

16.ABOLITION OF ZAMINDARI SYSTEM

Rural Poverty at the time of Independence

When India became independent, the biggest challenge faced by the country was acute poverty, especially in the rural areas. It is estimated that more than half the rural population (55%) was very poor; that is, about 18.6 crore people. They did not have access to any resources like land, nor did they have education which could help them get some gainful employment. In fact, opportunities for employment were very few. The only employment open to them was the extremely low paid agricultural labourers. A very large proportion of peasants were landless. Some of them leased in lands belonging to landlords to whom they had to pay rent and do forced labour. Hunger constantly haunted them and famines and epidemics were frequent and devastating.

At the time of independence it was widely agreed that in order to end rural poverty, it is most important to give the poor access to land for cultivation. This could only be done by ending the zamindari system or landlordism. The agitations during British rule focused attention on the problems, demands and hopes of the peasants. It was clear that the peasants wanted the government to reduce tax and free them from the stranglehold of moneylenders and the terror of the zamindars. They also demanded that the land should belong to the peasant who actually ploughed it. 'Land to the Tiller!' was the slogan.

- Do you think there was any other way of giving gainful employment to the rural poor?
- How many acres of land does a family of four persons need to get a decent living in your area? (Give the figures separately for both irrigated and unirrigated land.)
- While the slogan 'Land to the Tiller' meant that the tenant will get the land, what will happen to the landless agricultural worker, who works for wages?

Abolition of Zamindari and other Intermediary Tenures

The law to abolish the zamindari system was passed in 1950s by all state governments. They also abolished all forms of forced labour like *begar* and *vetti*. This effectively ended one of the most important grievances of the rural masses.

Three types of landlord's control were identified:

Let us see how the Land Reform Acts addressed these issues.

i. First of all laws were passed to end the system of revenue collection by zamindars. All land owners were to pay taxes directly to government. Since the zamindars would lose this source of income the government decided to compensate them by lumpsum payments, this compensation was about twenty to thirty times more than their annual income.

ii. The lands of zamindars which were cultivated by recognised tenants was taken over by the government and the tenants were declared the owners of the land. They had to pay tax directly to the government and not through any intermediaries. When the government found that it had spent a lot of money in paying compensation to zamindars, it made a rule that the tenants would be given land only if they paid some price for it. Those peasants who could pay, became the owners of the land and were freed from the burden of the landlord system. In all, about 2 to 2.5 crore tenants benefitted and became owners of the land they tilled. However, hundreds of thousands of poor peasants could not pay the price or did not have legal recognition as tenants. So they remained landless sharecroppers or labourers and had to keep working in the fields of big peasants and former zamindars.

iii. The law also said that the zamindars would be the owners of their own *khudkasht* land which they cultivated directly either through sharecroppers or labourers. This provision actually enabled most zamindars to retain control over most of the lands as they declared their tenants to be sharecroppers or labourers. They also evicted a large number of tenants to take over their lands for self cultivation. They used various loop-holes in the law to retain control over large portion of land. This was because the Land Reform Acts did not set limit to the amount of land a person could own.

iv. As per the new laws the government took over the waste and forest lands held by zamindars. At that time, the zamindars tried to make the most of it by cutting down all the trees and selling them. In this way large forest tracts were destroyed. All the same, the government got control of large tracts of wastelands which it could use for development and redistribution to poor people.

- Some people feel that the land reform laws only tried to help the landlords. Do you agree with them?
- Some people feel that the land reform laws tried to transfer land and power to prosperous tenant farmers only. Do you agree with them?

- Some others feel that the laws tried to strike a balance between the interests of different rural groups in order to minimise internal conflicts. Do you agree with them?
- Who gained most and who did not gain at all? Do you think the landlords lost much?

Andhra Region

The Madras Estate Bill came into force in 1950 (Andhra was then a part of Madras Presidency). As per this Act the Zamindars and *Inamdars* were paid a compensation of Rs. 15.5 crores in total and the land under them was given to the tenants who were cultivating it. In the Andhra region land passed to considerable extent, into the hands of better off cultivating castes. In due course they become powerful in politics and business too. On the other hand the labouring and service castes did not benefit from the land reforms.

However, the Act still did not affect the ryotwari holders who virtually functioned as landlords. It only abolished zamindari system where it existed in some pockets.

Abolition of Jagirdari system in Telangana

In the Telangana region, the powerful movement of the peasants was under way when the Nizam state was merged with India. Even before Independence, in 1927, forced labour or *vetti* had been abolished but this law was not implemented. However, in areas where the Telangana armed struggle was strong the practice was put to an end in 1948. In 1945 when the Telangana movement was beginning, the Nizam had made laws to protect tenants-at-will. This provided for registering them and giving them permanent rights to cultivate.

Immediately after the merger of Hyderabad state the Nizam who was still the head of Hyderabad government issued a *Firman*, abolishing the *Sarf-e-Khas*, the personal freedom of the Nizam and also all forms of forced labour like *vetti*. Through another *Firman* dated 15 August 1949 Jagirs (including *Samasthanams* and *Maktas*) which were like small kingdoms were abolished. The dominant sections of the cultivating communities of these jagirs got *patta* right on lands. As per the Hyderabad Jagirdar Abolition Act large jagirs were taken over by the government within a few days. Rs. 18 crores was decided as the compensation which was to be paid. Due to this Act, 995 Jagirdars were removed and the land was given to the farmers cultivating it. Further, there was a reduction in land tax.

The new government appointed the Hyderabad Agrarian Reforms Committee primarily to look into the question of land concentration and aspects of increasing production and also to study the aspirations of the farmers and tenants under the existing systems. The Committee made far reaching recommendations like removal of middlemen, ceiling on land ownership, taking away surplus lands from the landlords, protection to tenants, etc. However, only some of its recommendations were implemented.

The famous Hyderabad Tenancy Act was passed in 1950 protecting all types of tenants. Tenants-at-will (who could be evicted at the will of the landlords) were made protected tenants. All tenants who were in continuous possession of land for six years were made protected tenants or *pattadars* after a little payment. Now they could not be evicted easily and could continue to cultivate the land for generations. Similarly, the Hyderabad Inam Lands Abolition Act was promulgated in 1955.

