less than all-India average!

**2.** Agricultural Labour Households (ALHs) are a part (i.e., sub-set) of Rural labour households (RLHs). Understandably, some of the RLHs may get jobs outside agricultural activities. They earn little more than the ALHs. They spend more than the ALHs too. But there is no remarkable variation among the MPCEs among RLHs & ALHs in the states selected.

**3.** In states like **Haryana & Punjab**, both the ALHs & RLHs spend considerably **more** either than the national average or than many major states. According to the *'Labour Enquiry'*, "**8 states viz., Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, and Jharkhand [MPCE]** was below the national level. **These states accounted for 51.48% of total Agricultural Labour Households** in the country." Surprisingly, the *'Labour Enquiry'* missed to mention West Bengal in this list. [There are some variations between *NSSO* figures and *Update* figures due to some rounding up for which the total/percentage may not tally.]

**4.** In earlier discussions it is found that the **average size** of an ALH is **4.6**. Therefore, on an average, a single member of an ALH can spend not more than **Rs 85 per month!** In other words, each member of an ALH can spend only **Rs. 2.83 per day!** What's a 'food for thought' for the World Bank experts!

**5.** According to World Bank standard, any person **spending (and/or purchasing) less than \$1 is very poor!** In the prices of 1999-2000 (when this survey had been undertaken), \$1 was roughly equivalent to **Rs. 35**. Therefore, according to World Bank standard, the members of an ALHs are not just 'very poor', **they are, in fact, 'destitute'**.

### **Box 5: Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE)**

The total expenditure incurred by a household over a period of 30 days divided by household size has been expressed as monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of a household. The MPCE is a very important indicator of living standard of a household. In all there are twelve classes of MPCE (lowest slab being below Rs 225 and highest being above Rs. 950) which are chosen in such a way that each class excepting the top and bottom two classes approximately contained an estimated 10% of rural population while the remaining four classes each contained an estimated 5% of the population. (*Source: Rural Labour Enquiry*)

[**From UEB:** The ‘destituteness’ of these agricultural labour households (ALHs) may be depicted more by ‘**consumption pattern**’ of them. It is a well known fact that: ‘more the expenditure incurred on food, more is the intensity of poverty’. The rural agricultural poor (both the ‘poor’ peasants & the ‘poor’ workers) are compelled to eat/consume the foodgrains (even the seeds stored for the next season!) they sown and/or earned (in form of cash and kind) within few months! Nonetheless, they toil to earn few pennies to buy their foods from the markets. Most of their earnings are spent on consumptions of food, particularly for cereals. It is found that in 1999-2000, **62.3%** of expenditure of the agricultural labour households are incurred on **foods**. And of this expenditure on food, **43.40%** is spent for staple foods, i.e., **cereals**; 13.63% is spent for vegetables & fruits; 8.39% for milk & milk products; 6.59% for pulses and pulses products (another important nutritional food item); 6.49% for oils & fats; 5.85% for meat & fish; 5.50% for condiments & spices; and 10.15% for other foods.

**Table 22** demonstrates some of these expenditures of agricultural labour households (ALHs) for selected states.]

**Table 22: Percentage of Consumption Expenditure on Food (cereals & non-cereals) by Agricultural Labour Households (1999-2000)**

<b>States</b>	<b>Foods</b>	<b>Cereals as % Foods</b>	<b>Non-cereals as % Foods</b>
Andhra Pradesh	63.5	44.1	55.9
Assam	<b>67.2</b>	<b>46.0</b>	54.0
Bihar	<b>67.1</b>	<b>54.6</b>	45.4
Gujarat	62.8	27.7	72.3
Haryana	57.3	27.3	72.7
Karnataka	61.0	36.2	63.8
Madhya Pradesh	58.0	43.2	56.8
Maharashtra	57.9	36.4	63.6
Orissa	<b>67.3</b>	<b>63.2</b>	36.8
Punjab	55.3	24.8	75.2
Uttar Pradesh	59.3	44.6	55.4
West Bengal	<b>68.6</b>	<b>52.8</b>	47.2
<b>All India</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>43.4</b>	<b>56.6</b>

(Source: Same as Table 21)

## **L. Findings XI:**

1. *'Labour Enquiry'* states that: “**preponderance of food-group** items in the total consumption expenditure of the Agricultural Labour Households is **all pervasive in all the states**”. Moreover, it is found from the *'Labour Enquiry'* that the expenditure on food items accounted for roughly **60% to 70%** of the total consumption expenditure of Agricultural Labour Households in **almost half of the states** and between **55% to 60%** in the **remaining states**. It is also stated that: “In less developed states the food items account for a much higher proportion than the all-India average. Some of these states are Jammu & Kashmir, Assam, Bihar, Manipur, Tripura, Orissa, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Chattisgarh which have higher expenditure on food than the All-India average.”

2. In fact, from the *Table 22* it is found that the agricultural labour households (ALHs) are in dire state in 'left'-ruled **West Bengal** as they are compelled to spend **68.6%** of their meagre expenses on **food** items. Moreover, the ALHs of West Bengal spend **52.8% on cereals** of their food-expenditure. What's a tragedy awaiting for the 'left' leaders of West Bengal that **only Orissa (63.2%) & Bihar (54.6%)**, famed for wretched 'backwardness', are 'ahead' of West Bengal!

3. It is also found from the *Table 22* that there are large variations within the states in expenditure on **food** items. But these variations are **sharper** in expenditure on **cereals**. According to the figures, the ALHs of **Punjab, Haryana, & Gujarat** are less 'poor' than the other states.

[Still, the figures given above cannot depict fully the 'destituteness' of the agricultural labour households. Prices of cereals vary between state to state, even within different regions of a state. Thus, 'per capita per day availability of cereals' (in grams) by the agricultural labour households may provide some picture. It is found that in **1993-94 & 1999-2000, average cereal intake (in gm) by agricultural labour households are 431 & 418** respectively. The respective figures for **all households** in India (i.e., rural & urban, both) are **434 gm & 426 gm**. Thus agricultural labour households consume **less** than other households of India and this consumption level is **decreasing**.

It is argued that poverty ratio can be measured better by the index of **'intake of calories'** instead of cereal consumption. Before the 55th round of survey by *NSSO*, intake of **2400 Kcal** had been fixed as benchmark to measure poverty ratio. But, in the 55th round of survey conducted in 1999-2000, *NSSO* made a volta-face in declaring that instead of 2400 Kcal, **1868 Kcal** would be the new benchmark. Through this statistical jugglery the **poverty ratio** in India came down **to 26%** in 1999-00 **from 36%** in 1993-94 – a 10% decline in just 5 years! Since then, lot of points & counterpoints were raised by many renowned economists/analysts though these sophisticated 'debates' never reached the downtrodden people of the country. Nevertheless, some analysts did good jobs to disclose bitter truth of poverty. One of them writes:

“[I]n the rural areas of most of the major states, **more than 80%** of the population is **not able to afford the food**, which would fulfill their calorie requirements. The case of Andhra Pradesh is glaring. The official poverty line there is the lowest and consequently poverty ratio estimated by the Planning Commission is only 10%. However, as per our computation 89.4% of population in Andhra Pradesh is not able to afford 2400 Kcal per capita per diem. Similarly, in Gujarat, the official poverty line is low and the poverty ratio is 12.4%. The calorie norms, however, require the poverty line to be very much higher and the corresponding poverty ratio turns out to be 86%. In Tamil Nadu again the poverty line is very high and poverty ratio is 94%.... Our intention here is only to bring home the wide divergence between the two sets of figures and thus point at the absurdity of official estimates.” (*Magnifying mal-development*, *Alternative Economic Survey*, 2004)

But, the poor peasants and the workers engaged in cultivation are facing far more bitter truth of “absurdities” in their lives – ‘destituteness’, ‘starvation’ or ‘semi-starvation’ etc. Any “estimate” of “poverty ratio” means nothing before their empty stomachs. Nevertheless, some facts are really hard to swallow.

In this issue of *Update*, we have tried to depict some of the burning questions of the Indian agriculture. The ‘poor’ peasants, landless peasants, ‘poor’ & ‘destitute’ agricultural workers and/or ‘semi-proletarians’ are the pivot of Indian agriculture. They are the victims of multifarious exploitations – feudal & semi-feudal, capitalist & imperialist,

economic & extra-economic, and social, etc. We hope that this issue of ***Update*** may be useful to someone who are struggling sincerely to change this existing world.]

# Land Reforms and Imperialism

In 1947, under the charade of ‘independence’, the British imperialist rulers handed over power to the Indian ruling classes made of big capitalists and big landowners. The democratic aspirations of the freedom struggles waged by the masses had been betrayed. And this betrayal was perpetrated by the overt and covert understanding and collaboration among the big capitalists, big landlords, and the imperialist powers at that time. Under this treachery everything old had been preserved. Vast amount of feudal remnants remained. Remained the old methods of extra-economic coercion by the feudal landlords. Everything rotten, putrid social exploitations & oppressions were maintained intact. Capitalism developed, but developed slowly, disturbing little of the old structure, relations, and customs. In fact, under the age of imperialism this has to be happened. And, it had been happened.

