7. LAND REFORM IN INDIA : POLICY PERSPECTIVE

-There is only one fundamental Method of improving village life...namely, the introduction of a system of peasant proprietorship under which the tiller of the soil is himself the owner of it and pays revenues direct to the government without the intervention of any zamindar or taluqdar-

-Indian national Congress Resolution-1935-

With the introduction of land ceiling legislation in 1972, ceiling on land holdings was introduced in 19 States and 3 Union Territories. The 1972 national guidelines recommended ceiling limits ranging from 10-18 acres for irrigated land with two crops, 27 acres for irrigated land with one crop and 54 acres for dry land.

In pursuance of point No. 5A of the 20-Point Programme of the Govt. of India, the Land Reforms Division fixes annual targets for actual distribution of ceiling surplus land and brings out Quarterly Progress Report on the basis of figures received from States/UTs. The Govt. of India have issued Guidelines based on the recommendations of the Chief Ministers’ Conference held in 1972 for distribution of ceiling surplus land to the rural poor including SCs/STs. The State Governments/UT Administration is also distributing Govt. Wastelands and Bhoojan Lands to the rural poor.

As a result of implementation of ceiling laws, since inception till March, 2006, the total quantum of land declared surplus in the country was 68.38 lakh acres, of which about 59.80 lakh acres have been taken possession of and 49.40 lakh acres distributed to
53.50 lakh beneficiaries, of whom 39 percent belong to Scheduled Castes and 16 percent to Scheduled Tribes.

Under the 20 point programme of the Government of India, the Land Reforms Division fixes annual targets each year for distribution of ceiling surplus land in consultation with States on the basis of availability free from all encumbrances (Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India, 2006).

Land reform involves multi-dimensional changes spread over the socio-economic and political spheres. In our society where the land lords still constitute a powerful force to be reckoned with, implementation of even a marginally radical land reform measure becomes extremely difficult. Therefore, the Central Government proclaimed only those agrarian policies which were feasible within the limitations of the contemporaneous rural set-up. It varies from abolition of intermediary tenures as emphasized in the first plan to reform of tenancy in the second plan and also provision for ceiling on agricultural holdings in the third plan. The concern for tenurial reform and redistribution of land holding pattern was noticeable in the successive plan documents. The seventh Five Year Plan document has brought land reform into the mainstream of rural development activity. The approach of the seventh five Year Plan (1985-1990) states “The core of the anti-poverty programmes lies in the endowment of income generating assets on those who have little or none of these. Hence redistributive land reforms and security of tenure to the informal tenants have to be directly integrated with the anti-poverty package of programmes” (Govt. of India, 1984).