CHAPTER - 10

CONCLUSION
In the foregoing chapters various aspects of agrarian structure of Mahakhand relating to land alienation and depeasantisation have been discussed. In the light of this discussion an attempt is now being made to make an overall generalisation of the findings of the study followed by some of the policy implications arising out of it.

Mahakhand is no more a homogeneous peasant community. Tremendous inequality persists among the villagers in terms of the ownership of land, rate of exploitation of labour, indebtedness to formal and informal credit agencies and other land-based resources which form the basis of differentiation. It is inferred from the study that the agricultural economy of the village is in the process of acquiring capitalist relations, a process assisted by exogenous forces of irrigation, mechanisation, penetration of market relations and expansion of formal credit networks. The manifestations of these are perpetuated through the existing differentiation among the peasants of its internal characteristics. This type of transitional character of the agrarian economy of India has been highlighted by a number of social scientists (Rudra 1978, Rao et al 1981, Harriss 1982, Saith and Tankha 1972, Dharmlingam 1991). The emergence of capitalist relations led to the expansion of forces of production in the village which in turn intensified
the process of polarisation of the peasantry. Now the households of the village are essentially differentiated in terms of classes viz., rich peasants, middle peasants, small peasants and landless labourers. This classification broadly corresponds to the traditional socio-economic and political divisions such as Gountia, Parja and Sukhabasi. The parjas are internally differentiated into two classes. The upper class represents the features of middle peasant and lower class possesses the small peasant characteristics. The sukhabasis are the landless agricultural labourers. Previously in the village there was one Gountia, but now there is a group of landholding households locally referred to as Gountias. In fact, these are the rich peasants of the village who, on the one hand, exercise power like the traditional Gountias and, on the other, reinvest their surplus for higher productivity. Such a mode of production may be characterised as semi-feudal, semi-capitalist.

The tribals and the early settlers of the village have been deprived of their traditional rights to land and the rich immigrants have consolidated their landowning status by legitimising various forms of exploitation over the native settlers within the framework of state machinery. During the pre-irrigation period lands of upper landowning group were located encircling the water sources. The then best category of
land i.e., Gajabahal was mostly occupied by them. After irrigation plan they exchanged their lands with the poor and small holders according to the suitability of canal irrigation. The status of types of land has been changed immediately because of irrigation. The Gajabahal category of land has been converted into waterlogging land i.e. Daldali. Due to access to communication channels, the speculating rich disposed of the Daldali lands and pushed the tribals and other marginal holders to these lands.

With the advent of canal irrigation in the village new cropping pattern has been introduced which heavily depends upon new technology, HYV seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and special care. It made the traditional technology, seed and skill almost obsolete and forced the peasants to enter into wider market as regular buyer of agricultural implements and inputs. Due to in-time cash need, the small and marginal peasants are caught in the chain of borrowings. When the debt burden becomes unbearable they are forced to mortgage or sell the holdings. Apart from this, with the inroad of alien cropping pattern the small peasants are compelled to submit themselves to the large holders because effective water management always needs uniform cropping pattern, and for this, the small and marginal holders have to go for the crops and seeds which are adopted by the surrounding large landholders failing which the former's land gets locked. If their cropping pattern does not
correspond to the large holders, invariably it leads to crop failure. Continuous locking of land ultimately forces the peasant to dispose of the land. Because of the large scale farming and advantageous resource ownership position, the rich peasants corner the benefits of the expanded forces of production and poor peasants have to get land alienated and depeasantised due to their inherent weakness in carrying out the production process compatible with the changing conditions. Thus, the new cropping pattern is creating an island of prosperity for a few within the ocean of poverty.

In the post-dam period with the entry of migrant labourers the supply of labour has been expanded. Such a situation helps the large holders to take the upper hand. New terms, conditions and obligations are favourable for the extraction of greater surplus which enable the rich peasants to acquire more land and thereby contribute to the process of marginalisation and pauperisation of poor peasants and landless labourers. The labourers are drawn mostly from castes and tribes belonging to the lower economic status. In the village, presently there is a plenty of labour supply. Each landowner on an average gets 2.98 labourers as seen from village statistics. Since there is a huge labour mass who are backward on many fronts, the rich peasants find it convenient to exploit them and keep them under perpetual level of poverty. The process of land
alienation and depeasantisation began much before British rule. It was expedited when the constraints were placed on native patterns of land-man relationships. After canal irrigation, adoption of agricultural modernization and land reform measures the generated surplus labour could not be reabsorbed into the productive activities. Although the production per unit land has increased the distributive justice remained obsolete. The rate of exploitation of labour shows that more than 50% of the households of the village are exploited upto the extent of -5 to -1.

