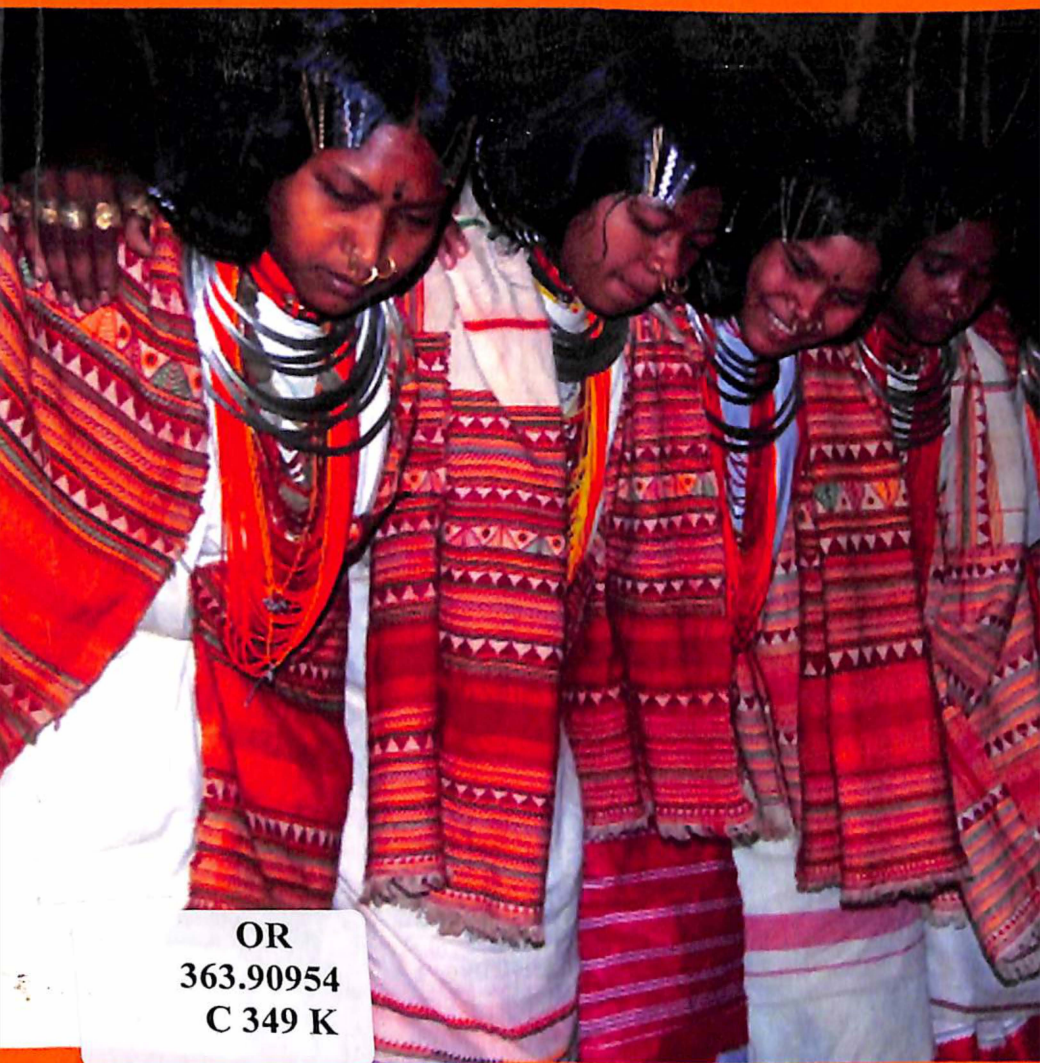


THE KALAHANDI TRAIL 1965 - 66



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NITISH CHAKRAVARTY



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THE KALAHANDI TRAIL

1965 - 66

Nitish Chakravarty

Foreword by
Dr. J.P. Das



Sikshasandhan

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Contents_____

Foreword by Dr Jagannath Prasad Das	05
Preface by the author	07
Orissa 1— Distress All Pervasive	13
Orissa 2— Livestock as Human Fodder	19
Orissa 3— Lack of Rains Hits Hard	25
Orissa 4— Myopic Tactics Play Havoc	31
Orissa 5— Uncertain Prospects	37
About the author	43

FOREWORD

Kalahandi is widely known today as a famine-prone land, and even as a synonym for hunger. Reports, at regular intervals, of starvation deaths and distress sale of children have kept Kalahandi in the news. It was not so fifty years back. Distanced from the State headquarters by bad communication, Kalahandi had a secluded existence. But it was also the granary of Orissa with a large number rice mills; surplus grains used to be exported from here.

All that changed when rains failed in 1965. Rice plants scorched and withered in the fields, and the year's crops were lost. It reminded people of the great Orissa famine of a hundred years earlier which had caused a third of the population to perish. That disaster had been caused by failure of rains and the colonial government's foolish decision to allow export of rice and refusal to import when the need arose.

I happened to be the Collector of Kalahandi when the twentieth century's worst drought occurred, and even with my limited wisdom of twentynine years I could see that the situation was going to be grim. On Independence Day in 1965 I issued an order disallowing movement of rice out of the district and instructed the railway station-masters not to honour any indent for despatch of rice and paddy. The Government, however, asked me to withdraw the instructions forthwith and to allow movement of rice through free trade channels. Thus the rice stock was allowed to deplete leading to scarcity.

This is exactly what had happened in 1865 when Mr Ravenshaw, the Commissioner of the Orissa Division, had disregarded the advice of the Collectors and allowed export of rice. He had to allow the import of rice when people started dying in large numbers, but it was too late.

In Kalahandi the situation started deteriorating around October-November 1965, and in March 1966 I had to alert the Government on the need for special attention to the affected areas. I had listed the

following facts to indicate how the situation had reached near-famine conditions: the general condition of health of the people had deteriorated; there was a heavy influx of beggars into towns, and increased wandering and restlessness of beggars; there was a high incidence of cases of malnutrition; free kitchens were attracting a large number of disabled persons; there were cases of desertion of children; families had deserted their villages in search of work elsewhere; there were reports of starvation deaths and deaths due to malnutrition; there was an abnormal increase in crime; and there was need for gratuitous relief to the destitute.

It is this situation which Nitish Chakravarty describes in his dispatches published between April 30 and May 10, 1966. It is a first-hand account of a veteran journalist reporting from the front, describing graphically the distress of a famine-stricken people.

Around this time the Government also woke up and allowed import of rice to Kalahandi, and it was a herculean task to move rice stocks to the interiors of the district before the monsoon came. How the district administration tackled the problems and managed to save the day is another story.

Unfortunately the distress has continued over the decades despite the many poverty alleviation schemes introduced since then. Mr. Chakravarty's articles, therefore, have not lost their relevance for today's readers. ■

New Delhi
July 14, 2011

J. P. Das

PREFACE

The scourge of prolonged dry spells and starvation in tandem has fetched Kalahandi, the endemically drought prone district in the western region of Odisha, front page media attention over the past few decades. The name has become synonymous with hunger and deprivation. Natural or manmade calamities periodically drive people from their mud and thatch dwellings in the forests and hills of western Odisha to wherever they can hope to earn meagre wages in return for hard manual labour.

A severe drought - the twentieth century's worst-hit Kalahandi, Bolangir and the adjoining areas in 1965- 66 (the earlier major drought had, according to records, occurred in the region in 1866). Sketchy accounts of acute distress and hunger began trickling out in the spring of 1966. In the 1960s I was based at Bhubaneswar as the chief representative of Hindusthan Standard, a Calcutta daily which ceased publishing in the 1970s. The paper asked me to undertake a tour of the affected region and write a comprehensive account of the annus horribilis.