In fact, the Indian ruling classes (composed of big capitalists & big landlords) have taken a slow, limping, tardy, zigzag, roundabout, bourgeois process of agrarian reform betraying and suppressing the revolutionary-democratic spirit of the masses. It is a well-known fact that in the era of imperialism, the world bourgeoisie have lost their revolutionary potential and role in leading democratic revolutions. In this era, the bourgeoisie in several ‘independent’ and dependent countries have taken a path of reforms which may be called the “*Junker*” path as followed by the bourgeoisie in Germany in and after 1848 revolutions. In 1907, *Lenin* analysed the possibilities of two path of bourgeois development as below:

“Those **two paths** of objectively possible bourgeois development we would call the Prussian path and the American path, respectively. In the first case feudal landlord economy slowly evolves into bourgeois, Junker landlord economy, which condemns the peasants to decades of most harrowing expropriation and bondage, while at the same time a small minority of *Grossbauren* (“big peasants”) arises. In the second case there is no landlord economy, or else it is broken up by revolution, which confiscates and splits up the feudal estates. In that case the peasant predominates, becomes the sole agent of agriculture, and evolves into a capitalist farmer. In the first case the main content of the evolution is transformation of the feudal bondage into servitude and capitalist exploitation on the land of the feudal landlords – Junkers. In the second case

the main background is transformation of the patriarchal peasant into a bourgeois farmer.

In the economic history of Russia both these types of evolution are clearly in evidence.... Needless to say, in second case of the development of capitalism and the growth of the productive forces would have been wider and more rapid than by peasant reform, carried away in the landlords' way." (*Agrarian Programme of Social Democracy in the First Russian Revolution 1905-1907, Collected Works, Lenin, Vol. 13, pp 239-40*)

What have been analysed by **Lenin** hundred years ago is known as **two paths of bourgeois democratic development**. The first may be called the bourgeois-landlord path slowly 'transforming' the old feudal and/or semi-feudal agrarian structure & economy along the course of bourgeois development. Another path may be either called revolutionary or the proletarian-peasant path. **The first one** is mostly **favourable to the bourgeoisie** because it is least dangerous to their rule. This path is reformist making the peasants largely dependent on the state initiative for agrarian reforms, trying to snatch their urge of revolutionary transformation, and discouraging (and/or suppressing, if needed) whole-heartedly any awakening of the masses. **This path is favourable to the imperialism also**. Any growth of revolutionary urge and/or unrest among the landless peasants (along with the working class) may be averted if this path is taken. Moreover, be avoided the 'danger' of slipping of these countries into the 'communist' hands growing during the 1940s, particularly in Asia. If this path taken develops capitalism in the 'dependent' countries to a certain extent it cannot harm the imperialist control and grip over the 'dependent' countries since in this era of imperialism no capitalist country can survive (or 'develop') without the economic doses of finance capital and technology supplied by the imperialist countries. On the other hand, **the revolutionary path** if taken by the awakened working class and poor landless peasants, will not only overthrow the power of the big bourgeoisie (& of course, big landlords), but it also jeopardise the imperialist exploitation, control, and hegemony over the country. Thus in all sense, the **first path**, i.e., the *Junker* (or landlord-bourgeois) path is **beneficial** both to the big capitalists and to their imperialist masters.

Now listen to a little known personality, named **Wolf Ladejinsky**, (a Ukrainian exile in the USA after the October Revolutions in Soviet Russia), renowned for his



'historic' role in framing the land reforms programmes of the US imperialism in Asia and other backward countries:

“In agrarian Asia, land reform is no more an academic issue; and the **experience of Japan and Taiwan on the one hand and that of Communist China on the other** may well serve to identify the best interests of other Asian and non-Asian, non-Communist countries. The **first two have shown that the tiller can get the land he cultivates with no recourse to bloodshed and chaos.** Above all, they have demonstrated that a peasant can achieve his goal as a free and independent producer. He has escaped the serfdom which Communist Russia and China have imposed upon their peasants at the point of a bayonet.

It must be underscored, however, that the achievement rests on the will and resolution of a government in power **to meet the land hunger of the landless**, on the appreciation of the political consequences of a land tenure system where poverty and social degradation are its hallmark, on the ability to force upon the landlord class the concessions which make reform possible.

The last point is crucial. In the part of the world I come from, landlords, big or small, are not social reformers. To them, the very words “reform,” “change,” and “concession” partake of the devil. In their blind insistence on the status quo, in Russia and in China they were the creators of a revolutionary situation and the unwitting and unwilling allies of Communism.

**In the end, they dug their own graves and those of their own governments.** For these reasons and in the context of the revolutionary ferment sweeping the world these many years, the concessions imposed by a government upon the landlords are essentially an affirmation of a positive goal of a free people. Failing these affirmations, **the alternatives are the agrarian revolutions of Communist Russia and Communist China.**

There is ample proof that sooner or later the dispossessed will take the law into their own hands, to the utter destruction of the governments and classes who failed to grant them peacefully what they otherwise try to acquire through violence. The rise of Communist Russia and China has demonstrated that in the predominantly agrarian countries a government must have peasant support; failing that it truly has no support at all. It has demonstrated that the foundations of the social structure stand or fall in the countryside and that the peasant and his interests and aspirations must be placed

'in the center of the piece'. Japan and Taiwan are examples of why and how the peasant was placed there and how he and the country benefited from the act. Communist China is a lesson and a warning of the shape of things to come when the economic and social aspirations of the peasant are sacrificed for the sake of an outdated status quo."

Thus a **US expert clarified "Two Paths" of "Land Reforms"** from the imperialist point of view to be adopted in the countries simmering with peasant discontents. The **prescribed path** is: 'reforms' from top "with no recourse to bloodshed and chaos"; 'reforms' by the existing governments to save the "foundations of social structure" inherited from the past; 'reforms' of the landlords lest the "land hunger" among the landless don't go along path of "alternatives" of "agrarian revolutions of Communist Russia and Communist China".

In this perspective, the agrarian reforms taken by the Indian ruling classes will be understood. The ruling classes have taken the most peaceful path of agrarian reform (and 'land reforms') **from the "top"** by the bureaucratic state apparatus under the direct patronage of imperialism, particularly the US imperialism. In fact, this path of agrarian reforms ('land reforms' and bourgeoisie type of 'reforms' etc.) has been exercised and dictated by the US imperialism after the World War II in Japan, Taiwan, (and South Korea) to save these countries from slipping into the hands of 'Communism' then surging ahead throughout Asia. Soon after the surrender of Japan in 1945, the **MacArthy** led occupation forces dictated Japan authorities to take the agrarian reform aggressively. In these years, a little known figure to Indian people, **Wolf Ladejinsky**, a bitter anti-communist expert helped MacArthy to formulate the whole programmes of agrarian reform first in Japan, and next in Taiwan (after the peoples' democratic revolution in China). **Louise J. Walinsky**, who collected and edited the **Ladejinsky Papers**, applauded him highly in the following fashion:

"From the end of 1945 when he was posted to Japan to assist General Douglas MacArthur **in planning the postwar land reform** there, Wolf Ladejinsky spent the last thirty years of his life almost entirely in Asia. These three decades were devoted to the cause of agrarian reform....

Ladejinsky thus committed himself entirely to the survival and flourishing of democracy in the newly independent countries of Asia. Such an outcome, he was convinced, depended on satisfying the basic needs and yearnings of impoverished

rural Asians for a bit of land they could call their own, or at least for security of tenure and a tolerable rent on the land they cultivated for absentee and exploitative landowners. Only in this way could they escape from the grinding poverty and personal indignity they were increasingly unwilling passively to accept. **Aware of how powerfully Lenin's promise of "land to the tiller" had influenced the Russian peasantry to accept and support the revolution**, all too soon to be dispossessed again in favor of collective and state farms, **Ladejinsky developed a profound sense of the *political* role of the land**. He recognized the importance of ownership, tenurial rights, and the distribution of the land's rewards **in determining whether democracy would indeed survive in Asia or whether its rural masses would succumb to the Communists' promise**.

Ladejinsky's major contribution to the highly successful land reform in **Japan** (1946-48) brought him almost instant renown and led to requests for his advice and assistance in many other lands. He made a significant contribution to the equally successful land reform in **Taiwan** in the early postwar years....

From 1950 through 1954, in addition to his normal duties as agricultural attaché in Tokyo, he reviewed the effects of the Japanese land reform, assisted again in Formosa [i.e., in Taiwan], and, **at the urgent request of the ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, examined at first hand tenurial conditions and problems in Kashmir, Punjab, and Madras (in 1952) and the general status of the land reform program in India (1954)**. His final year in U.S. government service was spent as land reform advisor with the aid mission in Saigon. **From 1956 to 1961 he continued his work in Vietnam as personal advisor to President Diem**. For the next three years **he served the Ford Foundation** as a kind of roving regional consultant, advising on the foundation's work in **Nepal, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines**. In the latter part of 1964 he began his consulting work **for the World Bank**. After participating in a major World Bank study of **India's prospects for economic development** and in other missions to **Mexico and Iran**, Ladejinsky was **posted to India early in 1967 as a member of the Bank's resident mission in New Delhi**....

**While India was his primary responsibility and concern during this last period**, he was also called upon to assist *ad hoc* with the Bank's work in Iran, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.... Particularly in a number of the India papers over the last decade of his life, Ladejinsky repeatedly reviewed the evolving problems (and

programs) of the small submarginal farmer, of land reform, of the Green Revolution, of such institutional constraints as cooperative credit, extension, and administration, and so on.” (*The Selected Papers of Wolf Ladejinsky, Agrarian Reform as Unfinished Business*, Louise J. Walinsky, editor; published for the World Bank, 1977; <http://worldbank.org>)

Being an instrumental figure for the US strategy in Asia, *Ladejinsky* performed his duty as a ‘reformer’ of agrarian structures. He had an exclusive role in the ‘Land Reforms’ programmes of the Indian ruling classes first as an ‘advisor’, then directly from the auspices of the **Ford Foundation and World Bank**. In fact, he visited India in the 1950s several times and from the early 1960s to 1975 he stayed in India ‘instructing’ (read: ‘directing’) central and state governments of India in multifarious activities connected with agriculture, particularly in ‘Land Reforms’ programmes.

