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RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT
ON
DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE
IN TRIBAL AREAS

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In all, 20 papers have been received on tribal agriculture. These papers may be broadly divided into the following groups:

1. Papers relating to the general aspects of tribal agriculture.
2. Papers dealing with shifting cultivation in the hill areas.
3. Papers concerned with tribal agriculture in the plains.

I

GENERAL ASPECTS OF TRIBAL AGRICULTURE

A study of tribal agriculture involves, firstly, an identification of the factors that are specific to tribal areas and their implications for the development of agriculture, secondly, an analysis of the agricultural methods and practices followed by the tribals and, thirdly, the methods for improving tribal agriculture.

The factors that have a bearing on the development of agriculture in tribal areas have been examined in the papers submitted by P. C. Goswami and P. D. Saikia; B. K. Roy Burman and P. S. Sharma; J. S. Sisodia, V. N. Singh and J. P. Mishra; I. P. Singh; Dru Srivastava and C. B. Singh; and I. J. Singh, J. P. Mishra and J. S. Sharma. These factors may be classified under three broad heads : (a) physical; (b) social and institutional and (c) developmental.

A. Physical Factors

1. Poor communication

The authors mentioned above point out that the tribal areas are cut off from the neighbourhood because of difficult means of communication. This point has also been brought out by Usha Dar. The isolation of the tribal areas from the outside world has prevented the tribals from being exposed to new ideas and they are therefore extremely tradition bound and primitive in their approach. This means that when conscious and deliberate efforts are made to introduce them to methods of agriculture with which they are unfamiliar, they are likely to be

very cautious and very slow in accepting them. Isolation of the tribals has not only meant an absence of exposure to new ideas, it has also meant an absence of any incentive to accept new ideas as and when they have been put forward. This is because the new ideas in agriculture are directed towards an increase in the productivity of agriculture and efforts to increase productivity have a meaning only if the extra produce from agriculture can be utilized. Since the tribal areas have been cut off by poor communications, the surplus agricultural produce, if any, can hardly find its way to the outside markets and, therefore, there is no incentive to increase production beyond the local demand. Hence, it follows that the effect of isolation on agriculture has been to continue with primitive methods of agriculture.

2. *Lack of irrigation facilities*

I. P. Singh and Sisodia, Singh and Mishra have noted the near absence of irrigation facilities. This makes it difficult for the farmers to use chemical fertilizers or change over to the high-yielding varieties of crops.

3. *Difficult terrain in hill areas*

In the hill areas the terrain is undulating and covered with forests. This coupled with the quality of the soil makes it necessary to follow shifting cultivation.

4. *Low density of population*

Attention has been drawn to the low density of population in tribal areas by Goswami and Saikia. The paper does not clearly bring out the effect of the low density of population on agriculture. It does, perhaps, imply that low density of population is one of the factors responsible for communal ownership of land.

B. *Social and Institutional Factors*

The effects of social and institutional factors on agricultural development have been analysed by Goswami and Saikia and I. P. Singh.

1. *Distinct ethnic group*

I. P. Singh is of the view that the tribals have remained aloof from the rest of the society for generations and therefore form a distinct ethnic group with a social and economic life which differs from society in the non-tribal areas. The physical and mental separation of the tribals is responsible for their economic, social and educational backwardness. This backwardness has, in turn, led to the continuance of primitive methods of cultivation.

2. *Pattern of land ownership*

Papers by Goswami and Saikia and Roy Burman and Sharma have drawn attention to the system of communal ownership of land among tribals. The effect of communal ownership of land on agriculture has, however, been examined only

in the paper by Goswami and Saikia. They point out that the communal ownership of land along with the non-fixity of tenure means that the farmer has very little attachment to the land they operate. They are therefore not interested in long-term improvements of the land.

3. *Co-operative credit*

I. P. Singh observes that the co-operative movement is very weak in the tribal areas. Consequently the tribals have taken loans from the moneylenders by mortgaging their lands. These lands have eventually been forfeited due to the malpractices of the moneylenders. In the Tarai area, however, the study of Singh, Mishra and Sharma has shown that there is a strong bias of the tribals against borrowing, and this in turn means lack of capital for investment. Because of lack of capital it is not possible to change over to new technological methods in agriculture.

