CHAPTER - 1

THE PROBLEM
The popular notion on Indian peasant society is that the peasants are on the way of becoming farmers by deriving benefits from the infrastructural inputs of agricultural development such as irrigation, mechanisation, pesticide, fertilizer, extension of loan facilities and subsidies from Co-operative societies, Banks and other formal institutions which connect them with the wider market net-work. The other strong view on peasants is that although the quantity and quality of output has shown a positive growth, with the advent of agricultural modernization in India, the small peasants are getting depeasantised whereas the life style of the marginal holders and landless agricultural labourers has further deteriorated. The gap between the landholding groups is widening day by day, and the landless agricultural labourers have remained at the receiving end. Such a trend has an easy out-let for the marginal holders to join the landlesslabourercategory whose economy has changed from subsistence to survival. Both of these views have been substantiated through the micro-level empirical studies from different parts of India.

Due to the inequality in distribution of land in India, the underdog position of the peasants has remained almost unchanged since centuries. The system perpetuates because our society allows inequality of possession between
families and ethnic groups (in India it refers to the Jatis). The common belief in rural India is that those who own land do not work and those who do not work own land. The land owners not only own land and land-based resources, but also maintain an internal boundary for their class interests. The assumption of the inverse relationship between land and labour in reality is so complex that the simple dichotomy holds no good in practice due to economic and cultural reasons.

A number of micro-level studies revealed that those with excess land with better productivity do make use of the labour of others either by employing them on wage or letting land to them for a share of the produce. Normally, the lower caste members are the labour supplying groups. The village land owners depend on them and they are obliged to the owners through various primordial ties.

With the emergence of higher technology, the subsequent change of the status of land due to irrigation, movement of the people into the village and market relations, the terms and conditions between land owners and tillers have been changed. Along with the agricultural modernization came the migrant labourer with the support of the migrant land owners. Such changes in agrarian social relations have multiple ramifications. In the process some gained and some
lost land. For small and marginal holders contingencies as major internal factors and 'development' as one of the major external factors made them lose land and then join hands with the labour market for survival.

The land alienation and depeasantisation is a historic process. As major components, a few micro-level studies have successfully unveiled the role of the states at different periods of time whereby so called land reform measures have been enforced under class ideology. It will be intelligible enough to analyse the dynamics of social frame of agricultural modernization from below. Beteille recommends that one way of investigating the agrarian class structure is by examining native categories of people, or the way in which they perceive their own social universe as being divided into groups playing different roles in productive system (1974:13). Since, the factors in productive system do not combine in similar way everywhere and by and large they are moulded by the local historical and ecological conditions, the structure of inequality in specific areas is likely to vary. Therefore, the areas exposed to new technology respond differently. Hence inequality in agrarian social relations are area specific. However, as principle, structures share similar features, irrespective of any area.
The land in villages not only binds people together but also generates tensions and even divides houses. As the land became scarce and valuable through which the socio-economic and political power is maintained, the rich tried to accumulate more while poor tried to withstand the pressure on it. At such a stage the process of land alienation and depeasantisation was slow. Due to recent agricultural modernization, the emergent heterogeneity of ethnic composition in village rearranges the agrarian social relations. It includes the persons belonging to natives and migrants.

To enhance the productivity many new sets of institutions come into being. In response to such changes the factors like labour and capital undergo a change in their forms and contents. During such a period those who fail to compete to derive benefits from newly established institutions and get victimised in debt traps due to contingencies, market their land at the hands of land hungry groups. Ultimately, they fall into the stream of depeasantisation.

Not all peasants face similar problems. It is also not true to say that the exfeudals retain the same power as they had in past. It would not be wrong to say that most of the exfeudals and their allies in village level came down in the agrarian hierarchical order due to reformation and
development. Nevertheless, the rate of exploitation and its process through informal and formal credit markets have changed their faces. So also is the case in the relations of production.

The present thesis based on intensive field work in an agriculturally developed village of Sambalpur district intends to investigate and analyse the issues of land alienation and depeasantisation. The interest of this work is woven around the following questions: Did the canal irrigation and associated inputs of agricultural modernisation reduced the gap between the peasant categories? Since inequality is the basis of relationship between peasants and landless labourers, what is the existing rate of exploitation in the village? Does the rate of exploitation have any correlation with factors like land sizes, ethnic groups, structure of debt from formal and informal institutions? How does these complex relations affect the poor in village? and what is the critical land size.

To probe into such queries, and to know the existing processes of land alienation and depeasantisation, the data from empirical investigation were put to test through certain established formulie in order to locate the trend and suggest a few measures. To substantiate the findings certain typical cases have been considered.