What we heard in Bhubaneswar about the drought and consequent starvation deaths was so scary that my wife Manjula, fearing that proper meals might be scarce in the affected region, advised me to fortify myself with enough provisions for seven or eight days. So, along with a suitcase filled with shirts, trousers, shaving gear, etc., I plonked a basket stuffed with rice, dal, cooking oil, and some potatoes and onions in the luggage boot of a hired Ambassador, which took me and my photographer across Odisha's drought affected region in April 1966. On her insistence, a kerosene stove and bottles of kerosene were also loaded on the car.

We travelled hundreds of miles across the arid and rugged terrain of western Odisha. Often road links to the interior villages did not exist, and those who ventured in or out had to trek long distances on

foot. Our car encountered considerable difficulty in negotiating rocks and boulders, and the sandy beds of dry hilly streams. Thanks to the driver's stamina, we managed to access many remote hamlets and sparsely populated villages, rarely visited by people from outside. Miraculously, the car did not break down in spite of the strain it was subjected to.

Nothing matching or approximating the definition of a hotel existed in the interior of the western districts - not even at the district headquarters - in those days. When there was no place to buy a meal, we had no choice but to cook our grub. On such occasions I used to gratefully remember my wife for so thoughtfully providing the provisions and the stove, without which we might have tossed in bed many a night on empty stomachs. I dreaded the nights more than the scorching sun, for we never knew where we would be billeted overnight.

Some nights we spent on a police station verandah from where the nearest town was two or three hours' drive. One late afternoon we found ourselves in the centre of a dense forest strewn with rocks. The nearest township was many miles away, and there was no road to move out. I was deeply touched by the warmth of the humble forestguard who graciously offered his one-room 'bungalow', stuck up on stilts in the dense forest, for us, uninvited and unexpected strangers, to stay overnight. On such nights I got very little sleep for fear of snakes crawling up to the wooden platform on which my photographer and I perched ourselves. Of course the howling of animals also kept me awake.

This book contains a series of five articles I wrote for **Hindusthan Standard**. The articles provide a first hand account of the distress and suffering the drought caused. I visited not only the urban centres in the affected districts but also numerous hard-to-access hamlets deep in the interior, and talked to a cross-section of the people hungering for food in Kalahandi and Bolangir as well as to panchayat functionaries, social workers and many other concerned men and women.

What gave me much satisfaction was the articles' impact. Sadasiba Tripathy, Chief Minister of Odisha at that time, invited me for an appraisal of what I had seen. Some Odisha MPs were good enough to acknowledge the use they made during discussions on the Kalahandi disaster in Parliament of the account I had penned. I especially remember the late Banka Behary Das, then a member of the Rajya Sabha and later finance minister of the state, writing to me back in Bhubaneswar that without the Hindusthan Standard articles the distress and hunger in Kalahandi would not have come into national focus. Indira Gandhi visited the drought-hit region in May 1966, within months of becoming Prime Minister.

The biggest compliment I received came from an elderly lady, the wife of one of the seniormost civil servants in Odisha at that time. I was a member of the Bhubaneswar Club, which in those days used to be in the city's Forest Park neighbourhood. One evening at the Club, after my articles were published, I was introduced to the lady who, it seemed, was eager to meet me, for the moment the introductions were over, she told me: "I wish there was someone in Kerala (her home state) to write moving articles about the state's woes as passionately as you have done on Kalahandi."

Newspapers are highly perishable. I might have kept clippings of the Hindusthan Standard articles but they got misplaced or lost when a couple of years later I went abroad for an extended stay, and, after returning to Bhubaneswar briefly, moved to Delhi. Photocopying was unknown in those days. Though occasionally I felt that if the articles were read now, the present generation would get a feel of how acute was the people's distress in western Odisha half a century ago, but I did not see any prospect of retrieving them.

Sheer serendipity has led to the "re-discovery" of these long lost articles. Unknown to me, clippings of the original print were in safe custody and in perfect condition close to where I live in Delhi. One recent evening my good friend Jagannath Prasad Das, the distinguished poet and author, invited me over to his home (we are close neighbours), and took me by complete surprise by producing clippings of all the five articles. He was the District Magistrate and

Collector of Kalahandi in 1965-66, and retained clippings of the **Hindusthan Standard** articles for reference and record.

Dr Das as well as some other friends have suggested that since these articles presented a reliable and detailed account of the Kalahandi disaster four and a half decades ago, it would be worth printing them in book form to give the present generation a perspective on the all round distress it caused. I can vouch for the accuracy and authenticity of the information contained in the book, and I believe whoever reads it now would be moved by the grim story of the people's suffering. Hopefully, those engaged in research on famine and food starvation in India would find the book relevant to their work. It may also be useful in planning disaster mitigation.

I am indeed indebted to Dr Das for preserving these articles with such care for so many decades, and also encouraging and helping me in reproducing them in the shape of a book. The foreword that he has so kindly written for this book testifies to the reliability and authenticity of the information it contains. I am also obliged to Sikshasandhan, the Bhubaneswar based NGO engaged in improving the standard of education of weaker sections of society, for undertaking the responsibility of printing and publishing *The Kalahandi Trail 1965-66*.

The 1966 catastrophe was not the last to ravage the region. A constant feature of this never ending saga of human suffering is that it is only bad news that brings Kalahandi into media attention. People suffer in silence. Once in a while they mumble a feeble protest when politicians need to whip up an agitation to garner voters' support for their electoral ambitions. The tales of their woes are sometimes as grim after 64 years of independence as they were when I wrote my account.

But this time round it is not drought but deprivation of another kind that is in focus. Lanjigarh, where Vedanta, a U.K. incorporated company, plans to mine bauxite for producing alumina, is an administrative block in Kalahandi district. The forest guard's hut on stilts where I spent a night during my travels half a century ago was, I believe, in Lanjigarh block. The people of Lanjigarh are fighting hard to prevent Vedanta from driving them from their land.

I will be amply rewarded if this book helps stir up a fresh momentum to press the authorities hard to prevent the recurrence of such calamities, and contributes in reviving hope that the people of the so-called backward regions of Odisha are not destined to suffer eternally in silence. Except for removing printing errors and giving each article a title I have made no change in the original text. Hence the seemingly erroneous description of Varuna as the god of rain (the contrary view is that Indra is the rain god) has not been corrected. That also explains why Odisha is spelt as Orissa as in the original. The name chosen for the book is an addition. I regret that the photographs which supplemented the articles are beyond reprinting. ■

New Delhi
July 2011

Nitish Chakravarty

DISTRESS ALL PERVASIVE

The furrowed faces of a desolate group of men trudging aimlessly along a village path caught my eyes as I was driving back to Bhawanipatna from a visit to a minor irrigation project on a recent sultry afternoon. Their faces mirrored their agony, and I felt I ought to ascertain who they were and what did they do for a living.

A man, apparently still on the right side of 40, responded to my nod and, encouraged by me, unfurled his story. Sikal Majhi is a sukbasei (landless agricultural labourer) from a non-descript village in the Nilji area of the Sinapali Block in Kalahandi's Nawapara sub-division. The path of life has never been paved in marble for him.

The meagre wages he used to earn from his employer, a small landholder, were barely enough to keep him, his wife and their four children from starvation. Rare was the occasion when Sikal, his wife and the children indulged in the 'luxury' of two square meals a single day. A variety of fruits and plants that grow on their own in the forests usually supplemented the cereals they took. But Sikal had no grievances against the world. A God-fearing man, he thought there was little that he could do to change what fate had ordained for him.