Bhoodan Movement

Telangana landlordism and the armed peasant rebellion caused much concern among people in the country. Sarvodaya leader Acharya Vinoba Bhave wanted to solve the problem of land concentration through peaceful means i.e. through *Bhoodan* Movement. *Bhoodan* means donating land to the landless. He wanted to take voluntary gifts of land from the landlords and donate it to the landless. On April 18, 1951 Vinoba started the *Bhoodan* Movement. It was hailed a mile stone in the history of land reforms. As part of the Sarvodaya movement Vinobaji came to Sivarampally near Hyderabad. He walked upto Pochampally in Nalgonda district. A prayer meeting was held under the *juvvi* tree near the tank. In that meeting 40 families belonging to the scheduled castes requested for land. During the meeting Vedire Ramachandra Reddy donated 250 acres of land in the memory of his father. The first person to receive the land was Maisaiah. Inspired by this Vinobaji took up *Bhoodan* movement and later converted into *Gramdan* movement. Vinobaji received 44 lakh acres of land as donation all over the country. However, this movement did not make any serious difference to the land problem in the country as landlords continued to hold large tracts of fertile land.



Fig 16.1 : Photos of Vinobaji, Vedire Ramachandra Reddy and Maisaiah

An amendment, to the earlier Land Reform Act of 1950, was passed in 1954 which defeated the purpose of land reform by not bestowing the protected tenancy right over certain categories of cultivators. The Acts further recommended payment of crores of rupees as compensation in favour of the landlords. Thus the independent country had to bear the cost of the dispossession of feudal system. Big buildings, cattle sheds and agriculture implements were left in the possession of the erstwhile landlords. As there was no limit on land holding, thousands of acres of fertile land also remained with them as *khudkhast* lands.

Many of the laws were implemented tardily. Due to the delay in implementation the large landlords used it to their best advantage. Using the loop holes in the Tenancy Act the Zamindars regained control over the lands from the tenants. The Zamindars after abolition continued as big landlords claiming the land as their own. These lands were diverted to setup industries. For example, the Challapalli Zamindar showed 2650 acres under his sugar factory. But eventually they transformed as entrepreneurs in Andhra. But in Telangana they continued their domination into the twenty first century.

- Which sections of the peasants of Telangana gained from the various reforms? In what ways did they benefit?
- To what extent did the landless service castes benefit from these reforms?
- To what extent did the landlords loose and to what extent did they manage to protect their interests?

Land Ceiling Act, 1972-75

The Zamindari abolition did not solve the problem of land concentration. As you can see from Table 1, after the land reforms were completed in 1955-56 more than half the peasant families had less than 2 hectares of land. Big landlords still controlled about 38% of all cultivable land in the state. A vast number of landless dalit labourers were agitating for land. Kisan Sabhas became active agitating for further land reforms. This meant that the government should set a limit to large landholdings and take over surplus land and redistribute it to the landless labourers and small farmers.

Table 1 : The Structure and Distribution of Landholdings in Andhra Pradesh, 1956-2006

	1955-56		1980-81	
	2005-06			
	Share in no. of landholdings cultivated area	Share in no. of landholdings cultivated area	Share in no. of landholdings cultivated area	Share in cultivated area
Small 0-2 hect.	58%	48%	73%	29%
83%				
Medium 2-10 hect.	32%	44%	25%	52%
16%		46%		
Large 10 above hect	10%	38%	2%	
19%	1%	6%		
Total	100%	100%	100%	
100%	100%	100%		

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics (DES), Hyderabad.

Reading the table: Read the figures for the year 1955-56 carefully. It tells us that, after the land reforms had been implemented 58% of farmers were small farmers with less than 2 hectares of land each. Even though they formed more than half of all farmers, they had less than 20% of cultivated land. On the other hand you can see

that large farmers or landlords who were only about 10% of the farmers had about 38% of all cultivated land.

After the land ceiling was implemented in 1970s see the changes that took place. The number of small farmers who were% increased / decreased to %. Medium farmers now were less in number and controlled% more/ less land than before. Large landowners declined to less than % but still owned about % of land.

The situation was similar all over the country. Keeping this in mind the central government initiated a second phase of land reforms to set limit to the size of landholdings and redistributing land to the poor. Land Ceiling Acts were passed in most states for this purpose after 1972. The Land Ceiling Act was passed by the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council in September, 1972 which came into implementation since January, 1975.

The Act defined family with 5 members as a unit. A family of 5 members can have maximum of 10 to 27 acres of irrigated land and 35 to 54 acres of dryland. If a farmer had more land, it was declared surplus land to be taken over by the government. In Andhra Pradesh about 8,00,000 acres were declared surplus. Of this 6,41,000 acres were taken over by the government which distributed about 5,82,000 acres to about 5,40,000 families of landless and poor peasants. Actually this was much less than what was required and what was possible. The Act could not be implemented properly due to machinations of the landlords and also lack of sufficient political determination on the part of the government.

Several landlords gave false declarations to the officers and did not reveal the excess land. Anticipating the Act several landlords transferred their lands in the names of their close relatives, friends, and even farm servants. There were also instances where fictitious divorces were taken in law courts to show husband and wife as separate families. In this way even those farmers who had surplus land as per the Act protected their lands and did not show any surplus. Some of the surplus land that was taken over by the government was not fit for cultivation. If you look at Table 1, and at the figures for 2005-06 you can see that most of the farmers (83%) are small and they have about nearly half of all cultivated land. On the other hand you will see that the number of large landlords is 1% , and the land with them is 6%. This is partly due to the fact that most of the big landlords actually divided their holdings into small size and fraudulently distributed them among relatives and servants. This was more or less the situation in most of the states in India.

One of the states in which the Land Ceiling Act was more efficiently implemented was West Bengal. The West Bengal government acted with great determination and mobilized the landless and small peasants to participate in the implementation of the ceiling laws. As a result about 12,94,000 acres of land were taken over by the government and 10,64,000 acres were distributed to about 26,51,000 families. This shows us that political will can make these measures very effective and really enable poor to get access to land resources.