In the later years, as a consultant of ‘India Operations’ of *World Bank*, *Ladejinsky* made significant role in shaping the role of *World Bank* in Land Reforms programmes in general. In fact, the US imperialism had a worldwide scheme of peaceful process of agrarian reforms. In the late fifties and sixties of the last century it had helped the ruling classes of **Latin American countries** to take the route of peaceful transition of agrarian reforms not disturbing its tightened grip over these countries. Though in number of cases the ‘agrarian reforms’ taken produced minimum ‘reforms’, still these programmes of ‘agrarian reforms’ delivered immense political dividends to the US imperialism. In content, these process of ‘agrarian reforms’ was more political than economic. The history of number of Asian and Latin American countries amply testified this fact.

*Wolf Ladejinsky*, in his later days in India, made several comments about the programmes of land reforms in India suggesting some changes. Appreciating few peculiarities in Indian agrarian problems & structures he strongly recommended some measures called “**minimum programme**”. In this programme he advocated “recording of tenancies”, “security of tenures” rather than “redistribution of land”. Interestingly, **these prescriptions of Wolf Ladejinsky was implemented later by the ‘Left’ Front Government in West Bengal**. Not only the programmes of an imperialist expert had been implemented, but also the LF government claimed this fit of ‘land reform’ quoting *Ladejinsky Papers* in the *Economic Survey 2004* of WB government (p 37). In

effect, the LF government has implemented the programmes of the capitalist-landlord classes of India under direct guidance of imperialism.

In the programmes of 'agrarian reforms' (i.e., the path taken in bourgeois-landlord way) different organisations of imperialist fame, such as ***World Bank, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation***, etc. took crucial role. They made few changes in their strategies consisting of several measures in directing the 'land reforms' of the dependent countries. Particularly, during the 'Cold War' period, these imperialist agencies advocated programmes of **developing 'land market' in name of 'land reforms'**. Until 1990s, scores of dependent countries are dictated to develop land markets under the guise of land 'reforms'. From Philippines to Brazil, Indonesia to South Africa...., these prescription of developing land markets are rigorously followed, of course, with some serious side-effects. In most of the cases the victims were landless peasants and 'poor' peasants operating and/or owning a small piece of land. The devastating results of these programmes in the countryside of many countries sparked protests, sometimes revolts among the landless & poor peasants. On the face of these ongoing protests now comes few 'voluntary' agencies to "salvage" the poor and landless peasants. (Alas! Where have all the revolutionaries/communists gone!) From the late nineties of the last century these voluntary organisations or the NGOs occupy the stage of 'protests' against the 'imperialist' land reforms programmes of the *World Bank, FAO*, etc. in many countries. The simmering discontent of the poor & landless peasants have been hijacked. Novel programmes/proposals have been articulated and/or advocated on behalf of these NGOs. Concepts of developing 'land markets' is not discarded but is being modified to make the old programmes of the imperialism less painful. Concepts and programmes of 'Self Help Groups' have been promoted. Promoted the institutions of micro-credit as panacea legitimising the poverty, miseries, exploitations meted on the landless & poor peasantry. Thus, the "old structures", "old landlords", "old systems", "old order" have been preserved in toto serving the interests of the imperialism and existing ruling classes of those countries.

In this pervasive atmosphere of 'reforms' (and 'reformism') created and nurtured by capitalist classes (with overt & covert understandings with the old semi-feudal classes) under the direct patronage of the imperialist powers the demands of "LAND TO THE TILLERS" have been vanished almost.

The details of the above programmes of 'Land Reforms' of the imperialist powers/agencies cannot be done in this short space of **Update**. We are presenting here some of the excerpts of *Wolf Ladejinsky* & others. In the coming issues of **Update** we may discuss the roles played by *World Bank*, *FAO*, and the NGOs.

The first one is an excerpt of an article written by **Wolf Ladejinsky** (published in **July 1950**) when he returned from Taiwan to Japan after accomplishing some of the missions of Land Reforms.

### **“Too late to save Asia?”**

The Chinese peasant seemed out of his mind. He kept jumping up and down, making strange gestures with his fingers and palms, working them in a semicircular fashion around his mouth. My interpreter chatted with him briefly, then explained the situation to me. It was the paper the peasant held in his hand that caused his hysteria. That paper was the deed to the single acre of land which he had worked as a tenant for the past thirty-two years. Now that precious acre of land belonged to him!

This scene, which I witnessed not long ago in the courtyard of the land office of the small village of Kwangsi, deep in the heart of China, epitomizes the problem and promise of all Asia. It sums up the present and perhaps the future of a continent where agrarian discontent is gnawing at the vitals of the social order. It is on this strife the Communists have been able to capitalize so successfully by posing as advocates of reforms designed to benefit the peasantry. (...)

The heart of the problem of Asia today lies in the countryside. It is on the farm where solutions must be sought and found.

In the Chengtu Plain of Szechwan, the richest granary of China where I traveled last fall, the farmers who had just harvested excellent crops seemed concerned with just one idea – how to secure enough rice for themselves and their families, how to fill the empty rice bowls and add to the half-empty ones. The discontent I sensed in Szechwan is typical of the many regions I visited in recent years in other parts of the Far East, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. An overworked and overexploited peasantry that for centuries was inertly miserable is now alertly miserable.

The reasons for the age-old wretchedness of the Asiatic peasant can be summarized in a brief sentence: too many people, too little land. Pitifully small holdings, inadequate tools, and institutional arrangements over which the peasant has no control intensify his plight. A large part of the misery and hunger arises from the relationship between the peasants and the landowners, a relationship which the courts and local officials have given official sanction through the centuries. The peasants have been obliged to pay exorbitant rentals, for they have no bargaining power. Nor is their contract of tenancy worth the paper it is written on; it may be altered or abrogated at any time at the whim of the landlord.

The peasants of Asia have never been satisfied with this state of affairs. They have often raised horny hands against persons and governments which they believed were the causes of their distress. But in the main, until very recently the conservatism and inertia of the farmer and his ingrained, feudal subservience to the state and to his landlord kept the pot from boiling over. **Now the forces that keep the peasant within well-defined bounds are breaking down under rising agrarian discontent. The peasantry is at last in motion. The Communists have exploited this fact and placed it in the center of Asiatic politics.** It is only one side that has known how to exploit this overwhelming question and to place it in the center of Asiatic politics where it belongs.

The catastrophe of China is a case in point. Many are the reasons that explain the victory of the Communists and why in 1949 Nationalist China could not boast of a single Leonidas holding a single Thermopylae. But one cause seems to me beyond dispute: **Nationalist China was pressed and pushed over not so much by force of arms as by the Russian Communist tactic of giving land to the poverty-stricken, landless, hopeless peasantry.**

Is there any wonder that peasants living on the ragged edge of penury are easy marks for Communists who are masters in the art of exploiting agrarian discontent for their own political ends? The peasants know nothing and care less about Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism, and they are surely not eager for collectivization. (...)

Every revolution invokes the name of Liberty, but the concept of liberty is always shaped by the existing economic and social needs. For the Russian peasant's liberty meant

the ownership of the lord's land. The Communist promise in 1917, which ultimately was broken, that the land would belong to them fell on the eager ears of peasant soldiers who promptly left the front lines, rifle in hand, and went home to divide it. As Lenin put it, taunting his opponents, the peasants voted with their feet for distribution of the soil. Thus, Lenin and his party succeeded in "cornering" what Karl Marx called "the peasant chorus without which the (proletarian) battle cry will degenerate into just another swan song." **The Communists would never have obtained power in Russia had they not successfully exploited the peasants longing for the landlords' acres.**

Toward the end of his life Lenin despaired of a Communist victory in Western Europe. He visualized the final crucial battle as a conflict between a Communist East and a capitalistic West. In this struggle China and India were to join Russia as the forces of Communism. To win Chinese and Indian support, Stalin developed a program for those countries consisting of three stages: a struggle against foreign imperialism, an agrarian revolution under the leadership of the Communist Party, and finally a proletarian dictatorship. The key step was to be the wooing of the peasants.

It is in connection with this step that the Chinese Communists have assumed a role which has led many observers mistakenly to assume that they are "mere agrarian reformers." Actually they played this role because, according to Communist theory, the road to political power and dictatorship in China lay through the sponsorship of agrarian reform — land for the landless." To satisfy the innermost needs of the peasantry was only a means to a large end which has little to do with the welfare of the peasants.

Stalin's three-page program of revolution as exemplified by China, is now being exported to Indo-China, to Burma, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and even into little-known Hyderabad. The revolt last year in Hyderabad was a peasant uprising, about the largest, and for a brief moment perhaps the most effective in Asia outside of China, and it was under Communist leadership. The uprising was finally crushed and the Communists jailed, yet it is worth noting that as in China the peasants of Hyderabad were not enticed by Communist dogma but merely followed the welcomed Communist bait of "land and liberty in Asia."

There are fertile fields for the Communist strategy in other parts of India and Pakistan. (...)