C. *General Development and Agricultural Development*

The only paper that deals with the relationship between general development and agricultural development in tribal areas is by Dru Srivastava and C. B. Singh. It must, however, be mentioned that I. P. Singh does make a reference to this relationship. Srivastava and Singh, however, are seriously handicapped by lack of data. While the available data show that there are very large disparities in the per capita expenditure on welfare programmes in the different States, it has not been possible either to explain the reasons for the difference nor has it been possible to establish a definite link between the per capita expenditures on welfare and the level of agricultural development.

II

SHIFTING CULTIVATION IN THE HILL AREAS

The technique of shifting cultivation and the problems associated with it has been examined in detail by Usha Dar. It is a pointer to the importance of shifting cultivation that it has also been examined fairly extensively in the papers by Goswami and Saikia, Roy Burman and Sharma, I. P. Singh, and has been touched upon by Sisodia, Singh and Mishra and Srivastava and Singh. It may be pointed out that while the paper by Goswami and Saikia is on "Problems of Agricultural Development in Tribal Areas" it largely limits itself to an analysis of the problems of shifting cultivation.

All the authors agree that shifting cultivation is essentially subsistence cultivation with simple methods of farming. Empirical evidence in support of this observation has been provided by Census data which have been analysed by Usha Dar and Roy Burman and Sharma.

That the practice of shifting cultivation has led to the destruction of forest wealth has been pointed out by Usha Dar, Roy Burman and Sharma and I. P. Singh. Usha Dar's paper further examines the relationship between forest policy and shifting cultivation and recommends agri-silviculture for integrating forest preservation with shifting cultivation.

A number of recommendations for improving shifting cultivation and also diverting tribals to settled cultivation have been made by Usha Dar, Goswami and Saikia. The diversion of tribals to settled cultivation, however, has its own problems of adjustment to a new environment as pointed by Roy Burman and Sharma while the economic and financial difficulties of changing in the transition of shifting cultivation to settled cultivation have been examined by Usha Dar.

III

TRIBAL AGRICULTURE IN THE PLAINS

Tribal agriculture in the plains has been examined by Saroj Kanti Chaudhuri and R. C. Agrawal and S. L. Shah. The authors agree that agricultural performance of the tribals in the plains is not satisfactory. Chaudhuri points out that the main reasons for the poor performance of agriculture may be ascribed to the small size of holdings, the inferior quality of the land and the high proportion of tenancy among the tribals. While the tribals live in an area which is progressing in agriculture their own methods of cultivation continue to be primitive. Agrawal and Shah also find that the *Bhotiyas* who have been settled in the Tarai plains have remained secluded and carry on with their ancient methods of cultivation. Chaudhuri, Agrawal and Shah have made a number of suggestions for improving tribal agriculture in the plains.

IV

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

In view of the different aspects of tribal agriculture to which the paper writers have drawn attention, the group discussion at the Conference may centre around the following issues.

I. Pre-conditions for the Development of Agriculture in Tribal Areas

1. The negative and positive impact of (i) cultural, (ii) social, and (iii) economic factors on agricultural development in tribal areas.
2. Social and economic development necessary for the growth of agriculture.

II. Approach to Shifting Cultivation

- A.
 1. The approach of the forest policy to (a) shifting cultivation and (b) preservation of forests and its implications for shifting cultivation.
 2. The lines on which forest policy may be modified so as to reconcile the interests of the tribal cultivators and the interests of the forest authorities.
- B. The procedure for estimating the carrying capacity of land.
- C. Methods for increasing the yields from shifting cultivation.
- D. Programmes of training for extension staff and cultivators.

III. Approach to Settled Cultivation and Colonisation Schemes

1. Problems and difficulties of settled cultivation.
2. Lessons learnt from the experience of the colonisation schemes for settled cultivation.
3. Requisites of a settled colonisation scheme for settled cultivation.

IV. Institutional Arrangements for Tribal Agriculture

1. The most appropriate system of land ownership and land tenure (a) under shifting cultivation and (b) under settled cultivation.
2. The most appropriate arrangement for supply of credit and other inputs for tribal agriculture.

V. Subsidiary Occupations for Tribal Areas.