Futile wait for rain

At the beginning of the kharif season in 1965, Sikal as usual went to work for his employer. The field was ploughed and the seeds broadcast in due course. Then began the wait for the monsoon showers. Days rolled into weeks and weeks swelled into months but the rain never came, and the plants never sprouted out. For some time his employer paid him something to live on, but soon the stocks began running out and the landholder feared that if he allowed his grains to deplete further, he himself would face starvation.

Sikal realised that grim days were ahead. For a while his family survived by making a few paise here and there but in a village like his

the sources of cash income were limited. Whatever little belongings he had gradually found their way to the village market. He even parted with his shovel. The money that these small articles fetched was enough only for a few days, and soon cooking ceased to be a daily ritual in the family. Not many of his fellow villagers were in a better position, and he had none to fall back upon.

Trek for the unknown

Sikal and his wife decided that they must try their luck elsewhere. The couple of goats they had and the door and window frames of their hut were also sold away, and one morning the family set out for the unknown. A long trek on foot to Sinapali and Khariar brought them face to face with the stark reality that conditions elsewhere were not far different and neither work nor alms were easy to get.

Someone told Sikal that work might be available on projects under construction in the Bhawanipatna area. Having plunged into the uncertain, Sikal thought luck might smile on him at Bhawanipatna. He sold off the brass and bell metal wares that he had inherited from his mother to raise the bus fare to Bhawanipatna. On arrival there he did get a job but soon discovered that his limbs were unable to work as hard as he would like. The employer, however, wanted his men to work like denizens and for wages below the subsistence level.

Circumstances soon forced Sikal out of his job. Meanwhile, a daughter succumbed to starvation.. He did not have the means to burn or bury the body and hurled the corpse into the sandy bed of a dry river for vultures and jackals to feast upon. His wife set out independently to test her fate. Sikal no longer thought of the future.

Sullen faces

Thousands of men in the drought affected districts of Orissa share the agony and suffering of Sikal. The sullen faces of hungry men, whose ribs one can count with the naked eye, and of pot-bellied children and rickety women are a common sight in these districts. They 'live' in the marketplace at Khariar and under the shade of the trees at Bhawanipatna. One can see them at Patnagarh or Kantabanjhi

and elsewhere in Bolangir. It is not necessary to look for pockets of distress. Misery and squalor have invaded the highways of life. Distress and suffering are too vivid and too wide spread to escape the eyes of even the most indifferent observer.

Drought has upset the lives of all strata of society, especially of the class of people that directly depend on land for their living. Homes have been ruined, the ties that bind a mother to her child, a wife to her husband or a father to his family have snapped. The farflung districts of Kalahandi and Bolangir, which between them sprawl over some 8,500 square miles and have an aggregate population of 20 lakhs, are now dry as desert. The streams and rivulets that crisscross these districts have nothing but sand in their beds. A few wells here and there, fewer tanks and katas (tanks fringed by embankments on three sides) and a handful of tubewells are the only oases in this dreary desert.

Almost every one of the numerous villages I visited in the course of an intensive tour of the drought-hit areas has its own tale of woe and suffering. Though by and large suffering follows a common pattern, the story of every individual has a poignancy all its own. The distress of Kalahandi and other areas would probably have never emerged before the wider public but for the silent sacrifice of the ten martyrs of Deoderah in the Komna block of Nawapara sub-division. The death of these ten men, who are believed to be the first victims of starvation, brought Deoderah into the map of Orissa and served to focus the attention of the State and the rest of India on the acute distress of the people.

Little change in life

Eighteen years of freedom seems to have made little change in the life of the people of Kalahandi or Bolangir. The Adivasis and the Harijans have yet to know that as free citizens of an independent country they have a right to live. Many of them are inclined to think that what is being done for them now is pure charity. There are even some who believe that the relief that flows in trickles into their villages

is the result of the benevolence of the former rulers and zamindars. (Kalahandi and Bolangir were princely states ruled by maharajas until their merger with Orissa after independence.)

No one knows for certain how many have actually died of starvation in the drought-affected areas; but even the most hardened cynic would find it difficult to deny that, defying all the definitions of the Indian Famine Code, men have succumbed to starvation. The substitution of the word malnutrition for starvation might serve to dress up the Government's publicity window, but it cannot wipe off the seamy side of life.

Following the abolition of chowkidari no records of births and deaths are maintained in the villages nowadays; small wonder no one keeps a count of the men, women and children perishing for want of food. I encountered numerous accounts of what are believed by responsible men like chairmen of panchayat samitis and sarpanches of gram panchayats to be the result of starvation for days on end.

Normal deaths

Even making allowances for the tendency among distressed people to attribute natural deaths to starvation, it is an undeniable fact that in the drought-hit areas more people have died in recent weeks and months than was the case during the corresponding period in previous years. As a senior Government official, now retired, told me, if starvation means death after a long time in the course of which one does not have even a morsel of food, then no death in the world can ever be attributed to "unadulterated starvation", for even the lowliest of the low would be able to gather a morsel from food thrown away into dustbins or drains.

Elderly men liken the present situation in Orissa to the great famine that devastated the State exactly 100 years ago. I have come across none who can personally testify to the distress of 1866 but what I have seen leaves me in little doubt that conditions are certainly not what one should expect in an independent country. Wherever I have been, panchayat samiti chairmen and gram panchayat

sarpanches have narrated to me starvation deaths that have occurred in their respective jurisdictions. The lists they have given me are by no means exhaustive. For the sake of illustration I would mention a few cases. At Bargaon in the Khariar Block, during the first fortnight of April, starvation caused at least three deaths. They are Sridhar Rout aged 35, a seven or eight year old daughter of Buti Harijan and a five year old daughter of Hagru Gour. A 50-year old man of Kusumal village in the Khariar Block died on or about April 8.

A 40-year old man, reduced to skin and bones as a result of prolonged starvation, collapsed on the road at Sinapali. He was helped to the Bharat Sevak Samaj run feeding centre where he took his last meal before falling into eternal sleep. A man from Dabhra in the Sinapali Block died near the residence of the Sinapali Gram Panchayat sarpanch.

Naka Chindar and Charan Chindar, father and son, and Sankranti and Unasi died at short intervals in the Sinapali Block. A death occurred in Kusumsila village in the Bhawanipatna Sadar Block. Four starvation deaths occurred in Mantritral village in Duajhar Gram Panchayat prior to March 31. Ganga Meher, aged 42, by caste Bhulia, son of Sikal Meher, father of three living children, of Duajhar village, died on April 16. A 25-year old man, whose identity could not be immediately ascertained, was stated to have died at Ranimunda in Khariar Gram Panchayat on March 30. A one-and-a-half-year old child of the same village has also died. Yet another death has been reported from Kusumal village in Khariar Gram Panchayat.

To compile a list of starvation death cases in the drought-hit districts will be akin to attempting to retrieve a pin lost on a sea beach. I returned from my visit to Kalahandi and Bolangir with the impression that, if exactly identical conditions had occurred in the non-Adivasi belts of Orissa, especially in the coastal areas, thousands would have perished. The Adivasis and Harijans of western Orissa are so closely linked up with nature that they alone are capable of surviving in a horrific situation that has been precipitated in their districts. ■

(Hindusthan Standard, Calcutta, April 30, 1966)

LIVESTOCK AS HUMAN FODDER

A crestfallen, bare-bodied and unaccompanied boy of two stood quietly under a blazing sun in front of the feeding centre for children at Bhalumunda in the Bangomunda Block of Bolangir one recent noon. He seemed unconcerned about his surroundings and even about himself. Curiosity prodded me to ask the child who he was. He would not respond to my queries. Was he shy? Or, was he too young to know his own identity?