Many people wouldn't hesitate to approve of a revolutionary movement if it is the only way the common man can secure his elementary wants. But we must realize how serious a threat an agrarian revolution could be at this point of history, even if the upheaval seems justifiable from that point of view. **The only way to thwart Communist designs on Asia is to preclude such revolutionary outbursts through timely reforms, peacefully, before the peasants take the law into their own hands and set the countryside ablaze.** But reforms, if they are to have a lasting effect, must come not only from opposition to Communism but from an honest purpose and plan to raise the status of the peasantry. (...)

Douglas MacArthur in Japan, Nehru in India, and, more recently, General Chen Cheng of Formosa have understood the urgency of taking the wind out of the Communist sails in a peasant ocean. MacArthur knew how to do it and did it. A successful land reform under his direction has created in Japan a new, large class of private owner cultivators and has rendered rural Japan practically impervious to Communism. Nehru is trying hard to do it.

India's needs for technical farm improvements are overwhelming, and **Nehru** is well aware of it. But he is just as conscious of the urgency for a concurrent land reform program which will give the Indian peasant an incentive to improvement and a sense of responsibility.

**Nehru's motivation is economic, social, as well as political: "If we don't do it, they will." And "they" are the Communists.** Suggested farm reform can become a powerful political instrument. The native governments friendly to us would be more likely to win popular support, and popular support in Asia is "peasant support or nothing." **An owner cultivator or a reasonably satisfied tenant would acquire a stake in society. He would guard that society against extremism. Private property would be strengthened** where it has been weakest at the huge base of the social pyramid. The common man of Asia would become a staunch opponent of Communist economics and politics not necessarily **to favor the interests of the United States** but simply because his own interests lay in the same direction.

Secretary Acheson summed up the causes of Asia's tensions in the San Francisco address on U.S. policy toward Asia. "They (the Asian people)," he said, "have been striving

for independence, better education, more widespread ownership of land, and control over their own destiny.” He continued, **“It is no accident that their goals and our goals are the same.”** But while we are busy enriching the economic, political, and social institutions the American people have already achieved, Asia is yet to create the beginnings from which a democratic society may evolve. Such conditions cannot be handed to Asia as a gift; they must grow out of Asia’s wishes, opinions, and activities.

Nor is this easy. For Asia, unlike Western and perhaps also Central Europe, lacks almost entirely the traditions, institutions, habits of thought, and experiences which are essential to democracy. **That indeed is the principal political and psychological reason why Communism is a much greater threat in Asia than in Europe.** (...)

The need for U.S. material and technical assistance in Far Eastern programs of agricultural improvement is accepted as an integral part of our policy in Asia. (...)

Whatever we may contribute to Asia’s advancement and stability **be it in the form of dollars, of technical guidance, of organizational advice, or of military assistance** — our policy and all our diplomatic competence and tact should be actively and sympathetically guided by the knowledge that the foundations of the social structure stand or fall in the countryside and that the peasant and his interests and aspirations must be in “the center of the piece.”

We must make an effort to persuade the more conservative Asian groups that rural reform is essential to their own preservation as well as in the interest of the peasantry. Provided such basic attitudes are developed, here and in Asia, the United States could begin to supply the mechanisms of reconstruction and effectively employ them. (...)

They [the landlords] suffer from myopia, a disease likely to be fatal. The landlords of Szechwan refused to support a mild reform program even though the Communist armies had already penetrated the gates. In the rest of Asia, too, landlords also may be their own gravediggers — and of their own governments.

In country after country one sees **feudal classes** bent on maintaining the status quo unsullied. They cannot gain popular support. They neither benefit the rural community nor have they proved at all effective against Communist penetration. **They are the unwitting and unwilling allies of Communism, for they are the creators of the**

**revolutionary situation. It is these and such forces that today hold great and decisive power in Asia. Without their consent and support no progressive organization can function.** One of the basic tasks of the United States foreign representatives abroad should be **to convince these groups and their governments to follow the example of Tzar Alexander II, who saw in time that his only chance of keeping the throne was to initiate reform.** He warned the Russian landowners a hundred years ago that “it was better to begin the abolition of serfdom **from above than** to wait for it to begin itself **from below.**” **He abolished it from above,** and the Romanov dynasty retained the throne for another half a century until Alexander’s less wise grandson lost it. (...)

“Land and liberty” has ever been the ideal of all peasants. It is the American ideal. We must lend all means at our disposal to bring it closer to realization. If the struggle against Communism is to succeed, it must be inspired by an ideal, a broad and bright vision of the future, that will find an instant response among the disinherited of the largest of the continents. (...) (*Source: The Selected Papers of Wolf Ladejinsky, Agrarian Reform as Unfinished Business, Louise J. Walinsky, editor; published for the World Bank, 1977; <http://worldbank.org>*)

### **‘What had we done in Japan’**

(...) To Asians, where four out of every five till the good earth, “farming” is synonymous with crushing poverty, a bad case of landlordism, heavy taxation, usury, and debt without end. (...) This poverty on the land has been intensified in many areas by political unrest and war.

The Communists, with a quick eye for the main chance, have been making the most of peasant discontent by holding out that most enticing of baits – ownership of the land. **The Communists succeeded in China. They have failed utterly in Japan. There, General MacArthur stole the Communists’ thunder** and made the landless peasant’s dream of a piece of land he could call his own come true. **In Japan we have forged an economic and political weapon more potent in Asia than the strongest battalions and blandishments the Communists can put forth.** (...)

In pre-occupation Japan, only 30 percent of the farmers owned the land they cultivated; the other 70 percent either owned no land or were part tenants and part owners. (...) The tenant paid 50 percent of the crop as rental; he provided, in addition, his own expensive chemical fertilizer, farmhouse, farm buildings, implements and seed, and numerous assessments other than the land tax. A tenant was lucky to keep 30 percent of the crop for himself. Eviction was a common practice. (...)

This plight of the majority of the Japanese farmers was not lost on General MacArthur. He remembered the failure of the Philippine government in 1945 to act upon his advice to fight farm unrest among the Filipinos through more widespread ownership of land. He understood that any real chance of cutting the political ground from under the feet of the Communists, of bringing even a semblance of democracy to Japan, depended on the improvement of the lot of those who worked the land.

He knew that there was no point preaching democracy to empty stomachs. **On December 15, 1945, General MacArthur issued the historic directive, ordering the Japanese government** “to take measures to insure that those who till the soil of Japan shall have a more equal opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labor.”

In compliance with this directive, the Japanese government **drafted a land reform program, formally enacted into law in October 1946.** The reform provided for the purchase by the government from the landlords of 5 million acres for resale to the tenants who had priority proof purchase. Absentee landlords were required to sell all their land; noncultivating resident landlords could retain 2.5 acres, and owner operators could retain 7.5 acres-or 30 acres in Japan’s northernmost island where land is more plentiful. In cases where subdivision would lower the productivity of the land, the owner operators could cultivate a larger acreage.

The price of land was fixed by the Japanese government at per-acre rates of 3,000 yen for rice land and 1,860 yen for dry land, when the rate was fifty yen to \$1.00. The government, in addition, paid a subsidy to the landlord. Tenants who cultivated the land acquired by the government had priority of purchase and could pay for the land at once or in thirty annual installments.

There was no attempt to abolish tenancy completely; this was thought neither feasible nor desirable. Only the abuses were to be corrected. Cash rent ceilings of 25 percent of the value of the crop were established; a written contract was introduced which specified the rights and obligations of landlord and tenant. (...)

There was serious opposition to the program to be overcome. Some landlords attempted to impede the program by illegal eviction of tenants, lawsuits against the Japanese government alleging that the reform law was unconstitutional, and through propaganda to dissuade the tenants from buying land. The courts ruled the law constitutional, and in most cases tenants refused to be moved from the land. Lingering doubts as to the intention of the government to press the program were dissipated as the first purchases and sales of land became known.

The fact that the occupation backed the program had much to do with the overcoming of the opposition. But even General MacArthur with his authority and the confidence of the people could not have altered a traditional land structure **if conditions had not been ripe**. They were indeed. Land reform was not an occupation whim but a well-judged response to the needs of the great majority.

Three years after the inauguration of the land purchase program, the task was accomplished. A Japanese farmer once told me that "A farmer without his land is like a man without a soul." There are now many more farmers main Japan with "souls"; more than three million, in fact, the number of households which at last have acquired a stake in their communities by purchasing 5.5 million acres of land. The acreage operated by the tenants has declined from 46 to 11 percent. The owner operator is now Japan's typical farmer. This all came about without a single loss of life, the shedding of a drop of blood, or a yen's worth of damage to property.

(...) No reform can add to the very limited arable acreage of Japan. Even under a system of equal distribution of arable land, a farm family would own only 2.3 acres. This is almost 2 acres short of what is needed to give the Japanese farmer a reasonable assurance of a decent standard of living. **The occupation farm policies were designed, therefore, not to seek unattainable final solutions but to alleviate burdensome economic conditions and to forestall the Communist peril that feeds on them.** This much has been achieved. (...)

The occupation, by meeting the farm issue squarely, has **destroyed one of the fertile sources of Communism in Japan** and has given the country a good measure of political stability. In the view of one like myself who saw the Communists rise to power in Russia, failure to ease the farmers' lot **would have turned the Japanese countryside into a hotbed of unrest and possibly delivered it to the Communists.** The occupation's farm aid strengthened and multiplied the independent landowning peasants, the group that makes for a **middle-of-the-road, stable rural society, lending no ear to political extremists.**

For this reason, we – and not the Communists – **have made political capital** from the rural diplomacy we conducted here. (...)

