

Removal of Rural Poverty

Synopsis: India is basically a country of villages and agriculture. Over 70 per cent of its population is rural poor. Poverty can be seen at its starkest among them. They lack even the bare minimum needs of life. Millions of them have been living under poverty line for generations. Unless their poverty is alleviated there cannot be real freedom and independence. Many schemes have been launched to remove rural poverty, they have also yielded results but it is like drop in the ocean. Land reforms and their implementations have direct and close bearing on rural poverty removal and so need to be expedited. The landless poor farmers, peasants and laborers should be given land and its ownership.

The real Indian can be found in the villages. In spite of rapid urbanization, industrial growth and migration to towns and cities, 74.3 per cent of the country's population lives in villages, In contrast only 25.7 per cent population lives in urban area. India is an agricultural country and its lives in villages. But the villagers are still the poorest in spite of 50 years of independence, green revolution and industrial and technological advancements. Poverty can be seen among the India villagers- small landless farmers, laborers, artisans etc. in its starkest form. They are starved, ill-clad, without a roof over their heads and deprivies. Thousands of these poor villagers die for want of nutrition, basic and minimum amenities of life.

This is still painfully true of the India villagers. They are without land, without employment, with means of sustenance. They are deprived of the barest minimum desirable nutritional standards of calorie intake. Millions and millions of villagers are living below the poverty line. Sixty-one per cent of the rural household lives below poverty line. It is estimated that two-thirds of households in villages with population below one thousands have a month income of less than Rs. 750 as against 16.1 per cent in the case of cities with population over 10 lakh. The condition in Bihar, West Bengal, Assam etc. is the worst.

Land reforms play a crucial role in rural poverty alleviation which involves distribution of land to the landless and nearly landless farmers. IN the villages there are millions of people who depend on land for their livelihood but are without any land or any other source of income. They toil and sweat to grow grains, vegetables and other agriculture crops and yet they are the most starved and hungry. They are the poorest and the most neglected lot, need the urgent help on a war footing. Justice and equality demand that they are given the rights of the land they till and cultivate. Their entitlement to the land is far greater than that of those who are proxy farmers and landlords who have lucrative and secure jobs in cities and towns and yet continue to have fat additional income from

owner's pe land in the villages. The landless farmer and peasants should be expedited and given land on ownership basis. Land reforms should be expedited and anomalies revived and absentee landownership terminated.

Some legislative measures have been initiated for providing ownership rights to tenants/security of tenure to tenants/subtenants/share-croppers. Provision regarding fixation of rents payable by the tenant and prohibition of eviction except on specific grounds further strive to safeguard the interest of the tenants. Several States enacted land ceiling laws in the 50s and 60s. Consequently several lakh hectares of land were taken over and distributed to many landless poor. The land ceiling laws were subsequently re-enacted and more land declared surplus. Consequently the number of operational land holdings has increased from 97.2 million in 1985-86 to 105.3 million in 1991-92. The holdings operated by SCs increased both in number and area during this period.

Where the land distributed under the ceiling laws and reform measures is of poor quality or without irrigation facilities, the assistance need to be provided generous financial assistance. And where there is not enough land to distribute among the landless peasants and laborers, there should be given other resource base such as leases over ponds, tanks, quarries, forest areas pastures etc. All other efforts like conservation of forest, drought relief programmes, rural employment programme etc. should be integrated and linked to the basic strategy of rural poverty alleviating and improvement of quality of life. The panchayats raj system should also be given more powers and resources to enable them generate more work and employment opportunities. Panchayats raj institutions are the only democratic agencies on the grass root levels which can really help so much in the improvement of the quality of rural living if genuinely empowered. Cottage industries should also be encouraged and helped. The village's artisans and crafts person should not be allowed to remain idle or to fall in disuse. Their skills should be fully utilized.