The study confirms the fact that while the higher landowners are mostly indebted to formal credit agencies, majority of the marginal peasants, small peasants and labourers are under the clutches of private moneylenders. Because of the land based credit policies of the formal agencies, the upper landowning group is the major beneficiary. The formal credit facilities have become a boon for their further prosperity. For the poor, however, it is a burden which invariably push them into the debt trap of the private moneylenders. The red-tapes and complex formalities involved in formal credit agencies, instead of providing relief to the poor peasants, further intensifies their miseries. In fact, similar situations are seen from a number of studies (Rao 1970, 1975, Lipton 1976, Lele 1981, Sarap 1991). While the primary advantages of formal credit facilities have accrued to large farmers, the small peasants and
landless labourers have seldom been benefitted. It is further revealed that because of wider political connections and greater influence over these credit organisations, there has been a tendency among the big landholders to remain defaulters and invest the amount for a purpose other than that for which loan is credited. The similar conclusions of willful default have been reported by a few authors (Dadhich 1971, Bottomley 1975). Hence, all the types of informal credits in the village are exploitative in their own rights. It is one of the major sources of surplus-labour appropriation, land alienation and impoverishment. The formal credit system has failed to replace the informal agencies. Rather the former has widened the latter's scope in the village. Both the types of credit facilities are complementing each other in depeasantising and pauperising the poor peasants and landless labourers.

In a nutshell, land relations predominate labour relations and credit relations serve to complement these relationships. The higher is the quantum of land, the greater is the ability to employ labourer, and the easier is the access to formal and informal credit agencies and other land-based resources. The interplay of land-labour-credit relations while creating a conducive mechanism for land alienation and depeasantisation of the small peasants, prepares a congenial base for the enrichment of the rich peasants. In the village the
rich peasants not only own a major portion of cultivable land but also control a large section of labour force. Along with this, most of them are the chief moneylending agents and principal beneficiaries of formal credit facilities. Due to this economic strength, they occupy vantage position in all the village level formal and informal institutions and dictate terms in the decision making processes in the village in their favour.

Over time there has been a systematic change in land relations, as a consequence of which landownership has become concentrated in the hands of a small number of households. The trend of land concentration has been supported by a number of studies from different parts of India. (Rao 1987, Gough 1989, Krishnaji 1990). From the pattern of landholdings, land sales and outstanding land mortgages, it is apparent that there is a constant and systematic process of land alienation and depeasantisation in the village. The origin of such twin processes lies elsewhere, but it picked up rapid momentum in the post independent period under the impact of canal irrigation, mechanisation, expansion of formal credit networks and other infrastructural developments. Most of the early settlers such as the Kondhs, the Gonds, the Paps and the Kultas are the worst sufferers and the late migrants such as the Andhraraites have very well established an advantageous position in the agrarian hierarchy of the village. The result shows that the landsize of
1 to 3 acres is the critical size and once the higher landowner enters into that category the existing socio-economic relations invariably take him into the stream of depeasantisation.