The Communists of Japan tried hard to exploit the agrarian difficulties of the country. They regarded the village as their very special oyster, and they cherished the ambition to use it as a base from which they would infiltrate the entire Japanese economy. Japanese Communists frankly admit now their lack of popular support in rural areas. This was eloquently proved by the September 1949 election of prefectural farm commissions when only two Communists were elected out of a total of 456 members. Today the Communists' role as a political party in the village has almost vanished.

What has taken place in Japan is food for thought in meeting the farm problems in the rest of Asia, in the Philippines, and in the Middle East. It is a commonplace that no government in Asia can hope to survive without peasant support. No armed force can keep the pot from boiling over if the needs of the farmers are not met. (...) [*Source: Ibid; written in June 1951*]

[**From UEB: Ladejinsky** observed in Japan, “a farmer without his land is like a man without a soul”. In his later years, he observed in India “**land hunger**” among landless peasants. Being a learned advocate of imperialist-backed land reforms he judged the true “hunger” of the landless peasants – even in post-war Japan – an advanced country in all respects than present-day India!

After the mission accomplished in Japan and Taiwan, the US administration **sent Ladejinsky to Vietnam in 1955** “to assist in an urgently needed land reform effort”. In Vietnam, *Ladejinsky* was appointed as the advisor of the

notorious ruler Diem where he tried to make a grand programme of agrarian reforms to halt the march of 'communism' at least at the gate of the 'South Vietnam' occupied by the US forces. In Vietnam, *Ladejinsky* spent seven years (1955-61) and wrote several articles. The excerpts cited below are taken from some of these articles written between 1955-56. – ***Update***]

## **Missions in Vietnam**

(...) **Land reform and farm conditions are political issues.** The Russian and Chinese Communists have succeeded in projecting the land problem into the very center of Asian politics. The Communists have been able to capitalize on the landlord-tenant strife with startling success by posing as advocates of reforms for the benefit of the peasantry. The **Viet Minh** followed in the footsteps of their masters, successfully preaching the same gospel. The accounts of officials and landlords may have exaggerated the Viet Minh's hold on the people, perhaps, in part, to underscore the magnitude of the task facing the new administrators. However, even when this factor is taken into consideration, the persistence of ideas implanted by the Viet Minh cannot be denied.

It has been suggested that non-economic ideas were largely responsible for the Viet Minh's strength in the community. Their method of "selling" their wares was one of a tremendous and unceasing political activity which kept the countryside seething with excitement; even anti-Viet Minh officials and landlords expressed grudging admiration for the Communists' organizational ability and their political acumen in exploiting to the fullest advantage every exploitable issue. As one official remarked: "They made greatest political capital of the land issue, but it was not only the land. Everything the Viet Minh touched was political: the creation of educational facilities, repair of roads, tax collections, army behavior, or capital punishment meted out to a 'criminal' farmer — all of these and much else were carefully explained on the ground of political necessity." The Viet Minh were, in effect, engaged in a continuous process of trying to convince the common people that their interests were identical with those of the Viet Minh and vice versa. Significant also is the evidence that the Communists were able to mobilize local talent to carry out their multifarious activities.

If the above observations gathered in the field are correct, there is cause for concern on the part of the national government regarding the current state of political activity in

the countryside, or rather the lack of it. A brief visit in central Vietnam convinces one of the existence of a political vacuum as wide as the countryside we traversed. Worried officials recognize the fact that no new content is being poured into the vacuum created by the physical disappearance of the Viet Minh. (...) Mere slogans and propaganda directed against the Viet Minh are not enough to save the day in the coming battle for Vietnam. (...)

There are other means of making political capital. The **land reform** of the national government is one of those “other means” as well as the first attempt to translate one of the aspirations of the farmers into political language. For reasons discussed elsewhere, this land reform phase may fall short of the anticipated results. Hence the pressing need to raise the status of the farmers by attempting to satisfy some of the human wants about which they feel so keenly. (...)

In a politically conscious Vietnam engaged in a bitter struggle with the Viet Minh, it would be **doubly dangerous to delay** indefinitely the partial realization – at the very least – of some of the expectations. The price of inaction might eventually be Communist action. (...)

[*Ladejinsky* wrote more about the urgency of land reforms and sent an urgent missive to the US President urging him for **immediate release of US aid** to accomplish land reforms programme in Vietnam. – *Update*]

(...) According to the current thinking, the government will buy the land from the landlords at a fixed price, give them an initial cash payment equivalent to 10 to 15 percent of the price of the land, and make the remainder payable in bonds. The tenants in turn will pay for the land in a number of annual installments. The immediate problem is to find \$30 million to make good the initial cash payment to the landlords.

**The government hopes that the United States would provide the sum as a grant or loan, preferably the former.** The reform is aimed at the southern part of Vietnam where holdings are large and the tenants are legion. Central Vietnam is a different case altogether and will not be dealt with for the time being.

Having had something to do with the matter in my past and present capacities, my own comment may not be out of order. First of all, I share my chief's view that the **land**



**must be given to the landless without delay and for well-known reasons.** Procrastination will not do any longer – not if we are interested in the survival of Vietnam on the side of the free world. This may sound alarmist, but in the southern part of Vietnam, which is the agricultural heart of the country, the landless who cultivate 75 percent of the land are not in a happy frame of mind. The landlords feel no better, and the upshot is that government tax collections are at a vanishing point. On the political side, the repercussions may be worse and the government is cognizant of that.

Second, while \$30 million is a lot of money, it is a modest sum when viewed in the context of the purpose to which it will be put and the anticipated effects. I am told that it costs hundreds of millions of dollars to maintain one U.S. division in the field. As against this, \$30 million will enable the government of Vietnam to secure the support of the overwhelming majority of the people; in time of need they may be expected to make up many a loyal armed division.

Two other considerations enter into the picture: the rapid pace of economic development in North Vietnam, assisted by the Russians, Chinese, East Germans, Czechs, and Poles, and **the wave of neutralism which is engulfing all of the mainland of Southeast Asia. In these circumstances, South Vietnam is the only uncompromisingly anti-Communist, anti-neutralist state in Southeast Asia. It is an outpost we cannot afford not to strengthen in every way.** The scheme under consideration is perhaps the most important step in that direction. It appears to me, therefore, that the \$30 million is not an excessive contribution towards the realization of a *must* program about to be undertaken by the government, in the face of known landlord opposition. (...) **It will be a case of waging a war that must be won.** (...)

The anticipated aid from the United States is to speed up and smooth the process of an **orderly reform from the top**. The stakes in this undertaking are greater than the risks; the former are nothing less than meeting the Communist challenge at a time when all opposition to Communism is softening, of broadening the base of political power, and of creating some sort of economic order where little is to be found now. (...) Hence the plea to be *bold*, to use President Eisenhower's special aid fund if possible, and, by the same token, **to give added meaning to U.S. foreign aid.** (...)

If I judge the Vietnamese temper correctly, an American refusal might have certain undesirable effects. I don't wish to imply, however, that U.S.-Vietnamese relations will be affected to any serious degree by our failure to assist the country to resolve this crucial issue.

Vietnam is not going to trade on both sides of the street in the manner of other recipients of U.S. aid. Because of that, in any consideration of the problem discussed here it is well to keep in mind that, **on the mainland of Southeast Asia, Vietnam is just about the only country which acts like a true ally.** (...) (*Source: ibid*)

[**From UEB:** 'Unfortunately' to *Ladejinsky*, this "outpost" in the southeast Asia had been lost by the US imperialists in face of heroic resistance of the landless peasants and masses. Nevertheless, the "**political issue**" like land reforms had not been lost by the imperialists. In fact, in other countries of Asia, Americas, Africa, etc. the prescriptions of **land reforms "from top"** were followed in different forms and scale under the diktat of the imperialists keeping in mind the particularities and peculiarities of the agrarian problems of those countries.

Moreover, to *Ladejinsky* and other mentors of imperialists, the 'question of land' and/or the 'land reforms' were **primarily and strictly a "political question"** to douse the flames of revolutionary upheavals among the landless peasants. They were critical to the "feudal" landlords in the sense that "they are the creators of the revolutionary situation". And the fact that "it is these and such forces that today hold great and decisive power in Asia" must be recognised by the US imperialists. In this context, an alliance with these "feudal" lords should have been forged to make them understood that either 'take the path of reforms' as "Tzar Alexander II" done in Russia or perish at the hands of the 'communists'. This **model** prescribed by *Ladejinsky* was in fact, followed in many countries even in India.

Before he was sent to Vietnam for the special mission, *Ladejinsky* came to India in 1952 at the insistence of *Chester Bowles*, the US ambassador in India to formulate a model for land reforms in Indian perspective. Next excerpt is written by *Chester Bowles* in 1954 expressing his urgency of land reforms in Asia and India. – *Update*]

## **‘Land reforms – by force, or by law?’**

(...) There is another pressing reason for land reform. **In the coldest terms of stopping Communism**, as a strategy in the Cold War, the democratic world simply must carry out these reforms before the Communists can use the lack of them as an excuse to overthrow democracy. At present the high rents demanded by landowners and pitiful wages paid to the landless labourers represent **a ready-made target for Communist agitators from the Philippines to Egypt, as well as throughout most of Africa and South America.** (...)

Whenever land inequalities are great as tenancy is Communists find a fertile field. (...)

I have seen the same close correlation between land ownership and the success of the local Communist parties in country after country, all the way to Japan. (...)

In **Thailand** the land system is more or less unfair than in most parts of India with a majority of the peasants either owning their own land or renting for an average of around 25% of the crop. Even here the Communist gains have recently encouraged the right-wing government of Pibul Songgram to put a limit of 20 acres on the ownership of all land used for agriculture. (...)