- Why did the Land Ceiling Act become necessary?
- Some people think that it should have been implemented in 1950 while others feel that such a measure would have caused a lot of opposition. Discuss the two views in the class and decide which view you agree with.
- Compare the implementation of Land Ceiling Act in West Bengal and in Andhra Pradesh and discuss how the Act could be effectively implemented.

Key words

1. Land Ceiling
2. Jagirdari System
3. *Firman*
5. Tenancy Act
5. *Bhoodan* movement
6. *Sarf-e-khas*
7. *Maktas*
8. Land holding
9. *Begar/ Vetti*
10. Compensation
11. *Khudkhast*

Improve your learning

1. When laws are passed in the Assembly, there is much discussion on it from different points of view. What would have been the different points of view regarding the Land Reform Act in 1950s? Which point of view would have been stronger? AS₁
2. What would have been the points of view in 1970s when the Land Ceiling Acts were passed? AS₁
3. Do you think the peasant women gained from these reforms in any way? Give your reasons. AS₁
4. Why was the end to *vetti* important for all kinds of peasants? What would the landlords have done to cultivate their lands now? AS₄
5. Imagine you are a tenant who got ownership over land when the Land reform Act was implemented. Write down your feelings. AS₄
6. Imagine you are a landlord at the time of the Land Reform Act. Describe your feelings and actions at that time.

AS₄

7. Many people feel that the land reform actually harmed a large number of tenants-at-will. Do you agree with this view? Give reasons. AS₁
8. Why was the Land Ceiling Act not implemented effectively even though the government tried to make effective laws? AS₁
9. Why do you think the spirit of *Bhoodan* did not help to end landlordism and get land to the tiller? AS₁
10. Locate Pochampally village in Nalgonda district in A.P. map. AS₅
11. Read the first paragraph under heading 'Rural Poverty at the time of Independence' and answer the following:
Are the conditions improved now? In what way? AS₂

Project:

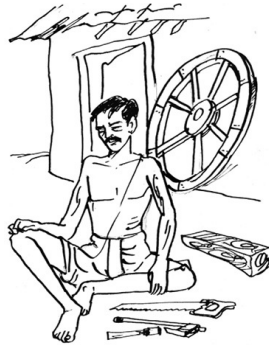
Form a group of five students. Discuss the experiences of elders in your area about the land ceiling. Know whether the issue happen in that village as mentioned in the lesson. Prepare a report and submit to the class.

17.UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

Distress in rural areas

Ramachari worked as a carpenter in a village in Chittoor district. He used to make tools and implements for the farmers in the village. He had no land or cattle. Though Ramachari was not a farmer, his well-being depended on the farming activities of his village.

Till a few years back Ramachari would get around 40 clients, most of them farmers. They paid for his services with paddy. Each gave him 70 kilograms a year. Of the 2800 kg he got this way, he kept what his family needed and sold the rest in the market. He could get around Rs.375 for 70 kg of paddy. This was some years ago. After retaining what his family required, he could make Rs. 8000 in a year this way. With that, he took care of the family.



Trouble started when agriculture operations began to change. The entry of 12 tractors in the village has reduced his work opportunity. Large and medium farmers were hiring tractors and there was less use of bullocks, as you would have read in an earlier chapter. However, that was not all. For many small farmers in the village farming was getting more and more difficult. The canal had dried up, and there was no water for irrigation. To dig bore-wells and buy seed, fertiliser, pesticides farmers had to take loans at high costs. Repayment was difficult, more so when the crops failed. In Ramachari's village, the villagers lost over 30 bullocks in distress sales. That meant less work for Ramachari who made various items linked with their use. No longer was there demand for Ramachari's implements as the farmers were not replacing their tools. The number of clients came down from 40 to 3 or 4 per year.

As the work in the village dwindled, Aruna, Ramachari's wife, started work in a chappal company in Vijaywada. "There was no choice," she says. "I had never been a migrant worker before. But the chances of finding work here were nil." So she migrates for one month at a time, leaving their three children with her husband. More than 250 workers migrated out of the village looking for work leaving the elderly and the young children behind.

While Aruna went to work in the city, the family would remain hungry many times. At times Ramchari had to borrow from the neighbours even to buy some broken rice. Ramachari would often fall ill and keep poor health. He was not able to work to the same capacity as before.

- In what way, was Ramachari's livelihood related to agriculture in the village?
- Do you think the hardships that the family faces is because of:
 - (a) Ramachari's lack of awareness and effort OR
 - b) the livelihood situation in the village.
- What do you think can be done such that Ramachari and his family get two square meals a day?
- How would you describe the exchange between Ramachari and the farmers in the village?
- How many kilograms of paddy would Ramachari retain for the family in normal years?
- Can we consider Rs. 8000 a year sufficient to cover the family's expenses (other than foodgrains)?

Chandraiah is a cart-puller. His family lives in the village while he works in the city market and lives in the city slums. At times he earns Rs.100 and on some days he doesn't earn more than Rs.40, depending on the number of trips he makes with his cart. During the

day, Chandraiah eats from one of the carts in the market selling **roti and dal**. Since he wants to save money to send to his family, he usually eats less than what would be adequate for the heavy manual work that he does. Towards the evening he is very tired. All the cart-pullers who stay in the slums pool in money and take turns to cook the evening meal. Living and working for twenty years in this manner, without adequate nutrition, has sapped Chandraiah's energy and he looks much older than his age.

- Discuss what is common to Chandraiah's and Ramachari's lives.



Fig 17.1: Discuss the different living standards in the above urban picture

Poverty as Chronic Hunger

Situation of chronic hunger is widespread. Numerous people, like Ramachari and Chandraiah, across Indian villages and cities cannot afford enough food every day to be healthy and lead an active life. They may not always appear to be in the desperate situation that we find with homeless or old people living on the streets. These people may look normal to us but they experience hunger and fatigue. They do not get sufficient food to eat. They are eating less than what they should. If this situation continues for a long time it is called chronic or persistent hunger. They are usually tired, feel weak and often fall ill.