Onlookers soon clustered round the two of us, and one of them volunteered the information that the kid belonged to Biripali, a neighbouring village. His parents had disappeared leaving the two-year old boy and another older son to fend for themselves. The two children, who were still of the age when mothers feed their young, were nobody's responsibility.

Mute Suffering

They spent their nights on the verandah of one house or another and ate a meal a day at the Red Cross feeding centre. They owned nothing, not even a tattered piece of cloth to cover themselves with. The little one stood mutely, perhaps a little perplexed, when the villagers narrated his pathetic plight to me. The Block Development Officer of Bangomunda, who had taken me to Bhalumunda, was able to persuade a relatively prosperous looking villager to take the child into his family for the time being.

Although the two-year old boy at Bhalumunda was my first direct encounter with a deserted child, it was by no means the only one. As I travelled around from village to village in the drought-stricken districts of Orissa, I heard many heart rending accounts of parents abandoning their young ones. Reports of children being offered for sale or sold away for a negligible consideration were not rare.

Deserted Children

I tried to find an explanation for this apparently inhuman phenomenon. What the villagers told me is that many parents were deserting their children or seeking buyers for them as they themselves were no longer able to bear the anguish of their young ones hungering for food for days on end. They abandoned them on highways or sold them off for a few rupees in the hope that this was the only way to ensure their survival. In some cases their hopes have been fulfilled, for the Bharat Sevak Samaj has opened a couple of orphanages at Khariar and Bhell.

With the villages denuded of their normal sources of sustenance, hungry men in large numbers have fled their homes. Sometimes they have even blocked the possibility of their return by selling away their homesteads. More often than not these desertions have led to frustration and misery. At the marketplace at Khariar some such deserters have found a 'home' away from their homes. They had wandered into Khariar in the hope of obtaining employment and food, but neither was easy to come across. What has saved them from immediate death is a free kitchen started by the Bharat Sevak Samaj at the marketplace.

Biswanath Harijan of Sanduhel village, together with his wife and four children, is one of those who have made the Khariar marketplace their 'home'. When I went to see them one night, I found Biswanath and his wife and children huddled together like dumb cattle. A single piece of ragged sari was all that Biswanath's wife had to cover herself with. He himself had nothing on except a small piece of cloth. The children, a couple of them quite grown-up, were all in their birthday suits.

There were quite a few other families in the marketplace whose plight was no better than that of Biswanath. If deserters like these have been reduced to destitution, those who have stayed back are no better off either. Harabati, a 60-year old woman, who sat with legs doubled up near the Bharat Sevak Samaj feeding centre at Boden,

travels two miles from her village, Kerapada, with two grand children in tow, for free food once a day. Crouched down by infirmity, Harabati is hardly able to carry herself, but if she does not come to Boden everyday, neither the children nor she will have anything to survive on. Harabati's daughter-in-law stays at home making vain attempts to feed her two month old baby with the milk of her dry breasts. The young woman herself survives on leaves and shoots. Harabati's son has gone away where no one knows.

Another dismal aspect of the drought became vivid to me at Boden. A young girl of eight or ten showed up below the window of the rest shed where I had broken journey and asked me for a few paise. I asked why. Holding her unkempt hair the young girl said she had not oiled her head for weeks together nor did she have a proper bath. Her parents were too poor to afford the luxury of hair oil. I gave her a 10-paise coin, which soon brought half a dozen other young boys and girls clamouring for a few paise. It was impossible to ignore them. But my 'munificence' attracted wider attention and young and old alike began gathering round the rest shed. It was with some difficulty that I managed to meet their demand. The incident reminded me that while efforts are being made to meet the essential requirements of life in the drought-hit areas, other needs, which are not non-essential, get overlooked.

Dead and dying

It is the landless agricultural labourers who have been affected most adversely by the drought. Hagru of Bargaon, in the Khariar Block, typifies the suffering of this class. One of his children had succumbed to starvation when I met Hagru. Another child, whom he was carrying on his shoulders, was also on the threshold of death, and Hagru himself was a moving skeleton. Unbroken malnutrition has not only robbed Hagru of the ability to work, but having sold away his earth cutting implements, he can not even find work in test relief projects.

Men like Hagru constitute about 20 per cent of the village population. Sixty per cent are small landholders, and only about 20 per cent belong to the large landowning class. The small landholders are in a sense worse off than the landless. Brahma Sankar Sower of Chatrang village is one such case. He has a seven acre farm, which normally yields about 40 quintals of paddy. After meeting all his expenses and storing some paddy for seed purposes, Brahma Sankar is left with about 16 quintals for the family's consumption. He also grows about 45 kilograms of wheat and 75 kilograms of mung. But last year not a sheaf of corn grew.

How has Brahma Sankar managed to survive? He has of course dispensed with the services of the sukbasis (agricultural labourers) who usually found employment with him. One by one the family parted with its belongings. Eight kilograms of brass and bell metal wares fetched Rs.92.75; another Rs 120 came from the sale of gold. He has sent away a pair of bullocks to a relation so that the animals can have some fodder. In his own village there is nothing on which livestock can graze.

Kunja Behari Mund of Bargaon village owns about 10.45 acres of land, and is relatively prosperous. But the failure of the monsoon has compelled him to sell off six oxen, and he is left with only two. For the cultivating season that is now beginning he would have to buy bullocks if the fields have to be ploughed. Four cows, one buffalo, and 25 goats and sheep have also been sold off. Despite all this, neither Brahma Sankar nor Kunja Bihari can afford more than one meal a day, and sometimes not even that.

Problems of animals

It is not as though human beings alone are bearing the brunt of the drought. Cattle, birds and animals are no better. The scarcity of water has created a serious problem for animals, especially buffaloes used to wallowing in water in the hot summer. It is feared that there might be sunstroke cases among animals. Fodder is almost totally unavailable and the fields where the animals usually graze are parched, with not even a blade of grass in sight. Apart from the paddy crop,

the drought has also affected other fruits and plants. There has been considerable mortality among trees of all kinds. The mango crop, which at this time of the year is usually abundant in the western districts, is poor this year.

With the loss of the paddy crop and the large scale destruction of other subsidiary crops, prices have soared high. Ragi (mandia), millet and other locally grown cereals, which supplement the food of the villagers, now cost much more than in normal times. Small wonder dependence on wild forest products has gone up. Women and children gathering kendu fruits, pipal leaves, fig fruits, kanda, chiranji, mahua, etc., are a common sight in the rural areas. Most families use these fruits and leaves as an important item of food and the poorest among them survive only on such fruits for days together.

Hungry and starving men have also been eating up livestock, and thefts of cattle are becoming common. At Bhawanipatna, I came across a man dragging a herd of emaciated cows, which I was told were being taken to the slaughter house. Many complaints have been lodged with the police about missing cattle, believed to have been eaten up. The residents of Mantritari in the Duajhar Gram Panchayat have lodged a written complaint with the Collector of Kalahandi that at least five cows were eaten up in their village till March 28.

An inevitable consequence of the grim situation is a spurt in the incidence of crime. Cognisable offences are becoming more frequent. Even dacoities - for instance from Uparpita in the Boden Block have been reported. A police official told me that more crimes were being committed now than in the corresponding period of previous years.

