CHAPTER V

LAND REFORM MEASURES

On the eve of India’s independence the effect of semi-feudal landlordism was the main hurdle in the way of national economic regeneration and revitalization. The greater part of agrarian wealth was being taken away and directed into unproductive channels by big landlords and intermediaries. In fact before the annexation of India by the British, there was a direct link between the tenants/peasants and the rulers. The tenants or tillers of land used to pay rent either in kind or cash directly to the rulers or kings of the time. But when British annexed India the system was abolished, no direct relationship between the tillers and the government was established. Instead, intermediary systems like Zamindari, Mahalwari and Ryotwari were introduced under which taxes were collected through intermediaries like Zamindars, Mahalwars etc. These intermediaries were simply appointed as mere tax collectors. The British rulers did not like to establish any sort of direct relationship with the peasants. Rather the intermediaries were given full power to collect any amount of taxes from the farmers as
they like. The intermediaries had to pay certain amount of the collection as fixed by the British Government, and the remains were taken by the intermediaries. In course of time, taking advantage of the ignorance of the poor peasants and non-interference of the British rulers, the intermediaries mainly Zamindars exploited the real tillers of the soil by charging exorbitant amounts of rent. In fact the intermediaries used to pay minimum rent to the government and most of the earnings of the hard work of the peasants went into the pockets of these intermediaries. At last the actual tillers could not maintain their own families and borrowed the money from the intermediaries or Zamindars at exorbitant rates of interest. At last the peasants were not in position to repay the loan amount. Taking advantage of non-repayment of loan and interest thereon the Zamindars took the possession of land and the peasants were simply used as bonded labours. Since the peasants were no more the owners of the land, they paid little or no attention to the development of land so as to raise the agricultural productivity by giving extra labour or efforts since the fruits of their hard works went to the intermediaries or big landlords. Because of these facts the agricultural productivity
declined tremendously and the country faced the problem of acute
food shortage. This calls forth the reorganization of agrarian system
and land reforms in the country. As soon as India got independence
and Five Year plan being launched the first priority was given to
reorganize the agrarian sector. The first step taken up by the
Government of was Land Reform Measures under which the
pattern of ownership of land has to be just and rational so as to
secure growth with social justice. The land reform programme is an
integrated programme designed to eliminate obstacles to economic
and social developing arising out of defects in the agrarian
structure. The objective of land reform policy should be to remove
such impediments to agricultural development as arise from the
agrarian structure and to eliminate exploitation and social injustice
within the agrarian system so as to ensure equality of tenure states
and opportunity to all.

In order to reorganize the agrarian system in the country the
following land reform measures were taken with the adoption of
Five Year Plans.

1. Abolition of intermediary tenures
2. Tenancy Rights

3. Fixation of ceiling on landholdings

4. Fixation rent

5. Consolidation of Holdings

6. Development of Co-operative farming

Manipur being an integral part of the Indian Union, it's not exception to implement land reform measures. However, the land tenure system prevailed at the dawn of independence and merger to the Indian Union was quite different from other states being a Princely one. Before the British occupation all lands in the state belonged to the Maharajah who allots land and allows the people to cultivate. The revenues were assessed in kind in terms of produce of the land (paddy) or in labour unit put in the process of production. “For smooth and effective revenue administration in Manipur, the whole valley was divided into four panas, namely”¹

(1) Ahallup pana

In Manipur, more than 70 per cent of the people depend on land and agriculture for their food, income and employment. But the state, with its peculiarities in respect of its land and people, presents gigantic problems for the development planners, social scientists and agricultural scientists alike. There have been several attempts since recent past in the direction of development of the state. One such measure has been the land reform legislations with the objective of providing land to the actual tillers, distribution of surplus land among the landless cultivators, ensuring security of tenure, raising agricultural productivity and thus helps in the socio-economic, transformation of the rural society.

Importance of land in a backward economy like that of Manipur needs no emphasis. Right from the beginning of the birth of Manipur, much thought and attention have been devoted to improvement in the system under which land was held and cultivated. In fact, land reform, the most essential factor for
agricultural development, is not yet properly applicable in all the districts of Manipur except the valley areas. The main land reform measures which were taken up by the government of Manipur during the last three decades or so can be discussed as follows:-

1. Abolition of Intermediaries

With the coming of Britishers in Manipur, NOI survey was introduced in the year 1891 in the valley area of this state. The NOI survey was replaced by Mauzadari chain survey in 1908. When Manipur was merged with the Indian union as a union territory; the powers of the then king were taken away and handed over to the government of Manipur as per provision of the Indian constitution. Except certain land areas reserved for the king and Princess and some decendence of the king all other lands where under the position and controlled of the government of Manipur. It is also to be highlighted that there were no intermediaries like Zamindars, Mahalwary etc. in the state. From 1952 plan table traverse survey was taken up in some portion of the valley area of Manipur. In 1947-48 cadastral survey was enforced in some parts of
Imphal West but in 1970 the work was completed in the whole of Manipur valley.