We need energy to move muscles, to walk, talk and do our routine work. We get this energy from the food that we eat. This energy is measured in kilocalories (kcal). For example one tea spoon of sugar gives us 40 kcal, one tea spoon of oil gives us 90 kcal. If you look at any packaged food it usually indicates the total calories that one would get from it.

The national calorie standard was established as 2,400 and 2,100 kcal per day for rural and urban areas. On an average a person requires food that would provide 2100 kcal per day as a minimum energy intake to stay healthy. In rural areas, where manual work is more intense, the calorie intake requirement is higher at 2400 kcal per day.

Can you imagine that 80 percent of people in rural areas in India consume food that is way below the calorie standard? That is 4 out of 5 persons have food that is deficient in calories. Deficiency in calories is not limited to people in the villages alone. In the urban areas too, 3 out of every 5 persons have food that is deficient in calories.

What is even more disturbing is that over the years, the calorie consumption of the poorest has been declining. When compared to the 1980s, while our country as a whole seems to have apparently become more prosperous and we have many more goods and services than were available earlier. But the poorest hunger has increased. They actually consume less calories today than say 25 years back!

- What is the average calorie intake of persons in the top quarter in the country
- By what percentage does the calorie intake of persons in the bottom quarter fall short of the daily calorie standard?
- Why do you think the calorie intake of the people are so low?

Hunger is not just painful to bear, it is also destructive. Chronic hunger and calorie deficiency is related to under-nourishment. People who are chronically hungry do not have access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food and therefore are undernourished. Their undernourishment makes it hard to study, work or otherwise perform physical activities. Undernourished children do not grow as quickly as healthy children. Mentally, they may develop more slowly. Constant hunger weakens the immune system and makes them more vulnerable to diseases and infections. Mothers living with constant hunger often give birth to underweight and

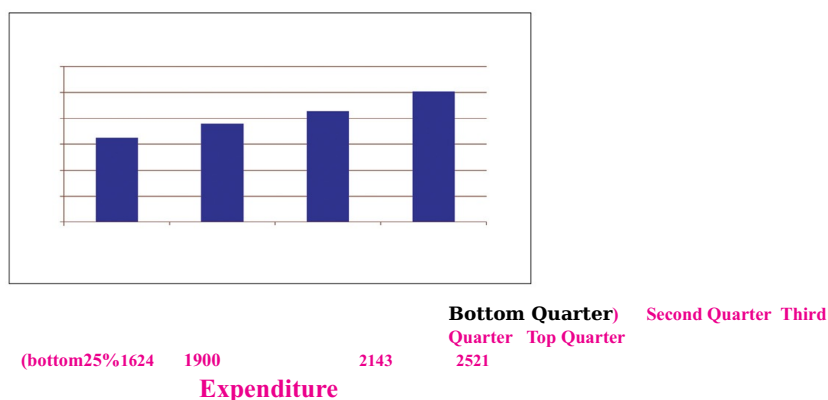
weak babies.

Food Inequality

Like scientists do experiments in the laboratories and generate data, for social scientists surveys are a valuable source of data and constitute evidence for analysis. National Sample Survey is one such survey conducted by the government of India after every four or five years to know about the economic and social conditions of the people. Surveyors interview a very large number of households across the country and compile this information on various items. This data is then used by researchers to understand what is happening to, say, employment, spending by people, schooling, health, access to drinking water, etc. This data is particularly useful to know whether the government policies are moving in the right direction.

Graph 1 on calorie intake was drawn using information collected during National Sample Survey done in 2004. Researchers tried to look at the calorie intake per person and found that the calorie intake differs widely across the poor and the rich. People with very low income can spend very little (the poorest) consume 1624 kcal on average. As the incomes and spending increases, the calorie intake rises. The calorie intake of the poorest continues to be much less than the calorie intake of the top quarter of the population, despite the poor needing more calories because of harder manual work.

For a very large percentage of people, their daily food intake doesn't meet the calorie requirement. All the people whose intake falls below the calorie standard can be considered as poor.



Graph 1: Calorie intake per person in Rural India

Note: Expenditure here means spending on household items like food, clothing, footwear, education, medical care, fuel and lighting, house rent etc. In 2004, every person in the bottom quarter could spend less than Rs. 340 per month per person, i.e. even less than Rs. 12 a day on these essential items of living! Those in the second quarter were spending a little more and so on. As one goes further on the x-axis, the spending rises.

Activity

- One way to find out if adults are undernourished is to calculate what Nutrition Scientists call Body Mass Index (BMI). This is easy to calculate. Take the weight of the person in kgs. Then take the height in metres. Divide the weight by the square of the height. If this figure is less than 18.5 then the person would be considered undernourished. However, if this BMI is more than 25, then a person is overweight. Do remember that this criterion is not applicable to growing children.

Let each student in the class find out the weight and height of three adult persons of different economic backgrounds like office workers, servants, business person etc. Collect the data from all the students and make a combined table. Calculate their BMI.



Fig 17.2: Measuring the height

- Do you find any relationship between economic background of person and his/her nutritional status?

Why Poverty? How can it be eliminated?

The most important contributor to poverty, as you would have guessed by now, is the **lack of regular employment**.

In the absence of employment opportunities, people lack the purchasing power (income) to fulfil their basic needs. Chronic hunger is one of the fallouts of this lack of minimum purchasing power.

Agriculture - Source of Livelihood

More than 50 percent of people in India still depend upon agricultural activities for their livelihood. Most of these are small farmers and agricultural labourers. Besides there are persons whose occupations are allied to agriculture like the carpenter Ramachari. Success of such non-farm workers like potters, leather workers, small-processing units in the village also depends on the state of agriculture. We saw how Ramachari and his family suffered when agriculture stagnated in the village. There was no demand for tools and implements that Ramachari could make. Ramachari had little work and hardly any income. Like other poor households, the family possessed no land or cattle. The village in that year could provide no opportunities for work as agricultural labourer in the fields. Neither was there any non-farm work.