In **Vietnam**, in what used to be French Indo-China, we find a less unhappy situation. (...) [This] was one of the principal causes for the bitterness against the French colonial occupation which has enabled the Communists, under Ho Chi-Minh, to secure mass support for the long-drawn armed struggle.

(...) In the **Philippines** the failure of the past governments to face up courageously to the land problem permitted the Communists led Huks to grow such roots in many rural areas. (...)

In **British-controlled Malaya**, the Communists, who have been fighting as guerrillas for seven years, find the same fertile soil. Here, too, the land belongs to large owners who extract exorbitant rentals from the peasants. (...)

On **Formosa** [now **Taiwan** – *Update*] Chiang Kai-shek was faced with some of the same political and economic issues on which he was beaten in China, including land ownership. In the last two and three years, his Nationalistic government has put through a land

reforms programme which could well **serve as a model** for every free nation in Asia.  
(...)

In **Japan** the correlation between land ownership and Communist success again holds true, and in a happy way. Under General Douglas MacArthur the most extensive land reform in Asia has taken place, and Communist strength among the villages is correspondingly slight.

(...) With the advice of our agricultural expert, **Wolf Ladejinsky**, a law was enacted which redistributed all land of absentee owners and all land above seven acres. About a third of the total farm acreage changed hands. (...)

Any examination of the land question in every Asian country demonstrates the danger of any further delay in carrying out thorough reforms. (...)

In **India** the obstacle to land reforms such as those so desperately needed in the **Tanjore district** are unquestionably formidable. The big landowners are educated, articulated, politically astute in a position to bring powerful pressure to bear on state legislatures.\*

Yet I believe that there are irresistible forces pressing for reforms. It is my hope that India will be the first great Asian nation to face the issue and **solve it in a peaceful, descent and democratic way**. (...) **In Russia and China the peasants voted for land reforms with their feet and their guns. In India they now vote for it by the ballot**. (...)

In 1952, I arranged to have two of Americans foremost experts in land policy, *Wolf Ladejinsky*, the architect of the reforms in Japan, and *Keneth Parsons*, Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Wisconsin, come to India to review the land ownership situation and to prepare recommendations for the government. After intensive studies in several states, including Madras and the Tanjore district, *Ledejinsky* reported that the bitter complaints of the peasants reminded him of similar complaints he heard in pre-Communist China in 1946. The land inequalities in parts of India, he said, were as bad or even worse than he had seen anywhere else in India.

Both *Ladejinsky* and *Parsons* concluded that progress in reforms was much too slow to meet the rising discontent of the villagers. Members of the India Planning Commission told me that these reports were influential in guiding the recommendations in the Five Year Plan. (...) (*Source: from 'Ambassador's Report', Chester Bowles, 1954*)

[\* In fact, due to these “big landowners”, who “are educated, articulated, politically astute in a position to bring powerful pressure to bear on state legislatures”, the land question in India was included in the state-list. *Ladejinsky* observed in his later years in India that these “politically astute” landowners were formidable voices against any form of land reforms and had in fact, important role in policy making within the ruling Congress Party. – **Update**]

[**From UEB:** “Sometime in August or September 1952,” wrote *L. J. Walinsky*, the editor of *Ladejinsky Papers*, “*Ladejinsky* arrived in **India** and remained there for about three months, during which he made field trips in the **Punjab, Madras, and Kashmir** and prepared reports on each for the Planning Commission.... *Ladejinsky* was **attached to the Indian Planning Commission** for the purpose of these studies. **The reports were made directly to the Planning Commission and discussed in each case with its members and staff.**” In fact, *Ladejinsky* was deeply involved with Government of India and on many occasions **instructed ministries and Planning Commission ‘what to do’ and ‘what not to do’** regarding land reforms in India. He again returned to India in the years of 1961-1964 as a mentor of *Ford Foundation* works. In these five years’ period, he not only lectured the Indian government on their tasks but also travelled to **Nepal**, the **Philippines**, and twice to **Indonesia** to propagate the land reform model of the US imperialism. Later **he settled in India (1964-75) as a World Bank man** and concentrated his focus in different agricultural problems including “**Green Revolution**”, “**technological improvements**”, **etc. apart from land reforms**. In these years, he acted as “reformer” and agents of changes in making the third world agriculture a destinations of imperialist capital. He “was asked to assist in more conventional Bank missions to **Mexico and Iran** in 1966”. He wrote “forty-seven pieces” of articles in these years: “forty-one for India”. He made extensive “field-observations” in Punjab, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bengal, eastern Uttar Pradesh”.

During the *Ford Foundations* years (1961-64) he developed strategies of land reforms stating that the reforms in countries like India cannot go along the same path followed in Japan or Taiwan. In place of “**redistribution of land**” he rather proposed for countries like India the concept of “**Land Ceiling**”. But after some dismal performances of the Indian government in this regard, he later advocated the “**Recording of Tenancies**” as described earlier in the introductory comments to this chapter. Nevertheless, he **concerned with the peasant unrest** developing in the sixties and seventies of the last century and assertively instructed the government in a continuous manner to accelerate processes of ‘land reforms’ to combat the ‘danger’.

The following excerpt was written in **April, 1970.**]

### **‘Peasant Unrest’ in India (1969)**

(...) It was the realization that the land reforms during the past two decades have not measured up to anticipations **that led to the conference of the state chief ministers in November 1969**. The **prime minister** left nothing unsaid to stress the urgency of the meeting. In her view, “The warning of the times is that, unless the Green Revolution is accompanied by a revolution based on social justice, **I am afraid the Green Revolution may not remain green.**” Mrs. Gandhi wanted the chief ministers to “act now when there is still time and hope” to implement the reforms properly as part of the new agricultural strategy, because “No single program so intimately affects so many millions of our people as land reforms.” Proceeding from the general to the specific, the prime minister pointed out the well-known ABC’s of what should be done, noting that the problem lies in the lack of effective implementation. Important, too, was the emphasis on reforms effectively carried out along with access to credit and other resources so that the newly obtained rights in the land could be productively used.

If the chief ministers were to commit themselves in earnest to the cause espoused by the prime minister, the **following** would have to be **attended to: The preparation of a record of rights of ownership as well as tenancy**, for without it no claim could be legally established and no tenant could attain **security of tenure; written agreements instead of the prevailing oral agreements, rentals clearly defined, and receipts for rents made mandatory**; as has been provided in some states, a tenant should not be liable for eviction for nonpayment of rent when arrears of

rent are being recovered from the produce and other assets of the tenant; the right of resumption should be extinguished at least until “personal cultivation” is so defined as not to infringe on tenancy rights; “voluntary surrenders” should be so regulated that the government or local authority can settle other tenants on surrendered land if such takes place; while the **ineffective ceiling provisions** are practically beyond redemption, they should be reexamined primarily with an eye to **preventing further concentration of land in relatively few hands**; in any new rights gained by a tenant, access to water where available should be part of it, particularly as a means of utilizing new farm practices; finally, the creation of the type of village body in which the representation of tenants could become directly involved as an aid to the implementation of a reform.

These are not novel measures; all are mainly concerned with security of tenure rather than distribution of land. The failure to enforce the ceiling provisions to create surplus land for distribution has been so general that any corrective measures are probably futile. The recent (late February 1970) announcement of the Uttar Pradesh government and that of Tamil Nadu that they are contemplating the lowering of the ceilings is hardly the panacea it appears at first glance, even if such measures are enacted. One must note not only the evasions, litigations, and harassment produced by the ceiling measures in the past but also the distinct possibility of diverting attention from the fundamental problem of how to achieve security of tenure. For these reasons, security of tenure rather than redistribution of land is the main issue of reforming what has remained unreformed in the agrarian structure of India. (...)

Despite the mixed setting with the preponderance of negative factors, it is reasonable to conclude that the issue of reform will not remain in the doldrums. **The tide of unrest is bound to rise** and with it agitation and organization of the discontented by political parties, both old and new, and **not only the parties of the extreme left**. In these circumstances, what states’ legislatures normally refuse to enact and enforce under the due process of law, they may well be compelled to grant under duress. Tamil Nadu, for example, may be a case in point.

Prior to the 1969 outbreaks of violence and loss of life, Tamil Nadu was reluctant to revise its tenurial enactments in line with the suggestions of the Planning Commission;

recent indications are that it might, at long last, fall in line. Rajasthan might be another straw in the wind judging by the overt agrarian unrest in Ganganagar district and the chances of allaying it. There, opposition parties have organized groups of underprivileged farmers to make sure that the land about to be irrigated by the new Rajasthan canal is not auctioned off to the highest bidders but redistributed among the underprivileged at fixed prices.

Under this pressure and in the hope of bringing the agitation to an end, the government of Rajasthan was compelled to set up a committee to conduct an on-the-spot probe into the existing rules for the allotment of land to poor farmers. The outcome of the committee's deliberations remains to be seen, but the point to stress is that even the concession of looking into the matter would not have taken place but for the agitation and organization of the farmers by a variety of political parties. **None of these cases nor the land and harvest grabbing in West Bengal, Kerala, and similar instances in a few other states are models of agrarian reformism.** They are nothing of the kind, but it takes little imagination to see that **the stage is gradually being set for a determined group to make political capital by organizing the village poor and pressing their demands outside an orderly legislative process.** It is for this reason that the Home Ministry envisions an “**explosion**” in the countryside if these problems are not dealt with vigorously and without delay.