The description and analysis made of the irrigated village under study clearly demonstrates that the changes in the agrarian social relations in pre- and post-British era have completely undermined the backward population. Even after independence, more specifically after the construction of Hirakud dam and its canal irrigation things have not changed as expected. Labour as a factor moved along with the land hungry south Indian cultivating group into the village as appendage. The land-based allocated resources for development and betterment of the poor and the needy section of the village have hardly reached them. Studies from Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, U.P. and Tripura lend support to the above study (Bhaduri 1973, 1983, Choudhury 1975, Mukherjee 1986, Kurilkarni 1982, Rao 1987, Shergill 1986, Verma 1991, Eswaraiah 1978). Most of these studies reveal the fact that informal moneylending agents are the chief sources of land alienation and depeasantisation. But the findings of the present study claim that not only the informal money-lending agents but also the formal agencies, rate of exploitation of labour, alien cropping pattern are the principal sources of land alienation and depeasantisation. The route to land alienation is through land sales and land mortgages.
The land reforms measures launched by the state have in no way benefitted the marginal holders. Rather they further marginalised and depeasantised them. The fact that the land reform measures have been heavily biased in favour of the new class of capitalist farmers who are its major beneficiaries, (Joshi 1975, 1989, Thorner, 1956, Rao 1975, Pathy 1981, Radhakrishnam 1981, Panda and Mohanty 1991) is noteworthy here. In fact, the so called 'land revolution' based on reforms has failed to bring a distributive social justice in India. However, Kurup puts it as social transformation (1986 : 27).

Thorner rightly observed:

"For the first time a class of capitalist farmers has come into being on an all India scale. It is certainly likely to grow in the proximate future. But I should not like to foretell what will become of Indian agriculture as a whole. The prospect for the vast mass of petty cultivators is far from clear. If for no other reason, their very number makes it impossible for many of them to become capitalist farmers" (1980:253).

J. Breman says:

"Alienated from the means of production, increasingly so from the means of consumption and expelled to the periphery of the village (or even thrown outside it) the agricultural labourers are penned up within their own milieu. The class of new rich have called into being an opposing class of new untouchables" (1985 : 357).
The prediction on transformation of direct producers into proletariat, demise of sharecroppers and polarisation of rural society because of green revolution (Parthasarathy 1970, Frankel 1971, Byres 1972, Dasgupta 1977) is gradually coming true. Some of these social scientists have also anticipated that red revolution would follow green revolution.

The political implication of the study is that the marginal holders and landless labourers, who have evolved as historically deprived large section of the village, have to fight out for the change. Since more than 50% of households are landless and 66.95% of main workers are agricultural labourers, the objective conditions are sufficient to bring out the qualitative change. But possibly the fatalism and the prevalent ideology in the village act as formidable constraints. However, what Thorner has observed is true, namely that

"a great deal of fundamental change is going on to-day among the working producers themselves - the labourers, tenants and drawf owners. They are getting a better evaluation of themselves as people and of their economic contribution. They are casting a more realistic eye on their neighbours who have been riding on their backs" (1956 : 76-77).
POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is reported from the study that landlessness and land concentration is of greater magnitude. More than 50% of the households are landless and among the landowners the distribution of land is markedly skewed. While about 20% of people control 80% of the land, rest 20% of the land is being distributed among small holders to support 80% of people. This inequal ownership of landholding leads to the inequal control over other land-based resources and thereby perpetuates the inequality of socio-political and economic relations. The results show that the prevailing set of land-reform measures, instead of reducing the gap, have created further inequalities. Therefore, a radical land-reform measure is needed to bring a relatively progressive agrarian order. Since vast masses of people are landless and marginal holders, the new measure should be launched keeping in view the interest of this deprived mass.

The critical landsize being 1 to 3 acres which with slightest contingent is susceptible to depeasantisation process, a special package of developmental measure should be launched for them which would check their sliding down further. Further, the remedial measures should also aim at not allowing the households of landowning size which lies just above it to slide down to critical land size. Such measures should be specific to areas with similar agricultural practices to the village under study.
The existing credit policies of the formal agencies which are largely advantageous to the rich peasants need to be reformulated. The policy should be so designed that in practice it can reduce the dependency of peasants on informal agents. The credit policies instead of being land-based or asset-based should be need-based with minimum formalities and political interference. The bureaucratic structure of these organisations is required to be restructured in such a way that it can provide timely services and can encourage the accessibility of marginal and landless labourers.

It is found that more than 66% of main workers are agricultural labourers and their high rate of exploitation is mainly attributed to low wage, tying of labour services through credit relations, illiteracy, and the like. Therefore, educative measures should be provided both through educational institutions and cultural media which will not only raise the literacy level but also increase their level of consciousness of the policies launched in their favour. In addition to this, a separate labour cell should be established at the village level to look into their working conditions, hours of work, wage structure, etc. wherein adequate number of labourers would be the representatives.