Since the well-being and livelihood of so many people are dependent on agriculture, it is very important that agriculture grows well. When agriculture prospers, it would normally generate employment and income for people in the rural areas. Also, when agriculture production is abundant, prices of food items are likely to be more affordable for people than it would otherwise be.

At present, there are a variety of problems plaguing agriculture. You have read in the Chapter on Agriculture in Our Times in Class VI, how the small farmers suffer as a result of lack of water for irrigation, loans at reasonable interest rates, reliable seeds and fertilisers for cropping. (You might like to re-read and recall the case-studies of small farmers Ravi and Ramu in Venkatapuram.) The high costs of inputs, low yields and frequent crop failure have led to acute farmer distress. Most small farmers are also forced to work as agricultural labourers in order to make ends meet. In fact, four out of five farmers in Andhra Pradesh are like Ravi and Ramu.

Here are a few steps that the government must undertake to support agricultural growth and those dependent on agriculture. Can you write a few lines on each? Why is it important? You could give examples from your own context.

1. Timely provision of seed, fertiliser, pesticides by the government such that the farmer does not have to depend on middlemen/ traders. The government must ensure that these products are of standard quality and reasonably priced.
2. Small irrigation projects
3. Timely availability of bank loans at reasonable interest rate
4. Outlets or marketing the crops at a fair price for producers
5. Development of roads, transport systems in the countryside
6. Assistance to farmers in case of crop failure

Other Livelihood Options

In Andhra Pradesh, nearly two-fifths of all rural families are mainly agricultural labourers. These families are mostly landless and others cultivate very little land. The opportunities for work are very limited. The number of days of agricultural labourers can manage to get in a normal year varies from 120 to 180 days. There are long stretches of lean season when practically no work is available on the fields.

In years when the crops fail due to drought, floods, pest attack or any other calamity, the number of days of agricultural work are further reduced. These are the times when large-scale migrations happen and acute distress and hunger strikes the countryside. What can be done to ensure that livelihoods are protected in such circumstances?

The Right to Work states that everyone should be given the opportunity to work for a basic living. The Indian Constitution refers to the right to work under the “directive principles of state policy”. Article 41 stresses that “the state, shall within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing right to work...” However, people have never been able to exercise these rights. The government when it liked would start public works and workers would be employed. But people generally could not demand work when they required or near to their place of stay.

After years of struggle by people’s groups the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MNREGA) was passed. It was a major breakthrough towards protection of livelihoods in rural areas.

MNREGA

Baleshwar Mahto, a resident of Bihar’s Araria district goes to Punjab every year in search of work to sustain his family. He had planned to go there this June as well. However, he got MNREGA employment in his own village and so he decided to stay back.

A large number of people from Araria are forced to look for work in Punjab, Delhi and Gujarat as employment is hard to find locally. What is available is very poorly paid, with wages varying from Rs.40 to Rs.60 a day during the harvest season otherwise., even less (Rs.25 to Rs.50 a day). Baleshwar takes up such employment only when he is forced to stay back in his village, for instance, owing to illness in the family.

However, in the cities, the migrant workers live in deplorable conditions, with no access to basic facilities such as shelter, sanitation or even safe drinking water. Women and children who are left behind face insecurity, and family relations often suffer.

MNREGA is a triple bonus for Baleshwar: apart from providing local employment, it enables him to combine this work with tending his own fields and spending more time with his family.

MNREGA lays down that any adult member willing to do unskilled manual work and who is looking for work must be given work by the government. A rural household can demand at least one hundred days of employment in a year for which they would be paid not below the minimum wages.

- *water conservation and water harvesting*
- *drought proofing (including afforestation and tree plantation)*
- *provisions of irrigation facility to land owned by households belonging to the SCs and STs*
- *renovation of traditional water bodies including desilting of tanks*
- With the help of your teacher, find out what the above works (given in italics) mean.
- Plan a visit to one of the sites in your village/ town where you can see public works in progress. Record your conversations.
- Why do you think the MNREGA places priority on provision of irrigation facility to land owned by households belonging to the SCs and STs?
- Why MNREGA is treated as a major breakthrough towards protection of rural livelihoods?

A Social Audit Report

The findings of the social audit team in Rachanapalle, Anantpur in Feb. 2009 shows:

- payments were made correctly,
- the field assistant performed his function well,
- there were no contractors at the worksite,
- but the work quality is poor.

Besides, it found that :

Plantation and ploughing work has been done only in 5.60 acres, whereas the measurement sheet of this work shows that ploughing and plantation work has been done in 15 acres. So money has been paid for excess of 9.04 acres. Old Technical Assistant Rammohan is responsible for this issue.

As per records Ramadevi of Sindiket Nagar had to be paid Rs.400 for 6 days regarding Pebble Bunding work .

But she has not been paid the amount.

You can access the information of social audit for your village at the website for The Society for Social Audit, Accountability and Transparency, Department of Rural development, Government of Andhra Pradesh. <http://125.17.121.162/SocialAudit/Login.jsp>

Social Audit in Andhra Pradesh

An often repeated complaint of government employment programmes has been about corruption. The benefits of the schemes, it is said, go to those who wield power and the contractors, whereas the poor receive much less than what is officially claimed. To reduce corruption, MNREGA introduced compulsory social audits.

Social audit is a process by which the community verifies (audits) the program and its implementation. It tries to find out whether the benefits of the project/activities reach the people for whom it is meant. The Andhra Pradesh experience in this regard has been particularly noteworthy. The government of AP has taken an active role in supporting this initiative from civil society.



1. A few energetic literate youth who usually belong to the families of MNREGA workers are trained in social audit processes.
2. These youth form teams go from door-to-door to verify muster rolls, check out worksites, record written statements of workers and conduct a series of meetings in each village
3. Next, a massive public meeting is organized at the mandal headquarters attended by people from every village, their elected representatives, the media, the MNREGA functionaries concerned, and senior government officers.
4. At this meeting, village-wise social audit findings are read out, workers testify and the officials concerned respond to the issues raised by giving an explanation about their actions under complaint.
5. Officials are also required to specify the nature of remedial action they will take and the time limit.
6. In the follow-up, social audit teams go back to their villages every 15 days after the mandal public meeting to ensure that the decisions taken are actually enforced.