The old system of assessing land revenue adopted by the Maharajas was abolished from 1892 under the British rule. “Annual land revenue at the rate of Rs.5/- per pari (2.5 acres) was assessed irrespective of the use, class and location of the agricultural land. During the Second World War, the rate of land revenue was increased to Rs.6/- per pari which was subsequently increased to Rs.9/- per pari after the war. The annual land revenue was again increased to Rs.18.75 per pari of ‘phouren loupham’. Land revenue at the increased rate was realized from the land owner’s up to 1977. The rate of annual land revenue was again increased by 25% i.e. to Rs. 23.44 per pari of “Phouren loupham” from the year 1978 onwards.\(^2\)

In order to regulate the system of land holdings and settlement, the Manipur land revenue and land reform (M.L.R. and L.R.) Act was enacted in 1960 by the Parliament which replaced

\(^2\) Udhop Singh L. op.cit. p.30.
the Assam Land Revenue Regulation1886 which was extended in the valley areas of the state on 15th May 1952. The said Act is enforced within the valley areas in some pockets of the hill districts.

2. Tenancy Rights

So far the tenancy of Rights is concerned; all the rules and laws enacted by the constitution of India came into force. The tenants of the cultivable lands have been protected by laws from the discriminating and exploitative attitudes of the land owners. Without the full consents of the tenants, the tenancy of land cannot be withdrawn immediately. Tenancy can be withdrawn only if the tenants failed to pay the normal payable rents or misused the land. Further the cultivable lands cannot be sold without the consents of the tenants. If the land owner would like to dispose his land first reference should be given to the tenants as well as the neighbourhood of the land. Thus tenants are fully protected from the unwanted attitudes.

3. Fixation of ceilings of land

Regarding the fixation of land ceiling, under the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (M.L.R. and L.R.) Act, one
family can hold up to 5 hectares of class-I land and 6 hectares in class-II land. If the family consists of more than 5 members, it may hold one additional hectare for each member in excess of 5 in case of class-I land and 6 in class-II land, but the holding will not exceed 8 hectare in class-I lands and 10 hectare in class-II lands in the aggregate. There is provision in the Act for payment of compensation to the land owners, when the surplus lands are acquired by the Government.3

The Progressive total of the area declared surplus and distribution of surplus land upto the year 1983-84 was 836.73 acres and upto the year 2001 was 1830 acres as shown in Table no. 5.1 and 5.2. Distribution of Ceiling Surplus land to the landless tenants was started in 1982-83. Upto 1983-84, the total area declared surplus was 836.43 acres. Out of 836.43 acres of surplus land, the government acquired 807.66 acres and 323.21 acres were distributed.

3 Udhop Singh, L.op.cit p.31.
### TABLE NO. 5.1

Acquisition of Surplus Land in Manipur:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total area Declared surplus (acres)</th>
<th>Total area taken in possession (acres)</th>
<th>Area yet to be acquired (acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upto 1983-84</td>
<td>836.73</td>
<td>807.66</td>
<td>29.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upto 2007</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>1685</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ministry of Rural Development Annual Report 2007-08, Government of Manipur, Land Reform Cell, Land Ceiling and Distribution of surplus Land in Manipur.*
TABLE NO.5.2

Achievements in Distribution of Surplus Land in Manipur:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Area Distributed (Acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upto 1982-83</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>323.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upto 2007</td>
<td>1258</td>
<td>1682</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ministry of Rural Development Annual Report 2007-08, Government of Manipur, Land Reform Cell, Land Ceiling and Distribution of surplus Land in Manipur.*
But upto 2007, the surplus land was increased to 1830 and out of this, 1685 acres were acquired by the govt. and 1682 acres were distributed and the of surplus land yet to acquired was 145 acres. The number of Beneficiaries upto 1983-84 was 293 but it was increased to 1258 upto the year 2007. In fact the existence of surplus land or excessive position of land beyond the limit was almost conspicuous by its absence.