“Explosion” may be long in coining or in its literal sense it may not come at all. But the prospect of mounting instability and violence cannot be excluded unless the states come to realize that theirs are the opportunities of enforcing beneficially the modest, **non-revolutionary** programs which have always been the **core** of the Indian agrarian reform movement. (...) (*Source: ibid*)

[Concerned with the unrest going on and the lackdaisical attitude of the government in implementing the reforms prescribed, *Ladejinsky* formulated a “minimum programme”. He described this “**minimum reform programme**” as “**not a revolutionary programme**”. Rather “it requires only the legitimation of customary peasant rights”. – *Update*]



## **“Minimum Programme” for India**

(...) Granting that reforms in India may yet see better days, what should be the character of a **minimum program** to which the states of India should address themselves? Experience here and elsewhere suggests an action program as outlined in the following paragraphs.

First and foremost is the preparation of a record of tenancies without which no tenant's claim could be legally established and no tenant can obtain security of tenure. (...) Written lease agreements instead of oral ones and receipts for rents should be made mandatory. Crop share rents are extremely difficult to regulate and should be replaced by cash rents; to facilitate this, either the rents should be fixed as a multiple of the land revenue or else the state governments should divide land in each area into a few broad categories and determine the average produce of each such category of land and the average price at which it may be converted into cash; as a rule of thumb, no rental should exceed a third of the crop, particularly where the tenant is responsible for all the inputs.

The essential purpose of tenancy reform is to give security of tenure and to regulate the rent tenants pay. One without the other makes no sense, and the two measures must go hand in hand. The Indian land-man ratio being what it is, no land at a rental below 50 percent or more of the crop can be secured without the force of law behind it. The tenant will not be able to protect himself without the assurance that, barring misuse of the land or nonpayment of rent, he can remain on the land undisturbed and with a right of renewal of the lease. **This is the basic part of “security of tenure” and is crucial to the entire scheme of land reform legislation.** To make this effective, the most debilitating part of the land reform in India, the ill-defined right of an owner to “resume” or take back the tenant's holding for “personal cultivation,” should be abolished or permitted only in exceptional cases defined by law. In practice hardly any tenants voluntarily surrender land; they do so only under the threat of total separation from the land, even as an agricultural laborer. Such surrenders, if they are not fictitious, should be so regulated that other tenants are settled on the land; in all other instances, which is the majority of them, they should not be permitted except when the land is required for some specific nonagricultural purpose. (...) (*Source: ibid*)

## **Box: Problems of ‘Land Reforms’**

The agrarian reform movement in Asia anticipated most of those in the Middle East and in Latin America, but this advantage in time did not bring about uniformly good results. With the exception of Japan and Taiwan, the picture of Asia leaves much to be desired. The landlords' property in South Korea has found its way into the hands of the tenants, but the government's failure to come to the financial assistance of the new owners has brought about indifferent results. The civil war in South Vietnam caused that reform to be short-lived. The Burmese tenants are owner farmers now, but government after government has failed to capitalize upon this and develop the rich land resources of the country. The Philippines has four reform failures on its record and is trying now for the fifth time with no greater prospects for success than heretofore. West Pakistan and Indonesia have proclaimed reform but with hardly any implementation, while Nepal, after a dozen years of cogitation, is just barely taking the first step. Finally, there is India, significant and encouraging for what it has attained in unprecedentedly difficult and bewildering conditions and just as significant and discouraging for what it has failed to attain, and for the reasons why.

None of this has anything to do with ignorance of the tenancy's conditions or inability to draft legislation to meet those conditions. Even Nepal, a closed and remote society only yesterday, is skilled enough to write good measures — if it wants to. Surely the same can be said of every country where reform has failed.

A number of reasons explain this state of affairs. To begin with there may be insufficient administrative and technical skill to mount a reform; but this is not a critical issue, and failure to implement a reform cannot be attributed to it. More to the point are inadequate measures or half-measures deliberately drafted so as to retard — if not obstruct altogether the application and implementation of a reform; absence of leadership among the peasants to propagate the reform idea and exert effective pressure on legislative bodies; disinterestedness — if not overt opposition — on the part of intellectuals and molders of public opinion; and, most important, the built-in opposition to reform by the landlords, whose role in the body politic is out of all proportion to their numerical strength. This combination of factors inhibiting reform is hard to overcome.

Land ownership as the main point of an agrarian reform is difficult to achieve. Examples are legion, and the reason is not far to seek. Land redistribution under agrarian reform is a compulsory measure imposed by a government upon the landowners on economic and legal terms unpalatable to them. In effect this involves a drastic redistribution of property and income at the expense of the landlords. It becomes a revolutionary measure when it passes property, political power, and social status from one group in the society to another. This is a real meaning of an agrarian reform where land redistribution is its central objective. Considering the fact that, in the areas under discussion, legislative assemblies are still dominated by land-propertied classes, it is not difficult to see why both the enactment of appropriate legislation and its enforcement present such formidable problems. Thus land reform, despite its economic implications, commences as an essentially political question involving a most fundamental conflict of interests between the “haves” and the “have-nots.”

*(Ladejnsky excerpt prepared for ‘Conference on Productivity and Innovation in Agriculture in Underdeveloped Countries’ held in 1964)*

[Taking a cue from the **recommendations** of this man, the **Left Front Government of West Bengal** enacted the “**Operation Barga**” in eighties for which it achieved massive congratulations from the ruling classes of India as well as the imperialist masters like *World Bank, FAO, United Nations*, etc. The LF government proved in practice that no other ‘bourgeois’ governments in India could implement the (imperialist-dictated) bourgeois programmes of ‘Land Reforms’ in such a way except themselves. What’s a remarkable achievement earned by these ‘leftists’! In fact, the LF government is glad to publish an **excerpt from *Ladejinsky Papers*** in the ***Economic Survey 2004***, to prove their ‘commitments’ in accomplishing the “Unfinished Business of Land Reforms” of *Ladejinsky* in Bengal soil. The excerpt quoted by LF government is written in December, 1974. – ***Update***]

### **“Operation Barga”: “unfinished” dream of an imperialist strategist**

(...) They (i.e. the landless and the semi-landless) are not only poor but have no political pull despite their numbers and no organization whatever. Presently, no political party, including the extreme left, is capable or willing to undertake such a chore. The days of the united front government of four or five years ago dominated by the Communists are gone. The 300,000 acres or so of land “grabbed” by Communist activists have since been returned to their owners, and many of the grabbers while their time away in jails. In this political topsy-turvy it is not surprising that the landless and the sharecroppers are left high and dry. Nor is it surprising that in the face of chronic distress and deprivation they are afraid to alienate those who provide them with work at least for part of the year. (...)

Whether the poor eat better is less a function of increased production than of purchasing power they command, but the latter will remain at low levels or hardly a part of the “income stream” if the agrarian structure continues to be dominated by a handful of wealthy farmers. Land reform – redistributive as well as protective – suggests itself as an obvious antidote against inequality of land and other income-earning assets. This presumably would strike at the root cause of inequalities and their perpetuation. In West Bengal, particularly, this is easier said than done. The pockets of high concentration of ownership are there; the 5 percent who own 50 percent of the land could stand a thinning-

out process, although the poorest of the poor, the landless, with no rights in land, would hardly come in for any shares.

This approach, however, is mostly academic; **the political climate for any redistributive scheme is not “right,”** and the ceiling legislation and its ultimate effect on land redistribution among the needy can be dismissed as of marginal value, as illustrated by the following development. The area slated for redistribution in West Bengal under the ceiling laws is 452,000 acres. In the past two years 58,000 acres have been acquired but **only** 5,000 acres were actually distributed. The remainder is under dispute in law courts. **A more rewarding way of helping one category of the poor – though not solving their problems – is to give the sharecroppers or tenants complete security of tenure, as distinguished from distributive reforms.** This would mean enforcement of the already existing legal rentals, sharing of inputs, recorded rights in the land, an end to evictions, and delivery of promised access to institutional financing of their agricultural operations. (...) (*Source: ‘Food Shortages in West Bengal – Crisis or Chronic?’; Ladejinsky Papers; quoted in ‘Economic Survey 2004’, Government of West Bengal, p 37*)

[Thus the dream of *Ladejinsky* was fulfilled in India by ‘left’ parties along the way prescribed by imperialism. In fact, the ‘old’ revolutionary (proletarian-peasant) path was abandoned by the ‘leftists’ in the late sixties of the last century. They opposed, sometimes vehemently, the spontaneous **“land grab” movements** of the landless peasants **describing it “chaos” echoing *Ladejinsky*.** Instead of this potential revolutionary path, they consciously **projected a path of reforms “from top”**. **Firstly**, during the late sixties, the **UF government** preferred bureaucratic measures to recover the ‘benami’ lands enjoyed by the landowners (bypassing the Land Ceilings Act). **Secondly**, under this UF Government of West Bengal legal avenues of ‘Operation Barga’ was prepared. ***Debabrata Bandyopadhyay*** (IAS), a renowned personality and former chief of the ‘Land Reform Commission’ of West Bengal Government writes how a ‘left’ minister of the UF Government asserted to take the land reform programmes **in a bureaucratic (“from top”) opposing the “land grab” movements. – Update]**

## **‘Unfinished Tasks’**

(...) *Hare Krishna Konar* who was the land revenue minister in both the UF governments was totally against illegal seizure of private land whether benami or held clandestinely by other means. His thesis was that the peasantry in West Bengal like elsewhere in the world was highly conservative in matters relating to private property. Under the inducement of any political party they might illegally occupy such private lands but they would look upon it as acts of banditry. They would not hold on to these lands with the shifting of political power from the left to other centrist or right forces. So he discouraged such seizures and insisted on proper vesting of ceiling surplus land through due process of law. It was entirely on his leadership that the kisan sabhas provided genuine witnesses before the revenue officers through which about one million acres of clandestinely held good lands were vested in the state. Bureaucracy played a significant role in unearthing ‘hidden’ land by painstaking investigations and vesting them through proper process giving due opportunity to the landowners to defend their cases. (*Source: by D. Bandyopadhyay, Economic & Political Weekly (EPW), July 5, 2003*)

[In another article, *Mr. Bandyopadhyay* explained more about the ‘Land Reforms’ programme of the ‘leftists’. – Update]

## **Land Reforms & Agriculture: The West Bengal Experience**

(...) [L]et us examine briefly West Bengal’s land reform programme. Land reforms in the state took place in **two phases**. Each phase had distinct characteristics of its own. The **first phase was in 1967-70** under the two UF governments.