The crueller months of summer are still ahead, and the next crop would not be harvested till November. The relief work, which is providing employment to some people, is likely to end with the onset of the monsoon. It needs no imagination to visualise that if no means of subsistence is provided to the distressed masses at the end of relief work, starvation will surely claim many more lives. ■

(Hindusthan Standard, Calcutta, May 2, 1966)

LACK OF RAINS HITS HARD

The parched earth of Orissa's western districts is as much fertile as the soil in the deltaic region of the State. In fact, agricultural operations having been introduced in much of the farming land in the hilly tracts comparatively recently, it retains a greater degree of natural fertility than the soil in the coastal belt where cultivation is as old as civilisation.

Yet what places the farmer ploughing the laterite or black cotton soil of Kalahandi, Bolangir or Koraput in an unenviable position is his total dependence on the mercies of Varuna, the rain god. It is this predicament that precipitated last year's catastrophe. Apart from making agricultural operations difficult and strenuous, the scarcity of water in the western districts manifests itself in other forms also.

Green foliage around village huts, which endow them with a grace all their own, is a rarity in the western districts. Even though situated in a wooded setting, the villages are usually no more than clusters of mud huts shorn of the vegetable and fruit plants one expects in a rural home. The result is that subsidiary food is hardly grown, and common fruits like bananas and papayas are extremely expensive. At Bolangir a few bananas and lemons cost me much more than I would have paid for them at Cuttack or Bhubaneswar, where the purchasing power of the residents is admittedly higher. It seems to me that the campaign for popularising the production of fruits and vegetables has yet to make any impact in the rural areas.

Nature's whims

How dependent is the Orissa farmer on the whims of nature can be imagined from the fact that out of 116 lakh acres brought under kharif crops in the State, only about 6.5 lakh acres are assured of perennial irrigation. Small wonder the scarcity of rains can play havoc with the lives of the people. The south-western monsoon which

feeds Orissa was utterly inadequate in 1965. The average annual rainfall in the State is 1,467 mm. The monsoon normally breaks around June 15 and continues to pour down in heavy showers till September 15. Between March and October, which covers the main cultivating season, the average quantum of rainfall is 1,369 mm. But during these eight months last year the actual occurrence of rains was a meagre 856 mm. Not only that the rains were inadequate; they occurred so erratically and were so ill-distributed and sporadic that the kharif crops everywhere, except the irrigated areas, were affected. The proportion of loss was greater in the areas where the land is usually parched.

It was not until the first week of July that the first monsoon showers broke. After a few showers came a long dry spell. The result was that the early agricultural operations could not commence in many parts of the State. The farmers became apprehensive about the crop prospects, though showers in the later part of July tended to revive hope. As soon as the showers came the farmer went back to the field. Before long however the rains ceased.

It was again towards the end of August that the clouds began to melt. Quite a large proportion of the land usually brought under the kharif crops was lying fallow till then. Hurried efforts were made to bring as much of the land as possible under the crops by taking advantage of the improved weather conditions. The intensification of agricultural operations was not easy. Bullock, seedlings and labourers alike were in short supply. In spite of handicaps the farmer strained all his resources to grow his crops.

Final Blow

But the final blow to the crops was dealt by the total cessation of rains when they were needed the most during the flowering time in October-November. The cultivator did not rest on his oars but tried to obtain water from wherever it was available. Trickle of water flowing through nullahs and streams were bunded up, and whatever water was there in tanks and katas (fringed on three sides by embankments) was poured into the fields; but his efforts were in vain.

I was told at places that the untimely application of fertilisers supplied by the Government towards a late stage of the season contributed in no small measure to the destruction of the crops. Whether or not there is any truth in this impression is for experts to verify.

Though the wrath of the rain god had to be borne by all parts of the State, its impact was the most severe in the districts of Kalahandi, Bolangir, Sundergarh, Sambalpur, Dhenkanal and Koraput. Parts of Sambalpur and Bolangir are served by the Hirakud canal system, but in the other trouble stricken areas canals are virtually unknown.

Irrigation need

The drought has underlined the need for stepping up irrigation facilities. The progress of irrigation schemes in the State has so far been extremely poor, and it is an acknowledged fact that the funds invested in irrigation have not all been properly utilised. Especially there are serious complaints even from official circles themselves about the manner in which the Lift Irrigation Department has been functioning.

The Lift Irrigation Department has so far installed some 30 deep tubewells and acquired about 600 pumps for purposes of irrigation. But many of the tubewells and pumps are not in working order. Moreover, there are complaints that the pumps were not made available to Rayagada sub-division in Koraput. Not a single one had been sent there at least till the fourth week of April.

The Jamunasagar minor irrigation project on the outskirts of Bhawanipatna is a classic example of the utterly slipshod manner in which irrigation schemes are being executed. I was told by the Chairman of the Bhawanipatna Sadar Panchayat Samiti that the project was 'under construction' for the last 10 or 12 years. Apparently defects were discovered after the first dam was built. A new dam was under construction when I visited the project recently.

Without fear of the slightest exaggeration it can be said that the Jamunasagar project is a sad reflection on the efficiency of the irrigation authorities. A scheme that would presumably cost Rs 5 or 6

lakhs should certainly not be in the stage of construction for years on end. There is another aspect of the project work which deserves the attention of the concerned authorities. The labourers engaged on the project are by and large in a deplorable condition, and, when together with the Panchayat Samiti Chairman I went to the site, I was shocked to find their women and children, many of whom were diseased, in as wretched a condition as destitutes. I heard complaints that fair wages were not paid to the labourers, and they were made to work beyond their ability.

In refreshing contrast to the Jamunasagar project was another minor irrigation project coming up at Kariakata near Patnagarh. Thanks to the enterprise of the engineers and the contractor, the project is expected to be completed in June, months ahead of its target date. Three hundred men are working round the clock to complete the project so that hundreds of acres in the area can receive the benefit of irrigation during the next crop season.

It is not perhaps the lack of wherewithal that stands in the way of executing irrigation projects, at least the minor ones. The rut lies somewhere else and only sincerity at the highest level of the administration can ensure the success of these projects, which are so vital to the agricultural economy of Orissa. The drought has revived demands for medium and large irrigation projects like harnessing the Indravati river.

While there are no two opinions that crop failure has been both widespread and extensive, a mess seems to have been made of the actual quantum of loss. A wrong assessment of the loss is bound to lead to an incorrect assessment of the need for relief, and that is what is supposed to have happened in some cases at least.