Large amounts of misappropriated funds have been recovered through social audits in AP. On many occasions, errant officials have “voluntarily” returned money to workers at the mandal public meeting itself. Action has been initiated against corrupt officials. In the process the awareness about the detailed provisions of MNREGA rose dramatically among labour.

Access to Affordable Food

“From his granary the king should set apart one half for the people in the countryside in times of distress, and use the other half. And he should replace old stock for new.”

Arthashastra (2.15.22-23)

by Kautilya, 4th Century B.C.

Alongside employment, the government has to ensure that everyone has access to affordable food. Employment and income cannot do much, if the prices of essential items are very high. The major way in which the government tries to ensure that the essential items are affordable is to sell foodgrains through the ration shops at a “fair price”. The government buys foodgrains from farmers and supplies these to the ration shops. Ration shops keep stocks of foodgrains (and other essential items like sugar, pulses, kerosene oil for cooking) and these items are then sold to the people. Prices at the ration shops are meant to be lower than the prices in the market.

The system of ration shops distributing foodgrains and other essential items is known as the **Public Distribution System** (or **PDS** in short). **PDS** has existed in India right from the time of independence and has played a crucial role in reaching food to everyone both in the rural and urban areas. There were ofcourse problems of functioning. At places, the ration shops would not open regularly or on time. The foodgrain stocks would be adulterated with the intention that no one buys. Ration shop owners would be found selling foodgrains to other shops rather than to the public. Many people including the poor would not receive ration. Performance of ration shops was not so good as expected in the poorest states and the poorest regions of India.

- Do you think that cash transfer scheme is an alternative to the PDS?

The problems of PDS require better implementation. Since PDS was working well in the Southern states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, it would certainly be possible to improve, if only everyone would try.

However, the Indian government had other plans. Around the year 1997, it decided that ration shops should cater mainly to the poor. From here on, the poor would be served by the ration shops, while the rest would buy foodgrains mainly from the market at a higher price.

To implement this new policy on the PDS, the government needed to know who the poor are. Thus, the panchayats in the villages were asked to conduct surveys called BPL (Below Poverty Line) surveys. These surveys take into account the family’s income, means of livelihood, number of meals per day, clothing, housing, migration, debt etc. to decide whether the household is a poor household (BPL household). Based on the survey results, three types of cards were issued.

The poorest families are issued Antyodaya cards. Next, whose situations are slightly better but still can be considered poor are issued BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards. The remaining families are issued APL (Above Poverty Line) cards.

Quantities and prices of ration given to each cardholder are different. For example, the Antyodaya cardholders are entitled to get 35 kgs of foodgrains (rice and wheat) per month per family. The BPL cardholders in Andhra Pradesh can receive 4 kgs of foodgrains per head, not exceeding 20 kgs per family. The Annapurna Scheme card holders who are the poorest of the poor (Indigent senior citizens) get 10 kgs of rice free of cost.

- Do you think the poor will be served better now with new policy? Provide reasons in favour of your answer.
- Could you suggest some more ways of improving the PDS?

The Struggle towards “The Right to Life”

The new policy on PDS has been at the center of much debate. We know that about 4 out of 5 people in the rural areas consume less than the minimum required calories. And yet, not even 3 out of 10 families in the rural areas in India possessed BPL and Antyodaya cards, as per the National Sample Survey of 2004. Thus, a large number of people who earlier benefited from the PDS were no longer covered by it. Many families of landless labourers did not have BPL cards. Whereas, there were some reports of well-off families with BPL cards.



Fig 17.3: Children taking mid day meal in school

There are other contradictions too in the new PDS (Public Distribution System) Policy. The government of India often has huge piles of food stocks (i.e. foodgrains that it bought from farmers). There have been times when foodgrains rot in godowns and are eaten by rats. Since the ration shops sell foodgrains at a fair price only to BPL, Antyodaya and Annapurna card holders, there are unsold stocks at the ration shop too. And yet, there is a feeling that we are not able to provide food to all.

This is a clear violation of the fundamental right - the Right to Life enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. People have asked: how can life be possible without food? Why can't the government take responsibility? Why can't the government supply foodgrains for free rather than have it rot? Is this a just situation? Over a period of time, a public campaign for Right to Food has built up. People have taken legal action. Civil rights groups have filed petitions in the Supreme Court against the government for violation of the Right to Life, of which the Right to Food is a part. They have sought that foodgrains at a fair price should be available for all families. Each family should be entitled to more foodgrains than they are getting presently.

Supreme Court rulings and continuous pressures from ordinary people have begun to make small but crucial differences in the workings of a number of programmes, including the PDS. But still much more needs to change.

- Ration shops are also called fair price shops. Can you guess why?

In this chapter, we have read about the Right to Work and Right to Food in the context of widespread persistence of hunger in India. Both the Right to Work and Right to Food are absolutely essential to escape from hunger and poverty. Escape from poverty and a life of dignity, however, means much more. It includes health and education, shelter and clothing, water and sanitation, pollution free air, energy and infrastructure, security, non-discrimination, democratic participation, etc. These economic and social rights are again part of the Right to Life. It is this expanded understanding that the society has to work towards.

Key words

1. Undernourishment
2. Agricultural growth
3. Directive principles
4. Public works
5. Social audit
6. Below Poverty Line
7. Public Distribution System

Improve your learning

1. Which of the following statement/ statements in the context of poverty as chronic hunger is true: AS₁
 - a. having food only once a day
 - b. having food below the required calorie
 - c. person driving the harvester and person ploughing the field require same calorie of food
 - d. person ploughing the field requires more calorie than shop owner
 - e. hunger also affects the persons immune system
2. Identify the major reasons for poverty described in the chapter. AS₁
3. What have been the major features in programmes like MNREGA and PDS? Which aspects of poverty do they try to address. Why are ration shops necessary? AS₄
4. Why are people without employment also often without assets, such as land, cattle, shops etc.? AS₁
5. Read the first two paragraphs under the title "The Struggle towards 'The Right to Life'" of page 201 and 202 and comment on them. AS₂
6. Write a letter to your District Collector on conduction of P.D.S. programme in your village? AS₆

Project:

Visit the ration shop in your neighbourhood and look for the following:

- When does the ration shop open?
- What are the items sold at the ration shop?
- Do you find the system of different card-holders?
- Can you compare the prices of rice and sugar from the ration shop (for families below poverty line) with the prices at any other grocery store? [Important: Ask for the ordinary variety rates at the grocery shop.