When the first UF government came to power in February 1967, the **countryside** in West Bengal was **seething with agrarian discontent**. The first arrow of the militant Naxalbari movement was shot in that village soon after the new government assumed power. Hare Krishna Konar, the charismatic peasant leader who became revenue minister, tried to dissuade the breakaway group of the CPI(M) from taking to violence. He failed. **To contain the movement politically in addition to the administrative and police actions being undertaken**, he said that he would act on Mao Zedong’s famous thesis of ‘fish in water’. Militants (fish) could roam about freely in the ‘water’ of peasants’ discontent. **If the restlessness of the poor peasantry could**

**be reduced, the fish would vanish.** Though ceiling provisions were introduced in 1955, **by 1967 only 300,000 acres** (approximately) of land had **vested**. This was all surrendered land of big landlords. It was common knowledge that the landed gentry still controlled huge chunks of agricultural land, way beyond the ceiling through various devious means. They had well crafted documents to show that nominally they did not possess any land above the ceiling. These documents could be disproved only by overwhelming oral evidence of direct witnesses like sharecroppers, agricultural workers and other categories of rural workers who directly worked under the real owners and not under the nominal title holders. A massive quasi-judicial campaign was launched to unearth the clandestinely held land strictly according to law and established procedures. By 1970 (in less than three years), about a million acres of good agricultural land vested in the state.

It had some important side effects which should be mentioned. The poor peasantry participated in the quasi-judicial proceedings in large numbers as witnesses. They found that it yielded results. Violence had created terror but produced no land for redistribution. **They reposed faith in peaceful collective action, eschewing the path of militancy.** The Naxal movement in rural areas **faded away.** (...)

During the Congress regime of 1972-77, some efforts were made to get back the land lost by the landed aristocracy. But they failed as proper legal procedures were followed while vesting. But they took their revenge on sharecroppers and agricultural workers who tendered evidence against them. Many sharecroppers were evicted. Social ostracism and even physical punishment was meted out to too many.

Thus, **when the Left Front (LF) government came to power in 1977** they had to urgently give attention to the plight of sharecroppers who had suffered badly during the previous regime. Benoy Choudhury, another famous peasant leader, became land reforms minister. (...) [A] procedure was followed with appropriate modification during **'Operation Barga; 1978-81,** with startling results of the **recording of 1.2 million sharecroppers in three years.**

Taking advantage of a law passed during the internal emergency (1975-77), which allowed free title to homestead plots up to five cents for a homeless family, 500,000 such

cases were also recorded in tandem with 'Operation Barga', giving title to such actual occupiers.

In quantitative terms over **1.6 million sharecroppers were recorded giving them hereditary right of cultivation**, and a fair deal in crop sharing with a certificate of sharecropping which could be used as a document to establish one's identity and also for securing crop loans from institutions. **About a million acres of vested land were distributed among 2.5 million beneficiaries who were landless or land-poor peasants.** Half a million households were given title to homestead plots. Land reform thus directly benefited a little over four million rural households – a significant proportion of the rural population. (...)

**After several decades of violence and turmoil** during each harvesting season, **Operation Barga brought peace to the countryside.** This tranquillity in the rural areas induced and encouraged private investment in agriculture for long-term benefit. Those who had the capacity could now think on a long-term basis and make investment decisions for increasing production on their own land. (*Source: EPW, March 1, 2003*)

[Thus, a land reforms expert (of bourgeois origin) made a candid appraisal of the land reforms programmes of LF government. The "land grab" movement had been "contained"; forcible "seizures" of land had been opposed; "restlessness of the poor peasantry" "faded away" and "vanished" by the land reforms programmes of the LF government executed through the bureaucracy and judiciary; and finally these reforms brought "peace to the countryside" "after several decades of violence and turmoil". Overall, it may have concluded that the land reforms programmes of the ruling classes of India under the patronage of imperialists was executed by the "leftists".

But, *Mr. Bandyopadhyay* missed a point, probably due to his class angle. He should have mentioned that **most of the 'benami' land was recovered by the struggling peasants in this period of "turmoil"**. LF government, praised for his 'extraordinary efforts' for land reforms, recovered & distributed little 'benami' land by the machineries of bureaucracy and judiciary. Most of the land, in fact, vested and distributed during those period of "violence" and "turmoil" under the direct pressures of the peasant unrest. Moreover, it should have been told that the measures of land reforms taken by LF government is very much limited in scale, skewed and full of fallacies. **Ajit Narayan**

**Basu**, an ex-member of State Planning Commission writes in the following way. –  
**Update]**

### **Land vested & distributed**

- Upto September 2001, the LF government distributed **10.58 lakh hectare** of land. **Most** of these lands (**6.26 lakh hectares**) were **distributed before 1977**, i.e., before the period LF ministry came to power. Moreover, out of these distributed lands majority were handed over during the period of peasant movement of late sixties. Therefore, the LF government, **distributed only 4.32 lakh hectare of land during the last 29 years!** (*Source: Economy and Politics of West Bengal, Ajit Narayan Basu*)

[Nevertheless, this is a ‘remarkable achievement’ in comparison to other states. Thus the LF proves that they are far better supporter and executor of land reform programmes of the ruling class than any other bourgeois parties in India.

But, buried under this ‘extraordinary success’ of land reforms, lies a bitter truth uncovered by Mr. Debabrata Bandyopadhyay. In a special article, Mr Bandyopadhyay states that the programme of ‘Operation Barga’ **silenced the ‘bargadars’ of their demand for title/ownership of the land they cultivate.** – **Update]**

### **‘Time is not ripe, yet!’**

(...) Harekrishna Konar was revenue minister (1967, 1969-70). During these three years, approximately 10 lakh acre of land outside of ceilings was vested into the hands of government according to the Act. In this regard the witnesses of bargadars were very much important. One day, in our conversations, I asked him, ‘bargadars are taking too much responsibility in vesting the lands. Are you thinking to give them the ownership of the land?’ He answered in simple, **‘time is not ripe, yet’.**

That was 1969-70.

Ten years after started the Operation Barga under the government of Left Front. Recording of the names of bargadars started. After the completion of recording of a few lakhs I asked Binoy Choudhury [then land revenue minister], ‘the recording of the names of the bargadars are going on. As a result, they can avail every opportunities of the Act. In



the Act it is also stated about prohibition of eviction, share of 75:25, etc. But, there is no mention of ownership.'... I said, 'the names of bargadars are being recorded now... Now the government may enact Acts easily to fulfil this task [of giving them ownership of land]. He said after a quite interval, **'time is not ripe, yet'**.

Dr. Bidhan Ch. Roy in 1958, Harekrishna Konar in 1969-70, and Binoy Choudhury in 1979-80 in replying to the same question gave the same answer: **'time is not ripe, yet'**. (...)  
(Source: *The Statesman*, 01.07.2004)

[**From UEB:** In fact, **the time has never came**. Never came the time for the executors of land reforms to recognise the rights of the bargadars to claim the ownership of land they cultivate. **On the contrary** of this recognition, **they legitimise the system of exploitation** perpetrated on the bargadars by the rent-seeking landlords. Moreover, a recent study, made by the West Bengal Government himself, discloses some startling facts exposing the myth of these much-acclaimed 'Operation Barga'. This study reveals that **'15% of the beneficiaries of 'Operation Barga' dispossessed land in last two decades'**. Moreover, though 75:25 is the norms fixed by the Act, nearly **'19% of sharecroppers deliver 50% share** to the landlords while **another 13% of them deliver 40% of share'** (*Beneficiaries of Land Reforms: The West Bengal Scenario, State Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development, Kalyani, Nadia, Government of West Bengal, Spandan, Kolkata, 2003*). Another point must be mentioned here. According to Ajit N. Basu, till September 2001, 10.58 lakh acre vested land is distributed and 'Bargadars' have been given right to till another 11.08 lakh acre land. In all, these constitute only 15.50% of net cultivated land of the state. Therefore, the 'land reforms' programme of 'Left Front' left aside 84.5% of land! This is happened in 'land-reform-famed' West Bengal! Hence, the records of other states in this regard is easily comprehensible. Alas Ladejinsky! Alas the mantra of land reforms executed in landlord-capitalist path!

In fact, this path was taken by the ruling classes mainly to absorb the revolutionary potential of the peasant masses once fuming against the oppressions, exploitations meted on them. This task was accomplished. Spectre of revolutions vanished away. Fear of losing lands in a revolutionary path had been averted. Pervasive atmosphere of 'reformism' was created. But they cannot annihilate the contradictions in the countryside. Nor it can be

happened. Nor be killed the 'land-hunger' among the landless peasants observed by *Ladejinsky*.]