So inadequate is the machinery for the compilation of statistics that the Government even does not seem to know the actual acreage brought under kharif crops in Orissa. While on September 22, 1965, the Deputy Minister for Revenue, Mr Chandra Mohan Singh, informed the State Legislature that 1,10,01,281 acres were usually brought under

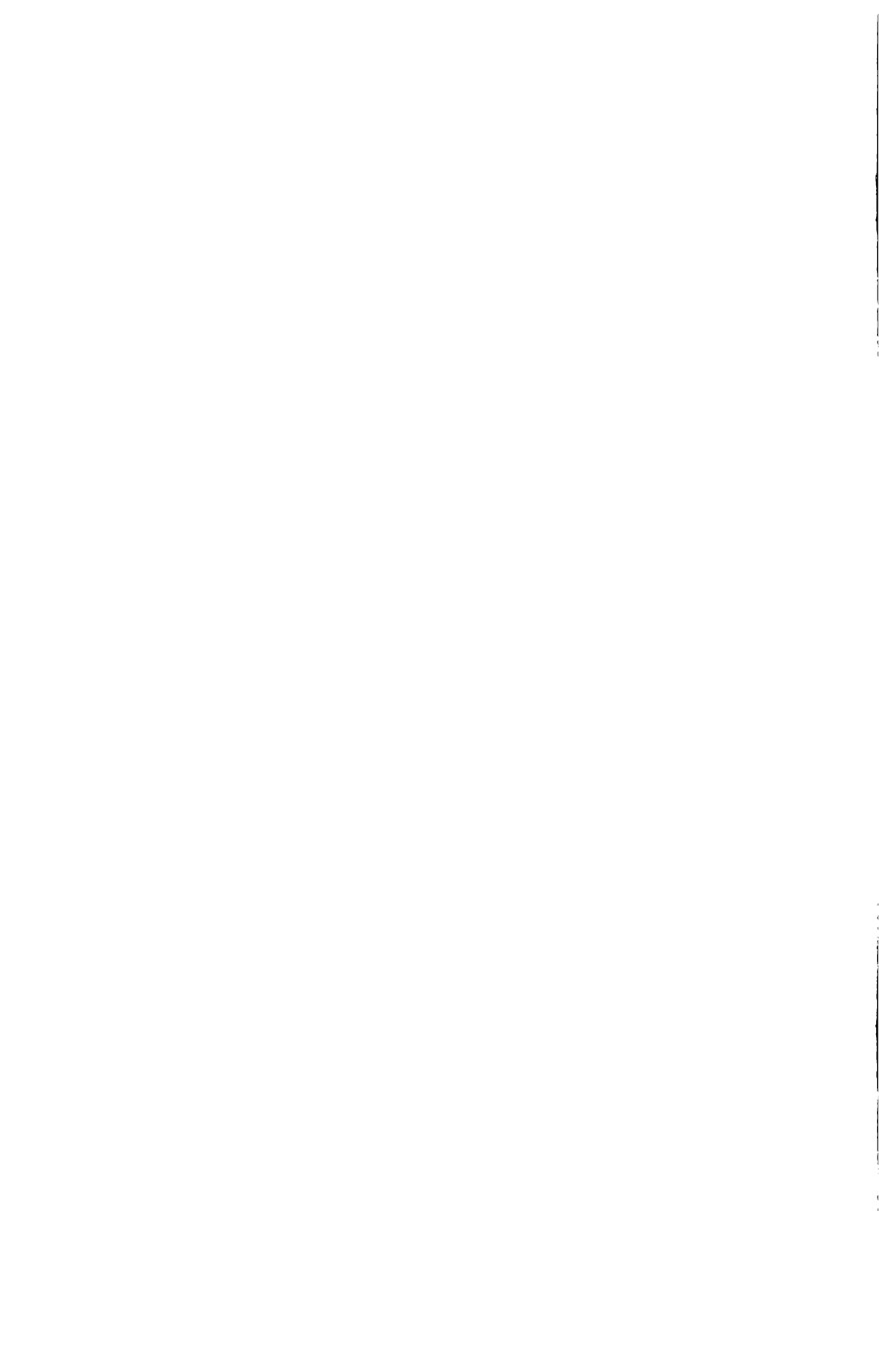
kharif crops, the Chief Minister, Mr Sadasiba Tripathy, told the same House on December 10, 1965, that kharif crops were usually raised on 1,15,81,400 acres. It is not easy to find an adequate explanation for this sizable difference in the estimates of the actual kharif acreage. Naturally these discrepancies will raise doubts about the reliability of the other statistics compiled by the administration.

In any case, even if the official figures are an under assessment of the extent of damage and suffering, the picture they present is staggering. In terms of the State as a whole the loss of food grains has been estimated at 21.7 lakh tonnes against the expected yield of 52 lakh tonnes in 1965-66. A third of Orissa's 1.75 crore people have been affected by the drought and the agricultural economy has suffered a severe setback.

Kalahandi district alone accounts for the loss of 3.54 lakh tonnes. The loss of crops is estimated at 3.24 lakh tonnes in Bolangir, 3.23 lakh tonnes in Sambalpur and 1.93 lakh tonnes in Sundergarh. These four districts among themselves account for more than half the estimated loss in Orissa. Most of these areas are not only self-sufficient in respect of their food grain requirements, but they export a sizable quantity to other parts. Therefore the loss of their production has not only caused hardship to them, but affected a much wider section of consumers.

Dry statistics seldom reveal the poignancy of suffering. For instance out of Kalahandi's 18 blocks, the loss of crops is estimated at more than 92 per cent only in four (in three of them Khariar, Sinapali and Boden – it is between 97 and 100 per cent). Officially the loss in the Komana Block has been assessed only at 77 per cent. But it was in the Komana Block that the first cases of starvation deaths had occurred. What the drought-stricken people need today is an approach that appreciates the suffering of the individual half-hidden behind the mesh of inanimate statistics. ■

(Hindusthan Standard, Calcutta, May 4, 1966)



MYOPIC TACTICS PLAY HAVOC

The crisis currently raging through the drought-stricken districts of Orissa is largely an outcome of the myopic policies of a Government virtually at the mercy of hidebound bureaucrats. The tragedy did not sneak into the State surreptitiously but invaded it in full view of everyone. No one pretends that when the monsoon decided to play hide and seek last year, it was in the Government's hands to melt the clouds. But what is uppermost on every lip is that the Government should not have been a silent spectator when the octopus of destruction was spreading its tentacles.

Far from coming to grips with a worsening situation at the earliest opportunity, the Government for a long time allowed itself to be lulled into complacency. It was as long ago as August last year that an alarm about the approaching disaster was raised by none else than a Deputy Minister, Mr Anup SinghDeo. But when Opposition members of the Orissa Assembly seized the picture drawn by the Deputy Minister to press for immediate drought relief measures, the Government quibbled with facts.

It tried to defend its complacency by describing the statement issued by a member of the Council of Ministers himself as having been based on 'third hand' facts. Curiously, when a colleague of his was describing in the legislature his observations as a tissue of exaggerations, Mr Singh Deo sat impassively. Naturally officials lower down the administration felt safe in their inaction. But it would be uncharitable to single out the administrative machinery for opprobrium; the responsibility has to be borne by the Government alone, for it failed to exercise its discretion regardless of the advice of bureaucrats.

State slow to move

A preliminary picture of the extent of the devastation wrought by the drought was in the Government's hands in August-September.

And in the autumn session of the State Assembly the Government acknowledged that nearly 50 per cent of the kharif crop had been affected - 12 lakh tonnes fully and 40 lakh tonnes partially. Presumably, even this was not considered a bad enough situation for the Government to step in, for no indications of large scale measures were available until the Opposition once again took the issue up when the House met in December. It was only then that the Government began waking up to its responsibilities. The allocation of a total sum of Rs 2.09 crores was announced in December. Eventually the allocation was raised to about Rs. 2.15 crores for the financial year ending March 31, 1966.

The major heads of expenditure were as under: Test relief: Rs. 50 lakhs; gratuitous relief: Rs 15 lakhs; drinking water supply: Rs. 35 lakhs; construction of small earthen dams: Rs. 2.56 lakhs; labour intensive works under the non-schematic budget of the Community Development and Panchayati Raj (C.D.) Department: Rs. 44.97 lakhs; pesticides: Rs. 9 lakhs; loans under the Agricultural Loans Act: Rs. 38 lakhs; loans under the Land Improvement Loans Act: Rs. 4.83 lakhs; and fertiliser loans: Rs. 25 lakhs.