18. RIGHTS APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

The idea of Human Rights

Like the idea of democracy, the idea of 'human rights' has gained ground all over the world during the last 300 years. It is held that all human beings, irrespective of who they are – their caste, gender, religion, country etc. whether they are law abiding or criminals, have certain basic rights which cannot be denied to them. Two of these rights are very important in the context of poverty – the right to dignified life and the right to liberty and freedom. The right to life means that all human beings have a right to live and live in such a way that their human dignity is not compromised. The right to liberty and freedom means that they can do, believe and speak out what they want without fear (without causing loss of freedom for others) and live the life of their choice.



Fig 18.1: "The Monsoon Failed this Year"

Pavan is a boy of about 13 years, who lives with his mother. He lives in a temple town visited by a large number of pilgrims. Pavan stands outside the temple gate and begs the pilgrims for food by falling at their feet. Sometime some of them give him stale left over food from their tiffin boxes. Sometimes he carries heavy bags for them and is paid a small amount.

His mother works in a house as domestic help. She works almost for twelve hours everyday, through out the month. She is constantly ordered about by her employers including young children. She is given left over food after everyone else has eaten. She is not allowed to sit before the employers, and has to always talk to them meekly. She is often insulted for some minor errors or delays and has to fight back her tears and anger lest she be thrown out of job.

- In the example above do you think Pavan and his mother are able to live with dignity?
- What would give them a life with dignity?
- Are Pavan and his mother free to do what they want?
- Who is to blame for this kind of life of Pavan and his mother? Are they responsible for their own condition?
- Whose duty is it to ensure that Pavan and his mother are able to live a life of dignity and freedom?

In the last chapters we saw some aspects of poverty. It is not merely going hungry; it means lack of resources like land or education to make out a living; it means lack of gainful employment; it means lack of access to some basic needs of life like health services, education, food, etc; it means lack of voice to be heard and ability to influence the formulation of policies or implementation of programmes by the government.

How can people rise above the poverty? How can they get the resources and the facilities needed to rise above poverty?

This can happen only when the government acts on their behalf. Often people in the government feel that they are doing a charity by providing for the welfare of the poor people and feel that the resources used for this is a burden on the government. However, when we recognise that it is the fundamental right of all people, it becomes the primary duty of the government to ensure these rights. Further, the resources spent on this will be seen not as a waste or as charity, but as necessary investment for the future of the country. So it is important to pass laws which sanction the economic and welfare rights of all people.

When the United Nations was formed in 1945, all countries agreed that human rights relating to freedom and economic development are fundamental rights of all human beings. Many countries guarantee rights relating to freedom but not to economic wellbeing like employment, fair wages and right to access to education, health services, housing and food. In 1993 once again all countries agreed that both kinds of rights are essential.

What do we mean? When we say that people have a right to food, education, health, housing, employment; We mean that it is the duty of the government to provide these for all its people. The governments should be legally

bound to ensure these to all its citizens and if they are not ensured then the people can go to court to enforce their rights. It also means that people like Pavan don't have to look at getting their food and other requirements as charity of the well to do people, but as their fundamental right. They can demand food, education, housing, medical treatment, etc. as their rights.

This will only be possible if the government makes laws in accordance with these ideas. In the last few years the government of India too has made many such laws. These laws relate to right to information, employment and school education. A law to ensure food security all is under preparation. Let us read about some of these laws in greater detail.

Need for Information to fight corruption

The government system is a very large and complex system. It is difficult to ensure that the policies and programmes are implemented properly. Programmes which are undertaken to benefit the poor and remove poverty often do not reach the needy and the funds get diverted. A major reason for this is corruption. One major reason why corruption thrives is that the common people do not have proper information about the programmes and how they are being implemented.

The people themselves had no way to verify how the money was spent by government or local body institutions. It was not possible to know how a building contract was allotted to a contractor by a municipality or panchayat, or what quality of bricks and cement were used, or how many days of labour was spent in the work. This information was not shared with the people. Yet in a democracy, it is the people's money that is used for their welfare and therefore people have every right to know how this is being used. Earlier it was assumed that the elected representatives alone can ask this information in the legislative houses and check the corruption.

- Discuss how the information regarding a road construction or building of houses is maintained by contractors.
- Why do you think checking this information can help in improving accountability?

How the movement began

A group of people in Rajasthan, organised themselves under the banner of *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS) and demanded information. There was no legal provision to take details of information as mentioned in the above paragraph from government to the people. Initially these documents were collected with the help of officials. People evaluated these documents through public meetings. Soon officials began to resist the idea of disclosing the information. This led to a people's movement, with rallies and marches for the next three years. People demanded that the information was crucial to their own welfare. **They argued that:**

- Information is crucial to the human development, and democratic rights. People can participate in government and ensure just development only if they have sufficient information in the form of official documents.
- Information will make governments more accountable in their functioning. It is possible to monitor the functioning and check possibility of corrupt practices. Information is crucial to the survival of the poor.
- In a situation where information has to be made public, arbitrary decisions by the elected representatives or the officials can be controlled.

After many years of struggle a law making it compulsory to give official information was made in the state of Rajasthan in 1995. During the next years many other states also adopted similar laws. And at the national level, The Right to Information Act (RTI) was passed by the Parliament in 2005. Today the Right to Information is recognised within the Constitution under two Fundamental Rights as Freedom of expression and Right to Life.