4. Fixation of Rent

Under the provisions of M.L.R. and L.R. Act 1960 the maximum rent payable by a tenant in respect of any land held by him is one fourth of the produce of land. There is no need to pay any extra rent by the tenant if the production from the land increase on account of land improvement brought by him or due to his adoption of improved techniques of farming. In the hill areas of the state, cadastral surveys have been made in certain areas only and the M.L.R and L.R. Act 1960 and Rules 1961 have not been extended; the land tenure is governed by the customary laws of the respective tribal people. During the British Rule, the Chin Hills Regulation was introduced in the hill areas of the state and house
tax at the rate of Rs.3/- per house was realized in place of land revenue. The house tax was afterwards increased to Rs.6/- per house.\(^4\) A Bill was passed by the state legislature in September 1975 for proper implementation of agricultural land ceiling and speedy distribution of surplus lands to the landless cultivators.

5. Consolidation of land holdings

The small size of holdings is thus explained by division and subdivision of ancestral property due to the growth of population, breakdown of joint family system, and the attachment to landed property, the decline of cottage industries, the laws of inheritance, the consequent pressure on land etc. On the other hand, fragmentation of holdings is due to the sub-division of property among just owners, each of whom wants a share in each plot of the ancestral land.

The prevalence of sub-division and fragmentation is a hindrance in the use of improved agricultural practices, such as better seeds, manures, use of superior agricultural machinery,

\(^4\) Udhop Singh, L, op.cit, p.33.
construction of wells, fencing of land, protection of crops from pests and improvement of drainage systems. There is wastage of land in boundaries and fencing. Moreover, quarrels over boundaries of small plots lead to litigation. Thus small and scattered farms are clearly an impediment for the efficient organization of agriculture. As a result, the cost of production becomes very high as compared to large farm.

6. Development of Cooperative farming

The Cooperative sector in India is the largest in the world and it plays a pivotal role in employment generation, poverty alleviation and food security. The role of Cooperative sector is extremely important in agriculture sector as it supplies agricultural credit and funds and has the potential to deliver goods and services in vital areas where state and private sectors have not been able to do very much. Similarly the movement of Cooperative becomes very high in recent years. The Cooperative movement in Manipur has played a significant role in the social and economic development of the state, particularly in the rural areas. Initially, this movement was confined mainly to the field of agricultural
credit. In the recent past, the farmers of agricultural crops particularly of vegetable are facing marketing problems. Farmers could not dispose off their produces at the remunerative prices as cold storage and export facilities are yet to be made available. Procurement as well as marketing of agricultural produces may be developed and modernized by strengthening the Manipur Cooperative Marketing Societies at the state level as well as all supply and marketing societies in the five hill districts.

Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) are basically multipurpose. The main functions of the societies are to extend financial supports such as short-term crop loans, medium term and long term loans on agricultural purposes, storage and distribution of consumer items, chemical fertilizers and marketing of agricultural produces. The PACS are known as Gram Panchayat Level Multipurpose Cooperative Societies (GPLMPCS) in the valley while in the hill, they are called Large Size Multipurpose
Cooperative Societies (LAMPS). As on 31st March, 2012, there are 152 GPLMPCS and 71 LAMPS.\textsuperscript{5}

However, the Cooperatives in Manipur are not functioning satisfactory due to problems like inadequate funds, inefficient management, lack of coordination etc. Out of the total of 5376, the number of dormant and defunct societies during 2011-12 are 1428 and 623 respectively.\textsuperscript{6}

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis:

1. Cadastral Surveys were carried out in the valley areas of the state and also in certain parts of the hill areas. Rent was fixed according to the class of lands as classified by the Government in the valley areas while in the hill areas the traditional Hill House Tax is still in practice.

2. Surplus land above the permitted land ceiling was acquired by the Government and distributed amongst the landless people.

\textsuperscript{5}Economic Survey of Manipur 2012-13, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Manipur, p.95.
\textsuperscript{6}Ibid.
The rights of the tenants were more or less protected, so as to ensure the security of possession of land by the peasants. This may help to encourage the incentives of the farmers to raise the level of productivity.

3. Due to the destruction of joint family system which was one time more prominent, the fragmentation of land increases significantly and thereby the large scale farming becomes impracticable.

4. Cooperative movement becomes very popular in the state, in the last two/three decades. Many types of Cooperative Societies particularly Agricultural Cooperative Societies were set up, through which the processes of marketing and farming are to be carried out. Unfortunately, the functioning of the Societies are still found unsatisfactory and calls for reorganization and revitalization.

5. Last but not the least, it will be also of immense importance to examine the impact of the existing land use pattern in the valley of Manipur on the socio-economic life of the people living in the village areas, particularly the impact of the introduction of new agricultural policy and change in the pattern of land utilization.