The amount was considerable, and had it been utilised immediately there is little doubt that the people would have been spared much of the suffering. But between Government decision and the actual placement of funds with the disbursing authorities there was a big time-lag. Most of the funds were made available to the districts only towards the close of the last financial year, and as a result relief work was delayed and a sizeable part of the grants remained unutilised.

Kalahandi hardest hit

Kalahandi, the worst affected district, received an allocation of Rs. 54.80 lakhs under various heads for the year ending March 31 last. Illustrative of the delay in the placement of funds is the fact that the first allotment of Rs. 10 lakhs for test relief work in Kalahandi was made available to the district administration only on February 10. Even then no immediate action could be taken. First, clarifications

about the accounting procedure had to be obtained from the Government, and, secondly, the programme of work had to be endorsed by the District Drought Relief Committee. The earliest that the amount could be placed with the executing agency - the Rural Engineering Organisation - was March 17. Small wonder not even 10 per cent of the money could be spent within the remaining 13 days of the financial year.

Not only that the funds remained unspent; even work remained suspended for periods varying between 15 and 45 days in different places. This is partly attributable to the archaic financial rules. Everyone talks glibly about the need for changing the rules in tune with the needs of a developing economy; yet no one is prepared to set the ball rolling.

How crippling has been the effect of the delay in launching test relief and allied operations can be visualised from the fact that the loss of crops was assessed at 77 per cent in Kalahandi at a meeting of officials and non-officials on October 11, 1965. At this meeting details of the relief measures necessary were also worked out. Even prior to that Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayats had adopted resolutions inviting the Government's attention to the deteriorating situation.

Desolation

By the time the relief work was taken up desolation had set in in the rural areas. Hungry men and women had begun the trek to towns, and household wares were finding their way to the village market. The suspension of test relief operations soon after they had begun contributed towards the further deterioration of the situation. In village after village I came across men willing to work and earn their living but unable to find any work. Not only the villagers themselves but Government officials testified to the non-availability of enough work for the available labour force.

Shortage of work is not however the only defect with the test relief operations. Other disquieting features of test relief are that the

wages earned by the labourers are extremely meagre, disbursement of wages is delayed, and often labourers have to travel miles to the worksite. At places village committees have taken up minor test relief works, but they have not been able to make much headway because they are hamstrung by financial procedures.

The labour force is unable to give its normal outturn because of unbroken malnutrition. The average earnings of a male labourer are 60 to 70 paise a day, which is not enough for a kilogram of rice. The President of the Bolangir District Congress Committee, Mr Brajamohan Thakur, is one of those who told me that payment for the work done was irregular and cases where contractors short-changed labourers through various kinds of manipulations were not rare.

The work generally chosen for test relief and allied works is such that any ordinary unskilled villager is able to do it. The funds are being utilised mostly on the excavation of tanks and katas (tanks without embankments on one side), surface wells and pucca wells, and the improvement of construction of roads. Some minor irrigation projects, though not part of the relief operations, are also providing employment to a section of the affected people.

Test Relief

I was told by officials dealing with test relief work that the entire programme would be speeded up shortly, and thousands of more people would be provided with opportunities of earning their livelihood. But from what I saw I gathered the impression that with only about a month and a half left for the monsoon to set in, it will be almost impossible to utilise all the funds on test relief works. Not only are there surpluses from last year's allocations, sizable amounts of money have been made available for the current financial year. It is anybody's guess how the authorities are going to use up all the money.

Whether or not all the funds can be put to good use, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that those who are engaged in earthwork receive a minimum daily wage regardless of their outturn. The ability to work is gradually diminishing, and if the present process of payment

on the basis of outturn is adhered to, most of them will not be able to make more than 60 or 70 paise a day. A wayout is probably the introduction of payment on the muster roll basis instead of paying the labourers on the basis of the cubic meters of earthwork done by an individual. Another wayout probably is to revise the rates.

Poor Payment

It is not that men engaged in earthwork are alone poorly paid. The kendu leaf season is on, and this is a seasonal trade that provides employment to thousands of pluckers, especially women, for about three weeks. The additional income from the plucking of kendu leaves has become extremely vital this year. But big kendu leaf merchants who make lakhs out of the trade are in numerous cases depriving the men and women engaged by them of even the minimum wages fixed by the Government.

The terms on which kendu leaf coupes are auctioned to the merchants enjoin upon them to pay one paisa for every 50 leaves plucked. I came across any number of instances where the poor pluckers were being paid one paisa for anything between 120 and 150 leaves. It appears that the arms of law are too feeble to take any action against the merchants who thrive by sucking the blood of the helpless pluckers.

It is not irrelevant to mention here the need for legal provisions for preventing the distress sale of household goods at throwaway prices when a natural calamity befalls the people. ■

(Hindusthan Standard, Calcutta, May 6, 1966)

UNCERTAIN PROSPECTS

The first pre-monsoon drizzles have slightly moistened the stone-hard earth; the cultivator in the drought-stricken districts of Orissa is back again on his farm. His bullocks - often he uses cows also - are as hungry and sickly as he himself is. He does not know where will his seeds come from nor does he seem to be aware who will give him the funds to buy the seeds with. Yet he ploughs the land every morning almost instinctively.

It is the uncertainty about seeds and loans for agricultural operations that has become Problem No. 1 in the areas where the drought last year destroyed the paddy crop. As in almost every other respect, in the matter of providing the farmer with seeds and loans also the Government has displayed incredible lack of foresight. Agricultural operations are already on, and the seeds should have been sown by now. But no one seems to know for certain when will seeds reach the cultivator. And the disbursal of loans in dribbles is just beginning.

Doubts have naturally arisen in the minds of the farmer about the prospect of the next harvest. His backbone has already broken; and, unless the next kharif is satisfactory, his life itself will be extinct. Officially the requirement of seeds in Kalahandi has been estimated at 1.5 lakh maunds; but non-official sources place the requirement much higher. Even so, all that the Government has decided to do is to provide Kalahandi with only 80,000 maunds. The Government is trying to wash its hands off the responsibility of making seeds available for low-lying land which gives the optimum yield. It was only lately that steps were being taken to procure seeds also for low-lying land.

Drop in the ocean

Likewise, the allocation of funds for agricultural loans has been a drop in the ocean. All that Kalahandi was allocated for the current

financial year was Rs. 6.75 lakhs. Fortunately the allocation is being raised. It is not surprising that with a provision of Rs 6.75 lakhs for one lakh families in the district, hardly anyone gets more than Rs 10 or 15. Even for this niggardly sum one has to run to and fro any number of times, and no one keeps a count of the mandays lost in the process. There are also complaints that in some cases money is extorted from prospective loanees for loan application forms, which are to be provided free of cost.

This meagre provision for loans for agricultural operations for the worst affected district looks all the more ridiculous when one remembers that a smaller amount will this year flow to the farmer through the Central Cooperative Bank. Short and medium term loans are made available by the Bank to its member societies and through them to the cooperators. But a creditor can draw these loans only if the member society pays back in due course at least 80 per cent of its dues to the Central Bank and the cooperators themselves pay back at least 60 per cent of their borrowings to the societies. Most creditors this year have failed to honour their obligations for no fault of theirs.

Relaxations

Some relaxations of the rules have been made in the meantime by the Reserve Bank of India to facilitate the financing of cooperative societies by the Central Bank and of cooperators by the societies. The main feature of the relaxation is that the short term loans granted last year in villages declared drought affected will be allowed to be converted into medium term loans. The defaulting short term loanees will thus be eligible to draw short term loans again this year.