PROVISIONS UNDER RTI

JAN SUNVAYI : MKSS used to conduct meetings, called '*jan sunvayi*' (or people's hearings). It is true that many people cannot read the government documents themselves. But every person in a village would like to know what the documents say. Thus, these were read out and explained. A muster roll would give names of people for whom wages were paid for making a hand-pump. The villagers can identify if the people mentioned in the muster roll were present during those days or were migrants, or if they were paid the amount stated in the document. This would bring out the corrupt in practices. Through these events people brought in necessary action. Officials were also given opportunity to defend and talk about the details given in the documents. The district administration and panchayat officials also participated in these meetings. When corruption was identified, criminal cases were registered against the concerned persons.



Fig 18.2: Women participants at MKSS meeting

Let us read certain provisions given under RTI and see how it empowers the people. Law prescribes that any individual can get documents like government orders, reports, advices, log books, rules and regulation, attendance list, letters, etc. The person who wishes to get this information may have to pay a small amount that will meet the expenses like making a copy of the document. But if the person who is asking for the information is below poverty line then he or she need not pay this amount.

Law also prescribes that in every government office there will be an officer incharge to respond to these questions. He or she is known as Information Officer. Above the Information Officer, there is another individual appellate authority who is expected to make sure action is taken. Further, at the State and Central government level there should be independent Information Commissions.

Law also prescribes how much time each department may take to provide the information requested. This makes sure that departments don't withhold the information for a very long period. In case the information is not provided in the prescribed time, the person can complain to the concerned higher officer and then register cases at the State or Central Information Commissions.



Fig 18.3: Information as per the Right To Information Act, 2005

- With the help of the teacher make a table of the orders, reports, advices, log books etc. that he or she received from the education department during the last one year. What documents does the school maintain to report to the education department? How is the record for mid-day meal kept?
- Why do you think the word 'independent' is important in the context of State Information Commission?
- Can you think of the questions you will want to ask information officer in the Health department? (If necessary read Chapter IX and formulate your questions.)

Under the RTI it is also compulsory for every government office to declare certain information in public even without being asked by the people. You can identify them on the walls of these office buildings. Or if you have access to internet you will find that most government department websites also provide the information about basic aspects of their institutions under RTI column. Visit any of these government offices directly or their websites and note them down.

Rights Approach to improve the living conditions

In the previous chapter we studied about Right to food and Right to employment. There has been people struggles to achieve them. Those who argue for rights perspective point out that these rights help people to live with dignity. It is not question of governments being kind to the poor, by providing them with opportunities of labour and providing access to food at reasonable rates so that their living conditions can be improved. It enhances the health and welfare of the entire society. Yet it is true as in the case of social audit of MNREGA you read about in previous chapter, citizens need to be active in monitoring performance of the government system regularly, just as elected representatives.

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009

The RTE Act is meant for providing free and Compulsory Education to all Children in the age group of 6 – 14 years and came into force from 1st April 2010.

Important provisions of RTE Act

- Ensure availability of schools within the reach of the children.
- Improve School infrastructure facilities.
- Enroll children in the class appropriate to his / her age.
- Children have a right to receive special training in order to be at par with other children.
- Providing appropriate facilities for the education of children with special needs on par with other children.
- No child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing the elementary education. No test for admitting the children in schools.
- No removal of name and repetition of the child in the same class.
- No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education.
- No child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment.
- Admission shall not be denied or delayed on the ground that the transfer and other certificates have not been provided on time.
- Eligible candidates alone shall be appointed as teachers.
- The teaching learning process and evaluation procedures shall promote achievement of appropriate competencies.
- No board examinations shall be conducted to the children till the completion of elementary education.
- Children can continue in the schools even after 14 years for the completion of elementary education.
- No discrimination and related practices towards children belonging to backward and marginalized communities.
- The curriculum and evaluation procedures must be in conformity with the values enshrined in the constitution and make the child free of fear and anxiety and help the child to express views freely.

You have read about the freedom movement and about the moderates like Gopala Krishna Gokhale. Gokhale in 1911 demanded from the British colonial government that they make a law for free and compulsory education for all children of the country. Of course, the British government did not agree. Unfortunately, such a law was not passed even after the attainment of freedom. Finally in 2002 the Parliament recognised education as a fundamental right. The 86th Amendment of the Constitution that made education a fundamental right was passed in the year 2002. The 86th Amendment says that “the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages 6 and 14 through a law that it may determine.” This law was finally passed in 2009 and is called the ‘Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.’

RTE law declares that all children of the age of 6 to 14 years have the right to free education and the state has to ensure building of sufficient schools in the neighbourhood of all children, appoint properly qualified teachers and make all necessary provisions. It also declares that the education should ensure all round development of the children, learning through activities, discovery and exploration and child friendly manner. It also states that children should be taught in their mother tongue and they should be free of fear, trauma and anxiety and be able to express their views freely.

In case free neighbourhood schools are not available, in case sufficient number of teachers are not available in the schools, or sufficient teaching learning materials are not available, or if a child is beaten or terrorised, or forced to study in unfriendly manner, such children can complain to the courts against the authorities.

- Do you think your school conforms to these norms?
- Find out to whom you can complain about the functioning of your school when necessary.

Key words

1. Human Rights
2. RTI
3. RTE
4. Liberty

Improve your learning

1. Correct the false statement: AS₁
 - a) Welfare functions of the government need to be monitored.
 - b) People need to allow the elected representatives alone to monitor the implementation of programmes.
 - c) Information officers can withhold the information for indefinite period.
 - d) By looking at various documents one can identify if the programmes are implemented without malpractices.
2. Read the paragraph under the heading ‘Need for Information to Fight Corruption’ and answer the following:
AS₂

Observe any of the government programme and make a report of its implementation in your area.

3. Collect a few success stories with regarding to Right To Information Act (RTI) from newspapers and tell them in your class. AS₃
4. RTE is a boon to the children. Explain. AS₁
5. Do you need any more rights? Why? AS₄
6. What information do you ask your Headmaster according to Right to Information Act? AS₄
7. How can you say that the Right to Information Act helps to face the corruption? AS₆

1. [Untitled-1](#)