The relaxation will not, however, apply in the cases of those who have defaulted in the repayment of medium term loans, and also to those who might be in arrears in respect of borrowings made prior to 1965-66. The effect of all these riders will be that actually only a fraction of the cooperators affected by drought will be able to make fresh borrowings from their societies. It is therefore all the more reason why larger allocations should be made for taccavi loans so

that the farmers are not starved of seeds and other agricultural requirements. Delay in this matter will be fatal.

Lack of foresight

Lack of foresight is not confined only to the provision of facilities for the next kharif crop. Almost everything else is afflicted by the same problem. For the distribution of gratuitous relief the Government has drawn up a definition of eligible persons; but the interpretation of the definition having been left to the discretion of local officials, various anomalies are creeping in. Complaints are also numerous that eligible persons are being deprived of gratuitous relief while undeserving persons are cornering the benefit.

What struck me as particularly disquieting at many places was that officials in charge of determining the eligibility of a person for gratuitous relief were more inclined to use their discretion against the extension of the benefit than in favour. Large queues of old and infirm people near the block offices were a common sight. It also seemed to me that though the Government direction was apparently to extend the benefit to anyone who qualified for it, every block had worked out a certain number beyond which there was reluctance to issue gratuitous relief cards.

Inexplicable

With all but 146 of Kalahandi's 2,816 villages officially declared drought-stricken, no one would think that the decision to extend gratuitous relief to 30,402 adults and 15,544 children in a population of more than 10,00,000 is an excess of munificence. It is because of this that the hesitation of the local officials to distribute gratuitous relief cards becomes all the more unexplainable.

At a Bhawanipatna eating house, the proprietor still inquires of his patrons about their choice of rice - *ushna* or *arua* (atap). For a while I wondered whether the rice position was still that easy. My inquiries revealed that the hotel-keeper did not have to depend on Government retail stores for his requirement of cereals; his sources were the producers themselves. Fortunately for the hotel-keeper, his

sources had not dried up as the result of the drought, and, therefore, he was still in a position to cater to his patrons' choice. But the drought has not left him altogether unaffected; he has to pay more for rice now, and further he has to spend much more this year for water than last year. The result is that the patrons have to pay more for the meals they eat.

Unlike the Bhawanipatna hotel-keeper most people who have to buy rice for their consumption as well as a large section of the producers themselves are now dependent on Government retail stores for their requirements. Even in the opening of retail rice sale centres there has been avoidable mismanagement. There seems to be an impression that if a villager has to walk six or seven, sometimes even 12 or 13, miles to buy rice, it should not cause any hardship.

Retail centres

In the Lanjigarh block, for instance, only five retail shops have been opened for the sale of rice to some 30,000 consumers. The number of gratuitous relief centres in this block is only eight. In the Bhawanipatna Sadar block only three retail centres were functioning in the rural areas and six in the town when I was there. Towards the end of April a total of 115 retail shops were functioning in Kalahandi and the total issue to these shops was 2,012 tonnes between December 1 and April 14.

More incongruous than the paucity of retail shops is the fact that only superfine I and superfine II qualities of rice are sold through these shops. In parts of the Sinapali Block, which is on the border of Madhya Pradesh, the price that a poor consumer has to pay for a kilogram of rice is 91 paise. It is difficult to understand why common rice should not be sold through these shops for the benefit of the indigent consumers. Suggestions have been made by many, including the Deputy Minister from Kalahandi, that, irrespective of quality, only the prices applicable to common rice should be realised from the consumers. Another point that many people made to me was that, if instead of selling rice, the retail centres in the rural areas had sold

paddy, the paddy husk would have, in howsoever negligible a quantity, mitigated the problem of cattle fodder. Somehow or the other nothing about it has been done.

VIPs' visit

Overstrained with the load of additional work, harassed and wearied Government servants in the drought affected areas are now tired of laying out the red carpet every time a VIP or a VVIP deigns to study the conditions himself. They have lately been seen frequently in these areas, and, whatever the other impact of their visit, certainly it has not hastened relief work. Many officials candidly told me that relief work would undoubtedly suffer if the Prime Minister visited the area. Now that the Prime Minister's visit has finally been decided upon, it is anybody's guess what will happen to relief operations.

It is also time the Government took a decision one way or the other about holding the Gram Panchayat elections. Till now the official position is that the election will be held on schedule in June and July. Naturally the Block Development Officers cannot take any chances, and in the midst of all their work they have to study the election rules and procedures and take other steps for the election. No extra hands have so far been provided for coping with work arising out of the drought. Perhaps there is a case for giving the overworked staff dealing with drought relief work a special allowance.

00Non-official bodies

Very good work is being done in the affected areas by non-official organisations, especially the Bharat Sevak Samaj. Some local contribution has also been raised for running the relief centres opened by non-official bodies. The residents of Sinapali have raised some funds locally for relief work. More of such effort can perhaps be mobilised by political and social organisations, which are far from being well-organised in these areas. There is need for more free kitchens in the relatively inaccessible areas, and the Bharat Sevak Samaj and other organisations should be given facilities to do so. It would not be irrelevant to state here that the midday meal scheme

should not be confined only to selected schools but should be extended to all schools. Steps against epidemics are still in an early stage. They should be extended. I was told that against a requirement of 30 lakh vitamin tablets only 20,000 had been supplied so far to Kalahandi.

Cooperation between various agencies of the Government is a necessity at all times. It is all the more so in an emergency like the present one. Unfortunately the lack of understanding manifests itself in curious ways. At Khariar the water distribution network is ready but water is not supplied as the Public Health Department has not yet been able to locate an independent source. It would not, however, draw water from sources under the control of other wings of the Government. Could there be a more deplorable case of red tape when men and women have to walk long distances to fetch water for domestic use?

All that has happened and is happening in the drought affected areas is a pointer to the need for more vigorous and sustained efforts. It is also necessary that those who deal with relief work should not measure everything with the yardstick of rules and procedures and precedents, and it is for the Government to relax the rules to enable the men on the spot to exercise their discretion. ■

(Concluded)

(Hindusthan Standard, Calcutta, May 10, 1966)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A life long journalist, Nitish Chakravarty was, in the decade of the 1960s, the principal correspondent in Bhubaneswar of *Hindusthan Standard*, a popular Calcutta based English language daily of the time, and *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the leading Bengali daily. During this period he worked tirelessly to project the problems of Odisha and the aspirations of its people through his reportage. From the mid-1970s until 2000-01 Chakravarty was Special Correspondent of *The Hindu* and later Political Editor of *Deccan Herald*, both positions based in Delhi.

Even though he moved to Delhi over 40 years ago, Chakravarty retains a deep interest in Odisha's progress and development, art and culture. He speaks and reads the Odia language. He has written numerous articles on national and international affairs in *The Hindu* and *Deccan Herald* and appeared on numerous television and radio programmes right from the 1970s.

He has written extensively on Centre-State relations in Political Communication, a two volume book. He has travelled to nearly 30 countries, mostly with some of India's finest Presidents and Prime Ministers, and has witnessed the proceedings in the Central Hall of Parliament, which he still occasionally visits, right from the 1970s.

He has held top positions in several professional bodies, including the Press Council of India and the National Union of Journalists. Over a five-decade long career, he has seen changes on the boggling, ever-expanding information highway, and witnessed gigantic technological leaps in communication tools. From the once-prized Remington typewriter to the days of terra-byte electronic mails, and now to the explosion of hidden cameras and social-media blogs, podcasts, posts and networking, he's stayed abreast with all. Journalism has changed; but situations haven't. Kalahandi is symbolic of this changing sameness, captured vividly in this short book.

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